TOWARDS AN INTEGRATIVE MODEL TO MANAGE RESISTANCE TO CULTURAL CHANGE

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ABSTRACT: This paper describes the development of an effective model in managing resistance to cultural change. The starting point of the description is the corporate culture, mainly its values and assumptions. It, then, shows the forms and manifestations of change manifestations and possible causes of the resistance. This paper addresses the change resistance issue by introducing two opposing views and their implications. The first view, the cause-driven model, argues that the strategies to overcome resistance depend on its causes. The main limitation of this model is that it fails to acknowledge the multidimensional aspects of change. On the other hand, the systemic view asserts that resistance is unchangeable and that the best method is to work with resistance rather than to overcome or beat the resistance. However, this model tends to ignore the individual aspects of resistance. I would argue that the best model should be the combination of both models in order to capitalize the advantages and mitigate the pitfalls of both models. The suggested model consists of six steps: building a shared mission, communicating the mission-based change agenda, encouraging the employees' participation, building trust through dialogue, and institutionalizing the cultural change. However, this model has three major limitations. Firstly, the implementation of the model should be integrated with the other change programs. Another limitation relates to the assumptions of this model (time availability, information needed, and resistance power). The last limitation is that this model undermines the stress and high tensions.

Keywords: resistance to change, corporate culture, situational strategies, system dynamic view of resistance

1. SETTING THE STAGE: CULTURAL CHANGE

Organizational theorists (Schein, 1996; Ward, 1994) define the corporate culture as a set of basic assumption about the organization that determines how its members perceive, think and behave. The manifestation of culture can be seen at least in two aspects (Ivancevich, Olekalns, & Matteson, 1999; Kotter & Heskett, 1992). The first aspect which is visible and easier to change refers to group behavior norms (Kotter et al., 1992), symbols, artefacts, and ritual (Ivancevich et al., 1999). The second and most important aspect which is invisible and harder to change, yet very important for building strong corporate culture, is the shared values and basic assumptions which provide a direction and guideline for the behaviors of all employees (Deal & Kennedy, 1988; Kotter et al., 1992; Schein, 1996). A recent work of Schein (2000) defines the first aspect as climate and the second aspect as culture.

Consider, for example, the cultural assumptions which support individualism and independence. The manifestation of these assumptions would

be on the leader's preference on the managers and the staff members. Moreover, the competition among staff members to get the necessary support from the leaders in terms of new projects, for example, became very harsh.

The main problem of this culture is that it does not promote employee empowerment and learning. Kotter (1996) suggests that learning discouragement may contribute to the creation of an overmanaged, underled corporate culture. The problems in coordinating, motivating employees and building corporate spirit necessitate building and managing strong and cohesive corporate culture (Deetz, Tracy, & Simpson, 2000).

While it is easy to prescribe the necessary culture with its main characteristics, such as organizational learning culture which is characterized by the development of opportunity for self-fulfillment, the achievement of caring environment and the establishment of trusting relationship among employees, the biggest problem may be the existence of a high degree of resistance from employees who want to maintain the status quo and react unfavorably toward the cultural change programs. Before proposing a strategy, it is important to analyze the nature of the resistance to change. One of the common tools is a force field analysis which is used to determine the causes of the resistance and assess their relative strength and importance (Senior, 2002). The force field diagram may show that the driving forces for change are dominated by competitors' behaviour, customer needs, the deteriorating performance, and redesign of job. On the other hand, those forces are still less than the forces against change caused by fear of the unknown, uncertainty avoidance, potential loss of power, reward, and current skills, and incompatibility of structure, control system, and intended cultural change. As a result, the employees resist change by actively rejecting the change agendas, starting rumors about the change process, blaming or accusing other colleagues (active resistance) and by agreeing verbally without doing anything (passive resistance).

2. TWO OPPOSING VIEWS OF RESISTANCE TO CHANGE STRATEGIES: CAUSE-DRIVEN STRATEGIES AND SYSTEM WIDE STRATEGIES

2.1. Cause-driven and Situational Change Strategies

2.1.1. Basic Concepts and Strategies

As the name suggests, the basic idea of this view is that the strategies to overcome resistance depend on the causes of the resistance and the situational factors (such as availability of time, relative power of the resistors, the information needed (Kotter & Schlesinger, 1991), scale of change and style of change management (Dunphy & Stace, 1990), and the maturity of followers (Hersey & Blanchard, 1977). Macri, Tagliaventi, and Bertolotti (2002) argue that the resistance to change can be analysed in two levels, individual perception and motivation (micro level) and organisational level. At individual level, Kotter, et.al (1991), Hultman (1998), and Grimaud (1994) provide an extensive description of the causes of resistance to change and their associated strategies. For example, the feeling of the employees that their needs have been met refers to the parochial self interest (Kotter et. al., 1991) or descriptive beliefs which are subjective interpretations that define for someone what is true and false (Hultman, 1998). The employees were content with their past performance and they did not see any

reason to change or learn new ways (Grimaud, 1994). The strategies to mitigate the parochial self interest and unconstructive descriptive beliefs are to generate the dissatisfaction with the status quo, to educate and communicate the change agendas, and to show the benefits of the change program ((Hultman, 1998; Ivancevich et al., 1999; Kotter et al., 1991).

Another type of beliefs that cause the resistance is the predictive beliefs which are the interpretations of what will happen in the future (Hultman, 1998). For example, the employees believe that the change will fail because they are lack of confidence about the result that the change would bring. The high performers resist the team-work cultural change which they perceived as a threat because of their low tolerance for change (Kotter et al., 1991) by arguing that their capabilities are irreplaceable. The strategies against these predictive beliefs are mainly to listen to employees' concern and suggestion (Hultman, 1998), to encourage their participation and involvement (Kotter et al., 1991), and to follow through on agreements reached to improve the situation (Hultman, 1998; Kotter et al., 1991).

The other cause of resistance concerns with the values (Hultman, 1998) and different assessment between leader and employees (Kotter et al., 1991). Beckhard and Dyer (1983) also suggest that the well-ingrained values exist in the family firm may make change more difficult to implement. The employees found that the new cultures which emphasises team-work, knowledge-sharing capabilities, and trust are not consistent with their old values which depend on the individualism and independence. Heifetz and Laurie (1998) provide a manifestation of this cause in a case of KPMG office in Netherlands which shows that the employees cannot do their work with the old rules in which strong respects for individuals dominated the effective teamwork and a cling to superordinate formed barriers to cross-functional problem solving. The strategies, therefore, are basically to work toward building common ground assumption (Hultman, 1998: 189) and to facilitate and support the employees in their adjustment to change (Kotter et al., 1991).

At the organisational level, the resistance to change necessitates the development of emotional capability of organisation (Macri et al., 2002). It translates into the collection of emotionally intelligent individuals that can recognise and use their emotional state in problem solving. Moreover, Lawrence (1991), Waddell and Sohal (1998), and de Jager (2001) showed that the resistance to change is usually not technical but social, including rational factors (differences of opinion between partners and employees), non-rational factors (personal preferences against the change), political factors (such as favouritism) and management factors (poor management styles) which involves the change in the personal relationship and interaction that accompanies the technical change.

2.1.2. Limitation of Cause-driven and Situational Model

Despite its simplicity and directness to the causes of resistance, the cause-driven model may not be effective because it fails to acknowledge the fact that there are many decisive variables in change (Pinderit, 2000; Williams, 1972) and that the individual factors may be integrated or interacted with the organizational factors to ensure the change to be successful (Strebel, 1994). Williams (1972) stated that emotional, cultural, and perceptual variables may influence the change

process and that the understanding of human behaviour and proper application of this knowledge would be the key to successful change. Folger and Skarlicki (1999) argue that the employees' negative perception of fairness in terms of distributive (outcome equity) justice, procedural justice (the fairness of the procedures to determine outcomes), and interactional justice (fairness of interpersonal treatment) may result in resentment-based resistance. Similarly, Pindert (2000) suggest that the support for a change should be reflected on the positive responses along emotional, cognitive, and intentional dimensions. However, the understanding of employees' behavior and their basic assumptions is not enough. Strebel (1998) argues that the organization should also manage the personal compacts of the employees which are the mutual obligations and commitments in terms of formal (basic tasks and requirements for the jobs), psychological (mutual expectations and reciprocal commitments between employees and the organization), and social (the alignment of organizational practices with its values) dimensions that exist between employees and the organization. Using multidimensional view, Okumus and Hemmington (1998) strongly argue that uni-dimensional change strategies are insufficient to overcome most potential barriers to change. Therefore, in order to overcome resistance, the company should not only adapt various strategies, but also manage and influence the employees' perception of the change, integrate the compacts with the change program, and build a common consensus about how the change should run (Strebel, 1998).

2.2. The System Dynamic View of Resistance

2.2.1. Basic Assumptions and Strategies

The proponents of this view assume that autopoiesis exists in organisation and argue that change is unthinkable and resistance is unchangeable (Goldstein, 1988). It also means that employees resist change when it is imposed by other people to them, rather than when they choose to do it (Kanter, 1997). Under this assumption, resistance to change can be considered as a survival mechanism (de Jager, 2001) or the balancing process of the organization to maintain some goal or target (Senge, 1990). This view stresses the importance of group dynamics which refer to the forces for and against the change under the prevailing condition of group life (Dent & Goldberg, 1999). Therefore, they argue that the best strategy to deal with resistance is not to overcome the resistance but to collaborate or work with the resistance (Dent et al., 1999; Goldstein, 1988; Kanter, 1997). Specifically, Goldstein (1988) proposed a far-from-equilibrium system which characterizes to have amplified fluctuations in response to change, open relation to environment, high amount of information, high potential for reorganization, and amenable to difference questioning the nature of resistance. Moreover, Senge (1990) suggests a new role of leader as a designer which requires an integrated systemic view of an organization in which the parts are interconnected internally and externally to the external environment. Therefore, the main advantage of this model is that it may enhance the organization learning process built on the system thinking as its conceptual framework (Paton & McCalman, 2000; Senge, 1990). Preston (1999) also asserts that this model which seeks to achieve harmony between the organization and the resistors to change can be used

to prevent the negative effects of resistance without consuming extensive time and energy.

Under this model, the best strategies, therefore, are to encourage employees' participation in response to the intergroup issues and conflict (Argyris, 1972), to promote difference questioning in the group techniques intended to contrast the workgroup purpose with its current autopoietic identity, to gather greater information about the system (Goldstein, 1988), and finally, to build shared vision (Senge, 1990). The benefit of these strategies is that it can be a living repertoire for partners, managers, and employees on how to work together as a team; on how to build strong trust and consensus, and on how to reduce unnecessary rivalries (Argyris, 1972).

2.2.2. Limitations of the System View

Even though the strategies developed above may be used to promote learning process in a workgroup, they fail to address individual change process needed to succeed the organizational change. Kyle (as cited by Bovey and Hede (2001), for example, show that the degree of control and ability of the individuals towards change and the degree of impact of the change on the individuals may influence the existence of resistance to change. Similarly, the research by Bovey, et.al (2001) reveals that irrational ideas influence the resistance and that the employees' emotion affects the association between irrational ideas and behavioral resistance. It is also interesting to note about the symptom of personal immunity to change resulted from the individual employee's hidden competing commitment (Kegan & Lahey, 2001). This symptom denotes the importance of a coping strategy in which the employee was asked to uncover the competing commitment, to determine the underlying assumptions, and finally, to change their behavior.

3. SUGGESTED STRATEGIES: AN INTEGRATED MODEL

Considering the advantages and disadvantages of situational model and system dynamic model, it can be argued that the best strategies should be able to capitalize the advantages and mitigate the pitfalls of both models. Therefore, the strategies below are the combination of such models developed to enhance the organizational learning process.

3.1. Building a Shared Mission

The successful companies begin with a clear mission that can adapt and respond to unpredictable change in the market (Martin, 1993). Collins and Porras (1998) stated that companies that achieve enduring success have a core ideology and envisioned future in their mission statement. Core ideology consists of core purpose and organizational core values. The core ideology guides the way the organization was established (for example, to provide business advisory services) and the envisioned future (for example, to achieve eminent position in the market). On the other hand, the core values are the essential and enduring tenets that remain fixed while the company's strategies adapt endlessly to the changing business environment (Collins et al., 1998). KPMG, for example, implicitly describes its values by stating that its reputation is built on a long history of independence, integrity and objectivity (KPMG, 2003). Another example is Ernst

and Young (2003) which clearly stated its core values: leadership, innovation, teamwork, client-driven, mutual respect, trust and openness, and integrity. It should be noted that establishing the core values is very important to mitigate the resistance caused by the value difference.

3.2. Communicating the Mission-based Change Agenda

The main purpose of this step is to build a consensus among members in organization about the change agenda. Kotter (1995) argues that undercommunication is one of the main causes of the failure of transformation efforts. The basic strategy in this step, therefore, is to use effective, ongoing and varied communication vehicles as an element for managing resistance to change (Laframboise, Nelson, & Schmaltz, 2003). Galpin (1996) shows the role of communication in promoting change through the transformation pyramid. Communicating the detail of change agenda (the what, how, when, and who of change program) is the strategy to address the lowest level of the pyramid which is the resistance caused by the lack of knowledge. The second level or the inability of employees to involve in the change can be overcome by educating and training. The highest level or the unwillingness of employees to participate can be mitigated by setting goals and providing coaching, feedback, and valuable rewards.

3.3. Encouraging the Employees' Participation

This step involves several key objectives: to get employees' involvement, to encourage their concern over the change, and to involve the critics (Harrison, 1999). The rationale of this step is that involvement in learning, planning, and implementation stages of change process will not only make the employees comply with the change, but also strengthen their commitment, and, thus, reduce the level of resistance (Axelrod, 2000; Waddell et al., 1998). During this process, it is also important to estimate the degree of resistance and to map the dynamics of the forces for and against the change (Trader-Leigh, 2002; Waddell et al., 1998). It means that leaders should be able to manage politics in the executive level, organizational level, and implementation level (Trader-Leigh, 2002) and to use power effectively to reduce resistance (Brill & Worth, 1997).

For example, leaders or change initiators can meet the organizational units to solicit ideas about the change process in a focus group to encourage employee participation (Laframboise et al., 2003). Alternatively, in order to overcome the personal immunity to change, it can also be conducted at more personal level in which each employee is asked to express his or her change ideas, to identify his or her individual adaptive challenge (Heifetz et al., 1998). Sarros and Moors (2001), for example, illustrates a case of how Lynn Odland can succeed in managing resistance at Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Australia by getting employee participation in building corporate cultures called "the Seven Signals" (recruit and retain the best, talk straight, empower and trust, continually grow and improve, aim to be famous, play to win-think globally, and have fun and celebrate).

3.4. Building Trust through Dialogue

It is important to differentiate this step with the participation process because this step relies heavily on group dialogue technique which enables the members to reach higher level of consciousness and creativity and to develop new

mental models (Schein, 1993). In a dialogue, the participants listen actively, explore all complexities of thinking and language, and build creative thinking to help them in problem identification and problem solving (Schein, 1997). The main objective of this process is to build the perception among employees that other person's behavior is consistent and sincere and, thus, the trust (Hultman, 1998). The case of Labatt Breweries, Canada's largest brewer illustrates an effective implementation of step-by-step processes comprised of 'prouds and upsets'-learning from the past, 'organization mirror'-learning from the present, and 'story-boarding'-shaping the future, in order to build trust culture between employees and management (Rankin, 1998: 62-8).

3.5. Institutionalizing the cultural change

This step is intended to make the new behaviors developed from the previous steps suitable and congruent with the expectations and new values of organization through formal policies, systems, and structures, so that they can be a stable part of the organization as a whole (Beer, Eisenstat, & Spector, 1990; Kotter, 1995; Schein, 1999). This stage also refers to the process of creating a new conducive environment to promote learning through cross cultural dialogue (Schein, 1996) which tries to open up boundaries and stimulate the exchange of ideas (Garvin, 1991). Office etiquette, for example may serve as new rules or guidelines of acceptable behavior within the new environment (Laframboise et al., 2003).

4. KEY ISSUES OF THE MODEL

The success of the suggested strategies depends on three major factors. The first factor is that this model is not a stand-alone plan. The strategies may need other change management plans which cover the whole organizational issues such as people practices (staffing and selection) and performance and reward system, both of which are not explored in this case study. Simons (1992), for example, suggest that the choice of interactive management control systems (which include the performance evaluation system) by top managers may influence the incentives to share information which promotes organizational learning. Therefore, it is also important to note that establishing a strong positive relation between rewards and performance is critical to implement value-creating organizational change (Wruck, 2000). Moreover, Wruck (2000) clearly stated that well-designed compensation systems may motivate employees to overcome their resistance and work productively toward new objective.

The second factor relates to the situational-contingency factors, such as time availability, relative power of the resistors, the information needed. If, for example, time has become the major constraint, the resistance strategies may change differently. Kotter and Schlesinger (1991), for example, suggest that negotiation and agreement and coercion, both explicit and implicit may be the best strategies to deal with resistance under time pressure. Similarly, if the information needed is low and the maturity level of employees is also low, directive or coercive leadership style may be effective (Dunphy et al., 1990).

The last factor is that the suggested model has seriously undermined the downside of change. Schein (1999) shows that in a transformative change, it is likely that disconfirmation and anxiety among employees will occur. Heifetz and

Laurie (1998) illustrate the change process at KPMG which also used employees' involvement and participation as the main strategies. This case also reveals that stress and high tensions were the constant preoccupation for change initiators. The stress level may be greater in a more radical style of organizational change because of the level and pace of change, the degree of uncertainty and the difficulties in changing the old cultures (Callan, 1993). Therefore, in order to anticipate these reactions, it is important to ensure that both the organization and individual employees have been equipped with coping strategies. Some individual coping strategies are the use of problem-focus or emotion-focus coping efforts and the use of internal resources (for example: personal traits and sense of mastery) and external resources (supports from friends, family, and managers). Moreover, organizational initiatives strategies such as stress programs, unlearning programs (to deal with the removal of old cultures), and job related tasks (such as job enrichment) (Callan, 1993) can also be used.

5. CONCLUSION

To sum up, this paper illustrates the change resistance issues in a cultural change process. I strongly suggest that the best method in dealing with resistance should combine the advantages of two opposing views: the cause driven strategies and systemic view. The first view, the cause-driven model, argues that the strategies to overcome resistance depend on its causes while the systemic view suggests that the best method in dealing with resistance is to work with resistance rather than to overcome or beat the resistance. The suggested model consists of six steps: building a shared mission, communicating the mission-based change agenda, encouraging the employees' participation, building trust through dialogue, and institutionalizing the cultural change. However, this model may suffer for three major reasons. The first reason, the non-stand alone program suggests that the implementation of the model should be integrated with the other change programs. Another limitation relates to the assumptions of this model (time availability, information needed, and resistance power). The last reason deals with the responses towards change, such as the stress and high tensions which necessitate the application of organizational and individual coping strategies during the change program.

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