

Change Management in Telecommunication Sector: a Managerial Framework

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Abstract

Change is inevitable in telecommunication organizations nowadays. Political instabilities, technology advancements, changing customer tastes, globalization, and cultural changes are among the factors constantly forcing telecommunication organizations to change. Leaders in this sector realize the importance of change management in the change process. This is demonstrated and published in numerous studies. However, there seems to be lack of managerial frameworks that help telecommunication companies implement effective change management practices. This paper presents a managerial framework for the implementation of change management in telecommunication sector. The framework is constructed using empirical findings from three case studies of Palestinian telecommunication companies. It consists of four main dimensions, namely change planning, change management, change reinforcement, and change feedback collection. The value of this framework is that it represents an initial attempt to explore factors of successful change management in telecommunication sector. The paper concludes with research and practice applications of the managerial framework.

Keywords: Change management, telecommunication industry, conceptual framework, case studies.

1. Introduction

Nowadays telecommunication companies witness dramatic changes at all levels (Tsekoa, 2002; Garber, 2013).

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There are many drivers for change in the telecommunication sector; caused by technological advancement, fierce competition that has risen drastically in the last years, and the need to develop new services in the telecommunication sector (Hodges, 1995). Telecommunication organizations need razor-sharp reflexes to cope with the fast changing technologies and management skills. Therefore, change management is a vital tool to be adopted by the telecommunication sector to maintain development and growth (Kanter 1991; Tsekoa 2002). As organizational changes have become more frequent and a necessity for survival, the resistance of employees in this sector has become an important human resources management function and a priority for top management to increase chances of success of different change projects (Tang and Gao, 2012).

However, managing employees' resistance during organizational change requires an effective type of change management processes (Jansson, 2013). In particular, communications from the right entity in the organization help improve the employees' response to organizational change (Kotter and Schilesinger, 2008). O'Neill (2012) explained that management practices related to organizational change must be clear, consistent and based on what is in the change for the individuals to improve their perception, and ultimately, improve their cognitive appraisal about the change.

In other words, without appropriate body in the organization to communicate with employees, organizational inappropriate practices may even increase resistance of employees (Tang and Gao, 2012). Furthermore, Minerich(2008) stated that creating awareness and reasons for change must be clear and simple and that communicating these reasons must be realistic and linked to the vision in the company in order for employees to buy-in. With this in mind, there seems to be lack of change management frameworks that help telecommunication companies choose the most appropriate course of action to navigate successfully during change process. This paper aims at closing this gap by constructing a managerial framework of change management in the telecommunication sector. The framework is constructed using empirical findings from three case studies of Palestinian telecommunication companies.

The intended change management framework is intended to help individuals as well as managers to move successfully from a current state to a future state while achieving the desired output in order to establish competitive advantages and sustainability. The paper is further organized into nine sections.

Change management literature review is presented in the next four sections; these are followed by a description of three case studies conducted and the data collected. Finally, the results are presented and the conclusions discussed.

2. The Concept of Change Management

Change is one of the difficult challenges that organizations face these days. Robbins (2003) defines change as making things different. Change is everywhere, it is unavoidable and it needs successful handling to make organizations navigate successfully through it (Davidson, 2002). Raftery (2009) stated that undergoing a new change is the most difficult matter and it is questionable of success and it always has enemies whom are beneficiaries from the old system. Garber (2013) mentioned that change is inevitable in the workplace, so the role of the manager is to embrace the change by making the transition process easier. Davidson (2002) explained that change refers to an important difference in what was before, it can include doing work in new ways, using new tools or systems, using new reporting structures, new roles in the job, producing new products or introducing new services, following new managerial procedures, merging, reorganizing or other unrest and change in job location or markets. Therefore, change management is taking a proactive approach about how the change is treated within an organization.

It involves adapting to the change and monitoring the need for change within an organization; starting that change and then controlling it (Hiatt and Creasey, 2012). Walmsley (2009) defined change management as the process of continually renewing an organization's direction, structure, and capabilities to serve the ever-changing needs of external and internal customers. Several researchers relate change management practices to the management of the human side of the change as being the most difficult ingredient in the change management process. For example, Hiatt and Creasey (2012) stated that change management is a set of tools, practices and methods to manage the people side of change that are important to transit individuals from a current state to the preferred future one to achieve objectives of a needed change.

They mentioned that change management provides ability for both groups and individuals to participate in the change and support it in a way that everyone works to achieve change objectives.

Furthermore, Allena et al. (2007) emphasized that change management is not a process that stands alone for designing a business solution but it is about realizing human reactions and anticipating the best strategy to deal with these reactions.

Change management makes it easier for organizations to achieve success in meeting demand and face internal and external challenges (Bashir and Afzal, 2011). Organizational change is affected by outside challenges that cause internal instability (Avey et al., 2008; Mou, 2013). The external changes from the marketplace can include loss of market share, competitors' acceleration in creating new offers, lower prices, and new business opportunities for growth (Hiatt, 2004). In his book titled *Managing Change*, Walmsley (2009, p.6) mentioned other external change triggers, which are "mergers or acquisitions", "a serious business downturn", and "legislative changes". He mentioned other change triggers which need a proactive approach such as organization decisions in rising cost, building a new strategy, making sales review or new technology available. O'Neill (2012, p.1) stated five driving forces that affect organizational change: A high degree of talent needed to solve problem in "high level activities", "mobile technology", the need of innovation, and distributed work that relates to the evolution toward less centralized organizational structures, location and work practices, and sustainability.

3. Importance of Change Management

Change management facilitates employees getting back to their work after change happens and makes it faster and more effective (O'Neill, 2012). Hiatt and Creasey (2012) stated that change management helps employees adapt and embrace change by reducing employees' resistance to attain the objectives of business. They have also explained that change initiatives are always undertaken because there is a better chance or there is a problem to solve in the current state. Hence, organizations must manage change to ensure that it produces the expected results. Change management help individuals to embrace change and adapt new skills, behaviors, and values by change leaders, whom make individuals able to transit successfully from the current state to the future one (Fernandez and Rainey, 2006; Kunze et al., 2013).

Walmsley (2009) stated that if managers see change management practices in an organization as unnecessary, then no plans and no strategies will be prepared to embrace change. According to him this view of change management will cause the organization to lose its efficiency, productivity, and in many cases valuable members.

4. Levels of Change Management

There are two main levels where the change management practices can be applied. Firstly, individual change management where individuals are supported and managed in how to transit change successfully by teaching them good tools and techniques and understanding their roles through the change process (Hiatt and Creasey, 2012). This includes: managers coaching to help their employees though change, holding focus conversations with employees, especially resistant ones, determining diagnose gaps in the program of managing change for each department, and identifying corrective actions which are based on desired results (Kunze et al., 2013). Secondly, organizational change management, that is defined as the manager's perspective from the top looking down in the organization. It concerns the skills and practices that help the organization navigate the needed change easily and successfully. It includes using individual change management tools with organizational tools like communications, and training the overall culture of the organization (Mou, 2013).

5. Change Management Models and frameworks

As it was stated earlier in this paper, there seems to be lack of managerial frameworks that help telecommunication companies implement effective change management practices. This paper closes this gap by presenting a managerial framework for the implementation of change management in the telecommunication sector. This has been deemed necessary as all of the available change management frameworks are general in nature and cannot be used to deal with the complexity and nature of change in the telecommunication sector. However, there are many change management frameworks available in the literatures that are conceptual in nature. One of these models is the ADKAR model for managing change. It stands for awareness of employees, their desire to change, their knowledge about change, ability to change, and reinforcement to keep change in place. This model can help managers to determine where their employees are in the change process.

It only deals with leveraging employees capabilities to support the change, and it does not cover organizational aspects in the change process (Rafferty 2009). Kotter (1996) has also presented a change management model as a result of studying change management practices in more than hundred organizations. Kotter's model concentrates on making change occur; highlighting the importance of the feeling about the necessity of the change in the organization, and highlighting the need of effective communication through change process (Mou, 2013; Cameron and Green, 2004). However, the model does not cover fast changing business environments such as the telecommunication sector environment. Another model of change management that has taken a significant take up in the field is Lewin's Model of Change (Price and Chahal, 2006). Lewin's model visualizes the change as the process which keeps the forces that affect the behavior of the system stable (Duffy, 1996).

The change process according to Lewin's model of change includes three steps: unfreezing the status quo, then changing to the desired future state, and refreezing the new state (Vakery and Antonio, 2010). Although the model is theoretically comprehensive, it showed lack of practical tactics that can sustain organizational changes. Furthermore, O'Neill (2012) stated that the process of the organizational change can be successfully managed in five steps. First, create the big message. In this step managers must identify what's in it for me? They must also share the message of the change, and the need for the change, as well as the benefits of changes in the workplace with their employees. Second, take the Pulse of the Organization. In this step, change managers must use many approaches to determine the readiness of the change and attitudes of employees and holding short informal meetings and conversations to make people invested in the plan. Third, deliver the Message by creating an overall communication plan. Fourth, Support the Move; this step includes celebration and organizing a ribbon cutting for starting the move process. Fifth, evaluating the process; this last step includes conducting interviews and distributing surveys to evaluate the process as well as summarizing the lessons and applying them to improve the process of change. While this model is one of the best available models of change, it lacks clear identification of strategies to deal with employees' resistance and organizational readiness aspects.

6. Research Methodology

In order to empirically explore the implementation of the change management practices in the telecommunication sector and to assess the requirements of the change management process in this vibrant sector, three case studies were conducted in three leading companies in the telecommunication sector in the West Bank and Gaza regions of Palestine. The methodology used mixed methods approach of data collection. This combination of data collection methods was deemed necessary to reduce the limitations of any one tool if used alone (Flick, 2011). Two sources of information were used from the three companies, namely, primary and secondary sources. Primary sources of the research were semi-structured interviews with key managers and front-line employees who are actively involved in change projects at the three companies. Whereas, Secondary source of data were companies published materials and internal reports related to change initiatives that have helped the researched in supplementing the data collected through primary sources. Forty two semi-structured interviews were conducted in the targeted companies. These include 23 managers and supervisors, and 19 front-line employees. Thematic analysis method was used to analyze the semi-structured interviews. The thematic method is used to analyze, and identify themes within data. This method organizes and describes the data in details that are rich, and it often interprets the main factors of the topic of the research (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun and Clarke, 2006).

7. Data Analysis and Results

In this section, semi-structured interviews are analyzed and then compared with documents' content from the three companies. This comparison was done through a discussion of the themes that emerged from the interviews, and how these themes can be connected in a comprehensive managerial framework to lead telecommunication companies during change. Thematic analysis was employed in this study, after transcribing the interviews, as it provides a holistic context of the phenomenon (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). The full process of analysis followed Bryman and Bell's (2007) considerations in coding in order to achieve the analysis themes. Table 1 provides a summary of all codes and the central themes identified.

Table 1- From Codes to Central Themes

Codes	Issues discussed	Initial Themes	Central Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs • Troubles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employee needs • Employee troubles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current Constraints • Employee Requirement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current problems
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of awareness • Poorness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employee awareness • Individual's capability • Employee training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building awareness • Skill development • Employee engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity Building
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ineffective planning • Insufficient information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation in Planning • Sharing information • Employee involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information sharing Channels • Communication activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discomfort • fear 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fearful of change • Employee Discomfort • Dealing with discomfort 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opposition to change • Dealing with Change opposition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change Resistance

Theme 1- Current Management Problems

Most managers and employees stated that the main problem they faced was not taking the people side of change into account. The majority of managers in the targeted companies emphasized that there is opposition to change that has caused change failures in various occasions. This resistance was of two types; the direct type when employees do not want to work, and the indirect one by complaining and actively opposing change. The majority of managers suffer from rumors during the change process due to ineffective communication planning. Inefficient training is another significant problem that most of individuals face in the change process. Front-line employees and managers both agreed that there are gaps in the content of the training courses and what is being implemented in reality; usually happens due to top management support and absence in the change process. Most middle managers, supervisors and the front line employees indicated that there is employees' discomfort associated with any change initiative; as they need more time to adapt to change which is not always granted.

Theme 2- Capacity Building

Majority of interviewees commented that the effort spent on capacity building processes and skills development to support change projects in the targeted firms are not enough.

Most of the studied companies provide training program to all administrative levels on topics related to Change management, Time management, and Strategic planning. However, there seems to be consensus between interviewees that what is needed is beyond training; they need to build a culture that involve people in the decision making authority to make training more effective. In addition, most interviewees commented that they did not receive sufficient reinforcement after change implementation, and that noreward programs are practiced in many cases.

Theme 3- Communication

Most of the managers in the targeted companies talked about the current communication activities they have in their companies, these activities include regular meetings, emails, brainstorming sessions, telephone, and workshops. These were regarded by interviewees as the cornerstone for change success. Top management holds meetings with directors every change, but in larger scale changes they hold meetings with middle managers and employees. However, majority of interviewees emphasized that meetings which are held during the change process are not transparent and have a one way channel. Most employees indicated that they were informed about change by many ways: Emails, telephone and meetings from the direct manager but they were not involved in the decision making process. This was confirmed by the front-line employees who stated that they did not understand what the change has for them, and how it can impact their current role. Most employees stated that they have a procedure for getting help and assistance during the change process but they have no clear channels to provide feedback. They concluded that their managers listen to them, but the problem is in taking their opinions into account.

Theme 4- Change Resistance

Most of top and middle managers stated that they expected resistance to change from their employees. They have mentioned many reasons for the change resistance in their companies.

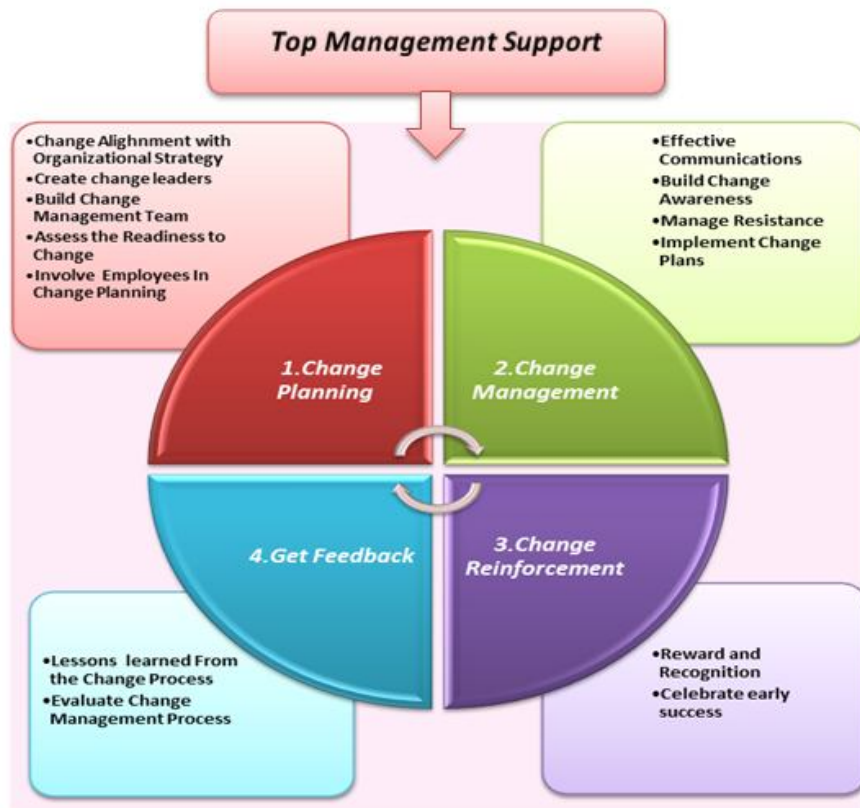
These reasons are fear of losing job, unknown reasons for the change, insufficient guidelines for employees, and lack of feedback.

In order to avoid resistance they did incremental changes, which facilitates embracing employees in the change process. Most middle managers and supervisors made an open discussion with their employees to reduce their opposition to change after the change has started, but this was reported to be unsuccessful. To reduce the resistance to change in some of these firms, a trial period is given to check employees' perceptions and reactions to the change, but hardly provide solution to employees' resistance as their reactions are not dealt with.

8. Discussion

In this exploratory study, an attempt has been made to investigate current practices in telecommunication sector in order to build a managerial framework to enhance the change management process in this vital sector. While it is difficult to generalize findings from exploratory case studies, the case studies conducted demonstrate an interesting dynamic of the change management process that can provide an understanding of how an effective change management process could be achieved. It is found that change management planning, top management active involvement, reinforcement and feedback providing is likely to enhance telecommunication organizations ability to change by promoting a number of drivers for learning from feedback. These elements and associated drivers are presented in Figure 1 below in a managerial framework. The results from this research are discussed in the context of change management literature as presented below.

Figure 1- change management framework for telecommunication companies



There is a high degree of effectiveness in the role of the top management in the change process. This indicates that top management has the main role in supporting the change process. Results show that top management has the least degrees in evaluation of the practices of managing change, because they think that these roles are not their responsibility. They think that it's other administrative levels responsibility as middle managers or front line employees who should act these practices from the top management point of view. This belief forms a problem in managing change that there is no commitment from the top management to the main roles of change management. Lack of top management confidence may be related to pervious fails in managing change, lack of respect and attention from top managers in the individuals, giving them orders without making them understand the reason and without listening to individual opinions or inquiries. Tang and Gao (2012) mentioned that to get confidence from employees you must respect them.

Other aspects to building trust with employees are that one must share information with them as much as possible.

The researcher noticed that change reinforcement wasn't taken into account in the current change management practices. The researcher observed that there are no rewards and no recognition after change implementation to those who committed to the change. In addition, there is no celebration of the early success. This is related to the fact that top management and change leaders were not informed about the importance of change reinforcement in the continuity of this change. The absence of change reinforcement leads to difficulties in involving individuals in the change.

However, results also showed that top management level have the least contributions in communication practices, which may result from their believe that communication practices not their responsibility, or communication practices do not have core importance in managing change. This may prove to be problematic in managing change in the telecommunication sector in Palestine, and if top management realizes the importance of communication practices and the ways to share information, this will help in facilitating change management and increase its efficiency. Another issue raised by the results is the individual misunderstanding; this issue can be attributed to the ineffectiveness of the communication process, the lack in the change leader's skills and a defect in the communication activities to reduce misunderstanding. One of the sources of misunderstanding in the change process is that senders always focus on business issues whereas receivers focus on the personal implications; mismatch between what a sender says and what a receiver hears. Walmsely (2009) emphasized that the leader of change should communicate with the individuals in a two-way setting, not only giving them orders but to listen to them too. Two-way communication gives a chance to the individual to ask questions, to provide feedback and to clarify points which are not clear (Tribe, 2013). Hence, it is very important to determine the communication channels clearly and to inform employees about these channels; to help the change leaders to get feedback in order to assess the change process, to assess its efficiency and to evaluate their achievements.

9. Conclusions and Future Work

Due to fierce competition and technological advancements in the telecommunication sector, change has become a vital tool for survival in this sector.

The aim of this paper was to present a managerial framework for the implementation of change management in telecommunication sector. The framework was constructed using empirical findings from three case studies of Palestinian telecommunication companies. It consists of four main dimensions, namely change planning, change management, change reinforcement, and change feedback collection. Although this study has a number of significant insights and contributions, given the nature of exploratory research work presented, the findings from this research cannot be generalized. On the other hand, shortage of prior research studies on the topic of change management in the telecommunication sector provided a difficulty in attempting to suggest grounded theory development based on the findings (Cooper and Emroy, 1995). Nevertheless, this limitation served as an important opportunity for the need of this type of research. It would be valuable for future research to test the current managerial framework in other industrial sectors to understand its applicability to different types of companies. There is also a need for future empirical research to quantify the impact of implementing such change management frameworks on the financial performance of organizations and their competitive advantage; by developing economic models that capture the financial rewards of change management.

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