Lesson 28: Leading Change

Introduction

This lesson consists of:

1. Leading Change

2. Case Study

3. Student Journal Entry

Assignment

1. **Read Course Guide**

2. When you solve a case study or act as a leader in your organization:

I. ***Identify*** the **Areas of Interest**

II. ***Analyze*** the situation in terms of leading change.

A. ***Describe*** the type of change.

B. ***Identify*** which components of the Organizational System are undergoing change.

C. ***Identify*** any sources of resistance to change.

D. ***Identify*** any leadership strategies being used to overcome resistance to change.

III. ***Explain*** any connection between the resistance to change and any problems the organization is experiencing adapting to the intended change(s).

IV. ***Select*** an appropriate theoretical leader strategy(or strategies) to overcome the sources of resistance to change.

V. ***Apply*** the theoretical leader strategy(ies) to the situation through a specific leader plan that addresses all Areas of Interest.

VI. ***Assess***, evaluate, and revise your leader plan.

3. **Complete a Student Journal entry** for Leading Change.

Think of any situation in your professional life with your present organization where you were in a leadership position, a change was made, and your employees expressed or demonstrated strong resistance.

**Or**

Think of any situation in your professional life with your present organization where you were not in a leadership position, a change was made, and you and your peers expressed or demonstrated strong resistance.

What component of the organization changed? What type of change was implemented? What were the sources of resistance? Were any leadership strategies used to overcome resistance to the proposed change? What problems did the unit, division, or department experience because of the resistance to change? Based on this lesson, what appropriate leader strategy, or set of strategies, could have or should have been applied to overcome the identified sources of resistance?

**Leading Change**

**Change and Organizational Adaptation**

Change is unavoidable in any organization, driven by many external and internal factors. Technological advancements, shifting social and economic trends, evolving regulatory frameworks, and demographic changes all contribute to the dynamic nature of the organizational landscape. While these external pressures act as catalysts, the **response to change is an internal process** that falls under the umbrella of **adaptation.** Adaptation involves **modifying structures, refining strategies, and optimizing processes** to meet emerging demands while maintaining operational efficiency and effectiveness. Organizations that fail to recognize and respond to change risk stagnation, inefficiency, and, in extreme cases, obsolescence.

Effective leaders are critical in **anticipating, strategizing, and managing change** to ensure a smooth transition that aligns with the organization’s broader objectives. Anticipation is key—Leaders who proactively forecast changes can develop strategic responses that mitigate risks and capitalize on opportunities. This proactive stance allows organizations to **shape their future rather than react to unforeseen circumstances.** A strategic response to change requires a structured approach, incorporating data-driven decision-making, clear communication, and alignment with the organization’s long-term vision.

However, adaptation is not merely about structural modifications; it also requires a shift in mindset and culture. Employees and stakeholders must **embrace a culture of continuous learning and innovation,** recognizing that change is not a singular event but a constant process of evolution. Organizations that foster **agility and resilience** are better positioned to navigate uncertainties and sustain growth. Leaders must also **minimize disruption** during transitions by ensuring transparency, addressing concerns, and providing necessary support systems, such as training programs or process adjustments.

One of the most significant challenges in adaptation is overcoming **resistance to change**. Employees often struggle with uncertainty, fear of the unknown, and perceived threats to job security or professional identity. Leadership must employ **change management strategies** emphasizing inclusivity, engagement, and open communication. Involving employees in decision-making, **clarifying the rationale behind changes**, and highlighting potential benefits can enhance acceptance and cooperation.

Ultimately, the ability to **adapt to change efficiently and effectively** is a defining characteristic of high-performing organizations. Those who approach change with strategic foresight, adaptability, and a commitment to growth will **emerge more substantially and competitively**. Conversely, organizations that resist change or fail to implement adaptive strategies may struggle to keep pace with evolving industry standards and market demands.

**Nature of Change**

Change can be classified into two broad categories:

1. **External Change** – Arises from factors beyond the organization's control, such as shifts in government regulations, economic downturns, technological advancements, or social movements. External change often necessitates a reactive response unless anticipated.
2. **Internal Change** – Stems from within the organization, such as leadership transitions, restructuring, or process innovations. Internal change is often proactively initiated to improve efficiency, performance, or culture.

Change can also be categorized based on anticipation:

* **Anticipated Change** – Foreseen and planned for, allowing for proactive strategies to mitigate disruption.
* **Unanticipated Change** – Sudden and unexpected, requiring organizations to react quickly to minimize damage.

**Effective leaders proactively forecast changes** and implement structured adaptation strategies to maintain stability and growth.

**Organizational Adaptation to Change**

Organizations must adapt through structured problem-solving to remain competitive and resilient. The Adaptive-Coping Cycle consists of seven key stages:

1. **Sensing** – Leaders must continuously gather and interpret data from both internal and external environments. This includes analyzing market trends, employee performance, and external threats.
2. **Communicating Information** – Effective communication ensures that critical insights reach decision-makers and stakeholders promptly.
3. **Decision-Making** – Leaders must develop actionable strategies to address challenges and opportunities based on the interpreted data.
4. **Communicating Instructions** – Decision-making must be translated into clear instructions for teams to implement effectively.
5. **Stabilizing** – Organizations must maintain internal cohesion and balance while implementing change to prevent resistance and confusion.
6. **Coping Action**—Executingplanned strategies, including process changes, new policies, or restructuring efforts.
7. **Feedback** – Organizations must assess the effectiveness of their adaptation efforts and refine strategies as needed.

Organizations that master this cycle become agile and resilient, responding effectively to change without compromising stability.

**Resistance to Organizational Adaptation**

Change is often met with resistance at multiple levels within an organization. Understanding and addressing resistance is crucial to ensuring smooth transitions and fostering long-term commitment to change.

**Individual Resistance to Adaptation**

Individuals resist change due to the following:

* **Fear of job loss** – Concerns that change will result in layoffs or reduced job security.
* **Loss of status or power** – Employees fear losing influence, decision-making authority, or prestige.
* **Threats to self-esteem** – Change may imply that past work or skills are obsolete, causing insecurity.
* **Skepticism and past experiences** – Employees who have experienced unsuccessful change efforts before may resist new initiatives.

**Collective Resistance to Adaptation**

Resistance can also emerge at the group and organizational level:

1. **Group Resistance** – Teams may resist change if it disrupts established norms, roles, or work processes.
2. **Organization-Wide Resistance** – Bureaucratic structures and deeply ingrained traditions often make organizations rigid and resistant to adaptation.

Unaddressed resistance can derail adaptation efforts, decrease morale, and negatively impact productivity.

**Overcoming Resistance to Organizational Adaptation**

Leaders can minimize resistance and foster acceptance of change through:

* **Transparent communication** – Clearly explaining why change is necessary and how it benefits individuals and the organization.
* **Skill development and training** – Providing employees with the necessary adaptation resources.
* **Employee participation** – Involving employees in decision-making fosters ownership and commitment to change.
* **Internal leadership alignment** – Ensuring all levels of leadership support and reinforce change efforts.
* **Gradual implementation** – Breaking significant changes into smaller, manageable steps reduces resistance and allows for smooth transitions.

**Major Change: Tuning, Adaptation, Reorientation, and Re-creation**

Nadler and Tushman (1989) categorize organizational change into four types:

1. **Tuning** – Small, incremental improvements that are made proactively to enhance efficiency without responding to an immediate issue.
2. **Adaptation** – Incremental changes made in reaction to external factors, such as adopting new technology in response to industry trends.
3. **Reorientation** – Transformational change proactively implemented to realign organizational structures and culture in anticipation of external shifts.
4. **Re-creation** – Radical, crisis-driven change required for an organization’s survival, such as restructuring after a financial collapse.

**The intensity of change determines how much resistance will be encountered** and whether leaders should adopt proactive or reactive strategies.

**Kotter’s Eight-Step Process for Leading Change**

John Kotter (1996) proposed a structured eight-step model for effective change implementation:

1. **Establish a Sense of Urgency** – Communicate the importance of immediate action to overcome complacency.
2. **Create a Guiding Coalition** – Form a leadership team to champion the change effort.
3. **Develop a Vision and Strategy** – **Clearly define goals and the path forward** to achieve them.
4. **Communicate the Change Vision** – Ensure all stakeholders understand and embrace the vision.
5. **Empower Broad-Based Action** – Remove obstacles and encourage employeeparticipation in executing the change.
6. **Generate Short-Term Wins** – Achieve small, visible successes to build momentum and reinforce commitment.
7. **Consolidate Gains and Produce More Change** – Use early successes to expand and institutionalize changes.
8. **Anchor New Approaches in the Culture** – Embed the change in organizational values and norms to ensure long-term sustainability.

**Incremental Change and Total Quality Management (TQM)**

TQM is a continuous improvement philosophy that ensures organizations consistently refine their processes. Its principles include:

* **Clear Definition of Quality Outputs** – Establishing measurable performance expectations.
* **Focus on Value-Added Activities** – Prioritizing activities directly contributing **to productivity and efficiency**.
* **Continuous Improvement** – Iterative refinements that create sustainable long-term progress.
* **Empowered Employees** – Encouraging ownership, autonomy, and innovation.
* **Encouraged Teamwork** – facilitated collaboration to solve problems effectively.
* **Benchmarking** – Learning from industry best practices to improve performance.

**Learning Organizations and Knowledge Transfer**

A **learning organization** fosters an environment of continuous learning and adaptation. It thrives by:

1. **Systematic Problem-Solving** – Using data-driven decisions rather than assumptions.
2. **Experimentation with New Approaches** – Encouraging calculated risk-taking and innovation.
3. **Learning from Past Experiences** – Institutionalizing lessons from successes and failures.
4. **Learning from Others** – Adopting best practices from external sources to enhance internal processes.
5. **Transferring Knowledge** – Ensuring insights are disseminated across teams and leadership levels.

The ability to learn and adapt quickly is a defining feature of high-performing organizations.

**Conclusion**

Successful change leadership requires a proactive mindset, strategic adaptation, and effective resistance addressing. Organizations that embrace Kotter’s change model, TQM principles, and a culture of continuous learning are more likely to thrive in a dynamic environment. Leaders can drive sustainable transformation that ensures long-term success by fostering resilience and innovation.

**Case Study**

The following Monday, you arrived at the Records and Identification Division and immediately called a meeting with your sergeants and civilian supervisors. You began telling them how things are going to change now that you are in charge. You stated, “You may remember me from last week when my car was stolen. I had a first-hand opportunity to observe how R & I operates. You people have a very efficient operation; you can all be proud of that. But you are losing sight of your primary mission!

“This division is supposed to support the rest of the department and the public by supplying their police reports. Instead, you treat everyone like they’re a bother. From this moment forward, I want to prioritize service to our clients! I expect every one of you supervisors to go out and make this happen!” You dismissed the group, and they all left silently. Soon, they were in full swing, giving last-minute instructions to the clerks before the doors opened. You could already see a large crowd of customers waiting outside.

Later that morning, as you were tacking up your degrees and awards on your office wall, you were visited by Senior Management Analyst II (Senior MA-II) Karen Davis, one of the watch commanders. She said quietly and professionally, “Chief, in the future, when you want to change how we do things, I sure wish you would consult with me first. I’ve worked in the records function for twenty-five years and have seen everything tried at least once. I know our way of doing business before this morning was the most efficient way to go. Everyone is getting the reports they need; we’re just doing it our way. Once you spend more time here, you’ll see I’m right. Complaining is part of being a cop, and those prima donna detectives complain the most.”

When you spoke to Senior MA-II David Walsh, another watch commander, he told you almost the same thing. “We’d all like to do the best thing, but I can’t figure out why you’d want to change an operation that has been getting rave reviews from all the bosses. At the retirement luncheon we threw for Chief Management Analyst Findley, he told us we were the best records division in the country. He said he was so proud of us that he could cry, and he almost did. Where else do you see clerks coming up with better ways to do things and everyone else in the division supporting them?”

Your meeting was interrupted by the sounds of a loud argument coming from the reception area. Senior MA-II Walsh moved quickly to get between Records Clerk Oscar Santana and Detective II Christopher West. The last thing you heard before Walsh separated them was Detective West’s voice shouting, “I don’t know who you think you are, but I’m not going to let some record clerk talk to me like that.” You’re not even sure to whom the comment was directed.

Senior MA-II Walsh pulled Santana into his office and asked what had happened. Oscar Santana replied, “This new touchy-feely stuff the commanding officer created just isn’t going to work! I know the only reason we’re trying this nonsense is to make the new boss look good. You see what happens when you try to be nice to cops? They take advantage of you and treat you like dirt. How can I get all this paperwork done if I don’t tell these people, plain and simple, what they need to do? I’m tired of trying to be Mr. Nice Guy—I wanna go back to getting the job done!”

The rest of the week must have gone better because you didn’t hear any more shouting matches, even with your office door open. The following Monday afternoon, you returned to your office when the phone rang. It was your friend, Captain Jack Black, from the Burglary-Auto Theft Division. Black told you that a whole stack of burglary crime-and-arrest reports, “the whole weekend’s worth,” had been misplaced by R & I. He waited until now to call you because he knew you were still getting settled into your new job, and he figured that they would turn up sometime this morning. He pleaded with you to recover the reports as soon as possible because the arrestees were in custody. You knew that meant the suspects had to be arraigned immediately, or they would be released without prosecution.

Captain Black also told you that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) inspection team would be here next week to do a Uniform Crime Report (UCR) audit. He didn’t usually know or care about “paperwork or computer stuff,” but it so happened that he had shared a bottle of scotch with an FBI special agent last night, and the audit came up in passing conversation. Knowing Black, you are sure his information is solid, even if his methods are unofficial.

Black added, “You know, I think you’re headed for trouble. That agent said something about an online preliminary audit showing some UCR numbers looking ‘dead wrong.’ If I were you, I’d jump on this right away, right after you get me those ‘Missing in Action’ burglary arrest reports!”

Now, this was a surprise. You knew the R & I employees were not real warm and cuddly, but they sure were efficient with their reports. You wonder when the UCR numbers got messed up—was it before or after your arrival? At any rate, the mix-up with the burglary reports is recent and disturbing. How could your employees bungle one of their simple, routine functions? You get up from your desk to hunt down the missing reports before a bunch of crooks get released because there isn’t any paperwork for court.

I*.* ***Identify*** the **Areas of Interest**.

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10.

(If necessary, continue listing **Areas of Interest** on another page.)

II. ***Analyze*** the situation in terms of resistance to change.

What is the relationship among the Areas of Interest listed above? More specifically, is there a chronological order or **logical chain of events** that helps you make sense of the facts you have? If so, outline the time sequence of events.

What component(s) of the Organizational System is/are undergoing change?

What type of change is being implemented?

What common sources of resistance to change are evident in this division?

(List the common sources below and describe how they are demonstrated in the situation, e.g., cite the words, actions, and circumstances that led you to conclude that resistance is occurring.)

Is there any evidence that the leader is using strategies to overcome resistance to change? Please describe the strategies being used and indicate whether or not they are effective.

III. ***Explain*** any connection between the resistance to change and any problems the organization is experiencing.

Have missed opportunities to overcome resistance to change damaged organizational performance? How?

Do the facts of the case and your explanation form a pattern that allows you to identify a fundamental or **root cause** (i.e., is there something in the case information that suggests it is the underlying cause of all or most of the Areas of Interest)?

IV. ***Select*** an appropriate theoretical leader strategy(or strategies) for the Areas of Interest.

Which strategy(or strategies) should the leader use?

V. ***Apply*** the theoretical leader strategy(ies) to the situation in the form of a specific leader plan that addresses all Areas of Interest you have identified and translate the theoretical leader strategies into specific actions you would take and communications that you would send to the employee(s) of interest. What will you do and say to whom, when, and how will you overcome resistance to change? What do the theoretical leader's actions look like in practice?

VI. ***Assess*** the effectiveness of your leader plan and revise it as needed.

After your leader plan, list the measures you would use to evaluate your actions. In this step, leaders must ask, “What information do I need to tell whether or not my leadership is having the desired effects? How will I obtain the information I need? How can it be generated? Who can help me get what I need? How often should I collect data, and in what form?”

Name:

**Complete a Student Journal entry** to lead the change.

Think of any situation in your professional life with your present organization where you were in a leadership position, a change was made, and your employees expressed or demonstrated strong resistance.

**Or**

Think of any situation in your professional life with your present organization where you were not in a leadership position, a change was made, and you and your peers expressed or demonstrated strong resistance.

What type of change was implemented? What component of the organization underwent change? What were the sources of resistance? Were there any leadership strategies used to overcome resistance to the proposed change? What problems did the unit, division, or department experience because of the resistance to change? Based on this lesson, what appropriate leader strategy, or set of strategies, could have or should have been applied to overcome the identified sources of resistance?

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