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**NAVIGATING THROUGH CHANGE IMPLEMENTATION BARRIERS IN
INSTITUTION OF LEARNING**

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Abstract

Globalization, fiscal and budgetary constraints, upsurge enrolment, international competition for ranking, advent of advance Information, Communication and Technology (ICT), pressure for accountability from the government and public, request for job-ready university products are some of new waves of change calling for different modifications in our citadels of learning at all levels. Leaders therein need to brace up to embrace the new norms and adjust accordingly. They need to accommodate international dimensions to compete in the global world, modify their curriculum to entail soft skills, provide open learning, advance online learning and artificial intelligence, review institution mission, restructure administration for quality assurance, create encompassing activities in order to significantly contribute to 2030 agenda of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Hence, change implementation is imperative. However, it is not an easy task. It always faces resistance and other challenges which leaders need to carefully and systemically bypass. This paper discussed various dimensions of change initiatives, causes of resistance and how to successfully navigate through change implementation hurdles. The discussion of the paper will help leaders in different institutions of learning to be battle ready for any type of change necessary to be implemented and able to successfully skip through the change process. It is recommended that leaders of various institutions of learning should embrace the new norms and adjust accordingly, acclimatize to the various dimensions of

change initiatives, causes of resistance and learn how to successfully navigate through change implementation.

Keywords: Change management, Resistance, Change leaders, Institution of learning

Introduction

Wave of Change

Educational institutions at all levels at present are facing unprecedented challenges and at the same time confronted with tumultuous environment, in which the old system of management, curriculum content, mode of teaching, method of assessment cannot successfully cope with the demands of the time. Educational institutions cannot remain idle in the face of myriad emergent issues such as globalization, fiscal and budgetary constraints, upsurge enrolment, international competition for ranking, advent of advance Information, Communication and Technology (ICT), pressure for accountability from the government and public, new innovative ideals need to be introduced. This will make institutions of learning to significantly serve the society and meet the needs and aspirations of the ever inquisitive students (Abusalim, 2020; Alexander & Manolchev, 2020).

There is a need for educational institutions to modify school curriculum to reflect the demand of the society. The society is no longer requesting for 'excellent bookish' products from institutions of learning rather they sought for innovators, collaborators, problem solvers, critical, creative and entrepreneurial students and team players. This is due to flexible nature of social interactions among people nowadays which disregard solo thinker and poor economic downturn which requires creativity in order to survive. Henceforth, citadels of learning have no other choice than to adjust the curriculum to incorporate soft skills, collaborative skills, non-cognitive skills, and critical thinking skills (Zawacki-Richter & Naidu, 2016; Tait, 2018; Gachino, 2019; Reimers, 2020)

Globalisation is another pressurizing factor which calls for training of students as global citizens rather than individuals with myopic understanding of global events. The exodus of university

products to other countries for different reasons, economic, academics or political requires students to have intercultural understanding of how to live a successful life in any clime they find themselves. Thus, institutions of learning, from lower level to higher level of education all over the world need to accommodate international dimensions, expand their curriculum and extra curriculum to accommodate international activities and programmes such as internationalized curriculum, open learning, study exchange programmes, international conference, recruitment of international staff etc. (Salmon, 2014; OECD, 2016; Treshchevsky et al., 2018). In fact, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have no other choice than to participate in the 'game of thrones' global university rankings for meaningful international competition.

Also, COVID-19 pandemic has ushered in new dimension to mode of delivery of instructions in citadels of learning. As the pandemic kept the whole world indoor, many institutions who are battle ready and have braced up for eventuality of the VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous) world quickly switched to online learning. They were able to wither the storm while others who are yet to accommodate emergent technology tools have their academic calendar disrupted. Right from this time, both Lower and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across the world have swung into action by making different new initiatives, such as open learning, online learning, virtual universities, Open Educational Resources (OER), artificial intelligence, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC)(Reimers, 2020)

Quality assurance evaluation conducted by schools in most times requires drastic change efforts. The evaluation may be both internal and external. However, both require modification of something in the system. Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) which is done at the institutional level may necessitate review of the mission, administration and management, academic programmes, performance and appropriateness of the teaching staff, availability and effective use of learning resources, physical facilities, financial auditing and evaluation of students' services. External quality assurance is carried out for programmatic evaluation where a course is evaluated for accreditation or otherwise. Both internal and external quality assurances will require transfer of staff, introduction of new ideal, restructure of system, introduction or abrogation of policies and procedures etc. For better

performance in the aspect of quality assurance, different change initiatives are required to be diligently implemented.

Finally, institutions of learning need to undertake change initiatives and radical transformation in order to contribute meaningfully to the attainment of 2030 agenda of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which all countries across the globe aim at. So as Educational Institutions throughout the world brace up for the change efforts, change initiative is expected to be an encompassing one which will cut across different aspects such as mission and vision, teaching pedagogy, managerial development, curriculum, quality assurance, leadership, physical and financial resources etc.

However, it is easier said than done. Change initiative is herculean task which requires diligence and most importantly knowledge regarding change implementation. The success or otherwise of change initiatives depends largely on how skill and sophisticated the leadership anchoring such initiatives is as regards to change implementation (Akinbode & Al Shuhumi, 2018; Christie et al., 2019; Daniela, 2024; Judith et al., 2024).

In fact, implementing change initiatives in higher education institution has been confirmed to be a complex, tedious and an ominous task. The reason identified is that typically higher education institution is a complex and loosely coupled system as well as an organized anarchy system (Reimers, 2020). It is an amalgam of professional expertise, with extreme collegiality, extended dialogue and consensus. Officiating any transformation or change endeavours in any institutions made of academia requires efficient leaders, who understand deeply the concept of change, can effectively communicate the vision of the change initiative, navigate through the barriers and fear which normally accompanied new initiative and strategically and technically suppress formal and informal resistant power aiming to obstruct the success of the change process (Christie et al., 2019).

This paper therefore discussed the concept of change and barriers confronting change initiatives with the aim of equipping leaders and managers who will anchor any change initiatives with right knowledge needed to succeed in implementing change and successfully sail through resistance to change. This will help in saving colossal loss that may occur to the huge investment and effort expended on new initiatives. It will as well assist in avoiding disruption that often occurs

to teaching and learning activities when any change initiatives are carried out. Thus, with this, everyone in the system will be able to reap the benefit accruable from the efforts and the efforts of the school management will not be jeopardized while credibility of school leaders will be protected.

The Concept of Change In Institutions of Learning

Change can be synonymously used for improvement, reform, innovation, development, adjustment or evolution (Liang et al., 2022). Change is sometimes defined based on the context it is used. For instance, at lower level of education, it may mean development of school plant, improvement in teaching methods, parental participation and students' excellent performance. In higher institutions of learning level, the term may imply quality assurance, policy reform, technological innovation, improvement in the budgetary allocation, structural reform, autonomy, accreditation, curriculum development or ranking improvement.

Institutions of learning usually embark on change initiatives in order to improve overall organisational performance. Sometimes, change may be done to improve a specific section of the system such as student, staff, curriculum or school facilities. Change initiatives may affect organizational structure, vision and mission, school practice, mode of teaching, teaching-learning tools, organisational culture, policy and procedures governing the institution (Salmon, 2014; Judith et al., 2024). If change leaders fail to manage change initiative effectively, any section of the school affected may resist and persuade others to make the change mission unachievable.

Change initiatives at times may be emergent as a result of unforeseen circumstances. That is why administrators of citadels of learning regardless of their levels should be well fortified to respond positively to any emergency. Change may be intentional or unintentional, planned, unplanned, gradual or abrupt, evolutionary or revolutionary, anticipatory or reactionary. None of the types of changes can be waived by leaders. How such change initiatives are handled will determine whether it will be a blessing or otherwise for the organisation.

Zawacki-Richter and Naidu (2016) explored trends and change initiatives undertaken in higher institutions of learning. He categorised

them into three: Macro –level, Meso-level and Micro-level. The Macro-level initiatives have to do with changes in the area of access, teaching methodology, equity, internationalisation, knowledge transfer, quality assurance and ethics. The Meso-level initiatives are in the area of management, organizational restructuring, educational technology, professional development, students support services and faculty development. The third initiative, micro level, entails change initiatives in the area of e-learning, instructional design, course design, and involvement in “MOOCs, “OER” etc.

For effectiveness and efficiency of any level of change initiatives, administrators have to bear in mind that no change implementation is hurdle free; it will definitely face little or many challenges. Knowledge of change initiation is the only way to navigate all through. Scholars and researchers of management opined that implementation of change initiatives is one of the greatest challenges facing leaders of various institutions in twenty first century (Inceoglu, 2018; Alexander & Manolchev, 2020; Roodbari, 2023)

Judith et al. (2024) asserted that the only way to succeed in change implementation is that those anchoring change endeavours should possess technical know-how of change management process. This will reflect in how they build a shared vision of the change initiatives, effectively communicate with people regarding the change vision, create an enabling environment for the change and how they handle and react to resistance to change. Roodbari (2023) stated that there is a need for strong, personal leadership from the top that can provide a clear focus as the organizations discard their traditional, hierarchical organizational structure in favour of learner, flatter, boundary-less forms comprising smaller, autonomous networking units.

Barriers/Resistance to Change implementation

Merriam Webster Dictionary opined that the word “resist” means “to fight against something “or “remain strong against” its effect or force. In an organizational or institutional context, resistance refers to an act of refusing to comply with the new rule, accept the new status quo, implement or participate in a change initiative (Pardo-del-val & Martinez-fuentes, 2019). Human being naturally love to uphold and maintain status quo, hence, when a new initiative is introduced, or there is a need for general transformation, resistance sets in to halt the

change. The gravity of resistance depends on the nature or type of change initiatives, preparedness of the organisation and skillfulness of the change leaders (Baesu & Bejinaru, 2013).

Resistance to change can be expressed through overt behaviour of the resisters in form of sabotaging, ridiculing, threatening, blaming, distorting, blocking or rationalizing. Resistance expressed through resisters' actions is easily noticeable. The other way of resisting is through covert behaviour, resisters will intentionally ignore the change initiatives, show apathy to it, refuse to implement the change initiatives, withdraw necessary contribution that can make change initiatives successful or sometimes act in pretension (Pardo-del-val & Martinez-fuentes, 2019). People resist change in organisations due to different reasons. Setyanto et al. (2019) opined that people may resist change due to shock or fear of the change initiatives, poor timing of execution, self-interest, satisfaction with status quo, poor communication or fear to lose prestige .

Beer and Nohria (2000) opined that resistance to change may be due to leadership practice of the change leaders. They asserted that if change leaders fail to combine and integrate theory E (change approach that focuses on economic value) with theory O (change approach that focuses on organization capability), resistance will automatically set in. They explained further that resistant factors that can come from leaders include poor buy-in strategy, poor communication, inadequate support from leaders and failure to prepare heart and mind for the intended change.

Guidetti et al. (2018) traced causes of resistance to unclear goal, lack of incentives and poor performance measure, fear of losing current benefits or positions, poor understanding or misconception of change purpose. Pardo-del-val and Martinez-fuentes (2019) categorize causes of resistance into three major factors: 1. Individual factors which entail personal factors such as need for achievement, locus of control and previous experiences of change initiatives; 2. Group factors such as social norms and group cohesiveness 3. Organisational factors which include threat to the status quo, fear of unknown and restructuring, and workload consequences.

The three factors are related to what Graetz et al (2006) described as anxiety. They state that employees develop anxiety as a result of change initiatives because they are oblivious of what the

outcome of change will be, thus, they want to maintain the status quo and be battle ready to resist anything that may tamper their comfort zone. They can even form group to protect their value and power and resist any change tampering their social, organizational and psychological status.

Pardo-del-val and Martinezfuentes (2019) on their own asserted that resistance to change can occur either during formulation or implementation stage. At former stage, resistance is in form of distorted perceptions of change need, low motivation for change and lack of creative response while the implementation stage may witness political or cultural deadlock and leadership inaction.

It is important however for change leaders to know that resistance to change passes through four stages. The first stage is 'denial stage' where people defend their present situation and deny the new change vehemently. At the second stage which is 'defensive stage', people totally reject suitability of the change for themselves and persuade people to see unsuitability of the change initiatives. The third stage is 'discarding stage' where resisters begin to forget about the past and prepare themselves to give a second look at the change initiatives. Finally, 'adaptation stage' stage sets in. Resisters start experimenting. They try to internalize the new change, new policy, new role and learn new skills needed to live successful with the transformation.

It should be noted that resistance has both positive and negative effects on change initiatives. The positive side is that it can pave way for improvement of the change initiative because the reaction may serve as a feedback loop for the change initiatives (Chandler, 2013). Graetz et al. (2006) asserted that resistance to change can help leaders to reconsider hasty plans and remarshalling employees' support for the new initiatives. Pardo-del-val and Martinez-fuentes (2019) opined that resistance can compel change initiators to harness people into problem-solving process, re-communicate the change vision and opt for better alternative ideas. However, the negative effects of resistance is that it makes change vision unachievable, jeopardize efforts expended, lead to wastage of resources, cause setback for the organisation and affect integrity and capability of stakeholders involved.

It is therefore pertinent for leaders and administrators of institutions of learning to learn how to successfully implement change initiatives and navigate through the ordeal of resistance.

Implementation of change initiatives and navigating through resistance

1. Application of Lewin's Force Field of Change approach

The force field theory was propounded in 1946 by Kurt Lewin who was a theorist and social scientist. Lewin opined that before change is introduced, there is the need to understand the present condition or situation, known as the status quo, of the organisation. The status quo in a social group entails two contending forces which are the driving forces (forces promoting change) and restraining forces (forces working against change). In the course of introducing change initiatives, change initiators firstly need to break the equilibrium of the forces and this is known as unfrozen the status quo. To set equilibrium, psychological attachment to the existing organisation culture, method, procedures has to be broken. This can be done in the form of explaining the need for the change initiatives and the benefits accruable to the individuals and organisations from the new initiatives. This will motivate the people to voluntarily embrace the new change (Richard, 2020). Individuals in an organization will always resist any initiative they assume will create frustration or discomfort for them. Unless sufficient psychological safety is created by the change leaders, people will deny the new practice, hence, there will be learning and survival anxiety. Consequently, resistance will set in and no change will take place (Anyieni, 2016).

2. Strategic implementation of change initiatives

Changing implementation means that people will discard old ways to embrace new method. Thus, this should be done systematically and in phases. The time of the change implementation should also be technically considered. Choice of time is imperative especially it should not be the time that will seriously affect the recipients or at odd time. Some people may resist change initiatives because they lack required knowledge and skills to handle the new innovation, so, it behooves of change leaders to train people on the change initiatives before

executing the new ideas. Management also needs to procure tools, materials, advanced technical equipment that will facilitate the new initiatives while physical facilities or enabling environment that will sustain the initiative should be provided with alternative. Time for adjustment to the new policy, procedures, structure or law should be provided while in the case of change initiative involving technology or data system, back up should be readily available. In addition, carrot approach should be utilised at the beginning to allow people to adjust to the new norms (Almalki et al., 2017).

3. Communication

Communication is a key important factor for success of a change endeavour and any innovation undertaken. Communication should begin before the change process begins. There is a need to survey people's opinions to find out how they feel about the change and what they fear, their suggestions can also be sought. The change recipients' mind must be prepared and those involved must be adequately kept abreast.

Researchers of change management opined that 70% of change initiatives failed as a result of poor communication on the part of change initiators (Al-alawi et al., 2019; Setyanto et al., 2019). Communication expected is a deeper message not merely conveyance of messages but emotional appeal to convince people's heart to accept the new system. Change communication is a change initiative wheel. It should be comprehensive and encompassing expressing the need for the change, the modality of the change process, the benefits accruable from the change, the duration and who to contact for enquiries and complaints. Communication will help in providing answers to the questions troubling people's mind due to the change process. Institution leaders should inform the staff, students and all concerned stakeholders on what improvement is expected from the change endeavour and what benefits will be gained from it (Fullan & Stielgelbauer, 1991; Akinbode & Al Shuhumi, 2018).

Apart from survey, deliberation, professional consultation, websites, social media are other avenues of updating people and getting information from them. During the change process, communication should not be one way off; it should be a continuous action so that resistance will be tamed intellectually and timely.

Consistent update will help in uprooting rumours that always accompany change initiatives and will also boost morale of employees involved. Kotter (2008) suggested that change leader has to convince at least 75% of the managers to avoid massive resistance.

4. Commitment of leaders and stakeholders to the change process

For change initiative to succeed, especially in institutions of higher learning with their own unique features, it requires full commitment on the part of the leaders. Change implementation requires deliberate and committed efforts of all stakeholders for the success of the change initiatives. Some leaders exhibit laissez faire leadership style in the middle of change process. However, to succeed, change leadership need to be ready to attend to both pros and cons of the change initiatives. There will be many unexpected eventualities which require leaders on standby mode.

Therefore, leaders should ensure that the change initiative is needed at the onset and worthwhile, ensure it is done at appropriate time or period, assign portfolios and tasks to competent team, be active throughout the whole process, encourage all staff to participate, attend to the resistors by convincing them, solve the accompanied challenges or obstacles, and be available to provide back up for any missing action and ready to take responsibility for any outcome of the change process. All these deliberate actions of the leaders will go a long way to make the change initiatives achievable.

5. Provision of needed resources

Effective change implementation requires two major resources: human and non-human. Both of them needed to be prepared as they are indispensable, otherwise, change initiatives will fail. The human sides of change management include effective leadership and management, staff training, and assigning team and portfolio. The non-human resource entails financial support or monetary factor that will be expended on the change initiatives, budgetary evaluation and allocation, and availability of physical facilities and identified materials (Meskhi et al., 2019). The resources needed also extend to political support, administrative support and buy-in strategy. This should be prepped for effective implementation of any change endeavour.

6. Converting institution to learning organisation

Implementation of change initiatives is easier in some organisations than others depending on the nature of the organisation. In a learning organisation, change implementation is easier than others. Learning organization is defined by Senge (1992) as “organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive habits of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free and where people are continually learning how to learn together”.

In such organizations, they build shared vision, expose to new things, develop system thinking and team learning, possess enabling structures, open self-development opportunities for all, allow participative policy making, give room for inter-organizational learning and develop mutual consultation and respect. In such organisation, change initiatives thrive and resistance is limited. To navigate through change process, institution leaders have to turn their institutions into learning organization (Percy & Dow, 2021). Rome, of course, is not built in a day. They will have to put institution on the cause right before change introduction or implementation. An organisation devoid of learning organisation features will surely rise against new things as it will always perceive change as a threat.

7. Ethical or cultural consideration

Change often times is viewed from the technical dimension while the human side is ignored. The human side or the ethical factor includes culture of the institution, ethics of the organisation, social and political influence, employees’ diversity, organisation vision, legal and policy issues, etc. Proposed change implementation must be relevant to the vision of the institution, in tandem with culture of the institution, consider staff and students diversity.

Organizational culture entails core values, beliefs, aspirations and behaviours that have been held and developed over time. It includes rules, structures and policies formally written in the organization document and unwritten code of conduct prestigiously upheld by people in the organization through the social interaction in the organization (Kaufman, 2013; Setyanto et al., 2019). Organizational cultures are values and feelings held important in the organization that

cannot be tampered with. So any new innovation that fails to recognise and consider these salient factors will be fiercely resisted.

8. Engage in SWOT (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threat) analysis

Change leaders have to analyze the organization's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) in executing change initiatives. The strengths to consider include institution politics, financial capacity, availability of human and physical resources needed for the change initiatives. The external factors (Opportunities and Threat) that have impact on any change initiatives include government policy, competitive advantage, and customers' satisfaction. Considering the pros and cons of the new initiatives and capacity on ground to cope with aftermath of the new wave, change initiatives should not be haphazardly implemented. Otherwise, resistance will set in and more complex problems will be created than intended progress. It is after conducting SWOT analysis that change initiatives should be implemented (De Weger et al., 2020).

Conclusion and Recommendations

In this present time, institutions of learning will either embrace change or being eroded by the wave of change. No way of running out. So all leaders therein need to brace up to embrace the new norms and adjust accordingly. They should therefore acclimatize to the various dimensions of change initiatives, causes of resistance and how to successfully navigate through change implementation. This paper has succinctly discussed all these cogent points and with understanding of this, leaders will be battle ready for any type of change necessary to be implemented and able to skip through different hurdles that normally accompanied change initiatives. Consequently, institutions of learning will successfully cope in the ever changing world, produce better products that will be useful to themselves in the dynamic world and able to raise the bar of their nation in the global world.

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