Change management

12

Key concepts and terms

- *Change agent*
- *Change management*
- *Field force analysis*
- *Gamma change*
- *Incremental change*
- *Operational change*
- *Transformational change*
- *Strategic change*

LEARNING OUTCOMES

On completing this chapter you should be able to define these key concepts. You should also know about:

- Types of change
- The change process
- Change models
- Reasons for resistance to change
- Overcoming resistance to change
- Implementing change
- The role of HR in leading and facilitating change

Introduction

Change management is defined as the process of achieving the smooth implementation of change by planning and introducing it systematically, taking into account the possibility of it being resisted or at least misunderstood.

However, Kotter (1996) emphasized the importance of leading change rather than simply managing it.

As described in this chapter, to manage change it is first necessary to understand the types of change and how the process works. It is important to bear in mind that while those wanting change need to be constant about ends, they have to be flexible about means. This requires them to come to an understanding of the various models of change that have been developed and of the factors that create resistance to change and how to minimize such resistance. In the light of an understanding of these models and the phenomenon of resistance to change they will be better equipped to make use of the guidelines for change set out in this chapter. The role of HR in leading and managing change is examined in the penultimate section of the chapter and the chapter ends with a set of guidelines.

Types of change

There are three types of change: transformational, strategic and operational.

Transformational change

Transformational change, sometimes referred to as gamma change, takes place when there are fundamental and comprehensive changes in structures, processes and behaviours which have a dramatic effect on the ways in which the organization functions.

Strategic change

Strategic change is concerned with broad, long-term and organization-wide issues involving change. It is about moving to a future state which has been defined generally in terms of strategic vision and scope. It will cover the purpose and mission of the organization. It will also refer to its corporate philosophy on such matters as growth, quality, innovation and values concerning employees and customers, competitive positioning and strategic goals for achieving and maintaining competitive advantage and for product–market development. These goals are supported by policies concerning marketing, sales, manufacturing, product and process development, finance and human resource management.

Strategic change takes place within the context of the external competitive, economic and social environment, and the organization's internal resources, capabilities, culture, structure and systems. Its successful implementation requires thorough analysis and understanding of these factors in the formulation and planning stages.

However, strategic change should not be treated simplistically as a linear process of getting from A to B which can be planned and executed as a logical sequence of events. Pettigrew and Whipp (1991: 31) issued the following warning based on their research into competitiveness and managing change in the motor, financial services, insurance and publishing industries:

> The processes by which strategic changes are made seldom move directly through neat, successive stages of analysis, choice and implementation. Given the powerful internal characteristics of the firm it would be unusual if they did not affect the process: more often they transform it. Changes in the firm's environment persistently threaten the course and logic of strategic changes: dilemma abounds.... We conclude that one of the defining features of the process, in so far as management action is concerned, is ambiguity; seldom is there an easily isolated logic to strategic change. Instead, that process may derive its motive force from an amalgam of economic, personal and political imperatives. Their interaction through time requires that those responsible for managing that process make continual assessments, repeated choices and multiple adjustments.

Operational change

Operational change relates to new systems, procedures, structures or technology which will have an immediate effect on working arrangements within a part of the organization. But their impact on people can be more significant than broader strategic change and they have to be handled just as carefully.

The change process

Conceptually, the change process starts with an awareness of the need for change. An analysis of this situation and the factors that have created it leads to a diagnosis of their distinctive characteristics and an indication of the direction in which action needs to be taken. Possible courses of action can then be identified and evaluated and a choice made of the preferred action. It is then necessary to decide how to get from here to there. Managing change during this transition state is a critical phase in the change process. It is here that the problems of introducing change emerge and have to be managed. These problems can include resistance to change, instability, high levels of stress, misdirected energy, conflict, and loss of momentum. Hence the need to do everything possible to anticipate reactions and likely impediments to the introduction of change.

The final stage in which the new structure, system or process is installed can also be demanding, indeed painful. As described by Pettigrew and Whipp (1991: 27), the implementation of change is an 'iterative, cumulative and reformulation-in-use process'.

The next issue is how to 'hold the gains', ie how to ensure that the change is embedded and maintained. This means continuously monitoring the effects and impact of the change and taking corrective action where necessary to ensure that it continues to work well. The change process has been described in the various change models set out below.

Change models

Change models explain the mechanisms for change and the factors that affect its success. The best-known change models are those developed by Lewin (1951) and Beckhard (1969). But other important contributions to an understanding of the mechanisms for change have been made by Thurley (1979), Bandura (1986) and Beer et al (1990).

Lewin

The basic mechanisms for managing change as set out by Lewin (1951) are:

- Unfreezing – altering the present stable equilibrium which supports existing behaviours and attitudes. This process must take account of the inherent threats change presents to people and the need to motivate those affected to attain the natural state of equilibrium by accepting change.
- Changing – developing new responses based on new information.
- Refreezing – stabilizing the change by introducing the new responses into the personalities of those concerned.

Lewin also suggested the following methodology for analysing change which he called 'field force analysis':

- Analyse the restraining or driving forces which will affect the transition to the future state – these restraining forces will include the reactions of those who see change as unnecessary or as constituting a threat.
- Assess which of the driving or restraining forces are critical.
- Take steps both to increase the critical driving forces and to decrease the critical restraining forces.

Beckhard

Beckhard (1969) proposed that a change programme should incorporate the following processes:

- Set goals and define the future state or organizational conditions desired after the change.
- Diagnose the present condition in relation to these goals.
- Define the transition state activities and commitments required to meet the future state.
- Develop strategies and action plans for managing this transition in the light of an analysis of the factors likely to affect the introduction of change.

Thurley

Keith Thurley (1979) described the following five approaches to managing change:

- Directive – the imposition of change in crisis situations or when other methods have failed. This is done by the exercise of managerial power without consultation.
- Bargained – this approach recognizes that power is shared between the employer and the employed and change requires negotiation, compromise and agreement before being implemented.
- 'Hearts and minds' – an all-embracing thrust to change the attitudes, values and beliefs of the whole workforce. This 'normative' approach (ie one which starts from a definition of what management thinks is right or 'normal') seeks 'commitment' and 'shared vision' but does not necessarily include involvement or participation.
- Analytical – a theoretical approach to the change process using models of change such as those described above. It proceeds sequentially from the analysis and diagnosis of the situation, through the setting of objectives, the design of the change process, the evaluation of the results and, finally, the determination of the objectives for the next stage in the change process. This is the rational and logical approach much favoured by consultants – external and internal. But change seldom proceeds as smoothly as this model would suggest. Emotions, power politics and external pressures mean that the rational approach, although it might be the right way to start, is difficult to sustain.
- Action based – this recognizes that the way managers behave in practice bears little resemblance to the analytical, theoretical model. The distinction between managerial thought and managerial action blurs in practice to the point of invisibility. What managers think is what they do. Real life therefore often results in a 'Ready, aim, fire' approach to change management. This typical approach to change starts with a broad belief that some sort of problem exists, although it may not be well defined. The identification of possible solutions, often on a trial or error basis, leads to a clarification of the nature of the problem and a shared understanding of a possible optimal solution, or at least a framework within which solutions can be discovered.

Bandura

The ways in which people change was described by Bandura (1986). He suggested that people make conscious choices about their behaviours. The information people use to make their choices comes from their environment and their choices are based upon the things that are important to them, the views they have about their own abilities to behave in certain ways and the consequences they think will accrue to whatever behaviour they decide to engage in.

For those concerned in change management, the implications of Bandura's concept of change (which is linked to expectancy theory; see Chapter 10) are that:

- the tighter the link between a particular behaviour and a particular outcome, the more likely it is that we will engage in that behaviour;
- the more desirable the outcome, the more likely it is that we will engage in behaviour that we believe will lead to it;
- the more confident we are that we can actually assume a new behaviour, the more likely we are to try it.

To change people's behaviour, therefore, we have first to change the environment within which they work; secondly, convince them that the new behaviour is something they can accomplish (training is important); and, thirdly, persuade them that it will lead to an outcome that they will value. None of these steps is easy.

Beer, Eisenstat and Spector

Michael Beer (1990) and his colleagues suggested in a seminal *Harvard Business Review* article, 'Why change programs don't produce change', that most such programmes are guided by a theory of change which is fundamentally flawed. This theory states that changes in attitudes lead to changes in behaviour. 'According to this model, change is like a conversion experience. Once people get religion, changes in their behaviour will surely follow.' They thought that this theory gets the change process exactly backwards and made the following comment on it (ibid: 159):

> In fact, individual behaviour is powerfully shaped by the organizational roles people play. The most effective way to change behaviour, therefore, is to put people into a new organizational context, which imposes new roles, responsibilities and relationships on them. This creates a situation that in a sense 'forces' new attitudes and behaviour on people.

They prescribe six steps to effective change which concentrate on what they call 'task alignment' – reorganizing employee's roles, responsibilities and relationships to solve specific business problems in small units where goals and tasks can be clearly defined. The aim of following the overlapping steps is to build a self-reinforcing cycle of commitment, coordination and competence:

- Mobilize commitment to change through the joint analysis of problems.

- Develop a shared vision of how to organize and manage to achieve goals such as competitiveness.
- Foster consensus for the new vision, competence to enact it, and cohesion to move it along.
- Spread revitalization to all departments without pushing it from the top – don't force the issue, let each department find its own way to the new organization.
- Institutionalize revitalization through formal policies, systems and structures.
- Monitor and adjust strategies in response to problems in the revitalization process.

Resistance to change

People resist change because it is seen as a threat to familiar patterns of behaviour as well as to status and financial rewards. Joan Woodward (1968: 80) made this point clearly:

> When we talk about resistance to change we tend to imply that management is always rational in changing its direction, and that employees are stupid, emotional or irrational in not responding in the way they should. But if an individual is going to be worse off, explicitly or implicitly, when the proposed changes have been made, any resistance is entirely rational in terms of his own best interest. The interests of the organization and the individual do not always coincide.

Hamlin and Davies (2001: 58) commented that: 'Any change creates stress and anxiety; this is because as human beings we deal individually with uncertainty in different ways.'

However, some people will welcome change as an opportunity. These need to be identified and where feasible they can be used to help in the introduction of change as change agents.

Reasons for resisting change

Specifically, the reasons for resisting change are:

- The shock of the new – people are suspicious of anything which they perceive will upset their established routines, methods of working or conditions of employment. They do not want to lose the security of what is familiar to them. They may not believe statements by management that the change is for their benefit as well as that of the organization; sometimes with good reason. They may feel that management has ulterior motives and sometimes, the louder the protestations of managements, the less they will be believed.

- Economic fears – loss of money, threats to job security.
- Inconvenience – the change will make life more difficult.
- Uncertainty – change can be worrying because of uncertainty about its likely impact.
- Symbolic fears – a small change which may affect some treasured symbol, such as a separate office or a reserved parking space, may symbolize big ones, especially when employees are uncertain about how extensive the programme of change will be.
- Threat to interpersonal relationships – anything that disrupts the customary social relationships and standards of the group will be resisted.
- Threat to status or skill – the change is perceived as reducing the status of individuals or as de-skilling them.
- Competence fears – concern about the ability to cope with new demands or to acquire new skills.

Overcoming resistance to change

Resistance to change can be difficult to overcome even when it is not detrimental to those concerned. But the attempt must be made. The starting point is an analysis of the potential impact of change by considering how it will affect people in their jobs. The reasons for resisting change set out above can be used as a checklist to establish where there might be problems, generally, with groups or with individuals.

The analysis should indicate what aspects of the proposed change may be supported generally or by specified individuals and which aspects may be resisted. So far as possible, the potentially hostile or negative reactions of people and the reasons for them should be identified. It is necessary to try and understand the likely feelings and fears of those affected so that unnecessary worries can be relieved and, as far as possible, ambiguities can be resolved. In making this analysis, the individual introducing the change – the change agent – should recognize that new ideas are likely to be suspect and should make ample provision for the discussion of reactions to proposals to ensure complete understanding of them.

Involvement in the change process gives people the chance to raise and resolve their concerns and make suggestions about the form of the change and how it should be introduced. The aim is to get 'ownership' – a feeling amongst people that the change is something that they are happy to live with because they have been involved in its planning and introduction – it has become their change.

A communication strategy to explain the proposed change should be prepared and implemented so that unnecessary fears are allayed. All the available channels as should be used but face-to-face communications direct from managers to individuals or through a team briefing system are best.

Implementing change

The problems of implementing strategic change were summed up by Lawler and Mohrman (2003: 24) as follows:

> Most strategies, like most mergers, fail not because of poor thinking, but because of poor implementation. Implementation failures usually involve the failure to acknowledge and build the needed skills and organizational capabilities, to gain support of the workforce, and to support the organizational changes and learning required to behave in new ways. In short, execution failures are often the result of poor human capital management. This opens the door for HR to add important value if it can deliver change strategies, plans, and thinking that aid in the development and execution of business strategy.

Implementing change can indeed be difficult. Research by Carnall (1991) in 93 organizations identified the following explanations for failures to implement change effectively:

- Implementation took more time than was originally allowed.
- Major problems emerged during implementation which had not been identified beforehand.
- Coordination of implementation activities was not effective enough.
- Competing activities and other crises distracted management from implementing the change decision.
- The capabilities of the employees involved were not sufficient.
- Training and instruction to lower level employees was inadequate.
- Uncontrollable factors in the external environment had an adverse effect on implementation.

The following suggestions on how to minimize such problems were produced by Nadler and Tushman (1980):

- Motivate in order to achieve changes in behaviour by individuals.
- Manage the transition by making organizational arrangements designed to assure that control is maintained during and after the transition and by developing and communicating a clear image of the future.
- Shape the political dynamics of change so that power centres develop that support the change rather than block it.
- Build in stability of structures and processes to serve as anchors for people to hold on to – organizations and individuals can only stand so much uncertainty and turbulence, hence the emphasis by Quinn (1980) on the need for an incremental approach.

The role of change agents

The change process will take place more smoothly with the help of credible internal or external change agents –- people who help to manage change by providing advice and support on its introduction and management. A change agent was defined by Caldwell (2003: 139–40) as 'an internal or external individual or team responsible for initiating, sponsoring, managing and implementing a specific change initiative or complete change programme'. As described by Balogun and Hope-Hailey (2004), the role of the change agent is to lead change. Alfes et al (2010) noted that change agents establish what is required, involve people in planning and managing change, advise on how change should be implemented and communicate to people the implications of change.

Keep (2001: 89) listed the following change agent competencies:

- project management – planning and resource allocation;
- contracting with clients – defining the task, establishing relationships;
- team building – defining roles, maintaining good working relationships;
- analysis and diagnosis – data collection, problem solving, systems thinking;
- data utilization – qualitative or quantitative data, paper-based review, survey techniques;
- interpersonal skills – dealing with people, leadership;
- communication skills – speaking, written presentations/reports, listening;
- political awareness – sensitivity, influencing;
- intervention implementation – participation, involvement;
- monitoring and evaluation – criteria setting and reviewing, measuring effectiveness;
- technical skills – financial interpretation, psychometrics;
- process skills – facilitation;
- insight – reflection, awareness of key issues, critical thinking, intuition.

It is often assumed that only people from outside the organization can take on the change agent role because they are independent and do not 'carry any baggage'. They can be useful but people from within the firm who are respected and credible can do the job well. This is often the role of HR specialists but the use of line managers adds extra value.

The role of HR in leading and facilitating change

Leading and facilitating change are two of the key roles of HR professionals. In practice, they are probably the most demanding of all HR roles. If HR is concerned – as it should be – in playing a major part in the achievement of continuous improvement in organizational capability and individual performance and in the HR processes that support that improvement, then it will need to be involved in facilitating change. Caldwell (2001) stated that the change agent roles that can be carried out by HR professionals are those of change champions, change adapters, change consultants and change synergists.

Leading change

Leading change involves initiating and managing culture change (the process of changing the organization's culture in the shape of its values, norms and beliefs) and the introduction of new structures, systems, working practices and people management processes. The aim is to increase organizational capability (the ability of the organization to perform well) and organizational effectiveness (how well the organization performs).

Ulrich (1997: 7) observed that HR professionals should be 'as explicit about culture change as they are today about the requirements for a successful training program or hiring strategy'. He later emphasized that 'HR should become an agent of continuous transformation, shaping processes and a culture that together improve an organization's capacity for change' (Ulrich, 1998: 125).

Change leadership means:

- identifying where change is required;
- specifying what changes should take place;
- assessing the benefits of the change and what it will cost;
- establishing the consequences of the change;
- assessing any problems the change may create, eg resistance to the change, and any risks involved;
- persuading management and anyone else affected by the change that it is necessary; spelling out the benefits and indicating what will be done to deal with potential problems;
- planning how the change should be implemented; this includes nominating and briefing change agents (people responsible for achieving change); minimizing potential resistance through communication and involvement, and managing risks;
- facilitating the introduction and management of the change;
- ensuring that the change is embedded successfully – 'holding the gains'.

Facilitating change

Change management is largely about facilitation. As Hamlin and Davies (2001: 13) observed, one of the major challenges facing HR 'is how to help people through the transitions of change, and how to survive in working conditions that are in a constant state of flux'. Brown and Eisenhardt (1997: 21) noted that managers who were successful in the art of continuous change 'carefully managed the transition between the past and the future. Much like the pit stop in a car race or the baton pass in track, this transition appeared critical.'

The role of HR in facilitating change was described by Vere and Butler (2007: 34) as follows:

- The issue needs to be on the strategic business agenda and managers must see how action will improve business results: that is, there needs to be a sound business case for the initiative. HR managers need to be able to demonstrate the return on the planned investment.
- The change needs to have the active backing of those at the top of the organization, so it is for the HR director to gain the commitment of the top team and engage them in a practical way in taking the work forward.
- HR needs to engage managers in the design of change from the outset or, if this is a business-driven change, HR needs to be involved at the outset.
- The programme needs to be framed in the language of the business to have real meaning and achieve buy-in from all parties; if there is too much HR jargon, this will be a turn off.
- Project and people management skills are crucial to ensure the programme is well planned and resourced and risks are assessed and managed.
- As in all change programmes, the importance of communication is paramount to explain, engage and commit people to the programme.
- In this respect the crucial role that HR can play is to ensure that employees are fully engaged in the design and implementation of the change.
- HR needs to draw on others' experience and learning.

To do all this, Ulrich (1997: 8) pointed out that 'HR professionals need a model of change and the ability to apply the model to a specific situation.' The models as described earlier need to be understood and applied as appropriate. The other qualities required are insight – to understand the need for change – courage – to pursue change – and determination – to achieve change.

But leading and facilitating change are hard work. As Alfes et al (2010: 111) observed on the basis of their research: 'The role is generally constrained and reactive.' They also noted that: 'HR professionals may find their roles circumscribed by expectations of their role, the nature of the change process, capability and capacity' (ibid: 125).

Ulrich (1997) may emphasize that one of the key roles of HR professionals is to act as change agents, but it is a difficult role to play. Perhaps, as Thornhill et al (2000) pointed out, the main contribution HR can make is to generate and support change where a core feature is the development and alignment of HRM practices such as culture management, performance management, learning and development, reward management and employee relations.

Guidelines for change management

- The achievement of sustainable change requires strong commitment and visionary leadership from the top.
- Understanding is necessary of the culture of the organization and the levers for change which are most likely to be effective in that culture.
- Those concerned with managing change at all levels should have the temperament and leadership skills appropriate to the circumstances of the organization and its change strategies.
- Change is more likely to be successful if there is a 'burning platform' to justify it, ie a powerful and convincing reason for change.
- It is important to build a working environment which is conducive to change. Learning and development programmes can help to do this.
- It is easier to change behaviour by changing processes, structure and systems than to change attitudes or the organizational culture.
- People support what they help to create. Commitment to change is improved if those affected by change are allowed to participate as fully as possible in planning and implementing it. The aim should be to get them to 'own' the change as something they want and will be glad to live with.
- The reward system should encourage innovation and recognize success in achieving change.
- Change will always involve failure as well as success. The failures must be expected and learned from.
- Hard evidence and data on the need for change are the most powerful tools for its achievement, but establishing the need for change is easier than deciding how to satisfy it.
- There are always people in organizations who can act as champions of change. They will welcome the challenges and opportunities that change can provide. They are the ones to be chosen as change agents.
- Resistance to change is inevitable if the individuals concerned feel that they are going to be worse off – implicitly or explicitly. The inept management of change will produce that reaction.
- In an age of global competition, technological innovation, turbulence, discontinuity, even chaos, change is inevitable and necessary. The organization must do all it can to explain why change is essential and how it will affect everyone. Moreover, every effort must be made to protect the interests of those affected by change.

KEY LEARNING POINTS

Types of change

The main types are: strategic change, operational change and transformational change.

The change process

The change process starts with an awareness of the need for change. An analysis of this situation and the factors that have created it leads to a diagnosis of their distinctive characteristics and an indication of the direction in which action needs to be taken. Possible courses of action can then be identified and evaluated and a choice made of the preferred action.

Change models

The main change models are those produced by Lewin, Beckhard, Thurley, Bandura, and Beer et al.

Reasons for resistance to change

The shock of the new, economic fears, inconvenience, uncertainty, symbolic fears, threat to interpersonal relationships, threat to status or skills, competence fears.

Overcoming resistance to change

- Analyse the potential impact of change by considering how it will affect people in their jobs.
- Identify the potentially hostile or negative reactions of people.
- Make ample provision for the discussion of reactions to proposals to ensure complete understanding of them.
- Get 'ownership' – a feeling amongst people that the change is something that they are happy to live with because they have been involved in its planning and introduction.
- Prepare and implement a communication strategy to explain the proposed change.

Implementing change

Implementation failures usually involve the failure to acknowledge and build the needed skills and organizational capabilities, to gain support of the workforce, and to support the organizational changes and learning required to behave in new ways. (Lawler and Mohrman, 2003: 24)

The role of HR in leading and facilitating change

Leading and facilitating change are two of the key roles of HR professionals. In practice, they are probably the most demanding of all HR roles.

Leading change

Leading change involves initiating and managing culture change (the process of changing the organization's culture in the shape of its values, norms and beliefs) and the introduction of new structures, systems, working practices and people management processes.

Facilitating change

Change management is largely about facilitation.

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Questions

1. What is involved in leading change?
2. What is the role of HR in facilitating change?
3. What are the main conclusions Alfes et al (2010) came to, following their research on leading and facilitating change
4. What is change management?
5. What is transformational change?
6. What is strategic change?
7. What is operational change?
8. What is the change process?
9. What are the main problems in implementing change?
10. What is Lewin's change model?
11. What is field force analysis?
12. Why do people resist change?
13. How can resistance to change be overcome?
14. What is the role of a change agent?
15. What are the key guidelines for change management?