Study on Exploring the Breakthrough Strategy of Leaders in Change Management

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Abstract

The “Change” is the powerful word which implies the breakthrough/ improvement in any activity/situation as we come across. Change Management may be defined as “the proactive steps or measures are initiated by the leaders in order to enhance cutting edge or desired results as forecasted.

Today’s world of business is in a tumultuous and chaotic state. Organizations are constantly searching new strategies, styles, skills and change interventions that can help them take on competitors and thus derive competitive advantage. Globalization is impacting not just the economic but also social, political, environmental and cultural environment. So a substantial departure is being witnessed in the ways in which things are being done or shaped today compared to the days before. The notions of management propriety of years are being re-examined. The needs and voice of GenY are becoming more salient in devising future course of actions in different spheres of people management.

Introduction

The paradigm is also moving from the modernism discourse to post-modernism, which, among others, underscores individual diversity of perspectives rather than the supremacy of collectivist thinking. Individualism is growing in its space to the length and breadth of the globe through globalization’s convergence effect, which is causing some semblance of commonality in the management practices that are being adopted.

There are full-blown models of neo-unitarist strategic human resource management that are being successfully practiced by several leading organizations thus threatening pluralism in employee relations, which has ruled the roost since the Second World War at least in the developed world. The discipline is increasing in its importance and is becoming a major focus of attention of the strategists. Apart from managing and leading human resource development processes (including management development), leadership building is becoming a major strategic priority of leading companies and a lot of investment is taking place in this area.

A Lead...

The leadership concept is now being democratized, and companies want to see thousands of leaders across the length and breadth of the organization through vigorous leadership development programs. These programs are now a major part of management development in several global organizations. A good number of especially global companies have taken the lead in setting up corporate universities. In India, for example, the Airtel group has set up Bharti Learning Systems where more than 600 full time people are working to support the knowledge updation processes of people employed in the Bharti group of companies.

The Infosys has built a 300 acre Leadership Development Institute in Mysore, which is known to be world class. With the rise of the knowledge economy, association of the term leadership is becoming essential with management development; though many people see quite some hype in the leadership
concept when compared to managing, which itself was seen to be carrying a superior connotation compared to administration, as early writers on management had argued. Despite the controversies, it is now almost settled that the processes of learning and leadership are seen as central to organizational change.

The current scenario is a reflection of the fact that consequent on the remarkable changes in the global economy and business, new issues in leading people development have come to the fore as the 21st century is in its dawn. From emphasis on management development in general, it now also focuses on leadership development, even as management development is also a major issue in view.

There can be seen a shift from pluralistic workplace order to the emergence of a neounitarist workplace order reflecting the supremacy of managerial prerogatives on the one hand, and the wishes and idiosyncrasies of people in the organization on the other; the former being more of transactional nature and the latter focusing on visioning, inspiring, mentoring, and directing organizational members’ march towards the goal realization. In terms of the leadership canvass a larger number of issues have surfaced in the literature. For example, looking to the Google Company’s leadership model, one sees a critical focus on diverse individuals – or what Peter Drucker would refer to as monomaniacs – and innovation. Overall, some of the new issues in leadership and management development today are CSR (corporate social responsibility), ethics, organizational future, and even issues in the downturn.

If one looks at all the leadership theories that have emerged in the leadership discourse over the years, which have also been dealt with in the book, it is understandable that the paradigm is moving from the traits leadership, hero leadership and charismatic leadership to more of transformational leadership, leaders as reflexive practitioners, and servant leadership. This is quite in synch with the notion of emergent strategy (talked by Henry Minzberg) which perhaps has hinted that the days of rational-strategy making are few and far between, and more strategies will emerge in this chaotic business world as it is becoming more and more unpredictable so as to legitimize rational strategy-making.

The fact that today’s leaders have to give a shared significance to the organizational members that makes available to them direction and guidance about their desired behaviours so as to realize the vision of the organization. This is very close to what has been elsewhere referred to as building organizational leadership brand as one of the roles of leadership and HR department by Dave Ulrich and Norm Smallwood in a recent book on leadership. For, people who are working below them do not necessarily require to be constantly guided. But since they are aware of how things are being done in the organization, their work needs to be facilitated where the leader acts as the catalyst. So the leader converses with them and aligns their activities with the organizational vision.

The leaders who work most effectively, it seems to me, never say “I.” And that’s not because they have trained themselves not to say “I.” They don’t think “I.” They think “we”; they think “team.” They understand their job to be to make the team function. They accept responsibility and don’t sidestep it, but “we” gets the credit…. This is what creates trust, what enables you to get the task done.- Peter Drucker

To keep up, a leader and manager today has to DO well at the following:

- Get back to basics when everything around us diverts into complexity
- Make strategic planning a way of life in our organization
- Set clear expectations of what excellence looks like
- Communicate constantly about company strategies and excellence
- Build a high performing culture that supports strategies and brings them to life
- Provide continuous feedback
- Constantly learn and unlearn
True leadership is special, subtle, and complex. Too often we confuse things like personal style and a position of authority with leadership. • Leadership is not primarily a particular personality trait. A trait closely linked to leadership is charisma, but many people who have charisma (for example, movie actors and sports figures) are not leaders. • Leadership is not primarily a set of important objectives. It involves getting things done.

The Importance of Leadership

Leadership is not primarily a formal position. There have been great leaders who did not hold high positions—for example, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Jeanne d’Arc—and there are people who hold high positions who are not leaders at all, but administrators who don’t want to rock the boat. • Leadership is not primarily a set of behaviors. Many leadership manuals suggest that what defines leadership is things such as delegating and providing inspiration and vision; but people who are not leaders can do these things, and some effective leaders don’t do them all.

The Role of Leadership

In an organization where there is faith in the abilities of formal leaders, employees will look towards the leaders for a number of things. During drastic change times, employees will expect effective and sensible planning, confident and effective decision-making, and regular, complete communication that is timely. Also during these times of change, employees will perceive leadership as supportive, concerned and committed to their welfare, while at the same time recognizing that tough decisions need to be made. The best way to summarize is that there is a climate of trust between leader and the rest of the team. The existence of this trust, brings hope for better times in the future, and that makes coping with drastic change much easier.

In organizations characterized by poor leadership, employees expect nothing positive. In a climate of distrust, employees learn that leaders will act in indecipherable ways and in ways that do not seem to be in anyone's best interests. Poor leadership means an absence of hope, which, if allowed to go on for too long, results in an organization becoming completely non functioning. The organization must deal with the practical impact of unpleasant change, but more importantly, must labor under the weight of employees who have given up, have no faith in the system or in the ability of leaders to turn the organization around.

Leadership before, during and after change implementation is THE key to getting through the swamp. Unfortunately, if haven't established a track record of effective leadership, by the time employees have to deal with difficult changes, it may be too late. They will provide clarity on the expectations, project scope and responsibility for each contributor. Typically, there are four key roles: the Sponsor (Senior Leaders), Champion (Leader), Change Agent (Human Resources) and Stakeholder (Employees).

The Sponsor is usually the Director/Dean in the department/faculty and:
• Has the overall responsibility for the department or faculty.
• Is the person who has authority over the project and over the individuals who will implement the change.
• Provides funding, resolves issues and scope changes.
• Approves major deliverables and provides high-level direction.
• Has a clear vision, identified goals and measurable outcomes for the change initiative.

The Champion is usually the Sr. Manager/Chair in the department/faculty that:
• Has the overall day-to-day authority.
• Provides the Sponsor with information about the issues and challenges.
• Engages and involves the right people on the ground.
• Brings the change vision to life.
• Encourages (and sometimes enforces) new and desired behaviours.
The Change Agent is the person or group that assists the department/faculty to implement the proposed change i.e., Human Resources. Their role is to advise and guide the Champion and Sponsor throughout the change initiative and:

- Focus on assisting, advising and coaching the Sponsor and Champion in the change effort.
- May act in a number of roles – data gatherer, educator, advisor, facilitator or coach.
- Has no direct-line authority to or over the Sponsor or Stakeholders.
- Act as subject-matter-experts in the change management process.

Stakeholders are those employees who will be impacted by the change. It is critical that they are involved in the process and understand how the change initiative will impact their current state.

**What Remains...What Evolves**

Certain aspects and behaviors of leaders and managers that were important twenty five years ago are still critical today and will likely still be important 100 years from now. These include acting with integrity, leading by example, developing talent and ensuring customer satisfaction/loyalty. However, there are vast differences between the old-style of administrating and directing and the new idea of guiding and inspiring. Today’s managers and leaders are faced with a whole new set of expectations in the way they motivate the people who work with or follow them, setting the tone for most other aspects of what they do. People today not only don’t want to be managed, in most cases, they simply won’t be managed. Today’s employee wants to be led. They want to participate and engage in every aspect of their job. Creating a two way relationship is critical especially considering that many knowledge workers today know more about what they are doing than their boss does.

Another significant shift for managers and leaders today is the necessity of thinking globally. The impact of globalization has affected all aspects of business. Appreciating and leveraging diversity is an additional shift that correlates to our world becoming smaller and smaller; the broad expansion of businesses spans seas, cultures, and religions. In addition to these actions and areas of focus, leaders and managers today must be more innovative and more proactive, anticipating problems and opportunities as well as entirely new markets and products.

**Occurrence Distinguished**

The following chart captures the changes that are both occurring and necessary:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>25 Years Ago</th>
<th>Today</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>Stability</td>
<td>Constant change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Managing work</td>
<td>Managing results &amp; leading people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking horizon</td>
<td>Short term</td>
<td>Short term AND Long term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach to work</td>
<td>Plans details</td>
<td>Sets direction and monitors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fine tuning what is</td>
<td>Creating entirely new/what could be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>transactional</td>
<td>Transformational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision making</td>
<td>Made them</td>
<td>Facilitates them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reactive</td>
<td>Proactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy</td>
<td>Controlling others</td>
<td>Passion for the work, the company, the industry and the people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk taking</td>
<td>Avoided it</td>
<td>Takes it and enables others to take it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules</td>
<td>Made them and measured to them</td>
<td>Breaks them and encourages others to do the same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>Avoided it</td>
<td>Uses it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerned</td>
<td>Being right</td>
<td>Doing what is right</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Resistance to change

A 2006 study by Harvard Business Review found that 66% of change initiatives fail to achieve their desired business outcomes.

Why is change so difficult?

Overview of the Leader’s role for managing change

Given the obstacles noted, leaders have a critical role to play in managing change, the following chart provides an overview of how roles can impact the change obstacle.

Resistance to Change
Employee Resistance
Communication breakdown
Staff turnover

Leaders’ Role
- Leverage relationship with team to address employee concerns on a personal level
- Ask for their feedback and respond to their concerns honestly and openly.
- Communicate key information to employees on an ongoing and consistent basis.
- Engage team by involving them in the initiative.
- Coach, mentor and enrich their roles.

Why do change efforts fail?

There can be a significantly negative impact on the department or Faculty when a change initiative fails, or its implementation is unplanned. According to John P. Kotter (author of Leading Change), organizations often commit the following common errors that will hinder their change efforts and they are noted below.

Eight Errors Common to Organizational Change Efforts and Their Consequences

- Error #1: Allowing too much complacency
- Error #2: Failing to garner leadership support
- Error #3: Underestimating the power of vision
- Error #4: Undercommunicating the vision
- Error #5: Permitting obstacles to block the new vision
- Error #6: Failing to create short-term wins
- Error #7: Declaring victory too soon
- Error #8: Neglecting to anchor changes firmly in the culture

Consequences

- New strategies aren’t implemented well
- Reengineering takes too long
- Quality programs don’t deliver hoped-for results

Any organizational changes of significance requires management and formal leaders to do what they are paid for – lead. That applies to negative, painful and traumatic changes like downsizing and layoffs, but it also applies to positive changes that affect the working lives of those in the organization. When
change is imposed (as in downsizing scenarios), clearly the most important determinant of "getting through the swamp", is the ability of leadership to...well, lead. The literature on the subject indicates that the nature of the change is secondary to the perceptions that employees have regarding the ability, competence, and credibility of senior and middle management.

If we are to manage change effectively, we need to be aware that there are three distinct times zones where leadership is important. We can call these Preparing For the Journey, Slogging Through The Swamp, and After Arrival. We will look more carefully at each of these.

**Preparing For The Journey.**

It would be a mistake to assume that preparing for the journey takes place only after the destination has been defined or chosen. When we talk about preparing for the change journey, we are talking about leading in a way that lays the foundation or groundwork for ANY changes that may occur in the future. Preparing is about building resources, by building healthy organizations in the first place. Much like healthy people, who are better able to cope with infection or disease than unhealthy people, organization that are healthy in the first place are better able to deal with change.

As a leader we need to establish credibility and a track record of effective decision making, so that there is trust in our ability to figure out what is necessary to bring the organization through.

**Slogging Through The Swamp**

Leaders play a critical role during change implementation, the period from the announcement of change through the installation of the change. During this middle period the organization is the most unstable, characterized by confusion, fear, loss of direction, reduced productivity, and lack of clarity about direction and mandate. It can be a period of emotionalism, with employees grieving for what is lost, and initially unable to look to the future.

During this period, effective leaders need to focus on two things. First, the feelings and confusion of employees must be acknowledged and validated. Second, the leader must work with employees to begin creating a new vision of the altered workplace, and helping employees to understand the direction of the future. Focusing only on feelings, may result in wallowing. That is why it is necessary to begin the movement into the new ways or situations. Focusing only on the new vision may result in the perception that the leader is out of touch, cold and uncaring. A key part of leadership in this phase is knowing when to focus on the pain, and when to focus on building and moving into the future.

**After Arrival**

In a sense we never completely arrive, but here we are talking about the period where the initial instability of massive change has been reduced. People have become less emotional, and more stable, and with effective leadership during the previous phases, are now more open to locking in to the new directions, mandate and ways of doing things.

This is an ideal time for leaders to introduce positive new change, such as examination of unwieldy procedures or Total Quality Management. The critical thing here is that leaders must now offer hope that the organization is working towards being better, by solving problems and improving the quality of work life. While the new vision of the organization may have begun while people were slogging through the swamp, this is the time to complete the process, and make sure that people buy into it, and understand their roles in this new organization.
Communication strategy

The importance of developing a well thought out communications strategy is often overlooked when embarking on a change initiative. Effective communication during a change effort will serve to provide employees with timely and accurate information, which can positively influence whether the organization can maintain employee productivity and morale and overcome resistance to change. The following five areas outline questions and key information for us to consider when building and delivering a communications strategy designed to inform and guide employees through a change event:

1. Building a Strategy
2. Involving Key Stakeholders in Communications Efforts
3. Determining Message Content
4. Identifying Most Effective Communications Channels
5. Ensuring Follow Up

Managing the emotions in change

There is wisdom in resistance….

Martin Luther King did not say, “I have a very good plan,” he shouted, “I have a dream!” You must provide passion and a strong sense of purpose of the change.

Resistance to change is the largest obstacle that leaders are faced with when initiating a change effort. It can be very damaging to the process and can potentially stall the efforts to move forward if not addressed appropriately. There are many reasons why an employee may resist change and so as “leaders of change”, we have to be sensitive to how individuals respond while keeping in mind that the process of commitment and acceptance takes time.

William Bridges developed a model that reviews the emotional impact of change over time and the leader’s role. He describes the difference between change and transition. Change is situational and will happen without the people, whereas transition deals with the psychological impact on the people.

Bridges’ Three Phases of Transitions


As a leader of change our role will be to support and encourage our staff throughout each phase. It is important to recognize that transition is not linear and therefore, those that are impacted sometimes find themselves moving back and forth between the phases. Given this possibility, we have to expect and anticipate that people will go through the transition process at different speeds and in different ways. Skills in communication, listening and coaching will be pivotal in identifying how to support staff, both as individuals and as a group, so they can move through the phases as quickly and effectively as possible.
Phase 1: Ending, Losing, Letting Go
In this phase, staff and faculty must come to a point where they can let go of the old situation and until they let go, they will not be able to move on.

Possible Reactions
- Sense of Shock
- Fear
- Resentment
- Apathy
- Loss

Tips For Leaders
1. Identify what each individual will be losing
2. Accept employees’ reactions
3. Be open about losses and show empathy to those affected
4. Look for ways to compensate employees for their losses
5. Provide employees with lots of information
6. Show care and concern
7. Ask for reactions
8. Listen and pay attention to what are heard
9. Allow people time to grieve
10. Respond to the questions

Behaviours to watch for:
- Asking questions
- Challenging
- Complaining
- Failing to see any positive outcomes
- Trouble sleeping
- Withdrawal
- Blame

Phase 2: The Neutral Zone
In this phase, staff and faculty are in the gap between the old and new where the “old” no longer works and the “new” has yet to be established.

Possible Reactions
- Anxiety
- Confusion
- Decreased motivation (which can result in lack of productivity)
- Some hope

Tips For Leaders
1. Talk staff and faculty about the feelings they can expect at this stage
2. Create temporary policies, procedures or structures as necessary
3. Strengthen connections within team
4. Encourage employees to think of new ways of doing things
5. Involve people in trying out ideas
6. Start training people on the new skills they will need
7. Continue to explain the purpose and plan

Behaviours to watch for:

- Adjustment
- Bargaining
- Willingness to get involved

Phase 3: The Beginning Zone

Possible Reactions:
Emotional commitment to the new state

Tips for Leaders

- New energy
- New identity
- Sense of purpose.

1. Explain the purpose for the new beginning
2. Continue to communicate the vision: what will the outcome of the change look like
3. Develop a transition plan: when they will receive information, training and support
4. Give employees parts to play in the transition

Behaviours to watch for:
- Rebuilding
- Cooperation
- Clear focus and planning

Conclusion

Playing a leadership role in the three phases is not easy. Leader not only have a responsibility to lead, but as an employee himself, have to deal with his own reactions to the change, and his role in it. Although each person will have a different response to change (personal history), they often show their attachment to the group (social situation at work) by joining in a uniform response to the change.

Today's business world is highly competitive. The way to survive is to reshape to the needs of a rapidly changing world. Resistance to change is a dead-end street. For all of us and for the organization. Organizations are reshaping themselves to change quickly in order to meet the needs of their customers. The organization's top leaders know they cannot throw money at every problem and that they need highly committed and flexible workers. As a leader, has to emphasize action to make the change as quickly and smoothly as possible.

“Resistance is futile,”

References:

2. Extracted from the Corporate Executive Board, Human Resources Learning and Development Roundtable.
3. Cited Sources:
5. Extracted and adapted from the Corporate Executive Board, Human Resources Learning and Development Roundtable.
9. Extracted and adapted from: