The Barriers to and Facilitators of Sustainable Organizational Change

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ARTICLE DETAILS

ABSTRACT

As the contemporary environment is infused with change, organizations push for change, and the notions of failure and success associated with organizational change management interventions are linked to (perceived) barriers and facilitators.

Purpose - This study aims to identify barriers and facilitators in organizational change management and investigate essential dimensions to consider to improve the successful implementation of change initiatives within organizations. As two ends of a spectrum, barriers and facilitators play a crucial role in either hindering or facilitating the progress of a change intervention. While barriers can impede organizational change success, they can also serve as facilitators.

Research Design - A literature review of over forty (forty) articles was conducted to determine how and how scholars have identified the variables contributing to the success or impeding change efforts. The study was conducted using a descriptive exploratory approach to identify variables considered barriers to or facilitators of change.

Findings - Based on descriptive analysis, the findings from the literature search were categorized under three (three) themes: 1/ Self; 2/ Social Support; and 3/ Organizational Support. A deeper understanding of each theme was achieved by categorizing it further into subcategories aligned with the given theme.

Value - This article provides a unique perspective on why planned interventions do not always consider the identified variables and, as a result, struggle to effect organizational change. By understanding factors that have a direct impact on change and assisting leaders and employees, this article provides a pathway for success in organizational change.

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Introduction
Humans have an inherent need for predictability and order, which may conflict with their adaptive need to reform (Hogan, 2007). Adapting to changing circumstances has led organizations to evaluate the processes used to implement change within the organization (Tsoukas, 2000). Leaders and employees continually seek to create something different as environments evolve (Burke, 2017), and maintaining stability and a sense of identity is imperative to this process (Huy, 1999). Organizations today face the most significant problem of change and transformation, making change management one of the essential management issues (Carnall, 2001; Wilkinson & Mellahi, 2005). Change is often associated with failure (Wilkinson & Mellahi, 2005). As a result of this reality, the field of organizational change has focused on causes of loss (Sheppard and Chowdhury, 2005), implications of failure (Wilkinson and Mellahi, 2005), and strategies to develop and manage change (Edmondson, 2011). Organizational change refers to the longitudinal process by which an organization becomes different over time (Burke, 2017).

The literature on organizational change management refers to the complexity of change (Huber and Van de Ven, 1995; Van de Ven and Poole, 1995), and Bateh, Castaneda, and Farah (2013) contend that complexity is enhanced when there is a lack of clarity regarding the factors most critical to successful change. Moreover, when there is little agreement on the factors most likely to influence change initiatives, further issues will likely arise (Sirkin, Keenan & Jackson, 2005). According to Todnem-By (2005), exploratory research is necessary to increase the existing knowledge regarding organizational change management influences.

On Barriers and Facilitators
It is important to understand the difference between a barrier and a facilitator to further illustrate how change management interventions can succeed or fail. A barrier is anything that prevents, restricts, or hinders someone from achieving a particular goal or objective and according to psychology, a barrier can limit an individual or a group mentally, emotionally, or behaviorally (Sam, 2021). Todnem-By (2005) emphasizes the importance of identifying barriers to success when managing change. There has been a tendency in most studies of failure to adopt a fairly static orientation, rather than a time-sensitive, process-oriented approach (Heracleous and Werres, 2016).

Literature Review
Whether a change endeavor is considered successful or unsuccessful is based on achieving the defined objectives, such as cost reduction or compliance with the change plan (Goggin, Weissert, & Goggin, 2002). Despite the availability of various frameworks and models in change literature, effective change remains a challenge (Fukukawa, Spicer, Burrows, and Fairbrass, 2013). The literature on change management identifies several factors which impact change efforts within an organization:

Resistance, cynicism, politics, injustice, job insecurity, power, stress, anxiety, fatigue, support, improper information, rewards, influence, commitment, and trust in management (Aslam, Muqadas, Imran, & Saboor, 2018),
Employee participation (Aslam et al., 2018),
Information about the change, job security, and organizational rewards (Oreg & Sverdlik, 2011),
Self-efficacy, personal impact, and social support (Wanberg and Banas, 2000),
Readiness for change (Madsen, Miller & Cameron, 2005),
Organizational culture and climate, and management support (Martin, Jones & Callahan, 2005),
employee stress (Dahl, 2011).

Arifin (2019) reports that based on the analysis of nine journals, organizational change is influenced by both internal and external factors, namely organizational factors (policies) and work environment factors (leaders and coworkers). According to research conducted by Giauque (2014),
there are both internal factors (self) and external factors (organizational policies, work environment, leaders, and coworkers) that affect organizational change. Giauque (2014) also examined the effects of perceived social and organizational support and stress on employee attitudes during organizational change.

Zaidi (2018) suggests that internal factors that influence employee attitudes toward organizational change include: work-related values, self-efficacy, threat appraisal, stress perception, job-related attitudes (organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and job invoices), job-related characteristics (skill variants, task identity, meaningful task feedback, autonomy, and goal clarity), skill development, employee trust, fear of change consequences, and employee career enhancement. The external factors include perceived social support, organizational support, leadership style (transformational and transactional), manager engagement, involvement in change, perceived corporate support, quality of information, and organizational justice.

**Methodology**

Guided by the epistemology of social constructivism as inherent within a dialectical perspective (Benson, 1977; Farjoun, 2019), this paper is based on an abductive and exploratory qualitative study (De Keyser, Guiette & Vandenbempt, 2019). Given the dynamics of the change management domain being relatively nascent, an exploratory case design of instrumental purpose was selected (Edwards, 2010).

The barriers and facilitators of organizational change management were examined in the context of fourteen (14) highly cited barriers and facilitators based on a review of 40 scholarly articles (journals, gray literature, dissertations). Three themes were identified: the individual self, the social environment, and the organizational environment.

**Findings**

**Theme 1: Self or Individual impact of emotions and attitudes during organizational change**

Uncertainty: Employees are uncertain of a changing situation and are concerned about the outcome

Stress: Change seen by employees as a source of frustration or harm

Resistance: The concept of employees impeding the change effort, and creating resistance (within or outside the organization) in opposition to a directive or requirement

Burnout: Exhaustion and depression caused by persistent work-related stress

Commitment: Belief in and engagement with the function, mission, or cause of an organization

Self-efficacy: The belief in one's ability to take action and persist in completing the task.

**Theme 2: Social Support and perceptions of the work environment supporting the change**

Manager Role: Participatory management has the potential to mitigate resistance and enhance the success

Culture: Establishing a common understanding of the organization and its function

Well-being: A feeling of satisfaction within the context of the organization

**Theme 3: Organizational Support offered through organization leaders to ensure effective change**

Leadership: the capability to lead, guide, and influence individuals and teams to achieve organizational goals

Trust: demonstrated through a leader's plan and goals

Communication: effectively transmitting information at the right time and engaging employees through multiple communication channels.

Models, Tools & Competencies: Type and level of conformance to methodologies and frameworks applied with a holistic understanding of the skills required for managing change is essential.
Barriers to and facilitators of organizational change management

The themes and variables derived from the literature review of the barriers and facilitators identified by scholars are further defined below.

**Theme 1 - Self**
Lomberg (2021) argues that low success rates result from an over-emphasis on reason and structure while ignoring human aspects such as feelings, motivation, and commitment. According to Greenhalgh, Robert, Macfarlane, Bate, & Kyriakidou (2004), the individual role in the change process cannot be underestimated. Armenakis & Harris (2009) emphasize that before any organizational change, employees involved in the change must embrace change within themselves to change an organization successfully. Change information is filtered through individual preferences and is either appreciated or rejected (Dibella, 2007). As a result, attitudes may aid or hinder the effectiveness of a change initiative (Armenakis & Harris, 1993), demonstrating the importance of understanding change from the perspective of the individuals involved (Sayers & Smollan, 2009).

**Uncertainty**
"Uncertainty surrounding organizational change is a critical barrier to change and is closely related to organizational cynicism "evaluative judgment based on an individual's work experience" (Cole, Bruch, & Vogel, 2006). Uncertainty leads to the view that change is futile and blames the failure of change initiatives on the program managers (Brown & Cregan, 2008; Rubin, Dierdorff, Bommer, & Baldwin, 2009). Dahl (2011) argues that organizational change can lead to employee frustration and uncertainty, as it threatens the identity and implicit contract between an organization and its employees. In addition, cynicism about organizational change leads to uncertainty, which encourages failed interventions, reinforcing the cynicism and belief that change initiatives are unlikely to succeed (Bommer, Gregory & Robert, 2005).

**Stress**
Shernoff, Lakind, Frazier & Jakobsons (2014) define stress as a negative emotional experience that results in anxiety, tension, and frustration. According to Oreg (2006), stress is caused by the interaction between a person and their environment, causing anxiety and tension and resulting in long-term debilitating diseases. The frustration, uncertainty, fear, and instability caused by organizational changes increase employee stress and the likelihood of employees leaving the organization (Dahl, 2011). Organizational uncertainty results in uncertainty, variability, imperfect or incomplete knowledge, change, chaos, volatility, disorder, entropy, time, the unknown, randomness, turmoil, stressors, error, dispersion of outcomes, and ignorance (Taleb, 2012). In addition, a lack of knowledge about the productive benefits of organizational change may result in stress, depression, uncertainty, and insecurity among employees (Aslam et al., 2018).

**Resistance To Change**
In the literature on change, resistance to change is a recurring theme (Oreg, 2006). According to the literature review, resistance to change is essential in change management. However, little is
known about what causes resistance and how it can be overcome (Tummers, Grandia & Kuipers, 2013). The literature further emphasizes that resistance takes many forms, from dragging out a process to withdrawing self-improvement measures to undermine the effort (Amjad & Rehman, 2018), employee unrest, rising coalitions, and sabotage (Fleming and Spicer, 2003). Therefore, the definition is determined by the chosen theoretical perspective (Van Tonder & van Schaik, 2004). Often, what appears to be resistance is a lack of clarity, direction, or sheer exhaustion (Cawsey & Deszca, 2007).

**Burnout**
Burnout is a serious, multi-faceted issue that emerges from organizational factors (as opposed to employee-related factors), and manifests in severe working conditions for the individual (Loh, Than & Quek, 2011). With burnout, employees experience extreme exhaustion and decreased physical and emotional energy to perform essential job duties (Halbesleben and Buckley, 2004). Among the components of burnout are emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment, with exhaustion as the central variable (Cropanzano, Rupp & Byrne, 2003). The lack of relief from organizational change fatigue can lead to distrust and uncertainty (Lewis, Romanaggi & Chapple, 2010). Burnout occurs when people become fatigued and overwhelmed by change, leading to a reduction in commitment and an increase in turnover (Berneth, Walker & Harris, 2011).

**Commitment**
Commitment is a primary reason employees remain with an organization (Allen and Meyer, 1996). The empirical literature on organizational change emphasizes employee commitment to change (Oreg et al., 2011). Commitment to a particular organization is "the degree to which one identifies with and involves himself or herself with a particular organization" (Mowday, Porter & Steers, 1982). Research has shown that commitment to change is a more reliable predictor of support for change than broader commitment toward other organizational factors (Ford & Greer, 2005b; Herscovitch & Werres, 2016).

**Self-Efficacy**
An essential component of self-efficacy and the behavioral change process is the perception of behavioral control over opportunities, resources, and skills (Kritsonic, 2005). A high degree of readiness to change, staff taking a proactive approach to problem-solving, adequate information about the change to facilitate predictability, and employee self-efficacy have all been found to be associated with organizational change success outcomes in organizations (Parkes, 2016; Jimmieson, Terry & Callan, 2004).

**Theme 2 - Social Support**
The flourishing of interpersonal relationships and social ties is emphasized by Ryff and Singer (2000), and Strümpfer (2003) argues that insights into social relations within organizations will be critical to developing a positive work environment on multiple levels: recruitment, training, and rewards. Underscoring the importance and endeavors towards relatedness can result in employee isolation and anguish. Jones et al, (2005) observed that change research does not adequately consider the perception of and responses to organizational change by different groups and teams. Viljoen-Terblanche (2009) emphasized that traditional change theories do not consider human perceptions. Successful organizational change implementation often depends on employees' acceptance and cooperation (Herold, Fedor & Caldwell, 2006).

**Manager's Role**
Managers are the primary source of information for employees, and can effectively manage change interventions into successful action-oriented strategies (Van Vuuren, De Jong & Seydel, 2007). An employee's relationship with the manager represents a key source of pressure and several studies
demonstrate the vital role of managers at various stages of organizational change (Huy, 2002), whereas Bosley, Arnold & Cohen (2007) argue that change efforts often fail because managers try to impose change from the top. A manager's attitude plays a significant role in the success or failure of an organization's change program (Lines, 2004). Several change models emphasize the role modeling of leaders (Hiatt, 2006; Kotter, 1996).

**Culture**
Culture describes a dynamic phenomenon constantly enacted and created by our interactions with others and a set of structures, routines, rules, and norms that guide and constrain behavior (Tyler, Lepore, Shield, Looze, & Miller, 2014). Several studies have demonstrated the importance of changing an organization's culture before implementing new initiatives Tyler, Lepore, Shield, Looze, & Miller, 2014). Cultural change within an organization requires norms and expectations re-assessed in light of the changing environment (Corazzini, Twersky, White, Buhr, McConnell, Weiner & Colón-Emeric, 2015). Culture not aligned with the mission results in lack of participation and buy-in, (Gleeson, 2017).

**Well-Being**
Anyieni & Gidion (2016) argue that leaders must consider the impact of change on people when managing change. Leaders' choices affect the quality of life and well-being within an organization (Mitroff, 2004), thereby affecting morale, cohesion, stress, and behaviors. According to Moyo (2012), employee wellness is an important research topic for organizational change, and improving collaboration in a change management context also ensures empowerment of employees, inter-organizational networking, and teamwork.

**Theme 3 - Organization Support**
Despite what we know of organizations and how organization members respond to change, organizations make inordinate efforts and time pondering, understanding, and mitigating change failures (Schwarz, Bouckenooghe & Vakola, 2020). Continuous change is a fact of life for organizations and their members. The organization's leaders can counteract the changes impeding the sense of well-being in the brain's emotional center (Schmitz, 2018). Studies show that employees' belief in organizations to manage the change (Jones et al., 2005), and establishing trust in leaders (Rafferty, Jimmieson & Armenakis, 2013) become increasingly important in the accommodation of a changing environment. Organizational change strategies must be reviewed time and again for effective and sustainable change (Alshurideh, Capretz & Raza, 2016).

**Leadership**
In past organizational change reviews, research focused mainly on how managers and leaders prepare for, implement, and deal with organizational change (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999). The behavior of corporate leaders influences employee behavior and according to empirical evidence, can significantly affect team members' performance (Tuuli, Rawlenson, Fellows & Liu, 2012). According to Gilley, Gilley & McMillan (2005), leadership poses a significant obstacle to change as leaders with insufficient change skills may lead to inability to motivate, communicate, and build teams. Todnem-By and Dale (2008) state that the leaders' adaptability, flexibility, commitment, and support for groups are essential success factors. Bateh, Castaneda, and Farah (2013) note that there is still much to learn about leadership's role in the change process. McGuire and Hutchings (2006) argue that organizational change interventions' success depends on organizational change enablers such as the power status of the leader and the team and acceptance or rejection of organizational change by employees. Bell and Bodie (2012) argue that leadership theories should be aligned with organizational change research and only leaders who find meaning in change can create authentic, sustainable changes for their followers (Blom, 2015).

**Trust**
Trust can be defined as the willingness of one party to rely on the actions of another party, regardless of the ability to monitor or control the other party (Mayer et al., 1995). According to the Theory of Trust, employees’ interpretations of the change situation and willingness to accept it contribute to progress in meaningful ways (Möllering, 2001). Trust is influenced by interpersonal and contextual organizational variables (Chan, 1997). Executive agents, such as the leader, are a significant predictor of employee trust (Colquitt et al., 2001). A strong emphasis on managing the employment relationship by fulfilling mutual obligations and by creating trust will yield more constructive responses to organizational change than focusing on managing an organizational change as an independent event (van den Heuvel, Schalk, Freese, and Timmerman, 2016).

Communication
Lack of effective communication can lead to the failure of change initiatives (Kotter, 2007). Sirkin, Keenan & Jackson (2005) discuss the importance of communication practices in organizational change initiatives. According to Oreg (2006), there is a positive correlation between communication and attitudes toward change. It was noted in several studies that many change initiatives fail due to a lack of effective internal communication (Barrett, 2002; Elving, 2005). The importance of communication in change processes has been emphasized by several authors (Elving, 2005; Daly, Teague & Kitchen, 2013). According to Daly, Teague & Kitchen (2013), communication is a core component of an organization's work. Researchers regard communication as the most reliable method of enhancing employee acceptance, which is crucial as employees play a key role in organizational change (Petrou, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2018).

Models, Tools & Competencies
An organization is a subsystem of a social system, as well as a part of the global system at large. As the entire system undergoes change and development, subsystems are compelled to adapt and adjust themselves to the transformation of the larger system (Kaveh, Khanlari & Sohrabi, 2009). Additionally, Prahalad and Hamel (1990) defined organizational core competence as the set of specialized skills that constitute collective learning. (Viljoen-Terblanche, 2009) Parkes (2016) identifies eight critical factors for the success of implementing business processes. It is the purpose of change management to keep employees, as well as the entire organization, prepared for learning and continuous improvement (Khachian, Manoochehri, Mehrnoosh and Vardanjani, 2012).

Discussion
Bringselius (2014) argued that when employees are not treated astutely concerning their social and psychological needs, they become impediments to success. Moreover, the inability to change one's management style or modify organizational structures or systems has been identified as a barrier to success (Bossidy & Charan, 2002; Gilley et al., 2005). The lack of communication skills, the inability to influence others to change, and the failure of management to reward employees who attempt to change are all additional barriers to change (Kotter, 1996; Ulrich, 1998). Research on organizational change has established the importance of changing recipients' attitudes toward change (Fugate, Kinicki, & Prussia, 2008; Oreg, 2006).

Conclusion
There is little agreement on organizational factors or activities that constitute an optimal and successful change process. The influence of particular change process factors on successful change implementation may not be accurate in all circumstances, and some aspects may be more relevant in different contexts than others (Ford & Greer, 2005a). In the literature scrutinized for this study, most theoretical models provided little guidance on the selection criteria or the relative importance of any change model.

The article identifies the characteristics that influence change efforts. It can be concluded that effective organizational change extends to multiple domains within the organization, and applying
the factors identified as barriers and facilitators cannot be addressed similarly across an organization. However, some scholars suggest that all change process factors are equally important and must be considered individually in pursuing successful change (Kotter 1995). According to Rafferty and Griffin (2006), an excessive focus on any given factor in organizational change could be at the expense of other organizational factors, such as commitment and satisfaction. Research on failure is no longer marked as ‘secondary to the study of organizational success’ (Wilkinson and Mellahi, 2005) - it is increasingly validated for its instructive capacity.

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