Role of Change Agent in Minimizing Resistance and Enhancing Readiness for Change

DR Shivani Gupta

Part-Time Faculty, Centre of Management and Humanities
Punjab Engineering College (PEC), (Deemed to be University), Chandigarh

DR Anju Singla

Associate Professor, Centre of Management and Humanities
Punjab Engineering College (PEC), (Deemed to be University), Chandigarh

ABSTRACT

Effective change management is crucial for a smooth transition from the old to the new while maintaining morale, productivity, and company image. Organizational change is prevalent in every sector, and its effective management is possible only with the cooperation and support of employees. But, the employees generally resist the change, and it is a significant challenge for the organizations to manage this resistance. During this phase, the change agent can act as a catalyst to stimulate, facilitate, and coordinate the change effort. Therefore, an attempt has been made to study the change agent's role in the effective management of organizational change while minimizing the employees' resistance to change. The present study is descriptive in nature and has been carried out through a literature review to analyze the selected constructs. The findings reveal that a change agent plays the role of a consultant, trainer, advisor, motivator, influencer, and researcher and makes sure that new strategies and tactics become the regular hallmark of change processes envisaged in an organization. The present study determines the factors that cause resistance and tactics to enhance the readiness for change. It provides an insight to the HR department of the organizations, change agents, researchers and academicians and has futuristic scope for further research.

Key Words: Organizational Change, Resistance to Change, Change Agent, Change Management, Readiness for Change

INTRODUCTION

Globalization has led the business environment to undergo drastic changes both in terms of complexity and dynamism. The essence of a growing organization is change, which is unavoidable in the current scenario *(Allen Barclay, 2009; Shivani Shah, 2011; Noe, 2012; Dr M Subramanya, 2019).* The concept of "Group Dynamics," "Change Management," and "Organizational Development" was first given by *Kurt Lewin*, known as "Founder of Social Psychology," in 1947. He also developed a Change Model, describing the change as a three-stage process that includes Unfreezing, Moving, and Freezing. Management of change is a systematic process that can be broken into several sub-processes. Figure 1, consisting of six steps in a logical sequence, depicts this process.

Figure 1: Framework for Managing Change in Organization
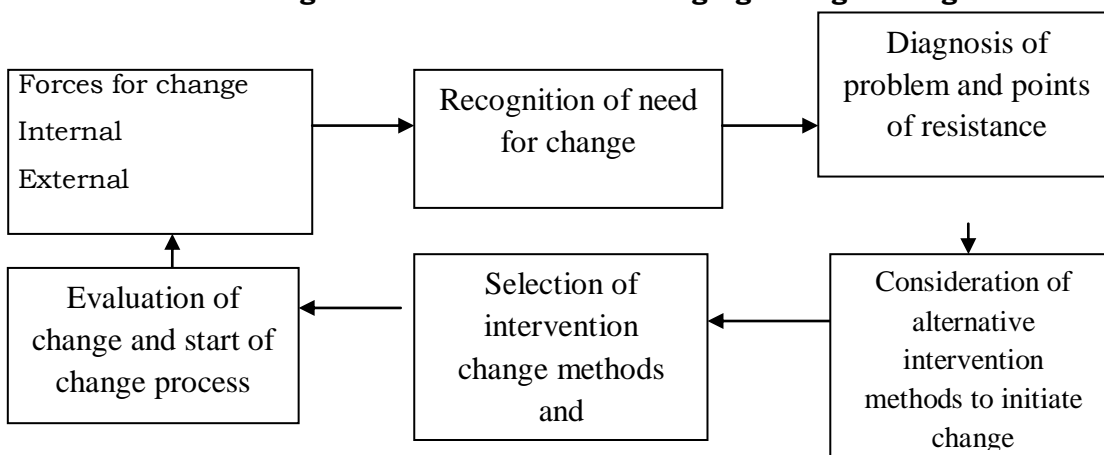
Source: J.P. Kotter and L.A. Schlesinger, 2015

The change has been considered as a custom in the time of mayhem (*Peter Drucker, 1999).* Unfortunately, most of the change management programs initiated by leaders in the organizations

1

fail *(Deepti Pandey, 2018; Beer and Nohria, 2019)* due to the fear of the unknown, fear of failure, former change experience *(Gioia et al., 2000; Caron and Aron, 2016)*, peer pressure *(Erturk, 2008)*, organizational politics, the climate of mistrust *(Gupta and Singla, 2016)*, ineffective communication, lack of support, lack of financial incentive*(Lawler and Mohrman, 2013;Frahm and Brown, 2007)* and lack of acceptance at the part of employees for embracing the change completely (*Spiker and Lesser, 1995; P Sudarkodi, 2011;Kotter, 2020)*. Therefore, the need of the hour is to manage employee's resistance through managing employee's behavior. The empirical evidence also revealed that there is a strong association between the practices adopted by change agents and employee behavior *(Lawler and Mohrman, 2013; Mossholder et al., 2014; Ulrich, 2019)* and organizational trust and organizational change *(r=0.74) (Gupta and Singla, 2017)*. Further, this study shows that the organizational trust exerts a mediating effect on the relationship of organizational change and satisfaction *(ß=.264; p<0.1; adjusted R^2=0.112)*. The change agent can be critical in creating trust and influencing readiness among employees in a change process. Hence, an attempt has been made to study the role of the change agent in the effective management of organizational change.

The objectives of the study are as under:

1. To study the role of the change agent in the effective management of organizational change.
2. To recommend strategies to overcome employee's resistance and enhance readiness for change.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The selected constructs, i.e. resistance to change, change agent, readiness for change and effective change management have been reviewed through existing literature

RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

Change management is a recognized discipline for over half a century, but still, majority of the change initiatives fail *(Ron Ashkenas, 2016)*. The resistance at the part of the employees to embrace change is the failure of an organization and it costs heavily. Resistance to change is defined as an employee's action attempting to stop or delay change *(Bemmels and Reshef, 2014)*. The employees go through the eight distinctive phases (Figure 2) viz; Stability, Immobilization, Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, Testing and Acceptance whenever they are trapped in a change *(Conner, 1998; Cheng & Petrovic-Lazarevic, 2015)*. The journey of an employee from the stage of Immobilization where he has negative feelings for proposed change to the stage of accepting the change with full heart is enthralling *(Kotter, 2020)*. Some employees easily accept the change, whereas, some do not, however, change agent with effective communication and guidance can bring them on the same platform (*Bemmels and Reshef, 2014;Cheng & Petrovic-Lazarevic, 2015)*.

Figure 2: Classic Psychological Reactions to Change
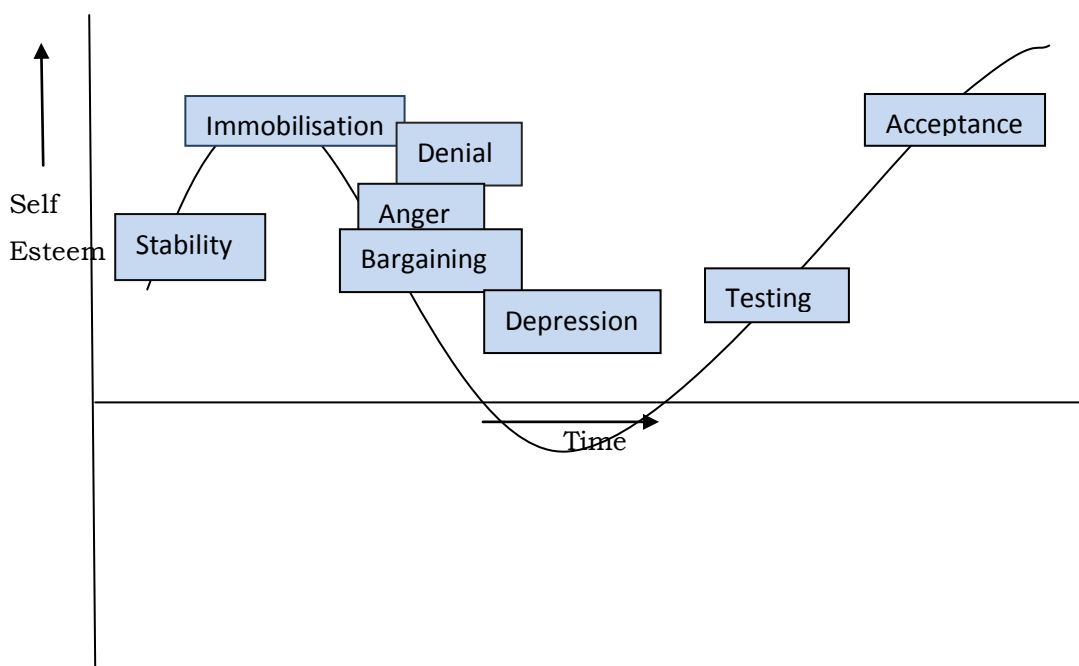
Source: Cheng & Petrovic-Lazarevic, 2015

CHANGE AGENT

Change agent, may be either external or internal, is the heart and soul of every change initiative *(Lunenberg, 2010)*. His role in an organization is most crucial, yet most difficult at the same time. A change agent is the one who has the skill and power to stimulate, facilitate, and coordinate the change endeavor *(Bandura, 2018)*. His main strength is a comprehensive knowledge of human behavior and he plays the role of a consultant, trainer, motivator, advisor, influencer and researcher *(Barclay, 2009)*. Along with updating the technical knowhow of employees during change implementation, change agent also provides social support to them, which is the key reason for changereadiness (*Barclay, 2009; Lunenberg, 2010;* Jones and Gallois, 2018).

READINESS FOR CHANGE

Readiness for change is a yardstick to measure how smoothly the change will be embraced by the employees *(Bandura, 2018; Tim Creasey, 2019)*. Managing transition and enhancing readiness for change is successfully achieved through plans made for specific activity and events. Training/Coaching sessions for employees to excel in new atmosphere is a key tactic to manage resistance *(Lodhal and Kejner, 2015, Bandura, 2018)*. It enables the employees to develop their potential around an organization's growth. Effective Communication, Influential Leader, Collective Support, Employee Engagement and Involvement Techniques viz; creating a trustworthy environment, sharing financial information, customer feedback and employee satisfaction survey also results as an organizational change intervention *(Lunenberg, 2010; Jimmieson and Callan, 2014, Lodhal and Kejner, 2015, Maddux, 2019)*. These techniques/tactics not only enhance readiness among employees, but, also make them confident that they can effectively implement the change process too.In generating change readiness, it's the employees whose behavior needs to be altered, the reason which makes it a herculean task. But, Social Cognitive Theory, Social Learning Theory and Motivation Theories viz; Maslow's Need Hierarchy, Herzberg Two Factor, ERG and McClelland can act as a driver for change agent as different motivation is required for different employees due to their position and attitude *(Noe, 2012; Holt, 2017; Bandura, 2018)*.

EFFECTIVE CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Effective change management, i.e., when resistance to change is less and readiness is high, is the amalgamation of the Art of Trade, the Science of Technology, and the Craft of Integration to make a successful changeendeavor*(Maddux, 2019)*. It is defined as an approach for preparing, supporting, and helping individuals, teams, and organizations tobring a successful organizational change*(Armenikas, A., 2007)*. The COVID – 19 Pandemic has led to a significant transformation in many sectors. There is a buzzing requirement of 5th generation (5G) technology as many employees are working remotely from their homes' comfort. As a result, the employees need to update themselves about all the latest technologies (5G technology) and collaborative tools such as Google Hangouts, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams. Different organizations adopt different techniques and methodologies to manage change processes. Performance Assessment and Coaching Tool (PACT) is used as an intervention strategy to conduct coaching sessions and workshops for employees during change. The Participative Problem Solving Approach while managing change to generate new ideas and commitment to implement those ideas is one of the strategies too. "Organizational Change Readiness Assessment (OCRA)" is conducted before initiating a change to determine their ability to absorb and sustain change. It helps them find out their weaknesses and develop risk mitigation strategies to convert their weaknesses into strengths.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Due to globalization, increased competition and changing environment, organizations need to initiate and sustain changes. Planning for change alone is not adequate; implementing the planned change and subsequently embedding and maintaining the positive changes are crucial for reaping the best. Keeping in view the various factors responsible for resistance like fear of the unknown, peer pressure, organizational politics, the climate of mistrust, fear of failure, lack of support, and former change experience, the present study found various measures like Training, Coaching, Employee Engagement and Involvement, Effective Communication, Influential Leader, Trustworthy Environment, Collective Support, and Employee Feedback, to enhance change readiness. Further, a change agent's role as a consultant, trainer, motivator, advisor, influencer, and researcher becomes of utmost importance in the change process. The change agent should share all the information on sensitive and important topics with the employees for smooth implementation of organizational change. The Model of Change by Kurt Lewin also provides a framework for change agents to bring

effective change by motivating them to adapt themselves to change and build confidence among them when required change is implemented and becomes permanent. Considering all the findings of the previous studies, it is imperative that the organizational change should be carried out in an atmosphere of mutual trust to minimize resistance, enhance readiness and for effective change management.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Achilles Armenikas. (2007). Creating Readiness For Effective Change Management. *International Journal of Organizational Change*, 58(4), 143-179.
2. Barclay, G. J. (2009). Self-Construal, Motivation and Feedback-Seeking Behaviours. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment*, *16*, 282-291.
3. Caron, A. & Aron, D. (2016). Working on Positive Emotional Attractor through Training in Health Care. *Journal of Management Development*, *25*(7), 671-688.
4. Erturk, A. (2008). A Trust-Based Approach to Promote Employees' Openness to Organizational Change in Turkey. *International Journal of Manpower, 29(5)*, 462-483.
5. Frahm, J. & Brown, K. (2007). First Steps: Linking Change Communication to Change Receptivity. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 20(3), 370-387.
6. Gupta, Shivani and Singla, Anju (2016). "Organizational Change and Job Satisfaction: An Analysis of Mediating Effect of Organizational Trust," *Indian Journal of Commerce and Management Studies*, vol. 7(3), pages 07-13.
7. Gupta, Shivani and Singla, Anju (2017). "Organizational Change and Job Satisfaction: Role of Management Support and Motivation," *International Journal of Science, Technology and Management*, vol. 6(1), pages 331-337.
8. Holt, H.S., (2017). "Comprehensive Definition of Readiness for Change", Research in Organizational Development and Change, Vol. 16(4), 289-336.
9. Jones, E., Watson, B., Gardner, J. & Gallois, C. (2018). Organizational Communication: Challenges for the New Century. *Journal of Communication*, 54, 722-50.

10. Jimmieson N. L., Terry D. J. & Callan V. J. (2014). A Longitudinal Study of Employee Adaptation to Organizational Change: The Role of Change-Related Information and Change-Related Self-Efficacy. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 9(1), 11-27.
11. Kotter, J. M., Munz (2020). Test of a Dynamic Stress Model for Organizational Change: Do Males and Females require different Models? International Association of Applied Psychology.
12. Kotter and Schlesinger, (2015). Organizational Identity, Image and Adaptive Instability. *Academy of Management Review*, 25(1), 63-81.
13. Lazarevic, P. and Cheng (2015). An Empirical Study of Employee Job Involvement and Personality Traits: The Case of Taiwan. *International Journal of Economics and Management*, 3(1), 22-36.
14. Lesser and Spiker, (1995). Research on how Training influences Administrative Staff Job Involvement and Organizational Commitment. *The Journal of Human Resource and Adult Learning, 4*(2), 115-121.
15. Lewin, K. (1947). Frontiers in Group Dynamics: Concept, Method and Reality in Social Science; Social Equilibria and Social Change. *Human Relations*, 1(1), 5–41.
16. Lodahl, T. M. & Kejner, M. (2015). The Definition and Measurement of Job Involvement. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 49, 24-33.
17. Lunenberg (2010). Ambiguity and Ambivalence: Senior Managements' Accounts of Organizational Change in a Restructured Government Department. *Journal of Organizational Change Management, 21(6),* 686-700.
18. Mossholder et al. (2014). Loss of Site: Organizational Site moves as Organizational Deaths. *International Journal of Sociology & Social Policy*, 23(6), 115-52.
19. Maddux (2019). Making Sense of the Organization. Oxford University Press.
20. Nohria and Beer (2019).Trainees Attributes and Attitudes: Neglected Influences on Training Effectiveness. *Academy of Management Review*, 11(4), 36-49.
21. Noe, R. A, & Schmitt, N. (2012). The Influence of Trainee Attitudes on Training Effectiveness: Test of a Model. *Personnel Psychology*, 39, 497-523.
22. Proctor, Sudarkodi (2011). Change Management: The Role of Internal Communication and Employee Development. *Corporate Communication: An International Journal*, 8(4), 268-277.
23. Pandey, Deepti (2018). Studying Organizational Change and Development: Challenges for Future Research. *Academy of Management Journal*, 44(4), 697-713.

24. Ron, A. (2016). Organizational Communication Research: Key Moments, Central Concerns, and Future Challenges in Gudykunst. Communication Yearbook, 24, 99-137.
25. Subramanya, M. (2019). Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB) in Response to Job Stressors and Organizational Justice: Some Mediator and Moderator Tests for Autonomy and Emotions. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 59, 291-309.
26. Shah, Shivani (2011). Change and Employee Behavior. *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, 19(3), 157-163.
27. Tim Creasey (2019), Attitudes towards Organizational Change: What is the Role of Employees Stress and Commitment? *Employee Relations*, *27*(2), 160-174.
28. Ulrich (2019). Positive and Negative Emotional Attractors and Intentional Change. *Journal of Management Development*, *25*(7), 657-670.