Continuing professional development and workplace learning 11: Managing the "people&qu
Smith, Ian
Library Management; 2005; 26, 3; ABI/INFORM Complete
pg. 152

The Emerald Research Register for this journal is available at
www.emeraldinsight.com/researchregister

The current issue and full text archive of this journal is available at
www.emeraldinsight.com/0143-5124.htm

Continuing professional development and workplace learning 11

Managing the "people" side of organisational change

Ian Smith
La Trobe University Library, Bundoora, Victoria, Australia

Abstract

Purpose – Aims to review the "people" aspect of organisational change.

Design/methodology/approach – Provides a concise review of the nature and impact of change.

Findings – Discusses the "people" aspect of organisational change and begins an exploration of the conundrum that people – the essential factor in successful organisational renewal – can also be the biggest obstacle to achieving change. Discusses the nature and impact of organisational change and outlines four key factors in managing the "people" aspect of that process.

Originality/value – This review is a useful source of information to help understand change management.

Keywords Organizational change, Change management

Paper type General review

The "people" side of organisational change

Change, the process of moving to a new state of things, one that is different from the existing state of things, is a constant for organisations. Indeed, it is paradoxical that the need for change is one of the few constants in an increasingly unpredictable and complex environment. Managing such change in organisations is, in very large part, about managing the "people" aspects of that process. This, the first in a series of five short papers on this topic, will examine the inherent conundrum of organisational change: that people, the human resources of organisations, are both an essential factor in achieving organisational renewal and, at times, may also be the biggest obstacles to change.

The nature and impact of change

Change – in our societies, our profession, an our organisations – is rapid and constant. Change involves moving from a known state to an unknown one, of ending the way things are done and doing things in new ways, of letting go. The pressures and demands for change in organisations may be external or internal, or a mixture of both. Change may be planned or unplanned. It may be fast or slow.

Our understanding of the process of change in organisations has shifted significantly over recent times. The long dominant freeze-unfreeze-freeze model saw organisational change as a process of moving through alternate, and clearly delineated, phases of stability followed by unsettlement and then stability again. By contrast organisational change is now generally understood to be more a process of virtually

Library Management
Vol. 26 No. 3, 2005
pp. 152-155
© Emerald Group Publishing Limited
0143-5124
DOI 10.1108/01435120510580898

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

constant change and adaptation – this characterised by ongoing instability and unsettlement. The most frequently used analogy is to negotiating constant "white-water" rapids.

Context is vitally important to an understanding of the dynamics of organisational change. What for one organisation or group may seem to be iterative low-key change may, for another, be ground breaking and radical. Libraries, by virtue of the nature of their core work – organising and codifying access to information – tend towards a conservative rather than a radical mindset. As such, they may present a greater change challenge than do many other types of organisation. That tendency to a primarily conservative character – which character by extension applies to the people who are employed in libraries – sits in stark contrast to the actual experience of many libraries over the past decade.

Writing at the end of the turbulent decade that was the 1960s, leadership and management guru Warren Bennis spoke of the need, in the face of a "dizzying rate of change", to achieve changes in the beliefs values and structures of organisations so that they can better adapt to new technologies, markets and challenges (Bennis, 1969). That prediction has increasingly rung true for the library and information services sector which has seen a marked change in both the scale and pace of change over the past decade. Collection acquisition and management, bibliographic control and reference and information services – which, along with lending services, represent the core of library functions – have all been massively impacted by technological advances since the early 1990s. Such technological impacts, in libraries and elsewhere, characterised as "disruptive change" (Lewis, 2004), have forced onto libraries a rapid shift away from an incremental and gradual approach to change to a way of thinking and working that can accommodate ongoing, radical and discontinuous change. As Farley *et al.* (1998) observe, such a shift away from the traditional conservative mindset of libraries and librarians requires not just minor alterations in attitudes and ways of working, but an acceptance and adoption of wholly new perspectives and mindsets. While they may not always be easily achieved such changes in mindset are, they argue, essential for libraries and librarians. By developing the capability to make such radical change the possible threats from "disruptive change" become opportunities for transformation and the cementing of a continuing role and relevance for libraries and librarians.

People – vehicle for change or obstacle to change?

If change is now a constant what of the responses to such change? Because it is the people who do the work of organisations the capacity and capability of organisations to achieve change is, to a very large degree, determined by the attitude of their employees. The ability of people to respond and adapt when faced with change is thus critical. People may be either the major obstacle to change or the major factor in achieving successful change.

It is often popularly held that people, particularly those working in established and settled organisations, will tend to resist change. That is an oversimplification. Individuals and groups can and do react to change in a range of ways. For some change and transition is exciting and stimulating – they cannot wait to make the changes and get to the new state of things. For others change is deeply unsettling and a threat to their values and sense of worth – something to be resisted at all costs. This

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

range of human responses to the challenges and uncertainties of change, means that organisations may not achieve change readily or easily. Managing organisational change is at its core about managing people and their reactions and responses to change. Successful organisational change is achieved *through* people. It cannot, other than in very exceptional circumstances, simply be imposed.

If managing the human side of organisational change is *the* major challenge, how then might managers effectively do this?

There is a vast and growing literature on the management of organisational change and a plethora of either specialised or wide-ranging prescriptions for success. J.P. Kotter of the Harvard Business School, a highly regarded writer on organisational change, offers a useful distillation of what he sees, based on a wide ranging review of attempts at organisational transformation, as eight key steps in the process of successful change. Done well, Kotter (1995, 1996) says, these eight steps provide the path to success. Done badly they are the root cause of failure. In outline Kotter's prescription for successful change is this:

(1) Establish a sense of urgency about the need to achieve change – people will not change if they cannot see the need to do so;

(2) Create a guiding coalition – assemble a group with power energy and influence in the organisation to lead the change;

(3) Develop a vision and strategy – create a vision of what the change is about, tell people why the change is needed and how it will be achieved;

(4) Communicate the change vision – tell people, in every possible way and at every opportunity, about the why, what and how of the changes;

(5) Empower broad-based action – involve people in the change effort, get people to think about the changes and how to achieve them rather than thinking about why they do not like the changes and how to stop them;

(6) Generate short term wins – seeing the changes happening and working and recognising the work being done by people towards achieving the change is critical;

(7) Consolidate gains and produce more change – create momentum for change by building on successes in the change, invigorate people through the changes, develop people as change agents;

(8) Anchor new approaches in the corporate culture – this is critical to long term success and institutionalising the changes. Failure to do so may mean that changes achieved through hard work and effort slip away with people's tendency to revert to the old and comfortable ways of doing things.

The role of people in achieving change is central to Kotter's framework. This again raises the conundrum that people are both an essential factor in achieving successful organisational change and, at times, may be the biggest obstacles to change. The way through that conundrum is simple. Managers must see and act on the imperative to effectively manage the people side of organisational change. The future papers in this short series will explore four key "people" aspects of this managerial challenge. These are:

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

- Creating organisational and individual readiness for change – why this is important and how to go about creating it;
- Dealing with resistance and reaction to change – why and how people resist change and how to understand and effectively respond to such resistance;
- Communicating, sharing information and involving people in decision-making about change – why this is important and how to successfully achieve this;
- Getting change to stick and take root – why doing this can be such a challenge and why cementing the work of change initiatives is critical to long term success.

Futurist Handy (1993) said that achieving change in organisations is not really about "managing", as that is a process which assumes that managers know where to go and how to get there, and that they can persuade others to come along. Rather, he argues, achieving change is more about guiding and steering. Whatever the nature of the process – managing or guiding, or a combination of the two – this short series will attempt to provide some pointers to effective management of the "people" aspect of organisational change.

References

Bennis, W.G. (1969), *Organization Development: Its Nature, Origins and Prospects*, Addison Wesley, Reading, MA.

Farley, T., Broady-Preston, J. and Hayward, T. (1998), "Academic libraries, people and change: a case study of the 1990s", *Library Management*, Vol. 19 No. 4, pp. 238-51.

Handy, C. (1993), *Understanding Organisations*, Penguin, Harmondsworth.

Kotter, J.P. (1995), "Why transformation efforts fail", *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 73 No. 2, pp. 59-67.

Kotter, J.P. (1996), *Leading Change*, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, MA.

Lewis, D.W. (2004), "The innovators dilemma: disruptive change and academic libraries", *Library Administration & Management*, Vol. 18 No. 2, pp. 68-75.

Further reading

Darcy, T. and Kleiner, B.H. (1993), "Leadership for change in a turbulent environment", *Logistics Information Management*, Vol. 6 No. 2, pp. 5-10.

Goulding, A. (1996), *Managing Change for Library Support Staff*, Avebury, Aldershot.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.