Strategies to Create a Climate of Change Readiness in Organizations

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to investigate how to create a positive climate for change readiness in organizations from the perspective of managers. This paper explores the literatures and researches about organization change. It advances understanding of change readiness by considering its characteristics. Change readiness is critical to change implementing and organization success, organizations should adopt effective strategies to create a climate for it.

Keywords: Organization change; Change readiness; Climate for change; Managers

1. To understand change and change readiness in organizations

Organization change ultimately is any activity that alters the current state within an organization (Maurer, 2001). Change in today's organizations is more rapid, more complex, more turbulent, and more unpredictable than ever before (Russell, 2004). So managing change is one of the most critical challenges for today's organizations and their managers. Change in organizations often accompanies with a purpose. Karyn (2002) points out change occurs as a result of an internal or external initiator that creates a requirement, need, or desire for change based on the perception of managers or employees within an organization.

Organization change is caused by many sources and may occur in different levels within an organization. And also the implementations for change are influenced by different situations. Armenakis (2002) argues that these situations can take one of many forms of conflicting management or subordinate styles. He noted that the styles can range from a sense of activism for internal or external change activities to a group of employees' perception of a challenge as well as their value system to strains on the internal social structure to the individual personality traits that exist within the organization. Organization changes are influenced by various forces and they may create either negative or positive effects for organizations. As pursuing change and transforming organizations is tough work. Karyn (2002) stressed that many change initiatives fail because cultures do not readily accept change, and do not effectively anticipate the impact on human systems. During change process bitter implementation battles and strident resistance can occur. Mark Twain ever said the only person who likes change is a baby with a wet diaper. Loizos (2020) states organization change failure has typically been viewed as occurring when expected outcomes of change have not been met.

In order to successfully implement change and help organization develop healthily, managers must be able to understand the basic elements of organization change. This leads many researchers to discuss the notion of change readiness, which can offer help to manage the preparations and conditions of change. Armenakis, et al. early in 1993 define perceptions of readiness for change as "the cognitive precursor to the behaviors of either resistance to, or support for, a change effort."

2. The characteristics of change readiness

In organizations, when facing organization change, employees even in similar situations will act differently. Some employees welcome change and then can effectively participate in. Some may be resistant and some, however, may choose not to participate and may even block the organization's proposed performance. Employees behave differently when they facing organization change due to the different level of change readiness, thus can bring various impacts on organization change----some are negative while some are positive. Cunningham et al (2002) noted that employees who seem to be prepared for change or who have the highest level of readiness for change may be the most beneficial to any organization. A high degree of change readiness is preferred in organizations.

Another characteristic of change readiness is that some employees are ready for one kind of change but difficult to be ready for

other kinds of changes. As individuals have various life experiences, values, and behavioral patterns etc. Ilgen and Pulakos (1999) indicated it is impossible to know for certain all of the characteristics a specific individual may need to develop and heighten his/ her overall readiness for change. It is hard for managers to identify employees' readiness for change and adopt effective methods to increase change readiness.

As mentioned in the first section that organization is keeping changing and all kinds of situations and variables are changing as well. Change readiness is changing as well. As Backer (1995) stated, "Readiness for change is not a fixed element of individuals or systems. It may vary due to changing external or internal circumstances, the type of change being introduced, or the characteristics of potential adopters and change agents". In organizations, employees are always confronting such constant changes as technology, job design, the structure of work, So change readiness should keep changing to meet the challenge of change. Ilgen and Pulakos (1999) stress that some degree of adjustment and improvement can and should occur continuously. Norton and Fox (1997) points out organizations that continually and consistently rise and meet that challenge are those that are most successful.

3. The way to create a climate for change readiness

For the organizations where changes are failed, the cost in money, resources, time, and lost good will can be staggering (Maurer, 2001). Moving organizations from current to future changed states is not easy and requires skills and knowledge. Managers can add strategies to build support for the change rather than assuming employees will automatically accept changes. So it is important to know whether the current mind-sets, techniques, and tools are effective for creating such an organization. That is the importance and necessary of creating a positive climate for change, in other words, to change change readiness. Organizational changes are activities that will influence every party of the organization, including its shareholders. In order to create change readiness, managers should get support from their shareholders. The best way to do this is to introducing change plans, strategies and possible outcomes to shareholders. Letting stakeholders know the change objectives and benefits. This can ensure managers credibility and accountability when facing employees.

From the manager's perspective, in order to create a positive climate for change readiness, it is vital to understand his organization and employees' readiness for change. Different organizations have different history and culture. The history and cultural system will influence its employees' behavior when facing changes. In fact, the longer an organization's history is, the stronger its culture is and it is harder to manage change readiness. So managers must bear this critically important reality in mind where any intervention starts. Some researchers suggest some methods of measuring readiness for organizational change. It is becoming popular that managers use questionnaires or surveys to access employees' change readiness. Managers should be able to assess the readiness for change within an organization. This ability will allow managers to think logically about how the change will impact entity members and enhance their ability to facilitate the change process (Russell, 2004). Managers can identify the readiness levels of employees and may start coaching them accordingly.

Whetheriy (1998) explored four major reasons why individuals may not be ready for change. Include: uncertainty resulting from lack of information, wrong information, fear of the unknown, and loss of control; threatened status or power base, pressure to learn new skills, and reluctance to let go and try new ideas; organizational culture blames those who make mistakes, or is weighed down by historical factors; a need to make new relations, or low trust. Customized communication, assertiveness, listening, conflict resolution, and feedback skill training can play a major role in increasing individual change readiness (Russell, 2004). Readiness for change begins with an individual's perception of the benefits of change (Mossholder et al., 2000). Managers can use effective communication channels to exchange information with employees. Endrejat et al. (2020) state through solution-focused communications would contribute to readiness for change scores. Through the communication, employees can get to know the purpose of change and the benefits of change. Therefore this can reduce the chance of misunderstanding and doubt of employees.

When change is about to occur in organizations, there are always some employees and even managers would have low levels of change readiness. According to Hanpachem, Morgan and Griego (1998) study among the employees who have lower change readiness, employees who are in managerial positions more often have this problem. Because these people have some power in the organization and they do not believe they will be involved in the change process. In other words, these people are not confident with their abilities to succeed in the change and are afraid of losing the original position. Powell (2001) argued that it is likely that someone will face a challenge and their ability to thrive in the face of that challenge are determined largely by their location in the social hierarchy. These employees in managerial positions have more burdens and are under greater stress than general employees. To increase the change readiness of this kind of people, Metwally et al. (2019) reveal that ethical leadership enhances employees' readiness to change. So it is extremely important to explain to them why to change and where the change would go. Only when they

understand why they should change will people begin to devote energy to the change effort.

In some cases, managers or leaders create a need for change within an organization based on their individual preferences. As discussed in Jansen's (2000) research on personality and organizational culture, there have been many instances where new managers come into an organization and try to exert influence on the existing structure and socio systems to match their personal preferences so that they feel more comfortable within the organization. Whether a change will be successful dependent upon the efforts of all team members, and whether employees are ready for change highly depend on the trust to managers. If managers only think about themselves and forcibly implement changes in organizations, they will lose the trust of employees without which employees will never be prepared for changes. Therefore, it would be helpful that managers improve their managerial skills in group dynamics, trust building etc when creating positive climate for change readiness.

It is apparent that individual readiness for change would be influenced by broader organizational factors. There are some outstanding problems when creating change readiness. Cabana et al. (1999) reported that some reasons employees do not participate in certain changes include a lack of awareness, lack of familiarity, lack of agreement, self-efficacy, outcome expectancy, and the inertia of past habits. Employees may feel changes are too difficult, too risky, or too painful. These feelings will have negative impact on change readiness. Brien (2004) suggested that it is proper to offer employees some space and time to understand changes and make some adjustment. He used a metaphor to illustrate this that before any embryonic innovation can fly it needs to be incubated and hatched, then nurtured and fed until it has the strength to test its wings. Hence, managers may leave some time and space for employees to get familiar with the mission of change and catch the pace of ongoing process and at last integrate a powerful team.

When facing organizational change, employees often feel under great stress and anxiety which may lead to health problems and concerns. This kind of issue can deduce work morale and affect change readiness. Managers can encourage some physical activities such as: gym class or short sight-viewing to refresh employees. Macedo (2011) states the workplace fitness programs have shown notable health and motivational results for employees. These activities can reduce health concerns, increase overall health, increase energy levels, reduce absenteeism, and may actually increase the time and effort used to perform work tasks during the work day. All of these benefits may increase an employee's power to become more prepared for change.

4. Conclusion

Organization change occurs constantly in today's organizations. Usually there are strong resistances to change. Employees are afraid of the unknown and may doubt there are effective means to accomplish major organizational change. Therefore, the change readiness of employees is extremely critical to the success of organization change. It is extremely important for managers to create a climate to encourage change readiness.

Change readiness is influenced by many variables and difficult to measure. Organization history, structure, culture can be barriers to enhance change readiness. And employees' values, beliefs, knowledge skills etc cause more concern when preparing for change.

From managers' perspective, they can create a climate to encourage change readiness by implementing effective communication channels, training programs, change readiness assessment, HRM practices etc to align the organization with the needed change and enable the transformation goes smoothly and finally achieve successful changes.

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