

Navigating Organizational Change: From Resistance to Acceptance, Learning, and Growth

Nancy Kymn Harvin Rutigliano

State University of New York Empire State College, USA

Nadine V. Wedderburn

State University of New York Empire State College, USA

John M. Beckem II

State University of New York Empire State College, USA

INTRODUCTION

Adaptation to external as well as internal forces is known as organizational change. Lunenburg (2010) defines organizational change as the shift of an organization from its present state towards a desired future state in order to maintain or increase its efficiency, in recognition of a constantly changing environment of operation. Organizational change is most successful when it is driven by linear strategic dynamics (those that are easily predictable in the long term) (Burgelman & Grove, 2008). Non-linear strategic dynamics are sudden and unpredictable, which make fast-shifting organizational change an absolute necessity for the survival of the firm (Burgelman & Grove, 2008; Chih, Yang, & Chang, 2012). Glor (2015) divides the premise of an organization's health into two: fitness and survival, both of which are dependent on the firm's capacity for dealing with dynamic and timely change. Arguably, sudden change tests the ability of an organization and its constituents to remain relevant and be responsive during inconstant periods.

Figure 1.
(wordle.net)



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Modern day organizations are faced with more uncertainty about the future outlook of the global business environment than at any time in the past (Burgelman & Grove, 2008). This reality is reflected by Radu, Liviu and Christian (2014) in their description of chaos as a “frightening word, heard more and more nowadays” (p. 1550). Consensus among business experts is that the world continues to grow more turbulent, and organizations that are unable to adapt are at a competitive disadvantage (Tung, 2014; Will, 2015). The most glaring aspect of change, Will (2015) asserts, is the widespread adoption of technology in different aspects of business operations. The expanding use of social media, the growth of economic power in developing countries, and the generational evolution of the workforce are some of the prominent factors behind the expanding agitations within the business environment (Will, 2015). A look at the evolution of global companies over recent decades reveals that the longevity of an enterprise is dependent on its ability to cope with linear and non-linear strategic dynamics (Burgelman & Grove, 2008). Organizational change inevitably presents opportunities for growth and learning and provides space for organizational members to become involved in shaping a reconstituted corporate entity. Leaders and managers serve their stakeholders and organizations well to present this context for organizational change. As this perspective becomes more widely accepted, and more fully explained later in this chapter, resistance to change can be expected to decline.

This chapter is organized as follows. First a literature review depicts in detail of the multidimensional nature of organizational change resistance and its causes. The discussion section presents several strategies that organizations may engage to move stakeholders beyond resistance and then summarizes the experiences of three organizations that have experienced successful organizational change, resistance notwithstanding. The section on future research directions suggests areas that are in need of deeper exploration and development. Finally, the conclusion recapitulates the importance of understanding the nuances of organizational change in informing effective managerial leadership and issues a call to all stakeholders to seize the rich opportunities for learning that organizational change possesses.

BACKGROUND

Forcing and Resisting Change

Chaos and resistance to change are two forces that exert pressure on organizations and their stakeholders—especially leaders and managers—from different points. While chaos is the force that necessitates organizational change, resistance impedes it. According to Tettenbaum and Laurence (2011), chaos by nature is unavoidable and not only drives organizational change but also makes it more complicated. Chaos theory, in relation to the business environment, has parallels with the quantum mechanics variant (Radu, Liviu, and Cristian, 2014). In the same way that signatures of chaos in quantum systems have been shown to possess a quality of linearity called orderly-disorder, seemingly chaotic and arbitrary disturbances in the business environment have been shown to possess surprising predictability in the long term (Tettenbaum & Laurence, 2011). Radu, Liviu and Cristian (2014) argue that business organizations are made of components that are highly unpredictable and complex. In the long run, even the most chaotic variables are found to coalesce into predictable loops that can help leaders and managers drive organizational change that is consistent with stakeholder needs (Terrence, 2015; Radu, Liviu, & Cristian, 2014). Tettenbaum and Laurence (2011) describe this quality of chaos as the “self-organizing nature of chaos” (p. 43). According to Karp (2006), organizational change initiatives and the behavior they provoke are seemingly chaotic but when looked at over a long period of time they are orderly and

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