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CHANGE MANAGEMENT PROCESS AND LEADERSHIP STYLES

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Abstract

In today VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous) world, every organization or institution is susceptible to change wave. Any organization that fails to positively respond to change will surely go to extinction. However for successful initiation and implementation of change initiatives, there is need for diligence and skillfulness from the part of organizational leaders especially those from Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Several studies have confirmed that seventy percent of change initiatives fail and the failure has been largely attributed to leaders' ineffectiveness in anchoring change programme. Through extensive analysis of findings of several case studies, failure to gradually institutionalize change initiatives and inappropriate leadership styles are found to be part of the reasons why change initiatives fail in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). This paper therefore discusses change management process and leadership styles. Turning institutions to learning organization and adoption of transformational leadership style are recommended for effective change management process.

Keywords

Educational Leaders, Change Management, Transactional Leadership Style, Transformational Leadership Style, Learning Organization

1. Introduction

Change from time immemorial has been integral part of both human and social development. It is just a natural phenomenon which every social entity has to witness in the cause of survival (Ann-Louise, 2015). In the twenty-first century, no sector is left untouched with the wind of change. All sectors have been forced to respond to the new trends by adopting new ideas and processes (Barber, Donnelly, & Rizvi, 2013).

In responding to globalization trend, higher institutions of learning have extended their horizon to cover global dimension rather than operating within their national or regional boundary. Technology explosion also has brought in more flexible instruction and almost every university now engages in distance and online learning. The world ranking as well is another reason why many institutions introduce different initiatives in their citadels of learning (Barber, Donnelly & Rizvi, 2013; Ingrid et al., 2017).

As higher institutions of learning embark on different initiatives in order to meet the test of time, change initiative can either have positive or negative effect on the institution activities depending on how such change programme is introduced and handled. The success or failure of any initiative depends on the effectiveness of the leader. To successfully manage change, there is need for the leaders to understand change management process as well exhibit appropriate leadership style. This paper discusses change management process and leadership styles in order to assist leaders navigate through change process successfully.

2. The concept of change in higher education sector

The word 'change' is ubiquitous word but no specific definition can be attached to it. It is synonymous to innovation, development, progress, improvement, evolution, adjustment, etc. (Graetz, Rimmer, Lawrence, & Smith, 2015). The word can be better understood from the context where it is used. At the level of primary or secondary school, change may mean reform in teaching methods or evaluation, improvement of school governance and inspection while at tertiary level it entails technological innovation, centralization or decentralization, staff

autonomy, accreditation and evaluation, parental participation, policy reform etc. (Ingrid et al.,2017; UE4SD, 2016; Harigopal, 2006; Fullan, 1999)

Specifically change is about altering organizational practice, structure, culture, policy and regulation. It is about becoming different or having a different form (Harigopal, 2006). There are several dimensions through which change can be viewed. It may be individual or collective, internal or external, local or international, temporal or permanent, gradual or abrupt, process or product, intentional or unintentional, profound or partial (Altrichter & Elliott, 2000).

Change can also be directional, fundamental, total, planned, happened, transformational, revolutionary, strategic, anticipatory or reactionary (Harigopal, 2006). In educational setting, change can come from multiple sources which include new legislation from the government, pressures from the staff, parents or students, new technology development etc. (Beaudoin, 2015). Change sometimes is unpredictable as may be triggered by emergent situation or crisis (Chadler, 2013).

The change drivers in higher institutions of learning in the recent times include globalization, technology explosion, upsurge enrolment, international competition, financial problems, pressure for accountability etc. (Nick, 2013). All these factors have necessitated higher institutions of learning to make changes in order to keep up with the test of time.

Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) for instance has drastically changed human interaction and broken the barrier of distance in communication. New means of teaching and learning then emerged and many “virtual universities” now spring up. So higher institutions of learning across the globe are now forced to extend their horizon to embrace both online and offline courses. In order to do this the process and content of study have to be modified. Barber et al. (2013) assert that adopting of MOOC (Massive Open Online Courses) is necessary for the institution of learning at this crucial time.

Globalization too has called for different reforms in higher education. Higher institutions of learning are now bound to think globally. They are to accommodate international dimensions which include involvement in international activities, an internationalized curriculum, study exchange programme, recruitment of international staff etc. (Chang, 2015)

Furthermore the issue of accountability is another driver of change in higher education. Due to economic constraints, government, parents and other stakeholders are mostly demanding for quality education in order to justify huge amount expended on educational sector. The shift in the world of work is another reason for change pressure, the world of work today demands for

soft skills, non-routine, collaboration and multiple role rather than the extremely formality, isolation and stringent division of labour obtainable in the past. To positively respond to all these factors, educational leaders are bound to initiate and implement different change programmes in their various institutions of learning.

3. Management of change in Higher Education Institutions

What is most important is how to handle change. Handling change requires adequate training because problem associated with every change is different from one another. Some problems are discrete in nature. In such problem, technical expertise is useful and outcome can be probably predicted. However there are other kinds of problems which cannot be handled with clear cut methods and outcomes of any action taken on them are unpredictable (Owen, 2011; Green, 1997).

Armstrong (2009) identified seven types of change and how they can be successfully handled. They are: incremental, transformational, strategic, organizational, systems and processes, cultural, and behavioural. He maintained that incremental change is a gradual change. It takes place in small steps. It is about responding to crisis situations logically and progressively. It means initiating innovations in the organization in such a way that the people will progressively get used to the new initiatives.

Transformational change means that the change manager implements major change programmes in order to meet the new demands. It is characterized with radical breakthroughs in paradigms, beliefs and behavior over a period of time. Strategic change on the other hand has to do with broad, long-term and organization-wide range issues. In implementing this change, the purpose and mission of the organization, as well as its corporate philosophy are considered. The change leaders also carry out SWOT (by considering the Strength, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats) analysis to determine how the change programme will be initiated.

The fourth one which is organizational change is about the structural change of the organization in terms of centralization and decentralization. Systems and processes change involve changing of operational methods of the organization e.g technology. The system change may mean upgrading or changing computer system of the organization such as electronic data interchange, enterprise resource planning, customer relationship management (CRM), computer-based supply, chain automation etc.

Cultural change is changing of customs, beliefs or assumptions in an organization. Changes in this area may be to create a new environment that is conducive for better performance. Behavioural change involves taking steps to encourage people to be more effective by shaping or modifying the ways in which they carry out their work.

Change initiative in higher education institutions can be in any of the above mentioned dimensions. To successfully carry it out, educational leaders have to be aware of the complexity of the institution where they operate. This is because change programme in higher institutions of learning often met with resistance. There are many reasons for the resistance and change managers have to consider them before initiating any change programme. Chandler (2013) asserts that the faculty members often resist change to curriculum or content of learning because of the tedious time they have expended in preparing the content. He states:

The teaching syllabus for many Faculty members is built up over many years of practice and members have spent a lot of time developing strategies that they consider to be effective and suit their personal style. This being the case, changes in a curriculum will be resisted on the basis of the amount of time and effort that has been spent putting the syllabus together and in some cases, could be considered an individual's life work (p.247).

Another reason for the change resistance in higher education institution is because it is an organized anarchy or loosely coupled system. 'The teachers, professors have substantial autonomy with their own individual traditions' (Chandler, 2013 p. 245). Other reasons for the resistance can be attributed to the change leaders. Many leaders in universities and colleges are unprepared to lead change. Sometimes they have an unclear vision for the change programme while at the other time the problem is their failure to exhibit appropriate leadership style that will enhance smooth transition of the change programme.

4. Change and Leadership styles

To be a promoter of change, HEIs leaders have to exhibit appropriate leadership styles. Change success has been found to be dependent on the leadership style of a leader (Baesu & Bejinaru, 2013). Through appropriate leadership style, change leaders would be able to 'influence and ultimately change the behaviors of employees, teams and the organization at large' (Baesu & Bejinaru 2013, p.147)

Leaders have to act as role drivers as well as role models in any successful change programme (Skakon, Nielsen, Borg & Guzman, 2010). Leadership styles and leaders' participation are determinants of success in organizational change programme (Oreg, Vakola & Armenakis, 2011). Steven, Medea & Thai-Son (2015) identify four leadership styles related to change process: Laissez-faire, transactional, transformational and change-oriented.

Laissez-faire is a French term which means "allow to act". Thus Laissez-faire leadership style is a 'hands-off' management approach. It is exhibited when leaders totally leave managerial activities to their subordinates. In relation to change process, laissez-faire leaders try to avoid change and when change finally occurs they eschew their responsibilities. Such leaders are found to be away physically and emotionally from their followers. This kind of leadership style cannot bring expected positive result of handling change in HEIs.

Transactional leadership style is also known as managerial leadership. The major focus of the style is on planning, supervision and group performance. Leaders who exhibit this style focus more on tasks, attempt to meet material and psychological needs of the employees in exchange for desired services or behaviour (Ann-Louise, 2015). Such leaders are concerned about day to day transaction in the organization (Steven et al., 2015). They seek compliance through rewards and punishment approach. However in relation to change process, this leadership style appeals only to the satisfaction of lower-order of individual need (Ann-Louise, 2015).

Transformational leadership style is characterized with four factors known as four 'I's: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration (Bass, 2008). The style focuses on meeting organizational needs, satisfies individual higher needs and evokes relationship oriented behaviour (Golm, 2009). Generally it means empowering followers by instilling confidence in them. By exhibiting this style the leader will be able to achieve both the organizational and employees' objectives (Van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013).

Leaders adopting this style act as role models, build trust and develop team by ensuring shared vision. They also instill pride and confidence in their followers, empower them through training, attend to their psychological and emotional needs and convince them on the need to change the status quo (Oreg et al., 2011).

In managing change, transformational leadership style has been found to be more effective compared to transactional leadership style (Brandt, Laitinen & Laitinen, 2016). It is

wider in scope and most appropriate for transitional period (Oreg et al., 2011). Transformational leader as a change leader performs the following roles:

- Create a feeling of urgency
- Provide a precise guidance
- Determine a vision for the change programme.
- Share the change vision with the employees
- Give authority to the workers to act in line with the vision
- Plan short term gains to celebrate the success
- Institutionalize new approaches in the organization (Saylı & Tüfekçi, 2008; İkinci, 2012):

Transformational leadership style is further noted to comprise key elements of change oriented leaders (Steven, 2015). HEIs leaders thus need to exhibit transformational leadership style when implementing change. This can be manifested by turning their institution to learning organization.

Learning organization will be able to quickly adapt to any change introduced in the institution. This can be done by allaying workers fear on change through exposition to knowledge and skills necessary to cope with eventual future change. Hence the workers would be able to foresee the future change, embrace and work along with it.

5. Preparation for change process

The first priority of educational leaders before implementing change is to ensure they turn their institutions to learning organization. To transform the institution into learning organization, the leaders should act on these seven constructs identified by Marsick's and Watkins in their DLOQ (Dimension of Learning Organization Model) model:

- Create continuous learning opportunities;
- Promote inquiry and dialogue;
- Encourage collaboration and team learning;
- Create systems to capture and share learning;
- Empower people toward a collective vision;
- Connect the organization to its environment; and
- Provide strategic leadership for learning (Yusuff & Reese, 2018)

So in order to be able to institutionalize change in the institutions, educational leaders have to be gradual in their process, ensure that prior preparations are well taken care of and appropriate leadership style is exhibited.

6. Conclusion

Leaders of Higher Education Institutions have to initiate series of change programme in order to keep on living in the contemporary societies. The change initiatives will enable them to be relevant, as well meet the need of the society. However the change initiatives should not be haphazardly carried out. This paper has discussed necessary preliminary tasks. Change initiatives success therefore depends on how well the leaders are able to prepare themselves and their institutions for the change programme.

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