

Change Management in Telecommunication Departments: A Case Study in East Azerbaijan Telecommunication Company

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Abstract

Political instabilities, technology advancements, changing customer tastes, globalization, and cultural changes are among the factors constantly forcing telecommunication organizations to change. Thus, change is certain in telecommunication organizations nowadays. Managers in this departments realize the significance of change management in the change process. This is shown and published in numerous studies. However, there seems to be lack of managerial structures that help telecommunication companies implement effective change management practices. This paper presents a managerial framework for the implementation of change management in telecommunication departments. The framework is constructed using empirical findings from one case study of East Azerbaijan telecommunication companies. It consists of four main dimensions, namely change planning, change management, change reinforcement, and change feedback collection. The value of this framework is that it represents an initial attempt to explore factors of successful change management in telecommunication departments. The paper concludes with research and practice applications of the managerial framework.

Keywords: Change management, telecommunication, theoretical framework, case study.

Introduction

Telecommunication companies Nowadays witness dramatic changes at all levels. There are many drivers for change in the telecommunication departments; caused by technological advancement, fierce competition that has risen drastically in the last years, and the need to develop new services in the telecommunication departments (Hodges, 1995). Telecommunication organizations need razor-sharp reflexes to cope with the fast changing technologies and management skills. Therefore, change management is a vital tool to be adopted by the telecommunication departments to maintain development and growth (Kanter 1991; Tsekoa 2002). As organizational changes have become more frequent and a necessity for survival, the resistance of employees in this departments has become an important human

resources management function and a priority for top management to increase chances of success of various change projects.

In other words, without appropriate body in the organization to communicate with employees, organizational inappropriate practices may even increase resistance of employees. In addition, creating awareness and reasons for change must be clear and simple and that communicating these reasons must be realistic and linked to the vision in the company in order for employees to buy-in. With this in mind, there seems to be lack of change management structures that help telecommunication companies choose the most appropriate course of action to explore successfully during change process. This paper goals at closing this gap by constructing a managerial framework of change management in the telecommunication departments. The framework is constructed using empirical findings from one case study of East Azerbaijan telecommunication companies. The intended change management framework is intended to help individuals as well as managers to move successfully from a current state to a future state while achieving the desired output in order to establish competitive advantages and sustainability. The paper is further organized into nine sections.

The Concept of Change Management

Change is one of the difficult challenges that organizations face these days. Robbins (2003) defines change as making things various. Change is everywhere, it is unavoidable and it needs successful handling to make organizations explore successfully though it (Davidson, 2002). Raftery (2009) stated that undergoing a new change is the most difficult matter and it is questionable of success and it always has enemies whom are beneficiaries from the old system. Garber (2013) mentioned that change is inevitable in the workplace, so the role of the manager is to embrace the change by making the transition process easier. Davidson (2002) explained that change refers to an important difference in what was before, it can include doing work in new ways, using new tools or systems, using new reporting structures, new roles in the job, producing new products or introducing new services, following new managerial procedures, merging, reorganizing or other unrest and change in job location or markets. Therefore, change management is taking a proactive approach about how the change is treated within an organization.

Significance of Change Management

Change management facilitates employees getting back to their work after change happens and makes it faster and more effective (O'Neill, 2012). Hiatt and Creasey (2012) stated that change management helps employees adapt and embrace change by reducing employees' resistance to attain the objectives of business. They have also explained that change initiatives are always undertaken because there is a better chance or there is a problem to solve in the current state. Hence, organizations must manage change to ensure that it produces the expected results. Change management help individuals to embrace change and adapt new skills, behaviors, and values by change managers, whom make individuals able to transit successfully from the current state to the future one (Fernandez and Rainey, 2006; Kunze et al., 2013).

Change Management Models and structures

As it was stated earlier in this paper, there seems to be lack of managerial structures that help telecommunication companies implement effective change management practices. This paper closes this gap by presenting a managerial framework for the implementation of change management in the telecommunication departments. This has been deemed necessary as all of the available change management structures are general in nature and cannot be used to deal with the complexity and nature of change in the telecommunication departments. However, there are many change management structures available in the literatures that are conceptual in nature. One of these models is the ADKAR model for managing change. It stands for awareness of employees, their desire to change, their knowledge about change, ability to change, and reinforcement to keep change in place. This model can help managers to determine where their employees are in the change process.

It only deals with leveraging employees' potentials to support the change, and it does not cover organizational aspects in the change process (Raftery 2009). Kotter (1996) has also presented a change management model as a result of studying change management practices in more than hundred organizations. Kotter's model concentrates on making change occur; highlighting the significance of the feeling about the necessity of the change in the organization, and highlighting the need of effective communication through change process (Mou, 2013; Cameron and Green, 2004). However, the model does not cover fast changing business environments such as the telecommunication departments environment. Another model of change management that has taken a significant take up in the field is Lewin's Model of Change (Price and Chahal, 2006). Lewin's model visualizes the change as the process which keeps the forces that affect the behavior of the system stable (Duffy, 1996).

Research Methodology

In order to empirically explore the implementation of the change management practices in the telecommunication departments and to assess the requirements of the change management process in this vibrant departments, one case study were conducted in three leading companies in the telecommunication departments in East Azerbaijan. The methodology used mixed methods approach of data collection. This combination of data collection methods was deemed necessary to reduce the limitations of any one tool if used alone (Flick, 2011). Two sources of information were used from the three companies, namely, primary and secondary sources. Primary sources of the research were semi-structured interviews with key managers and front-line employees who are actively involved in change projects at the three companies. Whereas, Secondary source of data were companies published materials and internal reports related to change initiatives that have helped the researched in supplementing the data collected through primary sources. Forty-two semi-structured interviews were conducted in the targeted companies. These include 23 managers and supervisors, and 19 front-line employees. Thematic analysis method was used to analyze the semi-structured interviews. The thematic method is used to analyze, and identify themes within data. This method organizes and describes the data in details that are rich, and it often interprets the main factors of the topic of the research (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Data Analysis and Results

In this section, semi-structured interviews are analyzed and then compared with documents' content from the three companies. This comparison was done through a discussion of the themes that emerged from the interviews, and how these themes can be connected in a comprehensive managerial framework to lead telecommunication companies during change. Thematic analysis was employed in this study, after transcribing the interviews, as it provides a holistic context of the phenomenon (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). The full process of analysis followed Bryman and Bell's (2007) considerations in coding in order to achieve the analysis themes.

Most managers and employees stated that the main problem they faced was not taking the people side of change into account. The majority of managers in the targeted companies emphasized that there is opposition to change that has caused change failures in various occasions. This resistance was of two types; the direct type when employees do not want to work, and the indirect one by complaining and actively opposing change. The majority of managers suffer from rumors during the change process due to ineffective communication planning. Inefficient training is another significant problem that most of individuals face in the change process. Front-line employees and managers both agreed that there are gaps in the content of the training courses and what is being implemented in reality; usually happens due to top management support and absence in the change process. Most middle managers, supervisors and the front line employees indicated that there is employees' discomfort associated with any change initiative; as they need more time to adapt to change which is not always granted.

Most of the managers in the targeted companies talked about the current communication activities they have in their companies, these activities include regular meetings, emails, brainstorming sessions, telephone, and workshops. These were regarded by interviewees as the cornerstone for change success. Top management holds meetings with directors every change, but in larger scale changes they hold meetings with middle managers and employees. However, majority of interviewees emphasized that meetings which are held during the change process are not transparent and have a one-way channel. Most employees indicated that they were informed about change by many ways: Emails, telephone and meetings from the direct manager but they were not involved in the decision making process. This was confirmed by the front-line employees who stated that they did not understand what the change has for them, and how it can impact their current role. Most employees stated that they have a procedure for getting help and assistance during the change process but they have no clear channels to provide feedback. They concluded that their managers listen to them, but the problem is in taking their opinions into account.

Discussion

In this exploratory study, an attempt has been made to investigate current practices in telecommunication departments in order to build a managerial framework to enhance the change management process in this vital departments. While it is difficult to generalize findings from exploratory case studies, the case studies conducted demonstrate an interesting dynamic of the change management process that can provide an understanding of how an effective change management process could be achieved. It is found that change management planning, top management active involvement, reinforcement and feedback

providing is likely to enhance telecommunication organizations ability to change by promoting a number of drivers for learning from feedback.

Conclusions and Future Work

Due to fierce competition and technological advancements in the telecommunication departments, change has become a vital tool for survival in this departments. The goal of this paper was to present a managerial framework for the implementation of change management in telecommunication departments. The framework was constructed using empirical findings from one case study of East Azerbaijan telecommunication companies. It consists of four main dimensions, namely change planning, change management, change reinforcement, and change feedback collection.

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