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The role of communication in the organizational change process

Marilyn R. Hibbs
University of Northern Iowa

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The role of communication in the organizational change process

Abstract

There is a common saying that change is one of the most certain things in life. While the saying may seem trite, it is even more applicable today than ever before. Alvin Toffler, in his book *The Third Wave* (1980), examines the factor of change in today's world, and points out the implications of the Information Age: The world that is fast emerging from the clash of new values and technologies, new geopolitical relationships, new life-styles and modes of communication, demands wholly new ideas and analogies, classifications and concepts. We cannot cram the embryonic world of tomorrow into yesterday's conventional cubbyholes. (p. 2) In keeping with this philosophy, this paper exams: the process of change; the importance of strong leadership in the change process, especially in the communication of mission and vision for the organization; and the basis for resistance to change, exploring how to handle that resistance with appropriate communication techniques.

The Role of Communication in the Organizational Change Process

A Research Paper

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of the Requirements for the Degree

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Marilyn R. Hibbs

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12/5/89
Date

Roger A. Kueter

Director of Research Paper
Sharon E. Smaldino

Dec 5, 1989
Date

Graduate Faculty Advisor
Sharon E. Smaldino

Dec. 15, 1989
Date

Graduate Faculty Reader

Roger A. Kueter

Dec 18, 1989
Date

Head, Department of Curriculum &
Instruction

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

There is a common saying that change is one of the most certain things in life. While the saying may seem trite, it is even more applicable today than ever before. Alvin Toffler, in his book The Third Wave (1980), examines the factor of change in today's world, and points out the implications of the Information Age:

The world that is fast emerging from the clash of new values and technologies, new geopolitical relationships, new life-styles and modes of communication, demands wholly new ideas and analogies, classifications and concepts. We cannot cram the embryonic world of tomorrow into yesterday's conventional cubbyholes. (p. 2)

In keeping with this philosophy, this paper exams: the process of change; the importance of strong leadership in the change process, especially in the communication of mission and vision for the organization; and the basis for resistance to change, exploring how to handle that resistance with appropriate communication techniques.

These factors seem to be critical when organizations are faced with the inevitable change factor. As these changes become more intense and more complex, a time of great confusion or stress is created for everyone, especially for those who can not or will not readily adapt. Yet the survival of many businesses today depend upon their ability to effect change in order to maintain a competitive edge (Craig, 1987). "Most corporations will find themselves undergoing anywhere from 5-20 years of serial transition as our economy adjusts to a new world order" (Kilmann, Covin, & Associates, 1989, p. 370). A substantial restructuring every 2 years in large companies is now probably average (Burgher, 1979).

For those managers or leaders in business and industry, who must act as change agents (those people charged with implementing structured changes within the organization), the inability to effect the change process can result in frustration, inefficiency, and turmoil. Yet, it is very apparent that "there must be a shift in the work of managers from managing stability to managing change (Kilmann & Covin, et al., 1989).

There is reason to believe that the communication skills which a change agent exhibits and fosters within an organization during the change process is one of the most powerful influencers in the success of change projects. Without proper communication systems in place throughout the formal and informal channels of an organization, most change projects seldom attain their intended goals or objectives.

There is much evidence to indicate that many organizations attempt to make strategic changes throughout the organization without understanding the dynamics of the change process or making sure that adequate and proper communication systems are in place. Because of this, these attempts are often met with resistance and/or defeat by the employees who are held accountable for implementing the details of the change.

Several themes have surfaced from my research on this topic:

1. Regular communication about the change must be stressed with consistent support from all levels of management.
2. A spirit of openness and trust is fostered in all channels of communication within the organization, both formal and informal.
3. A strong leadership with effective communication skills is critical; someone who is capable of conveying the mission, goals and objectives successfully to all subordinates.
4. Management development programs acknowledge natural resistance to change and explore techniques for dealing with it.

5. Adequate reinforcement and reward programs have been established which promote actions leading to the attainment of stated organizational goals and objectives.

6. In order to make sure that all of these communication factors are in place, extensive development at all levels of the organization may be necessary before any long term change in behaviors and attitudes can be expected.

Toffler (1981) sums up the communication challenge during periods of change within the organizational structure; a structure caught in the midst of an information crunch:

For the more diverse the civilization--the more differentiated its technology, energy forms, and people--the more information must flow between its constituent parts if the entirety is to hold together, particularly under the stress of high change. An organization, for example must be able to predict (more or less) how other organizations will respond to change, if it is to plan its own moves sensibly. And the same goes for individuals. The more uniform we are, the less we need to know about each other in order to predict one another's behavior. As the people around us grow more individualized or de-massified, we need more information--signals and cues--to predict, even roughly, how they are going to behave toward us. And unless we can make such forecasts we cannot work or even live together. As a result, people and organizations continually crave more information and the entire system begins to pulse with higher and higher flows of data. (p. 167)

Obviously, the need to address the problems inherent in change become even greater as the pace of change intensifies; the coming of the information age makes excellent communication during the change process mandatory.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

The Change Process

The change process is difficult because of (a) the uncertainty of future states (visions are often incomplete or at least fuzzy), (b) multiple transitions are occurring at the same time, (c) some transitions are incomplete (possibly becoming obsolete before fruition), and (d) transformation is so sweeping that the process can take 5-10 years or never be concluded (Kilmann & Covin, et al., 1989).

Categories of Change

Burgher (1979) has categorized change for purposes of study:

1. Change is evolutionary when the changes are small and is usually accepted as forward progress. It rarely constitutes significant departures from past practices. It is unlikely to provoke resistance.
2. Change is revolutionary when the shift results in the rejecting, or suppressing of old norms. It forces acceptance of new ones usually through the exercise of power and authority. It is often used in situations that have become intolerable and evolutionary means are insufficient. The results are dramatic and may be either negative or positive.
3. Systematic development is an alternative mode of change, which neither rejects or accepts the status quo. It begins with the intellectual model of what should be, the ideal, according to theory, logic and fact. The model is set forth to distinguish the discrepancy between what is and what should be, allowing people to focus their thoughts, efforts, and feelings on how to resolve the matter to eliminate the contradiction.

Communication Channels During Change

In all of the categories of change, communication plays a critical role. Since the demand for change comes from both inside and outside the organization, it is important to keep internal and external communication channels open. Process innovation comes mostly from outside the ranks of management, while people doing the work are the most valuable source of process ideas. Unless external communication is encouraged and supported, people are going to interact with outsiders less and less over time; thus, fewer innovative ideas (Kouzes & Posner, 1987).

A change process that requires high-fidelity transmission will inevitably suffer when the medium used is inadequate. In some cases it is because the sender is transmitting information over one channel and the receiver is tuned to another. This becomes especially vexing when technicians of various sorts communicate. The most effective channel is that which reaches into the understanding of the receiver, rather than meets the needs or convenience of the sender. Mistakenly, persons in authority sometimes assume that they can get through to others without continuous communication, producing numerous misunderstandings (Odiorne, 1981).

Differences have been found in communication channel use on the basis of the perceived complexity of innovations (Petrini cited in Rogers, 1983, p. 234). Mass media channels were satisfactory for less complex innovations, but interpersonal contact with change agents was more important for innovations that were perceived as more complex. If an inappropriate channel was used, a slower rate of adoption resulted (Rogers, 1983). There seems to be greater results from change agent activity at certain stages in innovation diffusion. It appears that the greatest response to change agent effort occurs when opinion

leaders are adopting; this occurs at a 3 to 16% adoption in most systems (Stone & Petrini cited in Rogers, 1983, p. 234).

At the interpersonal level, it is important to consider the individual dominant communication style when enlisting support for proposed changes. "The most effective way to get them to meet one half-way--is to communicate with them according to their needs" (Miller, 1988, p. 41).

Diffusion Theory

One theory of adoption of innovation is the diffusion theory, which is a process by which an innovation is communicated through channels over time among the members of a social system (Rogers, 1983). Rogers, in explaining the theory, describes the components of communication during the change process: (a) an innovation, (b) an individual or other unit of adoption that has knowledge of, or experience in using, the innovation, (c) another individual or other unit that does not yet have knowledge of the innovation, and (d) a communication channel connecting the two units.

The diffusion effect is the cumulatively increasing degree of influence upon an individual to adopt or reject an innovation, resulting from the activation of peer networks about an innovation in a social system (Rogers, 1983). Rogers has delineated several stages of the innovation-adoption process: (a) information, (b) persuasion, (c) decision, (d) implementation, and (e) confirmation.

Havelock (1982) has recognized similar stages in his Phases of Adoption:

(a) awareness, (b) interest, (c) evaluation, (d) trial, (e) adoption, and (f) integration. Through these phases, the individual passes from a passive state of awareness, to active information seeking, to a period of mental trial, to an actual trial on a limited or

probationary basis, to a decision of adoption or rejection, and ultimately to a routine use of the innovation.

Effective Mediums

During the change process, different mediums of communication are most effective at different times. Mass media may be more effective during the early, informative, knowledge stage, but interpersonal communication is indicated during the persuasion stage (Rogers, 1983).

At least one researcher found that adoption of innovation is directly related to the ideal timing of the use of various communication channels, progressing from mass media to interpersonal communications (Sill cited in Rogers, 1983, p.199). If circumstances necessitate using interpersonal channels for communication during the awareness-knowledge stage, the rate of adoption will be slowed (Rogers, 1983).

These mediums also vary in effectiveness depending on the receptiveness to innovation of the receiver. Mass media and cosmopolitan channels (such as seminars, outside change agents, etc.) appear to be more influential for those people who readily grasp and adopt innovations (Rogers, 1983).

People who are less likely to adopt innovations seem to respond better to interpersonal communications. However, interpersonal communications in work-centered groups have been shown to have potential shortcomings. These areas of interpersonal oral communication were examined and indexed for project groups: (a) intraproject communication, (b) organizational communication, and (c) professional communication. Groups that lasted longer accomplished less and had the lowest communication indices at all three levels. These groups tended to isolate themselves more from outside sources and ideas the longer they were together; creative ideas dried up. The implication is that outside

input is essential for creativeness to flourish. Communications within a group must be committed to keeping the doors open to the passage of ideas and information and destroying confining barriers (Kouzes & Posner, 1987).

This is consistent with Rogers' idea (1983) that a certain amount of heterophily must exist for the diffusion of new ideas to occur. His contention is that if groups are too homophilic, new ideas do not spring forth and expand.

At the interpersonal level, Havelock (1982) addresses the need for matching activities with the individual's adoption process. It is necessary to recognize in which phase individuals are operating, and coordinate communication processes to match.

As more complex innovations are under consideration, a multi-media approach may be necessary in order to customize the introduction of the innovation at the right time and place, to the right individuals, and with the right amount of reinforcement (Havelock, 1982).

Vertical vs. Horizontal Channels

Whenever social equilibrium is upset, communication occurs. It is the means, therefore, by which a system takes corrective action in the presence of difficulty; obviously, communication is essential if the source of difficulty is to be diagnosed. In a hierarchical structure, communication must proceed both ways, up and down. Upward communication can be effective only when the bottom and middle are free from any sense of intimidation and when the top accepts and even seeks communication from below. (Lippitt, Watson and Westley, cited in Havelock, 1982, p. 71)

Managing change requires a fine coordination of people and systems. Such coordination can be particularly difficult in large organizations where communication and

control are both complex and sensitive. In hierarchically structured organizations, where communications travel up and down through different levels without skipping around, the communication process can take too long; in addition, the more people there are in the chain, the more chance there is for misinterpretation. When an organization is divided into segments that operate more or less autonomously (decentralized), the communication process has fewer vertical levels, but management has to tie all those segments together to optimize corporate objectives (Burgher, 1979).

Line people know a great deal about the work they are doing that is frequently not communicated to higher management or staff. This upward communication can only exist when the functions of the organization have been provided with the necessary information, resources, and services, and are using them effectively (Burgher, 1979).

Resistance to Change

Resistance has been described as "a predictable, natural, emotional reaction of a client against the process of being helped and/or against the process of having to face up to difficult organizational problems" (Block cited in Robinson & Robinson, 1989, p. 156). Others have indicated that "at each stage of innovation, from its inception to its defense as status quo, wise strategy requires perceptive analysis of the nature of resistance" (Watson cited in Havelock, 1982, p. 121).

Reasons for Resistance

People resist for different reasons: they've had previous negative experiences; they may not see the rationale; they are content with the status quo; or, the reasons for the change are not clearly communicated to them. The tolerance that people have for change is intimately connected to their personalities.

People with a high need for basic security often resist making the commitment to change. People with a high need to achieve, to do something better, are more likely to embrace change. This is particularly true if they are rewarded with a tangible payoff (Dalziel & Schoonover, 1988).

Early Adopters vs. Late Adopters

People who adopt at different rates or times have been identified as having different communication behaviors. Earlier adopters have more social participation, are more cosmopolite, have more change agent contact, greater exposure to mass-media channels, greater exposure to interpersonal communication channels, engage in more active information seeking, have greater knowledge of innovations, have a higher degree of opinion leadership, and are more likely to belong to highly interconnected systems (Rogers, 1983). "The communication of innovations depends upon a vast network of social relationships, both formal and informal; a person's position in that network is the best indicator of when he is likely to adopt an innovation" (Havelock, 1982).

First adopters, or innovators, are marginal leaders and are not especially influential. Their status depends almost entirely upon their former alliances with successful causes. For later adopters, breaking through the "beliefs barrier" is not easy. Havelock sees the later adopters, or resisters as fulfilling a useful function; they prevent intrusions by alien forces, which might result in serious side effects (Havelock, 1982).

The differences between the new and the traditional are embedded in the paradigms of the members of an organization; this is apparent in their patterns of thinking about and visualizing of their organization. While traditional change strategies can improve an organization's effectiveness without changing its basic form, organization-wide transformation must, of necessity, begin by shifting members' paradigms and giving them

new ways of viewing the possibilities (Kilmann & Covin, et al., 1989). When individuals in an organization share common interests, they must carefully consider the overall impact of the innovation for the common good (Havelock, 1982).

Some crises are understandable, if they are perpetuated by outside forces, such as a takeover, or a change in customer needs. But if the crises are deliberately created by planning from within the firm, even when it comes from the very top of the organization, it can run into resistance by the bureaucracy. The arguments made against the change are all stated in rational and logical terms, but the underlying cause for argument is the possibility that the worker will be left obsolete, vulnerable, and exposed to being an organizational misfit. Past training, in the face of major changes, is now seen as useless and even foolish; self-esteem is lowered; and anger and dismay increase (Odiome, 1981).

Even small changes need proper preparation: (a) little changes prepare credibility for the big changes, (b) accumulated small changes that are poorly prepared lead to big problems, and (c) changes that seem trivial to some seem monumental to others (Burgher, 1979).

To prevent failure in the face of resistance, Havelock (1982) suggests precautions in the innovation process:

1. Individuals are allowed and encouraged to progress through all the adoption steps in sequence; no skipping of steps; no changing of order; no hurrying through some stages; and always recognizing individual differences.
2. Individuals are allowed and encouraged to make a personal commitment.
3. Individuals are allowed and encouraged to discuss reservations about the innovation.

4. The change agent should offer resources relevant to each adoption stage.

5. Individuals need greater support from the change agent when the actual behavioral trial begins.

Noncommitters vs. Active Resistance

More subtle, but a bigger factor than active resistance, is noncommitment by most people. This tendency becomes more prevalent as life becomes more complex, as people become more educated, and as professionalism dominates more of our lives (Odiome, 1981).

It has been noted that "many an innovation brought in with great fanfare is superficially accepted, and months or years later, things have drifted back to the way they were before. Nobody may have openly resisted the change. Nobody revoked it. It just didn't last..." (Watson & Glaser, cited in Havelock, 1982, p. 133).

According to Odiome (1981), a system for producing change faces these factors:

1. Specialization produces an activity trap and people will tend to remain noncommittal in decisions that might produce changes in their behavior.

2. He agrees with Heath that management needs to turn noncommitters into reasonable adventurers. Given a procedure acceptable to them and their professional mind set, they will make decisions that produce changes in an orderly fashion (cited in Odiome, 1981, p. 238).

4. The key lies in getting people to see the reasonableness and professionalism in widening their options when confronted with a decision.

Communication in the Face of Resistance

It is critical that in addition to analyzing the technical impacts of change, managers understand the human response to change and learn how to manage the pain that comes with organizational transformation (Kilmann & Covin, et al., 1989).

In communicating change, it occurs easiest when people receive favorable feedback for changing, and no unfavorable feedback. Resistance occurs when the messages received indicate that a proposed change will have more unfavorable consequences than favorable (Odiome, 1981).

The underlying premise is that all change is risky. Using a process that recognizes what is at stake for those affected by the change enables employees to move quickly from resisting change to becoming partners in helping it succeed. The perception of risk can be changed (Kilmann & Covin, et al., 1989).

People differ in their comfort levels with and readiness for taking risks. Readiness is based on two factors: (a) a personal tendency toward risk taking, and (b) perception of the degree to which the organization supports risk taking (Kilmann & Covin, et al., 1989).

The lower the individual tendency toward risk taking, the higher the perceived organizational supports must be for the risk taking behavior to occur and vice versa. Perception is a key variable. Research shows that often support exists but is not perceived (Moore & Gergen cited in Kilmann & Covin, et al., 1989, p. 383). In the case of individual risk-taking behavior, perception is reality.

An organization tends to attract and keep employees whose individual tendencies for risk taking match the organization's cultural norms. Organizations with low support for risk taking tend to attract and keep lower-level risk takers. Organizations with higher expectations and support attract and keep higher-level risk takers. Consequently, one

stumbling block of organizations that have been conservative and now want to become innovative is a work force that was developed to maintain the status quo (Kilmann & Covin, et al., 1989).

When employees perceive organization supports to be lower than their ideal for risk taking, they tend to become immobilized and "resist" taking action. Of the categories of risk taking (economic, physical, self esteem), the primary risks faced by people involved in organizational change are risks to self-esteem. The best way to protect from ego assaults is to stay with the tried and true...known as resistance (Kilmann & Covin, et al., 1989).

Kilmann and Covin, et al. (1989) indicate four stages through which employees pass in the face of change: (a) Shock, (b) Defensive Retreat, (c) Acknowledgment, and (d) Adaptation and Change. This terminology is somewhat different from Rogers' and Havelock's stages of adoption which have been previously mentioned. The best way to help people move from Shock and Defensive Retreat to the creativity stages, Acknowledgement and Adaptation/Change, is to provide a bridge of safety; increase employees feelings of safety regarding abilities, opportunities, competence, and freedom to fail.

According to Kilman & Covin, et al.(1989), it is not unusual for people to suddenly balk and become unwilling to participate in a change effort. If an individual was not aware of (a) the degree of risk taking that would be required for implementation, (b) the amount of disruption the change would cause, or (c) the lack of support from the organization, he or she may experience panic at the moment of realization and Shock may set in; it is important to involve employees in planning but not until they have reached stage three, Acknowledgment.

Leadership and Communication

Vance Packard, 25 years ago in his book The Pyramid Climbers said, "In essence, leadership appears to be the art of getting others to want to do something you are convinced should be done" (cited in Kouzes & Posner, 1987, p. 10).

Exemplary leaders enlist the support and assistance of all those who must make the project work. They involve, in some way, those who must live with the results, and they make it possible for others to do good work. They encourage collaboration, build teams, and empower others. They enable others to act. In 91% of the cases analyzed, leaders proudly discussed how teamwork and collaboration were essential. These same leaders indicate that this is the most significant of all the practices (Kouzes & Posner, 1987).

Kanter in Changemasters indicates that projects that disintegrated did so because the manager failed to build a coalition of supporters and collaborators. Enabling others makes them feel strong, capable, and committed. When people feel empowered, they feel a sense of ownership and use their energies to produce extraordinary results (cited in Kouzes & Posner, 1987, p. 11).

Communicating Vision

Perhaps the most essential task of the change leader in motivating and influencing others is perfecting communication. Aristotle said, "Once a man understands an idea, he can identify with it, acknowledge it, and make it his own" (cited in Kouzes & Posner, 1987, p. 21).

The vision must be communicated so well, that followers will sign on for the duration. Enthusiasm and excitement signal the leader's personal commitment to pursuing that dream. Honest, competent, forward-looking, inspiring; these are the attributes which communications experts refer to as "credibility" (Kouzes & Posner, 1987).

The real challenge is in sharing the vision; the more people who are involved with filling in the vision, or completing it, the more people who will understand it and will be able to help communicate it. Communicating the vision to those who will be responsible for implementing the new order is a step that cannot be overlooked. Messages will have to be clear, consistent, and frequent to put the vision across to those who need to hear it (Kilmann & Covin, et al., 1989).

Surveys of 284 top executives listed the most important characteristic of a CEO is a "leadership style of honesty and integrity"; "a long term vision and direction for the company" is ranked second. Followers have no idea what a leader's vision is until the leader describes it. The image that the followers develop in their minds is highly dependent upon the leader's ability to describe it. Leaders have to define a common purpose and then effectively communicate a vision so that others come to share it (Kouzes & Posner, 1987).

When leaders can effectively communicate a vision, it has profound effects. Those managers who felt that their senior executives effectively communicated the vision reported significantly higher levels of satisfaction, determination, and drive (Kouzes & Posner, 1987).

Followers of a leader want to know what the company will look like, feel like, and be like when it arrives at its goal in 6 months or 6 years. They want it described in rich detail so they know when they have arrived, and how they can select the proper route for getting there (Kouzes & Posner, 1987).

Communicating Information

Change leaders also understand that communication requires excellent information. The most effective leaders recognize that the objectives for change must be clearly communicated before the team can commit to them.

Social psychologist Edgar Schein said, "Leaders do not have a choice about whether to communicate. They have a choice only about how much to manage what they communicate" (cited in Kouzes & Posner, 1987). Throughout the change process effective leaders focus on developing the skills of written communication, meeting management, and presentations.

When guiding change, leaders must be willing to hear, consider, and accept ideas from sources outside the company. They must establish more relationships, connect with more sources of information, and get out and walk around more frequently. They stay in touch with social, political, technological, economic, and artistic changes (Kouzes & Posner, 1987).

Every leader ought to know how to paraphrase, summarize, express feelings, disclose personal information, admit mistakes, respond nondefensively, ask for clarification, and solicit different views. Sensitivity to others begins with the disclosure of facts and feelings by the leaders about themselves and with the willingness to actively listen to what others have to say about themselves (Kouzes & Posner, 1987).

Even with highly motivated, achievement-oriented people, the type of leadership provided makes a definite difference in performance, in the levels of stress experienced, and in long-term healthiness. Having a clear goal, a positive sense of direction, and feedback about progression; superior results are produced. This has been witnessed in groups of marching soldiers (Squires cited in Kouzes & Posner, 1987, p. 40).

Lack of clarity about what to expect in the change effort is a prime cause of resistance to change (Dalziel & Schoonover, 1988). A leader can provide safety by clarifying his or her expectations, clarifying and/or developing reward systems that are meaningful to employees, emphasizing and developing support systems, and making needed resources

available. This has the effect of opening them up to new experiences and moving them to the stages of Acknowledgment and Adaptation/Change.

Information has the ability to empower people, strengthening their resolve and providing them with the resources they need to be successful. In regard to empowerment, it has been said, "Powerlessness corrupts, and absolute powerlessness corrupts absolutely" (Kanter cited in Kouzes & Posner, 1987, p. 162). People who feel powerless tend to hoard whatever shreds of power they have, adopting petty and dictatorial management styles. Politics is the way of handling interdepartmental differences (Kouzer & Posner, 1987).

The more people believe that they can influence and control the organization, the greater the organizational effectiveness and member satisfaction (Tannenbaum cited in Kouzer & Posner, 1987, p. 163). Exploring ideas is essential for making goals and plans relevant to the end user. The process generates information, and engages participants in a dialogue about change. This avoids externally imposed goals and plans that can never have the full commitment of end users.

The impact of the change needs to be clear to the employees. As they realize the enormity of the transformation, minimize the number of surprises by giving complete answers to questions about impacts, changes, and disruptions throughout the organization (Kilmann & Covin, et al., 1989).

The importance of a high level of communication about the transformation cannot be overstressed. In the studies where CEOs thought they "over communicated", organizational members all reported a feeling that communication was too infrequent, that the exchanges raised more doubts and questions than they resolved, and that the process did not include enough varied representatives from the organization.

Graves has suggested secretive negotiations in the beginning to minimize discomfort levels of personnel, but Marks feels that the creation of formal, internal communication mechanisms as early as possible in the process may limit the anxiety that will be fueled by rumors, or outside news reports. This has been supported by evidence submitted by Ackerman that transition management structures should be created as early as possible to identify and deal with the unique issues that arise during each stage of the transformation process (cited in Kilmann & Covin, et al., 1989, p. 517).

Communicating Through Problem-solving and Decision-sharing

There is a need to develop a problem-solving attitude among organizational members. If people are involved in the change process and are allowed to contribute to solutions as well as to raise problems, they can develop a more realistic set of expectations about the transformation and what it will take to resolve the resultant difficulties. One way to accomplish this would be an open systems planning procedure (McCaskey cited in Odiorne, 1981, p. 32). If the organization is to succeed with change, problem-solving should be the norm.

Some management hate facing problems so much that they cut off useful information from others about how to solve them (Dalziel & Schoonover, 1988). Instead, information should be allowed to flow freely so that problems can be solved.

The most significant benefits of change leadership stem from developing individuals, teams, and entire organizations. If there is to be personal growth, individuals have to keep changing. For businesses to be competitive, they must remain open to change (Dalziel & Schoonover, 1988).

When people participate in making decisions, they make their expert contribution. Thus they often are able to prevent the kinds of errors which grow out of ignorance. They

also acquire more enthusiasm for the decision, or at least have some of their more serious reservations removed, and accordingly work more diligently to make the decision work in practice. The best decisions are accommodations of quality and acceptance (Odiome, 1981).

As the leader is assessing organizational readiness to proceed with change, he or she is constantly communicating in these areas:

1. Provides a history of change by keeping people fully informed to avoid surprises; by making a case for change in reasonable terminology and benefits to the user; and by spending a lot of time talking.
2. Provides clarity of expectations by emphasizing the benefits of change to all concerned; by allowing no surprises; and by soliciting formal and informal feedback.
3. Defines the origin of the problem in terms of who, what, why; examines potential problems; confronts problems first; and assesses feedback for speed of implementation.
4. Provides support of top management by defining top management concerns.
5. Demonstrates compatibility of change by showing how it is in line with present organizational goals and objectives; by making plans common knowledge; by creating an accepting environment; and by not overselling (Odiome, 1981).

Change Agents

Change agents provide a communication link between the resource for innovation, and the intended adoptees, facilitating the smooth and rapid transition. The change agent has limited influence at the persuasion and decision stage in the innovation process. He must operate through the interpersonal network of peers, with the opinion leader guiding the way (Rogers, 1983).

The opinion leader is seen as a credible source of evaluation of the innovation; value of an innovation is best resolved through interpersonal communication with peers. Once the opinion leaders adopt, the adoption curve shoots upward in a self-generating fashion, allowing the change agent to retire from the scene (Rogers, 1983). Havelock (1982) feels that diffusion through the opinion leader only works if the opinion leader tends to be somewhat innovative, and has good following connections.

One of the most fundamental factors for a change agent's success lies in the extent of the communication interface that the change agent employs during the initial diffusion process. During this time, the communication must be related to the client orientation and need. If the change is against the perceived needs or cultural values, many change programs fail (Rogers, 1983).

In selecting a change agent, those who have been in the client's role seem to be most effective, as they can empathize more effectively with the client. The change agent should represent a balance of competence and safety credibility. A change agent or aide who has adopted the innovation already, makes an ideal combination of heterophily/homophily (Rogers, 1983).

Even though the change agent must rely heavily on opinion leaders to promote innovation, his technical competence is his unique contribution. The greatest barrier for a change agent, is his difficulty in determining all the hidden meanings and side effects of an innovation for his client (Rogers, 1983).

The change agent may find himself less effective if his only contact in the organization is with the more educated, higher-status individuals; the socioeconomic gaps may be widened through the innovations that are introduced. Through the works of Tichenor et al., McNelly & Molina, Katzman, and Cook et al. , equality in the diffusion process has

been questioned (cited in Rogers, 1983, p. 396). The higher status individuals (often the earlier adopters) in a system gained more overall than the later adopters; therefore, widening the socioeconomic gap. When the change agent relies on the innovators and early adopters to "trickle down" the information, he fails to account for the interpersonal networks of homophilic segments, resulting in more of a "trickle across" phenomena (Rogers, 1983).

Whether the change agent is internal or external to the organization, project success was associated with a powerful client who exhibited readiness for change and whose values were apparent. Unsuccessful projects were characterized by more frequent mistakes, the most common being failure to have the client assume responsibility for the project's process and outcome (Burke, Lawrence, & Koopman, 1984).

To develop an innovation to its fullest, Havelock (1982) admonishes a change agent to be prepared to maintain flexibility and be prepared to (a) readapt the innovation, (b) shift gears up, down, or reverse, and (c) change implementation strategy as needed.

Opinion Leaders

Opinion leaders are generally influential, have a high self-esteem, and are not usually the first to try new ideas. Their retention of power rests with their ability to judge from others trials and errors before making a commitment. They can act as legitimators, facilitators, or gatekeepers (Havelock, 1982).

It is believed that the greatest response to change agent efforts occur when opinion leaders are adopting. When information reaches a 20-30% awareness level among the organization, a threshold point is reached, and it often coincides with the adoption of innovation by the opinion leaders (Rogers, 1983).

If the change leader is too innovative, he may not be perceived as being very credible, and his potential for diffusing the change may be limited. The change agent may need to employ the aid of the opinion leaders, who are more closely matched to the culture of the organization (Rogers, 1983).

Opinion leaders tend to be at the center of communication networks, thus, very influential. In this respect, they can be very useful in the change process, but if they are recruited too frequently by change agents or leaders, their effectiveness may be reduced (Rogers, 1983).

Even though opinion leaders are more homophilous with their co-workers, they are still generally better educated, have higher levels of literacy, have greater innovativeness, have higher social status, and have more mass-media experience. If an opinion leader can demonstrate the successful usage of an innovation, it can speed up the integration of the innovation among his peers. Network messages from opinion leaders are regarded as credible when convincing peers to adopt innovation (Rogers, 1983). However, change agents sometimes mistake innovators for opinion leaders, resulting in a low adoption rate. Havelock (1982) seems to feel that opinion leaders need to be somewhat innovative-minded, at least, to be helpful to the change agent.

CHAPTER III

Summary

While each author enumerates different stages of transition that must accompany the innovation/change process, they all seem to be in agreement that passing through the stages in a logical sequence is necessary for effective, efficient, and orderly change to take place. Business authors tend to analyze the process as a whole, while the communication/education authors break the process down into steps, analyzing the process with applications of accepted theories of communication and learning. The designation of steps, or transitional stages, lends itself to a better understanding of the process of change; the greater the understanding, the more likely the success of the project. Also, this break down into a logical order suggests a learnable strategy, limiting the amount of trial and error that so often accompanies organizational change.

Even though some authors consider the process of change only in terms of individual circumstances, it seems apparent that the individual level is all-important even when considering change on an organization-wide basis. The tendency to ignore the values, expectations, and internal drive mechanisms of the individual has repeatedly railroaded change projects; they are doomed from the beginning. The process of change can be so overwhelming, frustrating, and frightening, that the normal individual will retreat to a reasonably comfortable routine, rather than endure the trauma. While this retreat can be interpreted as resistance, it more likely signifies a lack of preparation for the change, including a lack of communication about the change.

In spite of the wealth of material on this subject, the consensus among the authors cited in this paper indicates a normal pattern of improper preparation for innovations regardless of their magnitude. Employees who are expected to carry out the details necessary to effect

the change are not sufficiently motivated. Perhaps the leadership that is so vital to help stir motivation is not available. Consistently, throughout the literature, the important role of leadership, the change agent, and the opinion leaders is reinforced. Either the role of these key people is not considered carefully in the preparation for change, or it is taken for granted. It is obvious from the reading on this subject, that the influence of key people can not be overlooked; serious attention must be given to the ways and means of implementing innovations utilizing their strategic contributions.

In many organizations, leadership is so far removed from the majority of the employees, that no vision or mission is ever communicated to them. As a result, their hearts and minds are never stirred to make the requested changes. This lack of visible direction makes it impossible to follow through; the status quo prevails regardless of the desires of top management. It falls upon the leader to open the communication channels, establishing an atmosphere of openness and trust; there is no room for political, ego-protecting games during a major transitional phase if it is to be successful.

Many times, the responsibility for change falls entirely upon the shoulders of the designated change agent, whether it be an internal or external change agent. Trainers, or facilitators often fit into this category. They, too, must rely heavily upon establishing trust and openness within the prevailing communication channels (including formal and informal channels). Yet, when they are expected to effect the change without the support of strong, visible leadership, the chances of their success is severely limited. In the face of inconsistent support from top management, enlisting the aid of opinion leaders with near-perfect timing may be the only means of accomplishing reasonable success. For the change agent, the ability to differentiate the opinion leaders from others, to enlist their

assistance, and to develop a feel for the correct timing of that assistance, appears to be a critical but learnable art.

While change agents may be seen as innovator-type personalities, they may also fall into the trap of only soliciting the aid of other innovators within the organization. Most authors agree that this could be a lethal mistake; innovators are normally viewed with suspicion by the average person, and therefore do not carry much influence among fellow employees during times of transition. This is where the ability to distinguish between the opinion leaders and innovators becomes crucial. When properly recruited, the opinion leader serves as a necessary role model for the majority of people who hesitate to adopt change. For later adopters, being able to focus on a successful role model reduces the personal risks associated with change.

Throughout the literature, acknowledging the natural resistance to change is stressed. By acknowledging this phenomena, it is more likely to be dealt with in a positive way. Establishing management development programs that address major concerns and normal human needs during times of change can smooth the way for individual adoption. Participatory decision-making and problem-solving techniques develop formal channels of communication, and address many of the issues of resistance. Providing adequate reinforcement and reward mechanisms also speeds the process along.

In light of the massive amount of material on this subject, it is amazing that many organizations lunge into major transitions with little regard for the research on this topic. It seems to be a growing trend to consider the available information on the dynamics of change prior to embarking on these transitions, but it may be the sole responsibility of the professional change agent to analyze current organizational goals, and objectives; and to evaluate and upgrade communication practices when necessary to facilitate the change.

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