Employee Resistance: Failure To Change Program

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In the competitive business world, each and every organization wanted to survive and grow as a market leader. To remain competitive organizations perceive change as very important for its survival and prosperity. Human resources are the biggest and most important assets for all the organizations. The success and failure of the organization depend on the performance of employees. In this paper, we intended to access the employee behavior towards change program, reasons for resistance towards change program. The main point that we can conclude for this paper is that employee resistance is one of the major factor that leads to failure of the change program. For a change program to be successful, it is very important to be faced with minimum resistance. An effective communication system needs to establish so that any chances of mis-communication are avoided. Participatory management should be there to provide a platform for all concerned parties to voice their opinion. The leader should develop a habit of listening to other. Although a supervisor can't always make people feel comfortable with change, however, they can minimize discomfort. And feedback from resistors can even be helpful in improving the process of gaining acceptance towards change.

Keyword: Organizational Change, Employee Resistance, Failure of Change program

Introduction

In this competitive business world change is an inevitable phenomenon. Change is the only constant factor and is very important to the firm. In order to survive all organization needs to acknowledge the importance of change. An organization needs to perceive change as an important factor for its survival and prosperity in today's world.

Change acts as an instrumental tool in dealing with new business challenges. Change initiative needs to be taken to keep with the pace of changing the environment and new challenging competition. The success and performance of an organization depend on its ability to match its operation and functioning in the external world. It is a fact that sustaining the success of an organization depends on its ability to adapt to a changing environment. Unfortunately, it has been found that 70% of organizational transformations fail (Jayme Alexandre de Lima 2009).

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Change is a common occurrence within organizations, and resistance to change is just as common. Employee resistance is viewed as one of the main reasons for the failure of change program in many organizations. Resistance is the resultant employee's reaction of opposition to organizational change (Keen, 1981; Folger & Skarlicki 1999). Employee resistance has usually negative implication for the organizational change program. Employees play an important role in the implementation of the change program, thus employees' involvement in the change program is a must for its success.

The process of change is ubiquitous, and employee resistance has been identified as a most critically important contributor towards the failure of many well-intend and well-conceived efforts to initiate change within the organization. It has been found that in many case obstacles to change program is due to employee resistance at all levels: front-line, middle managers, and senior managers. Studies show that employee resistance is the prime reason due to which most change does not succeed or get implemented (Egan & Fjermestad, 2005). We can say that at times, many change programs fail as the organization is not able to win its employees' commitment to making the change program a success.

In an organization, people feel that change is the problem they faced, but in reality, it's not change but resistance which is a major problem. The tendency of people to avoid change and reality of need of change is the major problem in an organizational setting. To address the issue of employees resistance and aid in making change program success properly planned change management program is needed, which most of the organization lacks.

Many individuals believe that a charismatic leader can turn a change program into a successful one. This is true to a certain degree but is not a complete truth. To lead a successful change program charismatic leader also needs employee who believes in the need of the change program. At times subordinates make it extremely difficult for their leaders to be good leaders. The uncooperative behavior of subordinates makes it difficult for leaders to guide them in an effective manner. Leaders who fail to understand their subordinates may not be able to lead the change program effectively. It is found that organizational change can generate doubt and resistance in employees, making it sometimes difficult or impossible to implement organizational improvements.

If management does not understand, accept and make an effort to work with resistance, it can undermine even the most well-intentioned and well-conceived change efforts. Coetsee (1999). Any management's ability to achieve maximum benefits from change depends in part of how effectively, they create and maintain an organizational climate that minimizes resistant behavior and encourages acceptance and support.

Employee resistance

It is human nature to resist something new and unfamiliar to them. Human being prefers predictability and stability in both their personal and professional lives (Garrison Wynn 2005). Employees tend to avoid situations which challenge their beliefs, upset their status quo, threaten their self-interests, increase stress or involve risk. It is believed that employees resist change as it is a fundamental human behavior to object when they have to be imposed on others will. Employees resist change until they are able to recognize the benefits of change and perceive the gains to be worth more than the risk or threats to their self-interests.

Early research

The importance of the concept of resistance to change was bought into highlight by Kurt Lewin. Kurt Lewin emphasized the importance of individual behavior that must be addressed in order to bring about effective organizational change. To overcome employees' resistance towards change, it is necessary to increase the pushing force that is directed towards the change and decrease the restraining forces. To achieve this, three stages of change, i.e. unfreezing, moving, and refreezing need to be followed.

In unfreezing, stage leaders focus on removing the influence of old practices and situation from the mind of employees. Only when the old habits are removed it provides an opportunity for adapting to the new one. In moving, stage leaders facilitates employees through the transition from old practices to new ones. In refreezing stage, leaders focus on reinforcing the new practices and stabilizing it.

"Overcoming Resistance to Change" was the first research conducted regarding resistance to change. The research highlighted the importance of employee participation in decision making, which minimizes the chance of occurrence of resistance on the part of employees. The research opined that resistance to change is a combination of an individual reaction to frustration with strong group-induced forces (Coch and French 1948)

Research findings

I have used finding from three different research/articles to analyze why employees resist change. They are presented below:

1. A review of past empirical research reveals three different emphases in conceptualizations of resistance: as a cognitive state, as an emotional state, and as a behavior (Piderit 2000). It is believed that employee resistance change when they have negative thoughts or beliefs about the proposed change. Employees believe that the effort they put in the change program won't lead to desired outputs. The negativity towards the proposed change makes employees resist the change which leads to failure of the change program.

At times even the resistance arises due to employees emotional factors. Aggression and frustration are the major emotional factor that leads to undesirable behavior and resistance to change (Argyris and Schon 1978). Employees also resistance when they are emotionally attached to the old way of doing things. Change is viewed as a threat to their identity. It is said that resistance to change is a defense mechanism caused by frustration and anxiety (Piderit 2000). Individual behavior also leads to resistance towards change. Resistance to change has also been defined as intentional acts of defiance or omission. Some employees have the habit of sticking with the old way and resisting new one. It is some people's behavior that they don't like anything changing around them. They prefer their comfort and space. This type of behavior also leads to resistance towards change.

2. Another empirical study conducted states that a potential cause of employee resistance towards change is, goal conflict between owners and employees. Usually, a change program involves a change in organizational goal, which results in shifting focus towards new goals. This requires increased focus towards a new goal to make it attainable. The firm's increased concentration and self-centered focus on its goals which ultimately affects employees' personal goals, and as a result it becomes very difficult for employees to succeed on their own goals and satisfy their needs.

This concept is supported by "principal agent theory". This theory states that employees are the agents who strive to maximize their benefit while owners are the principal who strives for maximizing organization's profitability. The conflict between the interests of two parties leads to resistance. Unless and until the parties are able to address mutual benefit resistance towards change is inevitable.

3. Employees' resistance to change can be categorized under different headings. Understanding these different types of resistance helps in understanding ways to reduce resistance and encourage compliance with change. Resistance to change can be broken down into three groups: organization-level resistance, group-level resistance, and individual-level resistance (George et al.). Organizational level resistance arises due to the existence of power conflict among the members. When people felt that the change may affect their status, they tend to resist it. Even the culture followed and adopted by the organization aids in resistance towards change. An organization where the culture is more inclined towards stability, employees working their resist any kind of change.

Group level resistance arises when there are informal norms and expectations. When the expectations are not stated clearly people resist it as they don't know what they are expected to do. Resistance also occurs when change alters interactions between group members. Resistance also arises due to group cohesiveness. When members of a cohesive group wish to keep things, such as members or tasks, the same within the group resistance arises. Individual level resistance arises when they don't possess the ability both technical as well as physical to adopt the change. In time individual resistance is also supported by their political and cultural affiliation.

Reasons for resistance

Based on various articles and journals, the main reasons for resistance are as follows:

- Lack of awareness about the change. When employees' don't know why change is happening and the reasons behind the change initiative, they resist it due to doubts that they have. Change is always done for something new. New things always bring new result which is mostly unknown to the employee. The fear of the unknown makes employee resist change.
- Comfort with the way things are. Many people love their space and don't want to change the things and want them to remain as they are. The fear that their comfort zone might be disturbed makes employee resist change.
- At times change threatens the interest, identity and security of the employee. The employee doesn't want to disturb the perceived status quo that exists in the organization. The believed needed to safeguard themselves from the threats of change, employees resists change.
- At times resistance also arises when employees misunderstand the implications of the change. When the purpose of the change is unclear, it is difficult for the employees acknowledge the need for change.
- When employees are self satisfied and don't feel the need to achieve anything new, they resist change.
- When employees are working in a traditional organizational culture, where stability is given the utmost importance they resist change.
- Resistance also comes when employees feel that change is being imposed on them. The feeling that others will is being imposed on them makes an employee rest change.

- Resistance also arises when there is a conflict of interest between the interest of the owner and employee
- Employees resist change when their friends or colleague resists it. The social pressure and peer group pressure compels them to resist change.
- Employees also resist change when they don't like or believe in the action of change agent
- Resistance also arises when the change is taking place too rapidly and employees are not able to comprehend it.

How employee resistance leads to failure of the change program

Employees are the one with whose help change program is to be implemented. Without employees support and help change program cannot be implemented. It has been viewed that many change programs fail as leaders, fails to get employee commitment towards the program. Until and unless employees believe in the program and work for its success, the chance of failure of the program is very high. Change in not an event, but a long process, so to make it success support of all staff members is a must. Thus, before implementing any change effort leaders need to make sure that there is organizational readiness.

How to deal with employee resistance

People will only take active steps toward the unknown if they genuinely believe in it. It is important that employees feel the need and believe in need of change. Employees' needs to be assured that the risks of standing still are greater than those of moving forward in a new direction. To address the resistance of employee, leader should be able to communicate effectively why the change is needed. The benefit of the change needs to be communicated properly. Employees also need to know the risks involved if the change initiative is not taken. All the communicated information must be truthful.

Leaders should use numbers whenever they can. The benefits in numbers are more believable that just stating the change will be beneficial. The benefits shared in numbers are more rational and employees can compare the benefit of the change effected. If leaders only communicate the benefit of change based on idealistic and unseen promises of reward, it will be difficult to move employee towards change.

It is important that the change manager anticipate, and plan strategies for dealing with resistance. We know change is common phenomenon so is resistance, so it is always good to be prepared to address the resistance. This applies not only at the introduction of the change, but there must be follow-through, so that the change manager observes the change over the long-term, and being alert for difficulties as it appears.

To deal with resistance, first of all it is most important to differentiate between the resistance to change symptoms, and the causes behind it. These behaviors fall into two categories: active-resistance or passive-resistance. Symptoms of active-resistance include ridiculing, finding fault, appealing to fear, and manipulating. Passive-resistance symptoms include agreeing verbally, but not following through, feigning ignorance and withholding information.

Agency theory proposes different solutions to address employee resistance. It states the alignment of employees' goals with the owner's goals is needed, to allow them to work on a

common ground and achieve the firm goals. To align the goals of two parties following steps can be taken: a) establishing appropriate incentives for the agents to motivate them towards the principal's goals, b) Efficiently monitoring and observing agents' behavior, c) Evaluating or monitoring the outcomes of the behavior and d) Making efficient contracting with the agent (Jensen & Meckling, 1976; Hill Charles and Jones Thomas 1992).

The importance of employee participation in decision making is very important in addressing employee's resistance towards change. When employees themselves are part of change decision the chances that they will resist change is very minimal. Thus, the participatory management style is an influential tool while dealing with employees' resistance. In order to facilitate a smooth transition from the old to the new and minimize employee resistance organizations must be competent in effective change management. The change management process consists of getting of those involved and affected to accept the introduced changes as well as manage any resistance to them.

We should never underestimate the power of observational learning while dealing with employee resistance. If you want to change to work, act as a role model. Employees when they see their leader as a role model for the initiated change, they tend to follow and act the change. Leaders need to have the imagination to create new possibilities that do not currently exist.

Leaders need to acknowledge the facts that change program not only need employees' acceptance, but also needs: the desire to change, the ability to change, and the permission to change. Most humans will not change their beliefs, habits, or behaviors unless they are motivated to do so. Most will not change, even if the change is for the better, unless there is come compelling reason. Thus leader needs to create awareness of the need to change. What are the compelling reasons to move away from the familiar and comfortable and move to something different and perhaps uncomfortable?

Leaders need to provide some assistance in developing the skills necessary for the change. Ignorant of the dynamics of human behavior, we assume that once people understand the need for change, they will miraculously move in that direction. Finally, there is the issue of permission. There is a misconception that change is always initiated by top level management. At times change may be initiated by subordinates or employees from lower level of management, permission must be granted by those in power. When a change is personal, we only have to give ourselves permission to change.

A feedback system needs to be established to facilitate change as well as address the issue, why employees are resisting change after all the effort needs to be acknowledged. An effective feedback system should be placed. Employees need to know not only what will change, but why the new reality will be better. People who resist change are often the ones most concerned about getting things right. Give them the chance to help you make a good change initiative better. To build participation and engagement. (Jeffrey D. Ford, Laurie W. Ford 2009)

Conclusion and Recommendation:

This paper has been prepared with references from numerous publication/ articles/ journals. The main point that we can conclude for this paper is that employee resistance is one of the major factor that leads to failure of the change program. For a change program to be successful, it is very important to be faced with minimum resistance.

To deal with resistance, a change process should constantly develop to make it more responsive and receptive to the contentment and the needs of all stakeholders including employees. An effective communication system needs to establish so that any chances of miscommunication are avoided. Participatory management should be there to provide a platform for all concerned parties to voice their opinion. The leader should develop a habit of listening to other. And all organizational members need to be prepared to adjust to change

It is very important to acknowledge that fact that, change is a process, not an event (Tom Ehrenfeld 1992). In a practical sense employees are not resisting the change. The process of change is simply moving from the current way of doing things in a new and different way of doing things. But rather employee may be resisting the loss of status, loss of pay, or loss of comfort. As change involves an individual's psyche, there is no concrete answer regarding how to deal with resistance. Since each individual is different, their perceptions and reasons for resisting are also different. The best way to do is to understand the unique circumstances within each individual that is causing their particular resistance.

At times rather than focusing on overcoming resistance, resistance can also be used in a positive way. Resistance to change is a valuable employees' passion which can be channeled more constructively. Employees' resistance can be taken as an opportunity to improve the change plan by utilizing rather than just overcoming.

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