

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF BUSINESS & MANAGEMENT

The Role of Charismatic Leadership in Change Management Using Kurt Lewin's Three Stage Model

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Abstract:

Kurt Lewin's Three Stage Change Model has long been used by many organization during periods that require change. On the other hand, a lot has been researched and written about the powerful effects of charismatic leadership on organizational performance. This article is a narrative review seeking to establish whether charismatic leadership can influence positively the process of change in particular whether charismatic leadership can be incorporated as a change enhancer in the Kurt Lewin's Three Stage Change Model. The research found out that indeed charismatic leadership can be incorporated in the Kurt Lewin's Three Stage Change Model to enhance the change process. Finally, the research gives some conclusions and recommendations which will be helpful to both practioners and researchers.

Keywords: *Charismatic leadership in change management*

1. Introduction

1.1. Change Management

The business environment has continued to evolve to incorporate dynamic and new ways of doing business. Globalization, information technology and various internal and external forces that affect the business environment have continuously brought about change. Organizations thus seek to continuously embrace change in order to stay ahead of the game (Pryor et al, 2008).

Change is often resisted by people and it sometimes take longer than necessary for an organization to successfully move from the current state of affairs to the desired status because at times it becomes difficult to convince employees or followers to accept the desired change (Valerie et al, 2013).

1.2. Theoretical Perspectives of Charismatic Leadership

The term charisma was first used by Max Weber to imply "the gift of grace." According to weber, charismatic leaders are able to influence people who are in distressful situations through the powerful gift of charisma bestowed to them. Employees who are in distressful situations look up to the charismatic leader because they believe that the leader is most qualified to move them out of the distressful situation. A lot has been written about organizational leaders who possess charismatic traits. Weber described them as enthusiastic heroes and prophets that influence enormous followership from people and hence they are viewed as "revolutionary forces in history." Weber further explained that charismatic leaders come out not during the normal day to day operations of an organizations or group but rather during the times of a crisis, adversity or distress when the core values, entity, and legitimacy of the organization are put into question and challenged by new and better ways of delivering the same results(Weber, 1964).

This early findings on the potential positive effects of charisma in leadership have inspired and motivated scholars and researchers to explore this concept deeper so as to gain more understanding on the role of charismatic leadership style in different organizational settings and environments. Researchers who have dwelt on this topic have come up with empirical evidence that suggests that the benefits include: leader employee effectiveness, employee job satisfaction, and employee commitment to the organizational goals (DeGroot et al, 2000; Waldman et al, 2004; Kirkpatrick et al, 1996).

During times of crises or organizational change, the employees of an organization are faced with uncertainty because of the unfamiliarity of the anticipated action. In such situations, employees are likely to suffer stress and anxiety as they anticipate change. This stressful environment is a fertile breeding ground for persuasive and charismatic leaders to restore faith and hope through an inspiring vision of how the organization will resolve the crisis (Burns, 1978; Kanungo, 1987; House, 1977).

Shamir et al (1993) points out that during circumstances where the intended organizational goal cannot be specifically stated, organizational performance cannot be correlated to work performance, and in situations where there are a few situational cues provides an opportunity for charismatic leadership to emerge and lead the situation.

Weber(1964) concludes that true charisma originates from something "new" in the organizational environment. In addition, in out of the ordinary organizations environments and occurrences this something new calls upon for "a charismatic authoritarian structure so

that charisma, at least temporarily leads to action, movements, and events which are extraordinary, not routine, and outside the sphere of everyday life."Charismatic leadership does not rhyme with routine but rather it embraces and enhances new occurrences, activities, goals, and set ups.

2. Kurt Lewin 3 Stage Change Model

2.1. Step 1: *Becoming Motivated to Change (Unfreezing)*

Lewin (1947) states that "Human behavior was based on a quasi-stationary equilibrium supported by a complex field of forces". Before bringing about a new set of behavior to be adopted in favor of the old behavior which people are accustomed to, the current state of affairs needs to be destabilized (unfrozen). Lewin foresaw that this was not going to be a simple task and that there is no one method of unfreezing which could be successfully applied to all the scenarios. Lewin further adds that this stage of organizational change is based on the theory that human behavior is learned from past observational happenings and cultural influences. Organizational change would thus require that adding new ingredients for the desired organizational change or eliminating the existing culture and activities that are supporting the current state of behavior.

During the unfreezing stage, the organization needs to disconfirm itself with the current state of affairs. However, it should be noted that the expectation gap largely influences the outcome. The larger the gap of what is believed and what needs to be believed for change to occur the more likely the new information will occur. Previous beliefs now seen as irrelevant creates "survival anxiety." However, this is not enough to prompt change if learning anxiety is there. Learning anxiety associated with the desired change triggers defensiveness and resistance among the followers due to the pain of having to unlearn what had been previously accepted and continuously acted on. It is paramount to move the followers past the possible learning anxieties for the intended change to progress to the next level. This can be achieved by either having the survival anxiety be greater than the learning anxiety. This is best achieved by reducing the learning anxiety associated with the desired organizational change (Schein, 1996).

2.2. *Role of Charismatic Leadership in the First Stage of Change*

Bryman (2000) states that charismatic leadership "helps to bring about change at the sub-conscious level by fulfilling employees expectations of strong leadership through vision". Leaders who are able to sell the vision of the organization through charm are more successful in rallying the employees towards change and help to reduce the learning anxiety.

"Through increasing the intrinsic valence of goal accomplishment charismatic leadership increases the understanding of the followers on the importance of the desired goal and how it will impact positively to the organization" (Mc Hugh, 1968). In addition, this leadership style identifies the desired results with the organizational identity. This desired identity sets the organization from other organizations. This brings meaningfulness to the follower's lives and efforts (Jahoda, 1981).

Charismatic leadership helps to cultivate faith in a better desired future because the rewards involved in a charismatic leadership process involves "self-expressions, self-efficacy, self-worth, and self-consistency" so as to highlight the importance aspect of committing towards attaining the desired change. While abstaining from asking provisions for "pragmatic extrinsic justification" for the anticipated behavior to internal self-related causes increases the employee's commitment to the desired goal. While non-charismatic leaders employ styles like specifying the targets and increasing the probability that attaining the desired state of affairs leads to achieving certain outcomes, "charismatic leaders tend to emphasize vague and distal goals and utopia outcomes by use of symbolism, imaging, and fantasy" (Locke and Latham, 1990; House, 1971).

Charisma enables the leader to engage the followers at deeper level in order to appeal to their intellectual, emotional, and behavioral commitment of the followers to view the impending change positively and of added advantage to the organization as compared to the current state of affairs in the organization (Dunphy and Stace, 1990).

Gilley et al (2009) notes that charismatic leadership helps to interact naturally and comfortably among his diverse followers. Successful change requires leaders to build confidence of their employees and build their confidence. This leadership style enables the leader to seek to understand his followers. By understanding the fears that the followers harbor he is able to successfully address the underlying challenge and restore the dwindling confidence among his followership. This restored confidence enables the employees to support and cooperate with the leader towards realizing the change initiative.

Charismatic leadership becomes of immense importance because a leader is able to "walk the talk" and through his soft skills and ability to influence the emotions of his followers the leader is able to make the impending change appear exciting and the worker feel significant and appreciated (Bennis, 1993).

Fiol (1999) States that effective communication is extremely important in any given leadership style but charismatic leaders tend to communicate differently. Charismatic leaders do not just convey information but they employ the use of such tactics like communicating passionately, emotionally, and inspirationally in order to motivate the audience.

Charismatic leaders can be separated from other type of leaders in their communication style which chose to excite the followership with metaphoric language that lend credibility to the communication (Kanungo, 1987). "The message is obviously important but the importance of the delivery of the message supersedes that of the message itself" (Yukl, 2010).

Ronald Reagan a former president of the USA is passionately remembered as one of the top three charismatic American Presidents in the Twentieth Century (Mio et al, 2005) Regan appealed to a sense of understanding to a desired cause of action through the use of symbolisms and metaphors whose impact could be felt far much better and longer than ordinary communication style.

It is at this stage of change where the leader needs to sell his vision of the desired change to the followers. Charismatic leaders can often come up with a vision that seeks to create a solution and is distinct from current state of affairs (Yukl, 2010) in addition, a

charismatic leader will “articulate an ideological vision”. This form of ideological vision created by the charismatic leader is a source of distinctiveness from the norm and is very effective in selling the organizational new agenda to the followers. As followers accept the idea from the leaders of the “unconventional and ideological vision” they will begin to accept and make use of the new values (Yukl, 2010) “Charismatic leaders interpret radical or innovative visions and plans into more “socially conventional ideas” (Fiol, 1999).

President Ronald Regan was able to successfully destabilize or unfreeze the current state of affairs by communicating his vision wholeheartedly with a lot of passion and vigor. Regan appealed to the unhappiness caused by the current state of affairs and thus unfreezing it. “In foreign affairs Regan’s vision is referred to as Romantically Utopia” as a result, Regan’s followers were able to readily accept his agenda internalize the values and hence participate fully towards implementation of the proposed plan of action which is different from current state of affairs (Garrison, 2008). In an organizational context where the leader is charismatic, it has been observed that the followers are highly motivated and are more willing to sacrifice their own personal agenda for the sake of accomplishment of the organizational desired goal which has been stipulated by the charismatic leader (House et al, 1994., Bass, 1988)

2.3. Step 2: Moving (Changing What Needs to Be Changed)

“Unfreezing is not an end in itself: it creates motivation to learn but does not necessary control or predict direction” (Schein, 1996). It is necessary to take into account all the forces at work and identify and evaluate, iteratively, the available options (Lewin, 1947).

Once the leader has demonstrated that there is sufficient dissatisfaction with the current conditions in the organization and a real desire to make some change has been put forward. It then becomes imperative to identify exactly what needs to be changed. A concise view of the new state is required to clearly identify the gap between the present and state and that being proposed. Three actions that can assist in the movement step include: persuading employees to agree that the status quo is not beneficial to them and encourage them to view the problem from a new better perspective, work together on quest for new relevant information, and connect the views of the group to well respected and powerful leaders that also support change (Alicia, 2005).

2.4. Role of Charismatic Leadership in the Second Stage of Change

Charismatic leadership can be helpful in this stage of change by “increasing the intrinsic valence of effort” this is enabled by putting emphasis on symbolic and expressive aspects of the effort. “The fact that the effort itself reflects important values that by making the effort, one makes a moral statement.” Charismatic leadership strengthens followers’ beliefs on goal accomplishment and reaching the desired state. “The intrinsic valence” of the effort can be improved upon by incorporating employee participation in the change effort. This will imply collective identity within the followers of the change initiative. This boosts the chances of the change efforts and behaviors representing that identity (Meindle, 1990).

In addition, charisma can help by “increasing effort accomplishment expectancies” this is successfully achieved by strengthening the followers’ self-esteem and self-worth. This is done by increasing his expectations towards the desired outcome of the followers and expressing open admiration of the followers’ expertise and ability to accomplish the desired change goal. By practicing this, charismatic leaders enhance followers’ perceived self-efficacy, defined as “judgment of one’s capability to accomplish a certain level of performance” (Yukl, 1989; Eden, 1990). Self-efficacy is a strong source of motivation (Bandura, 1986).

Charismatic leaders have also been known to help increase employee’s sense of self-worth by consistently explaining the relationship between follower efforts and important organizational values. “A general sense of self-worth increases general efficacy “which has been shown to strengthen and boost the confidence of the followers involved in the change process. Another aspect of charismatic leadership that will impact positively to increase effort accomplishment expectancies is its pillar of collective efficacy. “perceived collective efficacy will influence what people choose to do as a group, how much effort they put into it, and their staying power when group efforts fail to produce results thus being a member of an efficacious collective enhances one’s self-efficacy” (Bandura, 1986). In addition, charismatic leaders help to a larger extent to manage the employee’s impressions by leadership through courage and conviction (Yukl; Fiol, 1999). Charismatic leaders consistently send their messages of convictions to their followers (Conger and Kanungo, 1987). In order to increase the impact and effectiveness of these conviction messages, charismatics appeal directly to their employees carrying out the task at hand (Conger et al., 2000).

Shamir (1999) claims that charismatic leaders tactfully use passion, strength, humor to capture and maintain the attention of the followers towards the desired goal or results. The main goal of a charismatic leader would be to “create a positive impression that contributes value to the leader follower relationship.” (Yukl, 2010).

2.5. Step 3-Making the Change Permanent (Refreezing)

At this stage the new behavioral traits get entrenched to the organizational values and become habitual. Key milestones in this stage include reengineering a new self-concept and identity and building new interpersonal relationships. The main role of refreezing is stabilizing the new equilibrium emanating from the change by striking a balance in both the driving and restraining forces in the change process. One way that can be employed to put into implementation Lewin’s third step is by reinforcing the new patterns and institutionalizing them through formal mechanisms including policies and procedures (Lewin, 1947).

2.6. Role of Charismatic Leadership in the Third Stage of Change

In this stage, charismatic leadership can be applied through motivational influence to bring about a high level of commitment to the desired change and bind both the leader and the followers to a common mission, vision, or the target goal. (Bennis and Nanus, 1985;

House 1977). "Their art is to manufacture ethics to give life through commitment to the spirit of the organization" (Hodgkinson, 1983).

The word commitment as used in charismatic leadership imply "unconditional commitment-internalized "personal or moral commitment" (Johnson, 1982) this is creating and sustaining a motivational courage to sustain a course of action and to selflessly dedicate oneself to the change action regardless of the challenges and opposing forces.

By putting into practice the self-concept of followers, multiplying the value of particular identities and values and correlating behaviors and goals to those identities and values and to a mission that reflects them, charismatic leaders move and motivate followers by demonstrating a sense of personal commitment (Salancik, 1977; Staw, 1980).

Strauss (1969) claims that personal follower commitment to a goal is arguable one of the best of all intrinsic motivators since it is a commitment to one's own self-concept and evaluation standards to a conception of oneself as a certain kind or kinds of person who is expected and expects to act in ascertain way in certain situations."

3. Conclusion

During organizational change many important factors need to be considered in order to ensure a smooth transition of the organization from the current organizational state to the desired state. Both the external and internal forces in the organizational environment need to be considered before change implementation. Charismatic leadership has been found to be a positive enhancer during organizational change and can be applied effectively in the Kurt Lewin Three Stage Model. During each stage of the change model, different charismatic leadership styles can be applied to enhance the change process.

- In the first stage of the change process, charismatic leadership can help enhance the change stage through the leader selling the vision to the followers after having packaged the change message with metaphors, symbolism, imaging and fantasy. This makes the intended change more appealing and thus help to unfreeze the current state of affairs by reducing the learning anxiety. In addition, painting beautiful imaginary pictures of the intended state of affairs through communication makes the followers to view the previous or current state of affairs seem irrelevant and prompt motivation for the desired change.
- It is in the first stage where charismatic leadership can offer the intrinsic motivation required to influence followers to embrace the desired change. Charismatic leadership will help to understand the followers' fears or learning anxiety through the leader addressing the underlying fears and restoring confidence to the followers. By communicating with passion and vigor and leading through example, charismatics are able to appeal emotionally to the followers and thus motivate followers to embrace change.
- In the second stage of the change process, Charismatic leadership help to strengthen the follower's self-esteem and self-worth by increasing the followers' self-efficacy defined as judgment of ones capability to accomplish a certain level of performance. Charismatic traits like passion, strength, and humor enable the leader to capture the attention of the followers as they undertake the goal together. This enhances the ongoing implementation of the change process. In addition, charismatic leadership help to put emphasis on symbolic and expressive aspect of the effort by follower's belief on goal accomplishment and reaching the desired state. This is accomplished through practicing collective identity within the followers of the change initiative.
- In the third stage of change, charismatic leadership can enhance the change process through creating and sustaining motivational courage and by leaders selflessly dedicating themselves to change iregardless of the opposing forces. In addition, by doubling the importance of certain identities and values and inspiring followers through a sense of personal commitment.

4. Recommendations

During organizational change using Kurt Lewin's Three Stage Model the leadership team should incorporate some aspect of charismatic leadership which will act as a catalyst in the change process. Charismatic styles like passionately sharing the vision of the organization with followers, communicating using styles which appeal to the emotions of the followers, providing intrinsic motivation to the followers, increasing the followers' self-efficacy, instilling certain values and organizational identities, impression management, instilling faith and trust on followers, leading by example, demonstrating self-sacrifice and commitment during the change process should be put into use much as other important and different leadership styles are practiced.

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