

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF BUSINESS & MANAGEMENT

Change Management and Certain Implementation Perspectives: What Went Wrong?

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Abstract:

In the 21st century, the concept of Globalization, increasing interference of technology, biting competition, mushrooming growth of private universities can stifle any university's growth, efficiency, expansion and reputation. Hence, change is the need of time and its implementation process is crucial to success. There are two areas of the organization: One that is ready for change (Top management) and another that is unprepared. Generally, the top management, inside the boardroom decides what changes are to be introduced. Millions of rupees are invested. The key components of implementation process: "proactive" efforts - disseminating information, awareness, manuals, an extensive two-way communication with the employees are ignored. Can any change be the strengths of an organization without proper involvement of employees?" The ramifications are-employees' dissatisfaction, confusion and frustration and large scale employee turnover. Could it help achieve final goal: profitability and international standards? The basic requisite of change-establishing an environment receptive to change, focus on the mechanism to clarify the facts to various stakeholders of what is going to change, why, and what benefits they can expect to derive from the change, are ignored resulting in chaos. This scenario is presented through the case study of XYZ University.

Keywords: Change management, Technology, implementation, Communication.

1. Introduction

The XYZ University established in 1999, soon became a name at national level. It maintained an excellent progressive record in the education industry. Apart from excellent domestic performance and reputation, the university's global ambition had been to position itself in the international market. The owners and management of the university were thinking in terms of globalization, competition, control and regulation. There was a time when only a numbered university, wholly owned and operated by the Government, enjoyed the status of sole monopolized Higher Education service providers in India. There was almost no or very limited interference of technology in life. The situations, however, were entirely changed by the 21st century. There was mushrooming growth of private universities. The increasing competition and rapidly changing technology seemed to have stifled XYZ university's growth, efficiency, expansion and reputation. The growth without advancement in the field of fast changing technology was impossible. Hence, research, related to advanced technology in the field of education industry, was conducted by a small top level team of the university and finally, it was decided by the top management, inside the boardroom that the software introduced two years ago should be replaced by Ample Soft. Millions of rupees were invested and instructions were given to change management team to make sufficient efforts to disseminate information so as to give sufficient time and imagination to employees to be prepared for the change. The key components of implementation efforts suggested by the chancellor of the university were: disseminating information, reinforcing goal and vision, gaining and giving feedback, and maintaining high levels of commitment to the programs. The ultimate goal of all this was increased efficiency, reputation and profitability.

All the members of the management and Sales team of Ample Soft company, were thrilled to crack such a big deal and threw a lavish party for the celebration. With the deal, the employees of one organization were celebrating, while of the other(university), except those directly or indirectly involved in the decision making process, the rest were struggling, resigning and suffering from mental tension. The software was good. The advancement was the need of the time. The employees of the university were sincere and hard working. The owners were generous and empathetic. Then, what went wrong at the initial stage of the change?

Obviously, change starts from the top of the organization and descends to the operational level. Along the chain of command and implementation, certain questions arise: up to which degree would the communication system efficiently work and up to what extent would the top management and employees commit to change?

The change management team of the university, headed by Mr. Uday Tanejawas happy as it was this team that was instrumental in the final deal regarding technological improvement. The team was relaxed after taking the credit of doing something related to advancement. The team members considered it their privilege to take future course of action as per their wish, perhaps assuming that all the employees had a third eye to know everything about this and would willingly and easily accept the change and would learn the technology at the eleventh hour. After the deal, two months passed away. One fine day Mr Uday Taneja received a phone call:

- The Chancellor: "Hello! Is it Mr Uday? Chancellor speaking".
- Mr Uday: Y- Ye-Yes Sir.

Chancellor: "What is the progress of Ample Soft? I hope, by now, your "proactive" efforts for change commitment through an extensive two-way communication with the employees are over. The day after tomorrow, there is a meeting in the Board Room at 11:00 A.M. Bring the report on the change process as well as communication flow across the organization." MrUday felt as if. 'the rug had swept out from under his feet. 'Now, the team had to show the progress. The dismayed team became active.

The next day, the faculty suddenly received the email "All the faculty have to assemble in the auditorium 3, for the training session 1 for Ample Soft, today, at 1:00 P.M. "The employees of all the age groups got panicky. "What is this Ample Soft?" There was discussion everywhere in the university. Mr. Sharma, the 56-year-old, outspoken authoritative and social, senior faculty came out of his cabin in a mood of resentment, "Mr. Sinha, have you read the email? See. Two years ago we had taken training of Drainer Soft. With great effort, we have started using it. It is already doing well. Some of us are still not comfortable with its use. Now, again new technology!" Mr. Sinha responded, "Yes, and no prior information regarding this". Soon, a good number of faculty in an anxious mood gathered together. They were all panic-stricken.

There was a new topic for discussion. Most of the faculty and staff, kept their work aside and got engaged in non - formal discussion. Some were cursing the management, while others were critical of the system without proper implementation strategy. Some were criticizing technological progress and HR Department while others were cursing their own fate. They started devising excuses for not attending the training with an intention to delay the introduction of new technology into their work or probably to show their resistance. There were three categories of peoples' reactions to change: the deserters, though agreed with change yet efforts required for that were too demanding for them; the enthusiasts but overloaded with work; and a few new faculty of young generation, whose response was neutral. There was no active seeker for the change. Most of the employees tried to keep themselves away from the change. Not only did their fear of failure become the primary issue, but also load of work, additional to what they already had, was disturbing them.

Dr. Alia, after reading the email and sensing some commotion related to it, outside her cabin in the hall, also joined the group, "Was there any prior information to any one- any circular, meeting or discussion? As I have resumed my duty after ten days, I have no idea of it."

All: "No madam. No meeting. No circular. No discussion. Who bothers about our feedback and opinion? These decisions are the prerogative of a selected few."

Dr. Alia: "Youknow; a new software was introduced in the organization where I worked earlier but there the things ran smoothly. There, they focused on the concept of 'what the employees need to know?' The change information was gradually and consistently disseminated prior to training, through various channels of communication, such as briefings, presentations, electronic mail, internal publications, general informational meetings and small informal discussions. Thus, an awareness and understanding on the issues was created first. What has gone wrong here?"

Mr. Shalim, a very seasoned and balanced professor and a member of change team who was listening to all these, went to his cabin, closed his eyes and tried to analyze the situation. Various questions flashed across his mind: "The faculty are mature and sincere. They are basically aware of the need of change. Then is it unfair on the part of the faculty to resist change? Do they want that their change resistance should impede the change efforts or a great deal of in-depth information about changes is required by them? Is only sending an email sufficient or something else is required? What is this something else? Was the sudden message with the commanding tone 'Ample Soft Training Mandatory' appropriate or it should have been a gradual persuasion like "Familiarize yourself with Ample Soft"? Was the content of the heading itself provocative or was it audience focused?" He felt that an effective change management scheme comprises building an environment in which all organizational members can excel. Some comprehensive plans and tools enabling adaptability in people are prerequisites. What are these plans and tools?

Outside, in the hall, the members of the group were getting restive. Just then, the peon from the director's office rushed inside the hall to remind that it was 1P.M. and that the Ample Soft trainers were waiting for them. Everyone was upset. The experience of the last time when a new software without manual was introduced: The series of efforts, initial delays and mistakes in the work process because of lack of manuals, guidance, support and comfort level with new technology, the resulting embarrassing situations for the team as well as for the organization and finally memos from the boss – all flashed back in their mind. Hence, some eyebrows were raised over why another software was needed in addition to the existing system.

Only a small group - less than one-tenth of the total strength unwillingly reached the training venue. The training started:

- The trainer: "The time being short, I request all of you to start your laptops".
- The faculty: "Laptops! But we were not informed. We have not brought."
- The trainer: "You have not brought? But you were supposed to bring. How can we start the training without laptops?"
- Dr Rumani: "How the hell we'll come to know of it? We don't even know what is Ample Soft? What is its purpose? Why is it required? ---. We simply received an email that to attend this is mandatory and we came."

The trainers were paid hourly. They had to finish the training within an hour irrespective of understanding of the trainees. So, they started with whatever resources were available at the time

The lady trainer:"OK. Now look at the screen. You will enter www.amplesoft.com,this screen will come. Click this, this screen will appear. If you want to create class record, click this, enter this. If you want to create class schedule, enter this, add this ---." The faculty were blank and nervous. She Continued to speak for about thirty minutes. The training was hurriedly completed in a mechanical way. The trainees were more blank than they were earlier. The disgruntled faculty went back to their respective schools. They were all murmuring. "Is one or two half an hour mechanical training without manual sufficient?" "Is the system for only a few

IT and computer science people?" They outpoured their anger and frustration with the system and methodology of training and change management in front of Director Grievance – who half-heartedly listened to the employees. This added fuel to fire. The faculty developed a mood of protest. Understanding the gravity of situation, the director changed his tone and through his strong interpersonal skills, could pacify the faculty and assured them of all the possible support to manage the situation. The employees were temporarily cooled down. Nothing happened. The complaints were ignored. The trainers justified their training. The system was introduced with the consent of higher management. The people, who actually had to work had no say. Nobody bothered about them. The things were imposed.

The end term exams were hardly fifteen days away. The next day another e-mail came: "The Ample Soft will be functional from the running session itself. All the exam related entries will be made on Ample Soft. All the students will have to be enrolled on Ample Soft." Now the question: Who will enroll the students? Nothing was clear. There was no information. Except three champions no one knew how to do all these. Two of these champions were already too engaged with multifarious associated activities and the third one was silent with the anticipated increased work load. The selected few knew about third champion and made her do their work. No information for the rest. Was it unintentional? Or was it because no one felt it his/her responsibility to inform this to the concerned persons? Or none had information and clarity regarding these accountabilities? Or was it simply apathetic attitude towards and exploitation of those who were sincere and hard worker? However, finally, the pressure was created on the coordinators, who passed sleepless nights and worked day and night to complete the task.

Most of the faculty were working tirelessly. Much time was lost in tension to cope with the new technology. Why? Were the employee's dullards or were there pitfalls in the implementation system? The employees were aware of the significance of technology but were tense. Why? Was it because they did not want change or were there great loopholes in the manner of introduction of the new software and training? In the exam and result related process, several mistakes were committed. The results were delayed. Several errors occurred. The students gheraoed the higher authorities and indulged in vandalism. It was published in the newspapers, broadcasted in the news channels and was displayed on various social media. This affected the reputation severely. The speed of work slowed down and most of the time was wasted in rectification of errors. When errors took place, the employees got memo. This was highly demoralizing as they were already making their efforts. The consequence was –while a few worked tirelessly with a hope to get reward in vain, others resigned. Several employees of the Ample Soft trainer team also resigned. Every time when one tried to contact Ample Soft department, the information was. "This person has resigned. Please contact that person." Didn't it cause a drain on overall profitability? To reach the destination in the process of change journey, was the relationship between change and information ignored?

After a few days, the faculty members sitting in the campus cafeteria in a frustrated mood were discussing:

- Mrs Shaina: "In the organization, we are human beings or machines? Even machine when overburdened malfunctions. Does change depend on the whim of the top management only? The employees have to work as slaves or as part of the organization?"
- Dr Raghavan: "Can any change be the strengths of an organization without proper involvement of employees?"
- Dr Arpita: "It was really shocking to perceive how management at different levels perceived the internal communication process surrounding the change in the university: No prior information. No awareness. No manual till date."
- Mr Kartik: "Moreover, if any problem, we can contact only a selected few. If any matter remains unresolved, we as well as the students, even in the case of dire emergency cannot contact the senior People Soft officers only because they are too senior to talk to. I tell you my case- There was some complication in the case of the password of a student. We tried to contact the concerned person. He was on leave for two days. With great difficulty we managed a substitute number. When we contacted on that number, we came to know that the person had already resigned. As the affected student was restless he was sent to the Ample Soft department. Instead of solving the issue, the arrogant officer, wrote a complaining email against me to the director of school, 'Faculty sends student to Ample Soft.' Was it professional communication? When coordinator is handling every issue, is working day and night to cope with the changed technology; definitely, he might have tried to solve the problem and the student was sent to the Ample Soft department as a last resort. Can this kind of attitude and response lead to successful implementation of change? There is bragging, "Our team is ready to provide all help' When this is the response of the officer of the team what could be expected of the team?"

The resistance was brewing up. But again, Is the nomenclature 'resistance' appropriate or it seems to intrinsically convey an undesirable connotation to the message receivers. As there may be degree of negative reaction. Can we choose a more appropriate word like 'response' or 'reaction' which at least carries literally milder connotation?

The management team ended up telling rather than listening to what employees voiced back.

It seemed to be one dimensional approach and no session of interactive communications and problem solutions were put in place. These also became a barrier to the essence of employee's commitment to change. The ramifications were-employees' dissatisfaction, confusion and frustration and large scale employee turnover. Could it help achieve final goal: profitability and international standards?

The chancellor sitting in his office was remunerating over the issue of change and prodigality. The proverb "Prevention is better than cure" was haunting his mind. To identify the factors underpinning such consequences, he called up two meetings consecutively to address the issue. The first meeting was with a selected few and the second meeting with wider representation, was arranged in a big auditorium. The top management of the university, the officers of Ample Software Company, a professional counselor, the directors of all the schools and the representatives of faculty were present to discuss the situation. The faculty were surprised: No meeting of this kind in the past two months and now two meetings in two days? Why after loss? Why not before introduction?

The Chancellor (to software officers): “Sir we have invested a huge amount on this project. You were talking big of its success in other institutes and universities and had assured us of its success but, sorry to say, instead of doing good it has done much harm to us, although our employees are working much harder than they did earlier. How to reap huge rewards of this huge investment?”

Ample Soft Representative: “Sir, whenever an existing structure or process is replaced by the new one, anxiety of people is a natural phenomenon. If not properly and timely managed, this anxiety can sabotage the transitional efforts. Sir, I request your change management team to provide me the details of strategy adopted to take care of human component in the large transition effort. I hope it was not overlooked.”

The counselor: “With due respect to all, before further discussion I would like to have the following information:

- i. Did your team make an effort to analyze and understand individuals’ responses to change?
- ii. Were employees encouraged to participate in design, and to champion the new system?
- iii. Did the information flow timely, properly, with right content and through right channel?”

The Chancellor (to all): “In the meeting before introducing the software we had given certain guidelines (His secretary helps him to open the file.)” He reads:

- i. “The directors of all the schools and heads of several administrative departments should be timely informed.
- ii. The plan of transformation should be clearly communicated in advance in order to avoid potential loss of momentum, disappointment, and cynicism in certain groups of employees.
- iii. A “cascading-down” strategy from top officers to employees should be formed.
- iv. There should be provision for open discussion in the informal atmosphere.
 - He continued: “Are these instructions followed?”
 - Mr Uday: “Yes Sir”.
 - Directors of all Schools: “Pardon Sir. Sir, we were informed in the meeting held a day ago of the introduction of the software. The meeting was over at 8:00 P.M. and in the morning there was the email regarding the training.”
 - Mr Uday: “Sir two months ago, we had sent an email to all the employees.”
 - The Counselor: “So, I feel the concepts of utility were clear to a limited few and they were ready for the change but the concepts failed to reach the employees who had to actually work. They were not mentally prepared for this. There are two areas of the organization: One that is ready for change (Top management) and another that is unprepared.” (To Mr. Uday): “Did your members of change team make efforts to make communication strategy, which should serve as a critical instrument in facilitating changes or did it fall short of academics’ attention?”
 - The Chancellor: “To recapitulate, we want return on the amount invested. There cannot be reverse gear. Now, rethink, plan strategies and implement successfully. Establish an environment receptive to change. Focus on the mechanism to clarify the facts to various stakeholders of what is going to change, why, and what benefits they can expect to derive from the change.”

Now, the team had to become active. The members of the team rethought and planned to act holistically. A new circular was drafted to circulate across various departments in the university. The main points of the circular were:

Objective: To achieve international standards for expansion and for becoming a brand.

2. Advantages to Employees

- i. It will give the employees a feeling of pride that they are associated with a brand organization.
- ii. With expansion abroad, it will provide an opportunity to faculty to visit there in multiple ways: posting, faculty exchange, visiting faculty and the like.

With this, the change management team started the whole process again.

3. Questions

- Q1. Was the introduction of new technology wrong? Or was the manner of introduction wrong? Explain.
- Q2. Any change requires ample communication to reduce confusion and to align structural patterns to support the new direction. Hence, it is axiomatic (obvious) that good communication is an essential component in change management. Explain.
- Q3. Communication plays a crucial role in helping navigate change to the planned direction. Explain.
- Q4. Which incidents highlight significance of the tone and content of the messages to be delivered?