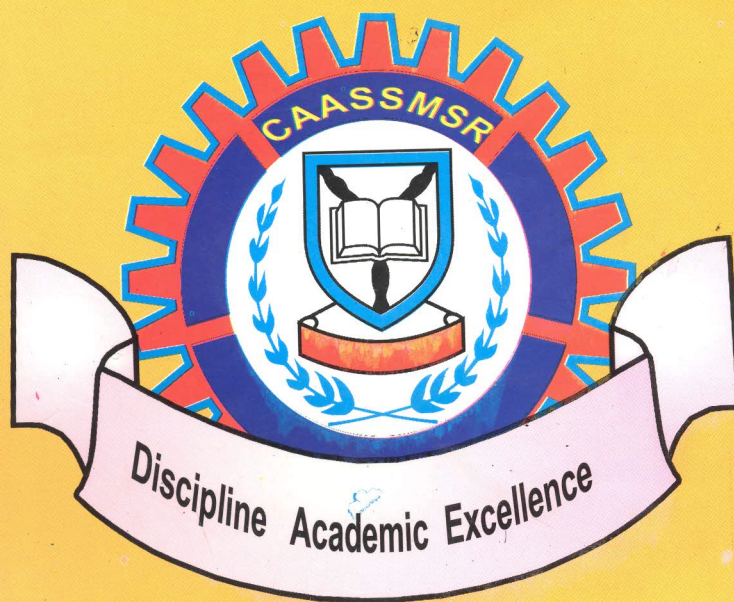


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08037128785, 08083029560
patkingly@yahoo.com

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patkingly@yahoo.com

THE READINESS OF ORGANIZATIONS FOR A SUCCESSFUL CHANGE MANAGEMENT IN A
HYPER-COMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENT

Nicholas N. Igwe, Ph.D, JP, MIMC, MNIM
DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT
GODFREY OKOYE UNIVERSITY ENUGU,
ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA.
e-mail: ngozinick@yahoo.com

Victoria C. Chibuike, Ph.D, MNAE
DEPARTMENT OF TECHNOLOGY AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION
ENUGU STATE UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (ESUT) ENUGU,
ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA.
e-mail: victoriachibuike@yahoo.com

AND

Francis C. Alinno, MNIM
DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT
AKANU IBIAM FEDERAL POLYTECHNIC
UNWANA AFIKPO, EBONYI STATE-NIGERIA
E-mail: alinoy@yahoo.com

Abstract

Successful Nigerian organizations of the future must not only be efficient, effective, competent and competitive within any specific domain, but must be able to adapt, respond, manage change and turbulence in their environment. The paper seeks to identify factors that get managers and employees of manufacturing firms in Anambra and Enugu States ready for change management implementation. It examines equally whether middle managers in these organizations act as dinosaurs or dynamos of change management implementation. The survey research method was adopted. Data was collected from a population of 177 manufacturing organizations from the two states. The Yamane's statistical formula was employed for sample size determination. Out of the four readiness factors of change content, change context, change process, and individual attributes, individual attributes was ranked highest with a mean of 4.31. The paper reveals that middle managers in the organizations are not dinosaurs but dynamos of change management implementation. It recommends that those who will be affected by change management implementation must be involved in the work of structuring it from the outset with a view to identifying their interests, their knowledge, their attitude toward the change project and their mental state.

Key words: Readiness, Change Management, Hyper-Competitive, Middle Management, Implementation.

INTRODUCTION

The management literature has claimed that the complexity of business activities has made firms to confront hyper-competitive or high-velocity environments (D'Aveni 1994; Brown and Esienhardt, 1997) or shaped by jolts (Meyer et al, 1990). The Nigerian corporate profile has not been spared in these phenomenal changes taking place all over the world accentuated by the wave of globalization. Since 1990s, we have seen dramatic changes in this direction, and its impact on business and corporate practice in Nigeria. The environment for business has changed tremendously and so have the consequences for business practices (Osisioma, 2004). These environmental features have been exacerbated by a sudden opening of the markets to free competition accelerated by hyper-competitiveness among the business firms. In these circumstances, rapid adaptive and organizational processes are essential to a firm's survival and success. A myriad of complex and often contradictory factors help determine who wins, who loses and how the game is played. Moreover, many of these factors change, often abruptly and in unpredictable ways-over time. Managers therefore must continually be alert to these changes in the environment, as well as challenges and be prepared to take decisive action when appropriate.

Ohmae (1999) asserts that the inevitability of globalization cannot be de-emphasized pointing out that competition is increasing from all quarters and modern corporations no longer have any place to hide. If they cannot compete globally they run the risk of becoming extinct due to manufacturing

inefficiencies or poor products and service. Again customers are increasingly demanding more for less. They are putting increased pressure on both the price and the quality of products and services that various firms offer. This creates increased pressures for efficiency that many firms would prefer not to face.

This is why managers must be skilled in change management techniques. There are a number of reasons why managing change becomes inevitable in a hyper competitive environment:

- To change the direction of an organization in order to accelerate growth and productivity.
- To improve the performance of weaker divisions or units, and
- To train and develop managers to adapt to changing conditions.

Organizations are designed to accomplish some objectives or functions and to continue doing so for as long as possible. But change can affect all types of organizations, from giants to the smallest business. No one can escape change. A change in one part of the system will have an impact on one or more of the other parts. Drucker (cited by Herbert (2002:2) succinctly puts it in corporate parlance: "Managers must learn to build and manage a human group that is capable of anticipating the new, capable of converting its vision into technology, products, processes and services, willing and able to accept the new". The challenge facing Nigerian organizations therefore is not to avoid change and attain a state of changelessness. It is to manage change. That is seek change, initiate it, keep looking

for something new to do, something old to discard and do all these with minimum disruption of the status quo, thus attaining a state of profitable dynamic equilibrium. Organizations that do not change are forced to change from existence to non-existence (Ejiofor, 1998). Given the prevalent and importance of organizational change and the difficulty of successfully bringing it about, there has been much debate over the last two decades in particular as the most appropriate way to manage change (Pettigrew, 1990; Stacey 2003; and Dawson, 2003). There is a consensus among academics and practitioners that organizations are facing unprecedented levels of change and consequently the ability to manage change successfully should be a core organizational competence (Cooper and Jackson, 1997). From the foregoing, the following pertinent research questions become imperative:

Research Questions

From the foregoing the following research questions, could be deciphered.

- What are the readiness factors that get organizational employees for change management?
- What is the level of commitment of the top management for change management implementation?
- To what extent is a middle level manager dinosaur or dynamos of change management in organizations?

Research Objectives

Using Anambra and Enugu States as research areas, this study sought to investigate the readiness of organizations for a successful change

management. Accordingly, the following research objectives were set for the study:

- To identify factors that get organizational employees ready for change management.
- To examine the commitment of top management in crafting out a successful change management.
- To find out if middle managers in these organizations are dinosaurs or dynamos of change management.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Organizational theorists worldwide might agree that readiness for change is often the crux to any change management strategy (Armenakis, Harris and Mossholder, 1993). If people are not ready for change, they tend to resist (Lewin, 1945; Prochaska et al, 1994). The key question for change agents appears to be how people get ready for changes in their environment in such a way that they are eager to implement effective changes within their organizations. Change is seen as a departure from the status quo. It implies movement towards a goal, an idealized state or a vision of what should be and a movement from present conditions, beliefs of attitudes. Readiness can be defined as prepared mentally and physically for an experience or action (Merriam-Webster, 2005). However, (Walinga, 2008) defines readiness as being at peace, tolerant or open to change. Thus, change readiness is defined as the state in which one is best prepared to change intentionally because one is best prepared for change

in the environment, and the challenge of change readiness becomes "getting managers ready to get employees ready for change". Readiness is arguably one of the most important factors involved in employees' initial support for change initiatives (Armenakis, Harris and Feild, 1999).

The concept of readiness may have been first introduced by Jacobson (1957), the foundation for readiness as a unique construct has been embedded within several theoretical models of the process through which change unfolds. Van de Ven and Poole (1995) synthesized change theories across several disciplines giving researchers managers and organizational development professionals a theoretical means to better understand the phenomenon.

Readiness takes its roots in early research on organizational change (Schein and Bennis, 1965). Perhaps, the greatest challenge of change lies with the assumption in the organization change literature that employees needed to "be made ready" for the change that is imminent within the organization (Armenakis and Harris, 2002). Increasing employee decisional latitude, participation and power often requires a further change in managerial approach from authoritative to participative. Perhaps, more important than facilitating employee readiness for change would be exploring how leaders can get ready to get employees ready for change.

The theoretical basis for change readiness begins with early studies on creating readiness "by reducing reassurance to change". Coch and French (1948) illustrated the power of participation in their

experiments involving garment workers. Experiments in creating readiness involve proactive attempts by a change agent to influence the beliefs, attitudes, intentions and ultimately the behaviour of organizational members. At its core, it is believed that change readiness involves changing individual recognitions (Bandura, 1982). Most change readiness models emphasize the importance of the need for generating an awareness of the need for change and supporting people's perceived ability to change.

Defining change management is tough under any circumstances write Holland and Skarke (2003) especially in the context at a new technology being implemented in an existing organization. In its simplest sense, change management means the process of helping an individual, group or organization change. Thus, change management implies a purposeful effort to bring about change (Rothwell et al, 2009). Contributing, Kudray and Kleiner (1997) define change management as the continuous process of aligning an organization with its market place and doing it more responsively and effectively than competitors. In their own commentary, Anderson and Anderson (2001) define change management as a set of principles, techniques and prescriptions applied to the human aspect of exerting major change initiatives in organizational settings. Its focus is not on what is driving change (technology, reorganization plans, merger and Acquisition (M & A), globalization etc.) but on how to orchestrate the human infrastructure

that surrounds key projects as that people are better prepared (ready) to absorb the implications affecting them.

Readiness for Change

The change readiness model explores and elaborates on the gap between preparation and action by asserting first that effective organizational change begins at the individual level of analysis. Whereas social information processing models (Griffin, 1987) suggest that an individual's readiness to change may be shaped by the readiness of others, the present research begins from the assumption that all organizational change must first be enacted at the individual level and perhaps even more specifically at the leadership level. Leaders, after all, are individuals. Ultimately, it would seem that all change, whether organizational, individual, externally, or internally initiated, depends on the individual's resolve or willingness to change. Edmondson and Woolley (2003) discovered that variance in interpersonal climate and behavioural norms across different work groups are likely to affect responses to a change program or other organizational intervention, even when implementation methods are consistent in their delivery. Researchers in the area of individual change or "personal transformation" have described the individual change process in terms of unfreezing, moving, and refreezing (Lewin, 1951). Researchers have identified the "stages of change" (Prochaska et al., 1997), while suggesting a variety of psycho-socio-emotional factors that may contribute to an individual's movement from one stage to the next, including self efficacy, perceived

behavioral control, and social support (Lazarus and Folkman, 1987).

However, as these purposeful changes are introduced, differences and conflicts between the organizational leaders and members may be confronted. For change to occur in the direction that leadership desires, conflicts must be resolved such that organizational members' beliefs and cognitions align with those of the leaders (termed dialectical change by Van de Ven and Poole, 1995). In essence, a state of readiness must be developed. Therefore, it is not surprising that the assessment of readiness prior to the introduction of change has been encouraged and several instruments have been developed to fulfill that gap (Cunningham et al, 2002; Weeks et al, 2004).

These instruments measure readiness from one of several perspectives namely, change process, change content, change context and individual attributes, (Jones, Jimmieson and Griffiths, 2005). The change process refers to the steps followed in implementation. One dimension of process can be the extent to which employee participation is permitted. A second perspective is the organizational change content which refers to the particular initiative that is being introduced (and its characteristics). Content typically is directed toward administrative, procedural, technological or structural characteristics of the organization. The third perspective is organizational context. Context here consists of the conditions and environment within which employees function. For example, a learning organization is one in which employees are likely to embrace continuous change. The fourth and

