Comparison of Change Management Models and Suggestions for Top Management

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Abstract

This article presents comparison of selected change management models, including pros and cons of different models. Model comparison is done from four different perspectives: 1. Usability and scalability, 2. Effectiveness, 3. Transparency and communication, 4. Autonomous versus controlled motivating. The article concludes with comparison summary and presents suggestions for companies evaluating their change management strategies and models.

Keywords: change management, models, comparison

1. Introduction

The text provides an overview of five change management models: Kurt Lewin's 3-step model, Gestalt psychology, John P. Kotter's 8-step model, the ADKAR model, and Sari Savolainen's Constructive Change Model. Each model is briefly described, and their pros and cons are compared in four tables covering usability and scalability, effectiveness, transparency, and communication, and autonomous versus controlled motivating. The conclusion suggests that while all models have commonalities, they vary in their approaches, with some being more theoretical and psychology-oriented, while others are business and management-focused. The choice of a model depends on the specific needs of a change initiative, and good change managers often apply multiple theories. The text also emphasizes the importance of trustworthiness and competencies in visioning, organizing, motivating, and communicating for effective change management. Additionally, it suggests that large organizations should lead change through a change portfolio to balance the rhythm and magnitude of different changes and avoid negatively impacting performance over time. The final recommendation is for the management of large Finnish industrial companies to invest in training and education in change management.

2. Comparison

The five change management models are here shortly presented, followed by model comparison tables. This article does not cover the details of the different models.

Kurt Lewin (1890 – 1947) was one of the prominent figures in the field of social psychology and is often recognized as "the founder of social psychology" or "the father of social change theories" (Haggbloom et al. 2002; Huarn et al. 2016). The focus of his theories and models is on individual and group behavior; the importance of changing individuals to make an organizational change happen. His 3-step model, often cited as Lewin's key contribution to organizational change, consists of three steps: 1. Unfreezing, 2. Changing, 3. Refreezing (Burnes 2004; Lewin 1947).

Gestalt psychology is a school of psychology that emerged in the early 20th century among a group of German-Austrian psychologists. Gestalt psychologists emphasize that organisms perceive entire patterns or configurations, rather than merely individual components. The Gestalt approach offers a way on looking for and respecting what already exists. Starting by asking, how does the system function and what is well-developed, only then looking for what is missing or what is underdeveloped. Gestalt puts emphasis on contacts with people, context, history and need. In Gestalt approach the cycle of experiences and change process consists of: Framing, Showing, Listening, Practice, Change, Closure (Farrands 2012; Gillie 2011; Nevis 1987).

John P. Kotter is internationally regarded as the authority on leadership and change. Kotter originally introduced his eight-step change model in his 1995 book "Leading Change". The model consists of 8-steps proceeding in sequence to

accomplish a successful change. Kotter's 8-step change process begins with creating urgency and finishes up with making the change stick (Kotter 2008; Kotter 2012).

The ADKAR model is a goal-oriented change management model that guides individual and organizational change, originally created by Prosci founder Jeff Hiatt in 2003. ADKAR is an acronym that represents the five tangible and concrete outcomes that individuals need to achieve for change to be successfully realized: Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability and Reinforcement. These goals or outcomes are sequential and cumulative, meaning they must be achieved in order. The ADKAR model underlines that changes have two dimensions: the business / project side of change and the people side of change (Prosci 2020).

On her Jyväskylä University Doctoral Thesis "Cognitive appraisal theory and psychological acceptance during organizational change", Sari Savolainen (2015) presents a Constructive change execution model. According to her thesis, in an organizational change situation, the main challenge is on managing people's unique and individual behavior and their psychological processes. On this basis, change management should focus on how to guide individuals' actions and behavior away from Destructive, to the direction of Constructive. To make organization's constructive change possible, Savolainen presents Constructive change execution model, consisting of 7 steps change process (Savolainen 2015).

The model comparison with pros and cons is presented in the following four tables, each table having their own perspective for comparison: 1. Usability and scalability, 2. Effectiveness, 3. Transparency and communication, 4. Autonomous versus controlled motivating. Change models and approaches presented have slightly different influence levels, from creating an urgency, like in Kotter's model, to focusing on the change from within. The models have different emphasis for example in motivation, communication, scalability and level of psychology. Each model has their pros and cons. Therefore, *change management in practice requires certain knowledge of the theories, for change managers being able to choose the correct approaches for their change initiatives*.

It is obvious that all the models seek to make a change that lasts. This requires a high level of transparency. The models differ a bit on the level of transparency, depending on the *management approaches, such as Top-down vs. Bottom-up*, or change from the environment vs. change from within. For example, in Kurt Lewin's 3-step model of change, an efficient change manager is needed to move the organization towards accomplishing the target goals in each step. In all the change steps, manager and the employees managed should work together in a team to drive from one point to another until reaching another static point again. Such teamwork requires high level of transparency and open sharing of information. The ADKAR change model is a great tool not only for change management, but also for individuals that are going through a change by themselves. It helps people to stay on track during the different steps of change. Sari Savolainen's Constructive Change Model has a very humanistic approach on change management, as the model is based mainly on psychology, individual's cognitive processes and feelings. Also, Gestalt Approach acts on change from individual perception, having a high focus on social psychology. Gestalt Approach is often seen as very theoretical and difficult for most to understand. It might be challenging to use in practice, even for change management professionals. Whereas Kotter's 8-step model offers a fighting chance to change company's ways of working, emphasizing business management. It's self-guiding and clear path with important steps which are easy to describe for people participating. The power of Kotter's model resides in people and the more rallied persons are involved, the faster and more effective the change movement is.

In terms of usability and scalability, in large organizations it's often difficult and time consuming to do the background research and planning, communicating effectively, getting feedback, and sensing the atmosphere. Thus, using Savolainen's Constructive Change Model or Gestalt approach could be challenging in large organizations if a major, fast pacing change is needed. Gestalt approach is highly consultative method to pursue change. ADKAR could be a usable model for changing and fixing dysfunctional processes in organizations operations. The organization should check all the five ADKAR elements, and if some of these are missing or is not complete, they could start by filling in the missing parts. ADKAR approach is clear and simple for everyone to use, also on a personal level outside working life. Kurt Lewin's model makes emphasis on building a trustworthy teamwork. Kotter's 8-step model is excellent for business, marketing and sales related operations. All the models are somewhat scalable to different organizations, situations, and changes. Though for example focusing on each individual's thoughts is impossible in the case of large organization with a major change initiative. Some models react more from the inside, whereas others focus more on influences from the outside.

It's worth noting that the more grounded and individual-based the change theory is, the more time consuming it is for the management. Gestalt approach, Kurt Lewin's, and Sari Savolainen's models require collecting data, sensing organizations atmosphere, and general understanding of social psychology. Such theories could be challenging for

managers not interested or not familiar with the psychological aspects of management. ADKAR and Kotter's models are more straightforward, easier for everyone to understand and less time-consuming. In terms of autonomous versus controlled motivating, all models seek to positively affect the automotive motivation. Motivated people are willing to work for the change, they are willing to do the needed actions for desired changes to happen – changes either in themselves or in the environment. Gestalt approach and Lewin's 3-step model put a high focus on individuals and their psychology, changing people from the inside. Whereas ADKAR and Kotter's model lean on motivation through excellent management and leadership, motivating groups rather than focusing too detailed on individuals. Savolainen's model lands somewhere between, as it focuses on listening and involving individuals. On the other hand, it requires excellent management and leadership skills, also some experience in the field of psychology. In the end, all the models seek to get individuals and groups autonomously motivated, moving towards the common goals for change. Some just focus more on organizational change management and leadership, others put more value and trust on individuals, their mind and self-awareness.

Table 1. Model comparison: Usability and Scalability

Model comparison: Usability and Scalability

Change model	Lewin's 3-step	Gestalt	Kotter's 8-step	ADKAR	S. Savolainen
Pros (+) and Cons (-)	+ Simple and easy to use +- Universal and general - Unfreezing can be challenging and difficult - Criticized for not being scalable to major changes in large organizations	+ Identifies key issues, the core for the change + Tendency towards meaning making + Experiential and experimental, can be applied in various situations - Emphasis on unique personal approach to change, might be difficult to scale up - Requires lots of continuous listening, difficult and inconcrete	+ Simple and self-guiding, instructive +Can be scaled - Needs aware leaders - Organization spirit and culture plays a major role on the outcome - Situation dependent, requires the right case to build from - Criticized for being commercial rather than academic	+ Easy, logical and systematic + Practical + Lots of training and support throughout the change process - Not for any business - Rather commercial, made by American consultant company	+ Practical and detailed + Applicable in small and mid-sized organizations -Rather complicated and indistinct, might be hard to follow - Not for quick changes, requires lots of preparing work and research in the beginning.

Table 2. Model comparison: Effectiveness

Model comparison: Effectiveness

Change model	Lewin's 3-step	Gestalt	Kotter's 8-step	ADKAR	S. Savolainen
Pros (+) and Cons (-)	+ Great model for general use, to be used in different kinds of change situations + Can be effective in many situations with small adjustments - Rather time consuming	+ Aims towards a sustainable change in the grounds of perception + Develops common vision for the individuals involved + Actions make impact and establish a new environment - Time consuming, slow to emerge and highlights all the essential dilemmas - May feel slow, soft and useless for the participants	+ Once all the steps are properly completed, should create a permanent change, a new status quo - Time consuming and difficult if people are not rallied together - Requires rather experienced, effective and capable leaders	+ Effective in many different types of changes + Compelling in a good way - Might take a lot of time - Might be too simplified and straight-forward in some cases	+ Effective for long-term permanent changes in rather small organizations - Time consuming - Could be too complex, especially for inexperienced or non-academic leaders - Difficult to use in large organizations, since feedback and effective communication is difficult with masses

Table 3. Model comparison: Transparency & Communication

Model comparison: Transparency & Communication

Change model	Lewin's 3-step	Gestalt	Kotter's 8-step	ADKAR	S. Savolainen
Pros (+) and Cons (-)	+ Identifies issues neglected + Focus on individuals as part of the change, their needs and feelings - Requires high focus and communication on an individual level, which is often challenging in large organizations	+ Builds up awareness of self and others + Acknowledges and uses past, presence and future + Emphasis on listening and communication + Possibilities to create new data, knowledge within a group - Does everything need to be shared with the whole organization?	+ High level of transparency needed - Requires excellent communication skills and leadership from the management	+ Simple steps for everyone to follow + Very transparent - Requires lots of coaching and training	+ Very transparent model, open communication - Getting feedback from masses is difficult and time-consuming - Can be too complicated and time-consuming in large organizations

Table 4. Model comparison: Autonomous vs. Controlled motivating

Model comparison: Autonomous vs. Controlled motivating

Change model	Lewin's 3-step	Gestalt	Kotter's 8-step	ADKAR	S. Savolainen
Pros (+) and Cons (-)	+ Focus on supporting individuals' autonomous motivation + Group or an organization changes only through individuals' motivation and positivity - Psychologic approach, might be challenging for some business managers	+ Establishes level of commitment and autonomous piloting to reach common goal + Systemic approach on change from intra- and inter-personal to small groups and lastly organization - Requires high level of individual motivation and awareness, which can be a challenge especially in large organizations	+ Fuels autonomous motivation + Adds self-guiding motivation and spirit - Can be more motivating to management than employees	+ Goal is to get people through the change together by using simple steps - Requires a lot of time from managers, especially during the Knowledge step	+ Focus on listening, feedback and involving individuals + Goal is to get people motivated and acting autonomously - Requires excellent leadership and people skills, even some psychology skills. This could be a challenge for many managers.

3. Conclusions and Suggestions

All the five presented change management models have something in common, but each has their own kind of approaches and framing. Some models have a broader and more general view, by purpose leaving case dependent details open for the change manager to adapt and adjust, depending on the needs of a certain change case. Others, such as Kotter and ADKAR, have rather ready-made clear steps to be used in organizations large or small, public, or private. Some of the models focus more on individuals and psychology, while others are business and management oriented, rather straightforward models. *It's obvious that choosing the proper change management theories and models might be challenging. Good change managers often apply several different theories and approaches for managing the change process, specific strategies depending on the features of a certain change initiative.*

Even though change management is broadly studied among management researchers and practitioners, there is no consensus on how change situations should be led. The fragmentation of change management theories leaves the manager able to use a wide range of different methods. This in turn can make it challenging to utilize consistent practices and assessments in managing change. All in all, good change managers must have good *competences on visioning, organizing, motivating, and communicating. Also, a good leader is trustworthy and reliable. People follow a person they can rely on. Trustworthiness in emphasized especially in change situations, as some level of uncertainty is always present in changes.*

Kurt Lewin, Gestalt approach and Sari Savolainen's model are more theoretical and psychology oriented, at least some of them being more difficult to practice concretely in business management. Especially the Gestalt approach might be difficult to use in practice, as it's seen difficult to understand even for the change management professionals. Though *all the theories help business managers in understanding the basic principles of change management and the aspect of social psychology involved in organizational changes.* For example, Kurt Lewin's "Unfreeze, Change, Refreeze" is often seen as the very basis of change management as most of the later developed theories and models lay their ground on Lewin's basic principles. Nevertheless, more commercial models like Kotter's 8-step model or the ADKAR model might often be easier for managers to understand, adapt and practice. Savolainen's constructive change execution model is democratic, bottom-up approach where employees are involved in decision-making, and they are given more responsibility. Though most major companies and organizations, also in Finland, are used to top-down management, where change management and decision-making is done by top-management. Employee involving, more participatory

bottom-up models might work better in minimizing change resistance, as the employees accept changes better when taken along and given more responsibility in initial change planning.

In addition to the models presented, large organization's top-management should always lead their change management through a change portfolio. *Rhythm and magnitude of different changes influences organization's performance, as changes always require resources and time. Herold et al. (2008)* point out that too many changes over a short period of time significantly reduces organization's performance. *The organization requires enough time for recovery, time for adapting and making a certain change happen. Too many changes done too frequently has a negative impact on performance over time. Thus, large organizations should have a change portfolio with a responsible portfolio manager, so that different change projects around the organization are led and controlled in a proper manner, without too much harming organization's general performance.*

As final suggestion, *it is recommended that the management of large industrial companies would train and educate themselves more in change management. Based on our research, many companies still have a lot to improve in their change management and change processes.*

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