A Change model for 21st Century Leaders: The Essentials

Mohammed Issah[1] & Judith A. Zimmerman[2]

[1]*Education Studies Department, Bahrain Teachers College, University of Bahrain, Manama, Bahrain*
[2]*Department of Educational Leadership, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green USA*

Abstract: Leaders in all fields today, are being charged to develop and communicate a guiding vision for their organizations while being attuned to their own strengths/weaknesses and the needs of their followers. The 21st century presents a culture of change and leaders need to have a sound understanding of the complex organizational change process to lead a successful change. The aim of this paper is to present an organizational change model that discusses leaders through learning and visioning, and shared leadership. The paper discusses practical ways in eight essential steps that leaders in the 21st century need to consider in leading change in organizations in business and education.

Keywords: Organizational change, Leaders, Change model.

1. Introduction

Increasingly, Leaders in all fields including education are being charged to develop and communicate a guiding vision for their organizations or institutions while being attuned to their own strengths/weaknesses, the organizational environment, and the needs and self-efficacy of their followers. Moreover, when leaders involve others in developing a shared vision and goals for reaching the vision, their actions give meaning, challenge, motivation and a common purpose to everyone in the organization (Senge et al., 1999).

Why are models of organizational change necessary or important to understand? They are helpful for assessing change at a macro level— the level at which many institutional leaders view (or should view) their organizations. Models can reveal why change occurs (the driving forces of change); how change will occur (the stages, scale, timing, and process characteristics); and what will occur (the content of change, outcomes, and ways to measure it).

(Theories and models of organizational change, 2001, p. 25)

Critical to initiating and advancing change is the leader's ability to be reflective (Heifetz, 1994), engage in breakthrough thinking based on trends (Marx, 2006), and act on what he/she knows (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000). Constantly changing environmental conditions require that organizations make adjustments to remain relevant and to survive. For example as Putnam (1991) noted that within any given environment there are areas of calm, agitation, opportunity and danger, and areas of unknown risks, however, with the appropriate decisions, actions, and skill set, the situation can be harnessed within the organizations' environment. According to Fullan (2009) principals of school organizations have a very difficult task to manage two different worlds, the old world of expectation that the principal will run a smooth school and be responsive to all and at the same time the new world inundated with disconnected demands, and expecting that in the mist of all these the school should constantly show better

E-mail: missah@uob.edu.bh, judithz@bgsu.edu

test result and ultimately become a learning organization. Therefore, leaders need to be well informed about the interplay of these forces (Fullan, 2001).

Change is undoubtedly both a fundamental (Myers, 2014) and a survival mechanism for 21st century organizations in all fields including education. However, change has to be undertaken in a systematic approach. Deployment throughout the organization of these values and vision is also a key to organizational change. According to Wheatley (1994), "Self-reference is what facilitates orderly change in turbulent environments. In human organizations, a clear sense of identity—of the values, traditions, aspirations, competencies, and culture that guide the operation…[provide] a reference point for change" (p. 94). Accordingly, the model addresses how leaders work with key members to create a culture that sets broad parameters for everyone's work, ensuring that the organization's values are found at every level in the organization.

Unfortunately, the success of change efforts is dependent upon employee willingness to change. Attitude toward change is a variable that has been linked to employee acceptance of new procedures/policies (Calabrese, 2002; Clawson, 1999; Greenberg & Baron, 2000; Robbins, 2000). Moreover, many barriers to both individual and organizational/institutional change have been documented in the literature (Greenberg & Baron, 2000; Robbins, 2000). As such the model in Figure 1 describes the step by step strategies for leaders to employ to assist them not only understand but also deal with the potential causes of change resistance. It addresses approaches to institutionalize change so that administrators and other change leaders can focus their attention on monitoring and evaluating progress and initiating more changes (Duke, 2004 & Kotter, 1996). In view of the complex nature of the organizational change process, the eight step model for change was developed after a review of selected organization change models. The most distinctive feature was the number of stages/steps in the change models, ranging for Lewin's three stage model

through Gibson and Barsade's four-stage model of change to Kotter's eight stage model.

Lewin's three stage change process include unfreezing, change and freezing (Gibson & Barsades, 2003, pp: 21). The unfreezing stage is when the leaders and members of the organization audit the present condition of the organization and highlight the benefits of a desired future state of the organization. The change stage is the implementation of the planned change in the organization for the desired outcome. And finally refreezing stage is consolidating the successful change made in the organization, and to ensure that there is no digressing from the newly attained stage of organizational advancement. Although the Lewin's model is linearly presented, the change process is rather circular because the stages in are interconnected in the change process. Lewin's model provides a rather general overview of the complex process of change (Moldovan & Macarie, 2014) and therefore lacks details for application.

Similarly, Thomas, Pamela, and Smaldino (2013) proposed a three step model for leaders, which includes creating a shared vision and meaning for the desired state of the organization, step two involves building the capacity of the coworkers towards the direction of the organization, and finally, step 3 involves the provision of appropriate conditions and incentives to support the movement of members in the desired direction of the organization. In Gibson and Barsades' (2003, pp: 21-24) organizational change model, following an analysis of selected existing organizational change models, identified a four-theme model for organizational change; (1) Change as "survival of the fittest", change as a result of the environmental forces or demands (2) Change as an evolutionary process - change as a "natural" process of the organization learning and growing (3) Change as a revolutionary process - change as a result of internal shifts of power and the emergence of new leaders (Moldovan & Macarie, 2014), (4) Change as a managed process - leaders take actions on purpose to effect change in the organization. The models

as presented suggests that with exception of the four stage (Change as a managed process), three of the identified forces of change are almost independent of leadership action (Moldovan & Macarie, 2014) despite the central role of leadership in the process of organizational change. In view of the observations made, this paper presents a model with concepts that leaders can easily identify apply in leading change. Though an eight step process similar to Kotter's eight stage model, the present model emphasis the integrated nature of the change process.

A. Step One (1). Situational analysis

This is a critical step in the change process. It is essential for leaders to develop an understanding of the current situation, and identify the gap between the current state of the organization and the exciting future they envision. The diagnosis brings to light the external or internal forces working against the organization in pursuit of its goals. For example the leader may discover that the culture of the organization is an obstacle to positive change, because at its current state, it is more devoted to maintaining the status quo than meeting any new challenges (Bennis, 2009). The situational analysis involves gathering and analyzing information, and developing suggestions for future actions. Therefore, finding the right problem to diagnose is crucial for the entire change process (Connor, Lake, & Stackman, 2002). This process should involve all the stakeholders, to ensure ownership of the process. For instance, leaders can implement a brainstorming session with the different units of the organization in order to diagnose the situation, with the leader playing a facilitative role in the process. Rogers (1962) stresses that, before changes are made, it is essential to complete a thorough analysis of both the individual and the social system. Failure to have an understanding of the diagnostic phase will not only negatively affect communication of the change to members, but the entire change process as well (Connor, et al. 2002).

B. Step two (2): Sharing of ideas and strategy

The outcome of the diagnosis should be shared with the stakeholders and serve as the basis for the development of a tentative plan. This creates the opportunity for leaders to address the concerns of members who are skeptical about the change. As with step one, brainstorming will be most effective in eliciting ideas and suggestions for the development of a tentative plan (Kirkpatrick, 1985). Also as in step one, two-way communication and participation is essential in the process. Kotter (1996) suggests that honest discussion of company problems, future opportunities, as well as the inability of the organization to take advantage of opportunities can raise the urgency level for change.

C. Step three (3): Change recipient analysis

Following from step two, it is important for change leaders to understand the individuals who will be affected by the change and their likely reactions. Change leaders should always expect reactions to change, irrespective of the level of change. In order to overcome individuals' immunity to change, it is essential for leaders to understand the commitments that make an obstructive behavior brilliantly effective (Kegan & Lahey, 2009). Moreover, individuals' and groups' readiness to change can be triggered by the inspirational realization of the truth about themselves (Kegan & Lahey, 2009). In other words the better a leader knows the individuals, who will be affected by the change, the more accurate will be his or her analysis of their reactions towards it (Kirkpatrick, 1985, p. 113). Fullan (2001) encourages leaders to turn change resistance to positive energy in the process. Leaders' use of empathy at this stage of the change process will enable them to understand the probable reactions of change recipients to the proposed change. Moreover, Bennis (2009) suggests that leading through voice, inspiring through trust and empathy does more than get followers on the leaders' side, because this can change the climate enough to give people the room to do the right things.

D. Step four (4): Team building

A coalition is essential in overcoming the barriers and challenges to the change process, especially where it is a major change. An understanding of the change recipients will facilitate the composition of a strong coalition. Because major changes are difficult, a strong coalition is often needed – one with the right composition, trust and shared objectives to sustain the change efforts (Kotter, 1996). Similar to the earlier steps, communication and participation are essential to the work of the coalition.

E. Step five (5): Change Implementation plan

Change cannot take place without a plan. The plan gives members of the organization a clearer picture of the direction of the organization and how to realize that exciting future envisioned. The strategies to be employed depend on the nature of the change. For instance, attitudinal change may require long term strategies as opposed to structural changes. Kotter (1996) suggests that creating an effective vision and strategy should be regarded by change leaders as an important investment in creating a better future. At this stage, those who will be affected by the change should own the outcome of the process. Opportunities should be created for all to engage in discussing and modifying the plan accordingly. Similar to the other stages, if not undertaken in a participatory style, this step could result in some individuals feeling isolated and the consequences can lead to failure. Furthermore, it essential that the leaders behavior communicates to the co-workers the desired change. It is imperative for the leader to recognize his or her role as a model of the envisioned change Gibson and Barsade (2003).

F. Step six (6): Decision making

It is anticipated that at this stage all the data, evidence, and relevant information is available for a decision to implement the change. The change leader still has the opportunity to involve a representative team in making the final decision. According to Kirkpatrick (1985)) this can lead to a high level of commitment to the decision by subordinates because it was "our decision rather than the decision by the manager" (p. 104).

G. Step seven (7): Change Implementation.

This is the action phase of the decision from the preceding step. To increase the prospects of the success of the change, change leaders need to consider making short term gains. Short term wins help transform fence sitters into supporters, reluctant supporters into active participants to build the momentum of change (Kotter, 1996). In addition to the empowering change process from step one, Kotter (1996) observes that the right structure, training, and systems, built on a well-communicated vision, can assist in mobilizing more members to provide the leadership to produce the needed change. More so, the ability of the leader at this stage to mobilize his or her co-workers resides both in self-understanding and in understanding the needs and wants, as well as mission of the co-workers (Warren, 2009).

H. Step eight (8): Evaluation

Change does not stop at implementation. At the evaluation stage, a comparison is made between what has been planned and what has been implemented, as well as the expected outcome(s). When the evaluation reveals the change has not been successful, the appropriate adjustments must be made to the change effort. Moreover, the evaluation and adjustment process is continuous.
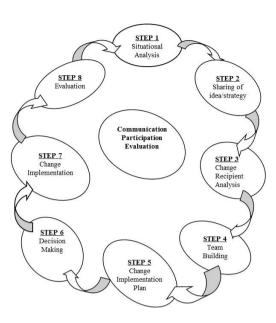
Figure 1 - Organizational Change Model – The Essentials

In sum, leading in the 21st century does not mean adopting one innovation after another, rather it means producing the capacity to selectively incorporate new ideas and practices inside and outside the organization at all times (Fullan, 2001). The eight step change process can contribute to creating a culture of change in organizations. These eight steps do not occur in isolation; more than one step can take place simultaneously. For instance, activities in steps two and three can take place to reinforce each other. More importantly, participation, communication and evaluation are three ingredients essential at every stage of the change process, for change to be successful. Despite, leaders often under estimate how much of the three elements (communication, participation, and evaluation) is needed in the change process. Within each step, two-way communications takes place to encourage participation, and at the same time the activities and ideas being discussed are in constant evaluation while moving to the next step of the process.

2. Discussion

Today's leaders, regardless of their fields, are obliged to prepare to lead change, understand the process and nature of change, and provide the essential support so that those involved in change can be successful. More so, according to Kennedy and Kennedy (1996), "we need to take a systemic view of change which not only takes attitudes into account but also investigates both the social norms and the perceived behavioral control which will be specific to a particular context" (p. 359).

The model explained leadership strategies for both understanding and dealing with potential causes of change resistance. Finally, the change model explicated approaches to institutionalize change that allow change leaders to focus their attention on monitoring progress and initiating more changes.

3. Recommendations for Practitioners

The model presented will be useful for leaders in the fields of business and education, who want to ensure the survival and continuous relevance of their organization. For example practitioners such as school principals can advance the institutional vision and values through the involvement of co-workers from the onset of the analysis of the organizations' situation and the subsequent steps. By encouraging active participation of co-workers, leaders can generate excitement and motivation for change, can ensure effective communication of organizations values and goals, and can result in better decision making based on inputs from many of the co-workers (Gibson & Barsade, 2003). Undoubtedly, for leaders as change agents it is important that these eight essential steps are addressed in order to achieve effective and successful organization change.

4. References

Barbuto, J. E. (2005). Motivation and transactional,

charismatic, and transformational leadership: A test of antecedents. Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies, 11(4), 26-40.

Calabrese, R. L. (2002). The leadership assignment: Creating change. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Clawson, J.G. (1999). Level three leadership: Getting below the surface. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Connor, P. E., Lake, L. K., & Stackman, R. W. (2003).Managing organizational change (3ʳᵈ ed.). Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group.

Duke, D. (2004). The challenges of educational Change. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.

Fullan, M. (2009).The challenge of change: Start school improvement now! (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin

Fullan, M. (2001). Leading in a culture of change.San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Fullan, M., & Hargreaves, A. (1996).What's worth fighting for in your school? New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Gibson, D. E., & Barsade, S. G. (2003). Managing organizational culture change: The case of long-term care. Journal of Social Work in Long-Term Care, 2(1/2), 11-34.

Greenberg, J., & Baron, R. A. (2000).Behavior in organizations (7thed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Hazel, C. E. (2007). Timeless and timely advice: A commentary on consultation to facilitate planned organizational change in schools. Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation, 17(2&3), 125-132. doi: 10.1080/10474410701346436

Heifetz, R. A. (1994). Leadership without easy answers. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Humphreys, J. (2001, May-Aug.). Transformational and transactional leader behavior. Journal of Management Research, 1(3), 149-159.

Kegan, R., & Lahey, L. L. (2009). Immunity to change: How to overcome it and unlock potential in you and your organization. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press.

Kennedy, C., & Kennedy, J. (1996). Teacher attitudes and change implementation. System, 24(3), 351-360.

Kirkpatrick, D. L. (1985).How to manage change effectively: Approaches, methods, and case examples. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc.

Kotter, J. P. (1996). Leading change. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Kouzes, J.M., &Posner, B.Z. (2003). Credibility. San Francisco: Wiley & Sons.

Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2002). The leadership challenge (3rd ed.).   San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Marx, G. (2006). Sixteen trends: Their profound impact on our future. Alexandria, VA: Educational Research Service.

Maxwell, J. C. (1998). The 21 irrefutable laws of leadership: Follow them and people will follow you.Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc.

Myers, E.L. (2014).Taming Turbulence: An Examination of School Leadership Practice During Unstable Times. The Professional Educator, 28(2), 1- 16.

Moldovan, O., & Macarie, F. C. (2014). How to change the informal side? A comparative analysis of organizational culture models.

Managerial Challenges of the Contemporary Society, 7(2), 39-45.

O'Reilly III, C. A., Harreld, B. J., &Tushman, M. L.

(2009). Organizational ambidexterity: IBM and emerging business opportunities. California Management Review, 51(4), 75-99.

Pfeffer, J., & Sutton, R. I. (2000).The knowing-doing gap. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Putnam, H. D. (1991). The winds of turbulence:

A CEO's reflections on surviving and thriving on the cutting edge of corporate crisis. New York: Harper Collins.

Robbins, S. (2000). Essentials of organizational behavior (6th ed.). Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Rogers, E. M. (1962). Diffusion of innovations. New York, NY: Free Press.

Senge P., Kleiner, A., Roberts, C., Ross, R., Roth, G., and Smith, B. (1999).The dance of change. New York, NY: Random House.

Theories and models of organizational change. (2001).

ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report, 28(4), 25-59.

Thomas, T., Pamela, R.,& Smaldino, S. (2013). Leading change and innovation in teacher preparation. A blue print for developing TPACK ready.

Warren, B. (2009). On Becoming a Leader: The Leadership Classic. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Wheatley, M. J. (1994). Leadership and the new science: Learning about organization from an orderly universe. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler P.