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Navigating Change: A Critical Evaluation of How Change Management Can Improve Organisational Performance

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ABSTRACT

Businesses are continually facing change due to evolving trends such as shifts in market, challenges in competition and advancement in technology which constantly impact on their performance. Organisations therefore need to continuously reshape how they operate to meet their goals, by adopting robust and sustainable change management strategies. The study aims to investigate how organisational performance is enhanced through effective change management practices, incorporating reviewed literature thereby providing a theoretical framework for the research. The research reveals factors that must be addressed to ensure the change initiatives are successful. It was concluded that in navigating change, leaders should focus on employee engagement and communication and develop a positive culture within the organisation. In addition, leveraging technology will support the implementation of change initiatives and all these will guarantee a sustainable organisational performance.

Keywords: Organisational performance, change management, leadership, resistance to change, employee engagement, stakeholders.

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1.1 Introduction

The ability of an organisation to achieve its goals and objectives by adjusting both internal and external situations reveals an organisation's performance. Organisational performance assesses how capable organisations can use the internal resources such as technology, financial and human resources in addition to external resources to achieve set objectives. There are different factors that could be used in assessing organisational performance. These include innovation, productivity, employee engagement and profitability. It is necessary for an organisation to continue to improve and adjust to changes in market conditions so as improve performance. With strong leadership, a good culture and team collaboration, this can be achieved.

According to Tangen (2004), it is sometimes difficult to decide on an objective measure of organisational performance because the relationship between different criteria has been identified and used as measures of performance. These include productivity, profitability, efficiency, quality, innovation and effectiveness.

Brown (2020), argues that companies need to know about different metrics used to be able to accurately assess their performance. The metrics include customer satisfaction, cost saving measures, benchmarks for operational excellence, employee engagement, indicators for internal processes and financial indicators such as return on investment. When organisations can understand the metrics which are relevant to their organisation, adjustments could be made to ensure internal processes and operations are improved upon. Identifying relevant metrics and developing a tracking system to assess if there is progress towards achieving goals and objectives is relevant (Bourne & Walker, 2020). Additionally, external factors such as industry trends and economic conditions should be considered in measuring performance because these factors could affect results (Tucker, 2019). Organisations can gain a compressive understanding of performance levels by accurately assessing the different metrics associated with performance and this can improve overall performance.

Organisational performance combines three major areas of the organisational outcome. These are the shareholders' return, financial performance and product performance (Owen, 2006). Due to the dynamic nature of the business environment, organisations, in trying to adapt to advancement in technology, competition challenges and market shift, constantly face pressure. The only way organisations can move to the desired state from the current state, is through managing change with a structured approach. Organisational change management is the process of supporting individuals and teams to make changes to old methods, techniques and procedures. It involves methods that a company uses to implement changes in its internal and external processes (Kotter, 2009).

Hiatt (2006), defines change management as the transitioning of an organisation's technologies and processes using a systematic approach that involves managing human resourcesto achieve the organisation's objectives. When change is effectively managed, resistance is minimised, and it is embraced across the organisation. This improves operational efficiency and long-term growth which ultimately ensures the organisation is performing optimally. This forms the thrust of this study which seeks to examine change management and its potential to enhance organisational performance.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Change and adaptability, especially during the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), made organisations realise that it is essential for theirsuccess and survival, when they can navigate issues that come with change and manage them effectively, especially with a convergence of disruptive forces which organisations are facing today. According to Singha and Singha

(2024), the increase in the awareness of the global goalto meet sustainability initiatives and the focus on employee well-being are making organisations reshape operational procedures and demand agile responses. However, most organisations cannot implement the necessary changes despite acknowledging the urgent need for change.

One important thing an organisation must do to respond to internal change, digital changes, technological change and dynamics of the market is to embrace change management. When change projects are not properly managed, the consequences can be huge and extensive. The financial cost of failed change programmes could be high. Organisations can spend huge amounts of money on inefficiencies of change initiatives, such as time and money spent planning and remediating unsuccessful change initiatives. The effort it takes to correct failed change project involves more money which eats into budget ((Kotter, 1996). Failed change projects has a huge impact on morale and engagement of employees. Research also indicates that when employees feel like change is under controlled or unhelpful, they become demotivated (Bordia et al., 2004). This demoralization will cause disengagement, turnover, and decreased performance; an iterative cycle that is counterproductive to the organization. (Kotter & Schlesinger, 2008). The organisation depends on leadership trust and an unsuccessful change programme will destroy that trust. If change is not successful, workers doubt the leadership abilityand credibility (Mishra et al., 2014). This undermined trust can derail further efforts in the future, and it becomes harder for organisations to change(Holt et al., 2007). When change projects fail, they have reputational consequences that last a lifetime. External stakeholders (customers, investors, partners) might view the company as unstable or poorly run (Kirkpatrick, 2015). The reputational damage can mean lost revenue, reduced customer satisfaction and failure to attract the best talent. The culture of resistance in an organisation is often created by failed change programs. Employees can grow jaded by the thought that, next time, they are going to fail in their change project or that there is no real need to listen (Oreg, 2006). It is this reluctance that might become an obstacle to change, in the end stifling innovation.

Failure of change programmes can affect the culture of the organization which will be difficult to convert when it comes to the need to change (Schein, 2010). This cultural inertia can be a hindrance to adaptability and innovation in the long run, when organisations get locked into the old ways of doing things and thinking, and when change is poorly managed, it leaves employees disengaged and ultimately this negatively affects organisational performance (Stephens, 2021).

Despite recognising the urgent need for change a lot of organisations are not able to implement the necessary changes effectively.This research aims to critically examine change management and its potential to enhance organisational performance. It will examine the multifaceted factors influencing successful change management, moving beyond industry-specific limitations to provide a holistic understanding, applicable across diverse organisational contexts. The research will discuss opportunities and challenges that come with changes because of emerging trends such as the focus on employee engagement, sustainability and artificial intelligence, and how effective change management practices could blend these factors into the organisation seamlessly. This research seeks to contribute to organisations and their ability to succeed and grow by identifying and addressing key barriers to successful implementation of change.

2.0 Literature Review

Change management refers to the process organisations use in organising, overseeing and carrying out changes that occur within an organisation to achieve desired outcomes. It is an important topic in the world of business, and it involves a structural approach used in

adjusting to business environment changes such as changes in consumer preferences, technology, market circumstances etc. The changes come with challenges for organisations to appropriately manage and adapt effectively.

2.1 Theoretical Frameworks of Change Management

Different change models exist, and they are designed to inform how significant changes in organisations can be implemented. There exists substantial debate regarding the definitions to 'models of change' and 'strategies of change'. Bennett (2004), states that an organisation's strategy is a laid-out plan to achieve set objectives. This refers to a method chosen and used in achieving set goals. It involves a vision, a purpose, long-term plans and tactics, strategic positioning, core values, goals and objectives (Harper, 2016).

According to By (2005), Change management models fall into three categories. The top-bottom change management model believes that change can be carried out with adequate planning having barriers only when employees are resistant to the change process. The second model which is the transformational change management model is based on the idea that individuals should be challenged to be creative and innovate new ideas while at the same time ensuring that a safe environment is created for that. They went further to add that the strategic change management model differs from the other two because it follows a specific method where it seeks to encourage employees to develop new workplace behaviours which allows them to see how the change will benefit the organisation as well as themselves. It emphasises the importance of leadership, communication and employee involvement in the change transformation process to ensure success, which also depends on different organisational circumstances. The key is for the organisation to adapt a model that suits the circumstance.

2.2 ADKAR Model:

This model was developed by Prosci in 2003 and was further promoted by a consultancy and learning centre which saw this tool useful for managing change (Hiatt, 2006). It is designed to help employees navigate organisational changes smoothly. According to Shah (2014), the acronym, stands for awareness, desire, knowledge, ability and reinforcement. ADKAR identifies and describes the way change can be achieved successfully at the individual level. It is focussed on achievement of goals and enables teams to direct their focus towards achieving the goals and outcomes for the business.



Figure 1:ADKAR change management process

2.3 Lewins change management model:

This model was propounded in 1949, and it is a three-stage model that uses the way the shape of an ice block can be changed to describe the different stages that change passes through. Ice block usually passes through three stages, unfreezing stage, change stage and refreezing stage. According to Hussain et al. (2018), The fundamental stages of change forms the subsequent phases that change passes through.

At the freeze stage, the goal is to make the entire organisation understand that the change is necessary and stop the existing processes so the leaders can establish new ways of doing things. For leaders to communicate and demonstrate the need for change, it must be said in a language that everyone will understand. Without this motivation, it may be impossible for leaders to secure the support and participation necessary for adaptation of change within the organisation (Hussain et al., 2018).

The unfreeze stage produces an uncertainty in the change stage. Subordinates at this point will try to seek solutions to the new problems by addressing their uncertainty, and they begin to support the new direction through beliefs and actions.This transition period between the two stages may take some time and the subordinates should be given enough time to enable them to acclimatise and actively participate to the new direction and transformation. Subordinates also need to understand how the changes will be of benefit to them to make the change management process successful. When these changes are implemented and employees incorporate the changes to operations, the organisation can proceed to the refreeze stage, which entails full support from the leaders as the changes are being internalised.

2.4 Kotter's 8 step change model: This leading change model was developed by Kotter in 1995. He refined common themes in organisations and transformed them into a prescriptive framework. This framework was developed from the knowledge he acquired while he worked as a consultant in different organisations. As a consultant, Kotter observed multiple challenges that come with attempts to make changes to processes in organisations. The model focuses on the strategic level of the change management process, and it is known as the vision for a change process.



Figure 2: John Kotter's model
Source: (Galli, 2018)

2.5 McKinsey's 7-S change management model:
The McKinsey &-S model was developed by Tom Peter, Richard Pascale and Robert Waterman Jr. The model analyses seven elements of a team or an organisation and highlights the improvements that are necessary. He suggests that there are other components of a system that implements change and therefore one element should not be prioritised over others, especially the focus on staff. The 7s model consists of structure, skill, system, staff, strategy and shared goals. The figure shows how the 7s are linked to each other. Implementing strategy will therefore involve the organisation moving from a current state to a desired state based on specific objectives and goals that they have set for themselves. Systems refers to the organisation or team's official procedures. It consists of resource allocation, systems for measuring and rewarding performance, planning, management control systems, budgeting

and information system. According to Spaho (2014), systems impact on employee behaviour because they control the way people are rewarded and how resources are allocated.

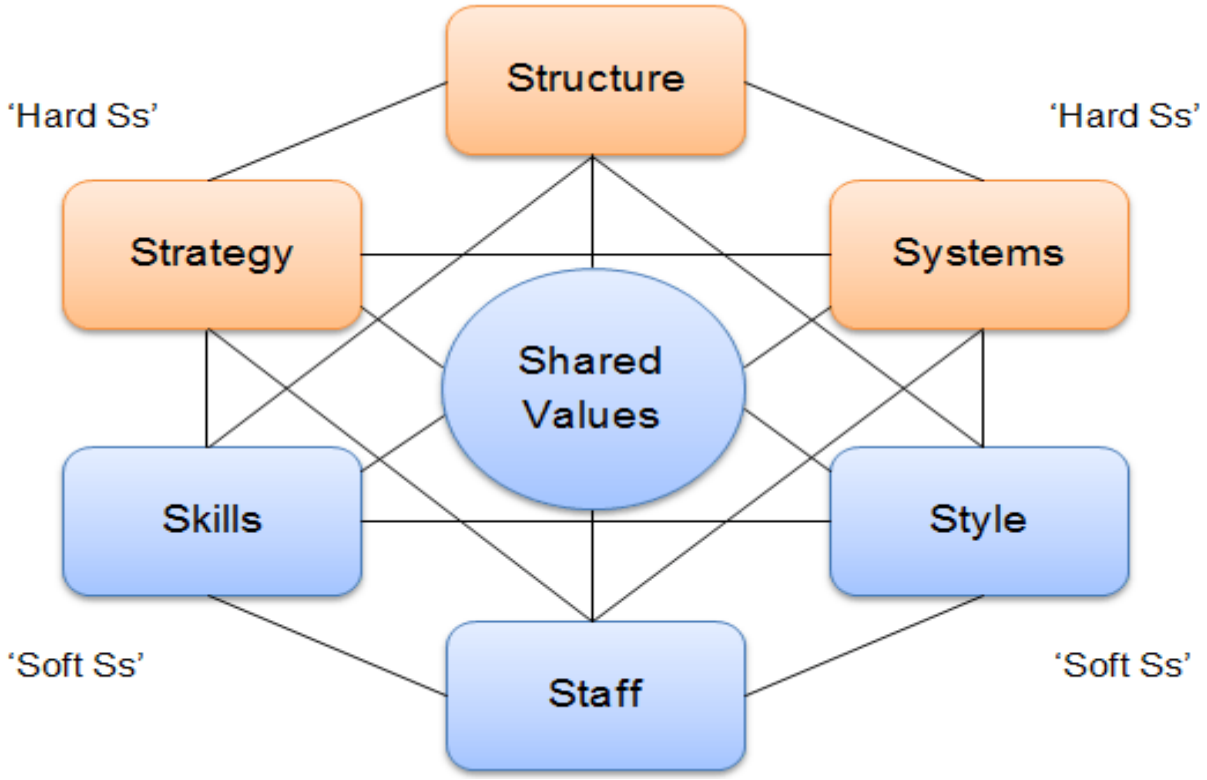

Figure 3 McKinsey 7-s Model source: (Alam, 2017)

3.0 Strategies for Successful Change Management

3.1 The Role of Leadership Vision in Change Management

In delivering transformation within organisations, it is necessary to consider the relationship between change and organisational leadership. According to Van der Voet (2016), the change process can be enhanced and simplified by having an effective change leader which will improve the commitment of the individuals participating in the change process. The leader will ensure that individuals have high-quality feedback and are engaged through the change implementation. Effective change leaders are those leaders that can communicate a clear vison with their team and encourage innovation and creativity to successfully manage the change. A positive and structured transformation requires an effective change leader (Tayal et al., 2018). McCave et al. (2020) stated that change leadership is one of the five essential aspects of ensuring positive transformation within organisations and this significantly impacts the process of initiating and administering change.

3.2 Employee Engagement andParticipation

The fear of not knowing how change is implemented will affect employees. This includes situations such as loss of control or threats to job security, which brings about employee resistance to change (Oreg, 2018). To mitigate this, there should be effective and transparent communication and when the change process is ongoing, employees should be involved in decision making. Communicating effectively with employees drives positive change initiatives through employee buy-in, commitment and understanding (Goodman & Truss,

2004). The information flow to employees should be consistent, inclusive and adequate for the different stakeholder groups to reduce uncertainty and improve trust in the system (Mouazen et al., 2023). Contributions of employees should also be acknowledged. The organisation should ensure there is adequate support where necessary, including staff training. When adequate support and training is given, it promotes adaptability, resilience and commitment from employees (Cummings & Worley, 2016).

3.3 Cultural Considerations in Change Management

According to Williams (2022), organisational culture is a system of shared values, beliefs and actions which guides the behaviour all employees and stakeholders within that organisation and it develops within the organisation.

Covaș (2019), argue that ifan organisation is making changes to existing strategies or trying to adapt to changing circumstances, it is important they adjust the organisational culture. Fromthe above, it is important that organisations align initiatives leading to change with the culture or find a way to adapt to changing circumstances to shape change management practices.

3.4 Technological Impact on Change Management

Technological advancement is another key factor that causes change in organisations. It compels organisations to adapt and remain competitive. This is because efficiency and productivity are enhanced through innovation (Stojcic et al., 2018). According to Marquardt and Kearsley (2024), when employees do not have the necessary technical skills, implementing new technology could be overwhelming, and the best approach to overcoming this challenge is through continuous training and support.

With emerging practices and emphasis on digital transformation, change management landscape is evolving rapidly. The use of digital tools and Artificial intelligence (AI) are becoming integral to change management. AI provides data-driven insights as well as predictive analytics which enhances decision making and enables organisations to streamline processes and anticipate challenges (Davenport & Ronanki, 2018). These digital platforms also facilitate collaboration and communication within the organisation making room for efficient and inclusive change initiatives ((Westerman et al., 2014).

4.0 Organisational Performance

Daniel (2019), defined organisational performance as how an organisation utilises its resources to achieve its vision. Organisational performance reflects the efficiency of an organisation’s operations and shows that the organisation can achieve its set goals. It is a significant area of study in organisational theory and management. It drives organisational improvement, ensures accountability and fosters strategic decision-making,therefore studying organisational performance cannot be overemphasised. Organisational performance can be measured throughmeasures such as market share and profitability and complemented with employee engagement to get a rounded view of performance (Kaplan & McMillan, 2020). Quantitative methods could be used as essential tools used in assessing organisational performance. These methods include return on assets (ROA) and return on investment (ROI). Through research, it has been established that organisations with a higher ROA have a stronger financial health and demonstrate effective asset management, making it a metric rated highly by stakeholder and investors.

Organisational performance incorporates several factors such as operational efficiency, financial performance, customer and employee satisfaction, which summarises the goals and objectives achieved by the organisation through its activities. Al-Mana et al. (2020), supported this, by stating that organisational Performance consists of factors such as the

increment of customer portfolio which increases competitive edge, organisation rapid growth, increase in the organisation's profitability as well as the involvement of metrics that measure sustainability practices and initiatives for corporate social responsibility.

The complex nature of organisational performance has led to different theoretical models to be developed to explain what drives performance.Kaplan and Norton (1996), introduced the balancedscorecard which combines financial and non-financial measures. The model lays emphasis on organisations aligning the performance measures with their goals and objectives to enable collaboration among teams towards a common goal and it encourages organisations to look not only at financial outcomes but other factors such as internal processes and customer satisfaction which drive long term success.

The measurement of organisational performance is important for several reasons. It enables organisations to assess its performance overtime, identify strengths and weaknesses and helps in strategic planning and organisations making informed decisions (Marr, 2012). This is very crucial for organisations especially with the rapid changes in technology and market in today's business environment, requiring organisations to quickly respond and adapt to emerging trends.

Measuring organisational performance is important because it drives accountability, which is key to motivating employees and improving performance (AbRahman et al., 2016). When performance targets are set, individuals understand their roles and responsibilities. When this is measured, itmakes the employees more engaged and committed to their work and this contributes to the overall success of the organisation. It also enhances communication and transparency especially when performance reviews are carried out regularly. According to Beer et al. (2022), transparent performance measurement, brings about an aligned workforce which is very crucial in today's dynamic business environment.

In addition, measuring organisational performance is fundamental for organisations to benchmark against industry standards and competition. Competitive analysis enables organisations to be viable in the long term (Fleisher & Bensoussan, 2015). It enables them understand industry best practices, understand their performance and thereafter develop strategies to improve on their performance to meet these benchmarks.

Applying data analytics and performance management systems on the other hand, allows organisations to enhance their capabilities through analysing data collected and visualising these data in real-time enabling informed decision (Ghasemaghaei et al., 2018). This method enhances overall performance, enabling organisations to make data-driven decisions and being proactive rather than reactive by anticipating and resolving issues before they arise.

4.1 Change Management and organisational Performance

The relationship between change management and organisational performance is key because for organisations to survive they must adapt to changes as they come (Fleisher & Bensoussan, 2015). Change management incorporates a structured approach to helping organisations transition from acurrent state to a state that is desired. A clear vision, strong leadership and effective communication are required for successful change initiatives (Fusch et al., 2020). Researchers have increasingly reported how change management practices have influenced organisational performance in terms of operational efficiency, financial outcomes and employee satisfaction.

Al-Haddad and Kotnour (2015) in their study, opined that for a change initiative to be successful, it must be tied to employing methods in managing the change. They proposed that organisations should adopt a structured change management framework that includes

stakeholder engagement and communication to enhance performance during change transitions.

Haffar et al. (2019), reported that organisations that use effective change management strategies may show better performance metrics when compared with organisations that do not implement robust change management strategies. This explains why these organisations tend to be in a better position to mitigate risks that are linked to change and leverage new opportunities.

Transformational leadership is an effective change management agent as indicated by Deviana and Hendarsjah (2023) who explained that this leadership style can foster a culture which embraces change. This will motivate employees to stay focused on achieving goals during transitions and this will ultimately enhance organisational performance. Walker (2024), emphasised that organisations should build an effective communication and feedback mechanism which will keep employees engaged. This will make them more supportive to change initiatives and ultimately bring about better organisational performance. They argued that this approach will contribute to job satisfaction and increase productivity leading to a successful change implementation.

Ahmadi (2024), in their studyindicated that change management will be successful when an organisation has a culture that promotes innovationand adaptability. This makes the organisation equipped to implement changes effectively and achieve their desired outcomes. Cultural adaptability facilitates fast response to market changes and enhance organisational performance.

Bellantuono et al. (2021), highlighted the role of technology in change management. They indicated that due to challenges and opportunities that arise from digital transformation, the organisations that can leverage technology seamlessly in the change management process will witness improved performance. This is because technology will contribute to making more informed decisions during transition through streamlining processes, enhancing communication and providing data analytics.

Another key area that influences the relationship between change management and organisational performance is the external environment. According to Rachmad (2022), adopting a proactive approach to change management will enable organisations outperform their competitors. This can be achieved through adaptation and continuous evaluation. Disconnected change initiatives will lead to employees being confused, which decreases morale and ultimately impacts negatively on organisational performance. It is therefore important for organisations to plan their resources to invest in change management training which will keep employees engaged and enable the firm to outperform competition (Jia et al., 2024). Moreover, it is critical to align the change management initiatives with organisational vision and this will lead to a sustained and improved performance (Berson et al., 2021)

5.0 Conclusion

This study highlights the relationship between change management and improved organisational performance. Navigating and managing change has become both a necessity for business growth and survival and ensuring organisational strategic positioning especially with the existing dynamics and competitive business landscape.

Our findings suggests that the key driver to successful organisational change is the ability of the organisation to meet its internal needs such as effective leadership, teamwork and collaboration, communication, organisational culture, adequate planning, employee engagement, technological advancement and market dynamics, competition and emerging

trends which together improve organisational performance. Effective change leaders set the vision for employees and motivate them to adapt to new organisational strategies. The ability of the leader to communicate effectively to their team on change initiatives improves how employees accept change which fosters trust and ensure smoother transitions.

Teamwork and collaboration are another essential key to creating a supporting environment to employees, making them collectively engage in problem-solving and innovate solutions to adapt easily to change. It was also discovered from the research that effective communication ensures that the objective of the change is achieved, through open and transparent communication which keeps all stakeholders informed. This also ensures that stakeholders can receive and give feedback freely.

Organisational culture strongly supports the management of change in organisations. This is because culture brings bout inclusivity and improves learning in organisations. Employees feel more engaged and involved when they are in an organisation that supports resilience and innovation, and this enables them to contribute to the change process positively.

In ensuing that organisations are prepared to effectively implement change, there is need for them to put in place strategic planning which involves assessing the current state of the organisation, the changes required to get to the desired state, setting clear goals and putting together the required resources. Adequate planning includes active employee engagement to the change process. This makes employees commitment, increasing their morale which ultimately increases productivity and organisational performance.

Advancement in technology will always lead to enhanced organisational performance through improved and streamlined processes and operational efficiency.

Lastly, competition and market dynamics also influence change in organisations.The organisations should therefore be attentive to emerging trends and market shifts to adapt easily.

If organisations adopt these insights, it will enhance the effectiveness of change management strategies, foster innovation and resilience and drive success to achieve sustainable competitive advantage to improve overall performance of the organisations. The study lays emphasis on the fact that change management should not be seen purely as an operational requirement but a strategic imperative that could influence organisational performance significantly.

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