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***TITLE : Administrators' Role in Managing Changes
in Institutions of Higher Learning***



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Administrators' Role in Managing Changes in Institutions of Higher Learning

Higher education institutions will always be confronted with challenges in their efforts to change. Changes are needed as institutions are not static. They have to move on with time and adapt to the changing environment. Institutions need to, among others, to innovate programmes of studies for the students, courses to upgrade the knowledge of the staff-be they administrators or academicians. As time changes institutions need to change their policies governing the students and the staff leading to a more relevant structure. The end result here is the birth of a new culture which every occupant of an institution must adjust to.

Every change in an educational system as needed, prompts every staff to understand the basic concept of managing change. A clear perspective on the concept of change and its approaches will provide a viable foundation for institutions to develop effectively.

My paper will attempt to discuss the essentials of change in a university. As someone who was in the forefront of the early development of Mara College and later Institut Teknogi Mara, the forerunners of UiTM, I will also suggest some methods in identifying possible areas of change in which the administration and other administrative personnel can collaborate to make their institution to be reckoned with. I don't deny that strong personality, a deep rooted organisational culture, and leadership are contributing factors towards a progress. However they can also be contributing factors that hinder change. As such I will identify some suggestive methods on implementing change effectively to bear positive results.

Why Change

Change is a part of any organisation. As every one knows it should be for the better. An institution needs change to respond to the demands made by the stakeholders; society, government, industry and particularly the parents and the students (Kogan *et al*, 2000). Demands by these stakeholders touch on among others, academic matters, facilities, services and contribution to nation building. The needs of the

students include well equipped libraries and laboratories, classrooms conducive to learning, and adequate books and instructional aids, comfortable halls of residence or homes as near as possible to the campus, recreational facilities and quality food in the canteen (Spencer and Pruss, 1993). Not to forget students demand quality instruction, superior academics, a relevant curriculum to prepare them for life after graduation incorporating meaningful religious and social programmes, and good discipline (Borden, 1987). There are no options for institutions but to respond to these endemic demands for the satisfaction of the students and their sponsors. Administrators need to be committed to these demands so that their institutions will fulfill their role as quality suppliers of human resource.

Demands in institutions do not only come from students. Equally pressing demands are also made by academic and non academic staff whose needs must also be addressed. The needs of the staff are of course different from the students. The staff want to be recognised for their efforts, be given opportunities to upgrade their academic qualification and be compensated with suitable wages and promotions, and be helped to acquire comfortable houses (Edick *et al.* 2007)

What I have spoken above are as to regard to internal demands. Requirements by governments (federal, state and local), society and industries on institutions as agents of transforming the human resource into the most important asset of the country are to be attended to. The Federal Government is sensitive to the development of each institution be it public or private institution. Government guidelines should not be seen as acts of interference on the education sector but to ensure continued accreditation and recognition of the institutions for them to be accepted worldwide (Bates, 2000). Thus an institution has to ensure that changes made must be in tandem with the country's education policies.

These different kinds of demands require proper response from administrators. A proper response demands planning and commitment to change. Added to these internal and external demands, the fast-changing technology pace means additional pressure on institutions to upgrade and modernise to enable institutions to be more competitive in their services.

If institutions are committed to their missions and objectives then change is inevitable.

As institutions review and adapt their missions and objective to the changing needs of the environment, change becomes an integral part and parcel of the administrative process. Institutions will venture to create new programmes, involve more people in strategic planning and implementation. They will continuously assess their programmes to ensure quality service. Accepting change for the better is possible if everyone in an institution shares the philosophy that change is mandatory for survival. The true impact of change can be observed when everybody involved welcomes it as a continuous and spontaneous process in the educational system (Quinn, 1980).

Priotising Needs of Change

Institutions need to satisfy the stakeholders who constantly will pressure them to change in accordance with time. However, some of these needs are not immediate and some may be just trivial and some are just a priority at a particular moment and not in the long run. Thus, administrators must be competent, skillful and discerning enough to understand and weigh the most urgent needs requiring immediate attention. Simply put, priotise the needs of change. Several methods can be helpful in identifying priority change areas.

One method is with the aid of consultation or a survey of the department supervisors and the staff members. The advantage here is that relevant groups are given an opportunity to be involved. As relevant groups in their areas of expertise, they should be willing to identify areas of immediate concern. Through that they should also be willing to propose ideas to address the problems and to support a suitable projected innovation. With valuable information from those in action the top management has a better view on the needs of the institution. With data, management should be able to draw appropriate plans to the needs of the institution. Do take note that a change is most welcomed if its impact does not threat the workers or the staff. If change is in congruent with the needs of the institution and workers, it becomes a strong base from which the institution can cope with its challenges (Silverhone, 2004).

A second method is through observing the behaviour of those in the work place. As they say a body language cannot hide a person's pleasure or displeasure. So it is with those wanting change. If cannot hide their behaviour it is a manifestation to signal the top management for a need to change. Needless to say here on how profound it is that

management should be aware of the behaviours of the workers and to find time to analyse them. A proactive action of visiting the workers in their workplace for better understanding of any known problem or need can be of great help.

Perhaps the best method of identifying a change is through collaborative effort between the management and the staff. Here the initiative may have to come from the administration. This method calls for an understanding that change should be through allowing members of the staff to participate in the identification of the real change need. The “management of change” involves more committed and responsible workers in the analysis of the problem, formulating alternative solutions, implementation of the programme, and in the evaluation process of the change (Kirpatrick, 1988). As “partners” to the change planning process it makes effecting the change much easier. Collaboration has always been accepted as a necessity for successful strategy.

Whatever a chosen method, in a formal organisation a change must be formally planned, and its needs and reasons must be carefully diagnosed by the management or by a designated committee to act on. In analysing a change, administrators must understand the driving and restraining forces. A driving force is a calculated positive result of a change. On the other hand a restraining force is a negative impact of a change (Wright *et al*, 2005). To diagnose a change or for the need of it calls for an understanding to the causes of some negative conditions in the operation of an institution. Furthermore the diagnosis may show some indicators for a necessity of change. Some of these indicators include low enrollment, excessive absenteeism of both academics, non academic staff and even faculty students, rapid turnover of staff, frequent mis-communication, frequent and odd negative behaviours (Cribbin, 1981). Administrators should grasp the full significance and meaning of any of the indicators to help them address the change needed.

Contributors of Resistance to Change

The identification of area or areas to change sets the administrators to the next challenging task. This task is to identify possible contributors of resistance to the planned change. To this extent an institution must study carefully these contributors relative to its strengths. This is to enable the institution to establish measures to counter these obstacles and to prevent them becoming a hindrance to the expected change.

People usually resist change under the following conditions: It is perceived to lower status or prestige of the worker, it causes fear, it affects job content of which they are accustomed to, it lessens their authority or freedom, it disrupts their established work routine, it affects formal and informal group relationships, it is forced upon them with no explanation, or because of mental and physical strain (Wilson, 1983).

Administrators must recognise institutional elements that need to be considered in reducing resistance to change. Such elements are; structure, infrastructure, system, core competencies, individual capabilities, and culture.

Let me clarify. Structure refers to the process of work in an organisation involving subordinate-superior relationship, boundaries of work between department, and the ways different jobs are designed respectively. Infrastructure in an organisation includes the application of technology to transform inputs to outputs. An organisation's system refers to its human resource (or human capital) systems and practices, communication systems, and administrative control system. Core competencies are proficiencies that are critical for functional activities in providing organisation's unique competitive advantage. Individual capabilities encompass knowledge, skills, and abilities found in each employee. These five elements determine the culture of the institution. Culture in this context refers to the values, norms, assumptions, and beliefs that are prevalent within an organisation. If all these elements are not modified to support a projected change, an organisation will experience resistance (Recardo, 1995).

Another element in diffusing resistance to change is leadership style that suits a change. Fearing that familiarity breed contempt many leaders tend to be aloof from employees. As result there is lack of clear communication and a lack of relationship that does not provide personal, emotional, and material resources to employees are prone to meet resistance in the change process. When leadership style does not support or provide a positive atmosphere for change, the change process is also adversely affected (Wong and Law, 2002).

Another equally important factor of resistance to change is the spirituality of the worker. Those whose spirituality is weak have the tendency to entertain doubts and hesitancy to whatever good programmes or innovations the institution is planning to undertake. People with high spirituality are more committed to undertake change. They

are more cooperative and willing to support the programme so long as these changes are not contradictory to their spiritual values, beliefs, and practices (Azhar and Faruq, 1999).

Diffusing Hostility: Suggested Answers and Countering Strategies

I use the word diffusing rather than countering because the latter sounds aggressive. Three elements (and their components) may need the attention of administrators in diffusing hostility towards change. These are the personnel, the organisational culture components, and of course leadership.

The word “personnel” comes in different forms denoting its importance to any organisation or country for that matter. As an economic force, personnel is now called “human capital” which was coined by the Nobel Prize-winning economist of 1992, Gary S. Becker. In his Nobel lecture, "The Economic Way of Looking at Behavior", he explains that his framework of analysis of human contributing factor in industry is not a traditional self-interested motivation but rather an analysis based on a set of assumptions and individual preferences. It is based on individual conception constrained by income, time, and imperfect memory and calculation capabilities to forecast.

People need to be satisfied. In that sense an institution must understand that any change must take into account employees’ personal needs, values, and assumptions. A change must satisfy the basic and psychological needs of employees. As such a change must be in tandem to their values and assumptions. A change no matter how well planned but which does not take into account personnel's needs, values, and assumptions will be ineffective (Bandura, 1986). Simply put a change must be employees’ oriented. Individuals do have values. Administrators must respect their values and assumptions, and understand their personal needs. This can be done through encouraging their involvement and participation in change.

Drawing a Strategy for Personnel Participation

For a change to have transformed a unit, department or organisation, it needs to be comprehensive. The end result and the consequence have to be felt to be worth the

effort. For this to happen there must be a strategy that calls for an individual or group to be involved in the selection or formulation of objectives and methods to be used in effecting the desired change. This strategy must accept the participation of workers in the planning, decision-making, and problem solving process. Here the input of the workers should be valued and respected. Once workers are involved in the planning process, the administration through a change agent may formally or informally translate the personnel's commitment into actual behaviour. And once this behaviour pattern is accepted and has gained acceptance in the group, others will also follow, especially if the influence of a formal or informal leader is strong.

Strategising and Restructuring an Organisation

Every organisation has a culture. A change may necessitate a change in culture to provide support for a transformed environment. For change to happen with the desired consequence it must be accepted by all. A guideline as proposed by Recardo (1995) can be helpful to ensure better acceptance of a proposed change.

Change must be preceded by a clear vision. Never change for the sake of change or the sake of imitation. Reasons must precede a change that will be beneficial to an institution in general and the whole staff. Administrators must communicate well in a manner that their expectations can be understood so that there will be a shared vision.

Administrators must act as role models. Normally administrators initiate a change. Thus they must lead the change process not only as those in the forefront but as role models to demonstrate their commitment personally and hold people accountable for success.

Flexibility must be accepted. Nothing goes to perfection. Environment is a great determinant to change. Environment is unpredictable and will change fast. Therefore flexibility is essential. An institution must be willing to adjust some elements of its organisational culture involving such areas as departmental boundaries, chain of command, MIS, performance management, administrative policies, office topography or physical layout and employee abilities.

Create a strategy for effective communication. Effective communication strategy

is a must to accomplish three objectives: (a) to interpret the intended future state, (b) to encourage and understand employee input during the designing process, and (c) to identify employee apprehension during implementation.

Conduct a pilot test. A pilot test will help to interpret the initial direction in the early stage of a change process. This may help to demonstrate a quick success. Perhaps more importantly a pilot helps to measure the validity of the change and for the advantage of the leaders to demonstrate needed performance in a shorter time.

Consensus does not mean there are no losers. Do understand that change gives birth to three distinct groups of people: the winners, the unaffected, and the losers. It is relatively easy for an institution to integrate winners and those unaffected into the overall implementation plan. Losers though adversely affected, are still part of the institution and may stay. So it is important to develop special procedures or policies to equitably address their concerns to win them over.

Foster cascading commitment. Those who believe in the change must assume an obligatory role. They must champion the cause of the change and must actively help make the change happen. They maybe informal groups leaders who have strong influence. Do remember that individuals from affected groups should be invited in the planning, design, and implementation of any initiative to change.

Measure performance and reward accordingly. Though measurement of performance rewards must be measured consistently, do understand that behaviours and performances need to be rewarded with accordance to adherence to directives, maintenance of the status quo, high performance, co-operation, efficiency, and other forms of intangible recognition. Without significant modification of these criteria, the wrong behaviour and performance are rewarded.

Bridge the old and the new. Losers are bound to pour their grievances. This is understandable. Avoid confrontation and trust that time will prove them wrong or will heal rather than bad-mouthing which only foster defensiveness among those still believe the past is right and will look at every angle to justify the past.

A lesson. A change is a lesson which must be initiated from the top to focus initially

on conceptual and strategic aspects (of the change). Learn from a change for future change.

Adequate resources. Resources are in many forms-among them money, facilities, equipment, and of course people. These resources must be accessible to those who need them. It is an irritation if someone assigned to a task is not provided with sufficient resources when needed. Lack of resources reflects lack of support and lack of commitment by higher management and of course it shows poor management.

Walk the talk. Actions speak louder than words. Therefore administrators' actions must take the lead with good examples. They must show-through actions- their commitment for the intended project or change. A difference between what administration advocates, and what it does, indicates inconsistency. If employees can detect this inconsistency, they can perceive that administrators are not sincere of the change.

Never afraid to replace key individuals. It is difficult to reassign a task to another member of the staff who is better than the previous one who either does not have the needed skills or personal attributes to support the initiative to change. Let it out and confront him but assure him of support if he believes in the change.

Transformational Leadership Strategy

Finally I like to stress on leadership as a significant contributor on a successful implementation of change. Looking through past work done the literature on change suggests that life- long change is dependent on transformational leadership.

A transformational leader provides a definition to be felt by those within an institution (in our context staff and students) of why a change is needed and how it is to be achieved. To do so his focus will be more on missions and strategies, identification and development of new talents, releasing and exposing human potential, leading out in new directions, be the role model, and aligning organisational structures to suit staff.

In short the goal of transformational leadership is....

".....to transform people and organisations in a lateral sense--to change them in mind

and heart; enlarge vision, insight, and understanding; clarify purpose; bring about changes that are permanent, self-perpetuating and momentum building" (Covey, 1991, p. 287).

Methods of Change

Administrators may be at will in choosing methods to implement change. Briefly described below are some of them which can be done separately or through integration.

Technological method. This is pertaining to an organisation's production process. The concept here is that changing technology means changing the way in which the organisation's output is produced. The aim here is to improve an organisation's quality or quantity of output. Such a change involves new equipment or techniques. In work design it involves job rotation, job enlargement, job enrichment, and work modules.

2. **Structural method.** Role of workers (which means also responsibility) is spelt out in a structure. When a change occurs administrators have to serve and to create and nurture a whole new set of roles for employees. The structural method modifies an existing (organisational) structure by interpreting the new roles of the people in accordance with the change. In an organisation change means horizontal and vertical differentiation of employees' role.

Managerial method. Efforts are to be rewarded. Making a change that affects an entire organisation is an arduous task. Administrators must not hesitate to reward positive behaviour and reinforces it until the desired change is complete. Students of organisation understand this as behaviour modification.

People method. In this method acceptance and appreciation of change can be done through education and training. An organisation has to upgrade people by whatever educational means such as formal enrolment in colleges for further studies, in-service courses, seminars, conferences and colloquia. The notion is an informed and knowledgeable person contributes to a corresponding change (Connor & Lake, 1988).

Management by objective (MBO). Needless to say MBO involves everyone in the organisation. Every staff has to define clearly his/her intended target in a given period of time. The targets set must be in tandem with both his/her personal and organisational

goals. For this to materialise he/she has to discuss this with his/her supervisor. An agreed timetable must be set, and a continuous assessment and interview have to be done with another supervisor. Thus a periodic report of the progress of the projected change can be done.

Feedback survey method. This system of initiating change is based on a set questionnaire to gather information about the organisation. This can be conducted in collaboration with outside consultant. This method does not end with the result of the survey. Employees must participate in planning corrective actions for problems revealed in the questionnaire.

Organisational development. This is a long-range systematic approach to redirect the energies of people in organisations to a more effective behaviour (Costley & Todd, 1987). This approach aims to change basic ways an organisation operates. It incorporates a wide range of training and personal development of systems for improvement. It is designed to improve the climate, health, and effectiveness of an organisation.

Change Model: Positive Step by Step Approach

Any change that affects an organisation has to be done systematically. This approach ensures effective implementation of an intended change. Below is an incorporation of approaches to synthesise a systematic and relevant approach in the initiation and implementation of change.

Determine the need or desire for change. Change must not be done for the sake of change nor must it be done to seek new identity because of change in management or administration. Change must be done because there is a need or a desire for it. This can be done by seeking ideas or suggestions from staff and students or from direct or indirect stakeholders. Personal observation by the leaders or administrators is also a potential source of information about the need for change. It best when there is collaboration between leaders and staff to find the needed area for change and to work towards effective implementation and evaluation of the change process and result.

If possible invite everyone to tentatively plan for the change. It is wise for a leader

to invite, if possible, everyone to participate in drawing a programme for change. Spencer & Pruss, (1993) suggest that the programme should among others include: (a) rationale for change, planning, and the implementation of the project; (b) identifying those who will be affected by the intended change; (c) an evaluation of organisation structure before the change and after the change; (d) an analysis the change will have on the institution; (e) financial impact; (f) an evaluation of management abilities to execute change programme; (g) identifying the driving forces and the restraining forces that can facilitate the change process; (h) the setting up of a small but flexible team that will be responsible to drive the change forward; (i) a time frame; and (j) a communication strategy.

Analysing reacting options. A reaction (it can be hostile), towards change must be expected. Time must be made available to analyse all reactions. This is also an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme and to revitalise the resources.

Make and adhere to a final decision. After having analysed the reactions and considered all possible inputs, then a final decision has to be made. If time is so limited then the final decision is for the administrator to make using all his experiences and wisdom. A person leadership skill is demonstrated here but if time is ample, it is wise to have consensus endorsement. A final decision can also be done through a problem-solving group which may include a representative from the staff association. The administration can call the staff together and make the decision. Whatever method, once decided a final decision must be formal and binding (Kirpatrick, 1985).

Establish a schedule and target date. Having a schedule and a target date help to show the importance of the implementation of a plan to change.

Create an environment of change. A right environment creates an environment of trust between management and the staff. And which in turn gradually strengthens the relationship between the two.

Establish proper communication. Many plans go wrong because of poor communication. Administrators must realise that there are different categories of workers who may interpret even a simple word differently. Hence administrators

should not take communication for granted like just handing a circular and for it to be understood. A proper communication channel also helps to explain effectively reasons of the proposed change and to convince other staff groups of its benefits to both the organisation and its staff.

Face the programme of change with courage and patience. It requires courage to launch a programme of change. Also the effect of change is not felt immediately and resistance is expected. Therefore there must be patience in handling change and resistance to it. Faith in a purpose and patience will pay dividend.

Be prepared with contingency plans or strategies. Unforeseen problems may crop up. Thus it is important to have contingency plans or strategies. Administrators may need them for different cases. For example for individuals, the administrator may have to have skill in conflict resolution, negotiation, coaching, and career guidance. For group, the administrator may have to work on role analysis, team building, and meeting management. And if it is for the system, the administrator may need to examine the work structure, department structure or office structure, job, and performance standards (Borden, 1987).

Monitor and evaluate the programme. A change is normally to benefit an organisation as a whole. For that to happen, the administrators definitely want the programme to run smoothly. So monitoring and evaluation are really important to help direct a change to a desired result.

Conclusion

Every educational institution wants to provide quality service to achieve excellence. To do so continuous development in accordance with the changing environment is a necessity. Demands for quality service may be initiated by the students, parents, employees, government and other stakeholders. These demands need to be addressed. To respond to these demands, the administrators of educational institutions must involve staff and students in identifying and prioritising those areas of change. For comprehensive perspective of the planned change both internal and external sources for change should be considered.

The introduction of change is bound to have resistance. To minimise it, both internal and external factors resistant must be identified and strategies be developed to counter them. Methods of change must be studied from different perspectives to serve as guiding approaches in implementing change. For a change to be effective it is best that a systematic step-by-step implementation approach towards a desired change must be adopted.

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