Lewin's Change Management Model

Idea In Short

Lewin's Change Management Model provides a structured approach for managing change in organizations. By breaking down the change process into distinct stages, it helps to ensure that the transition is smooth and successful.

Kurt Lewin, a German American psychologist and pioneer in the field of social psychology, group dynamics and Leadership developed the change Management model in the 1940s to understand and manage change in organizations. He conducted several studies on group behavior and factors that influence group decision-making and performance. Through his research, Lewin developed the concept of Force Field Theory, which proposes that an individual's behavior is determined by the interplay of psychological and social forces in their environment.

Force Field Analysis

Force Field Analysis attempts to explain how the process of change works by diagnosing the driving and the restraining forces that lead to organizational change. One side of the model represents the driving forces, and the other side represents the restraining forces. The driving forces push the organizations towards the new state, and the restraining forces are the factors which provide resistance to change or are regarded as the behaviours of the employees that block the process of change. The central idea behind Force Field Analysis is that situations are maintained by an equilibrium between forces that drive change and others that resist change. Change is characterized as a state of imbalance between driving forces (e.g., new personnel, changing markets, new technology) and restraining forces (e.g., individuals' fear of failure, organizational inertia). For change to happen, the driving forces must be strengthened, or the resisting forces weakened. According to Lewin, stability can be achieved when both the driving and restraining forces reach a stage of equilibrium, which should be approximately of equal strength from the opposite directions. According to the Force Field Analysis model, effective change happens by unfreezing the existing state of

affairs or the current situation, moving to a changed or a desired situation and then refreezing for making the change relatively permanent. During the stage of Unfreezing, the driving forces should be made stronger to motivate a change in the behaviour or ways of working, while the restraining forces should be made weaker or removed. Driving forces create a sense of urgency for the change. The driving forces from the external environment could be Globalization, Technological Development and IT revolution, changes in the workforce, etc. Apart from this, the driving forces may originate within the organization through the efforts of the corporate leaders.

Driving Forces

Any change process should start with informing the employees about the influence of the external driving forces like competitors, changing trends in the consumer demands and preferences, regulatory compliances and various other factors. Apart from this for implementing change effectively, the restraining forces should be reduced or removed.

Restraining Forces

The restraining forces or the resistance from the employees can be controlled by way of effective communication and involvement of the employees in the process, training initiatives for strengthening the new set of knowledge and skills, implementation of stress management techniques to help employees in coping with the stressors, negotiation for ensuring compliance and the last method is implementation of coercive measures if all the other measures fail and the need for change is urgent in nature. Correspondingly, people and organizations are constantly changing their attitudes, behaviors, and social dynamics. However, people and organizations resist change, even if it is necessary or beneficial. Hence, it is important to break down the existing mindset and behaviors to facilitate change. Therefore, people and organizations have a better chance of achieving their objectives and adapting to the ever-changing environment if they comprehend and manage these dynamics.

Stages Of Change

According to the Lewin Change Management model, change occurs in three stages:

1. Unfreezing
2. Changing, and

3. Refreezing

Unfreezing

Lewin identifies human behavior, with respect to change, as a quasi-stationary equilibrium state. This state is a mindset, a mental and physical capacity that can be almost absolutely reached, but it is initially situated, so the mind evolves without attaining that capacity. The first stage of Lewin's model – unfreeze - involves breaking down the existing mindset and behaviors of individuals or organizations. This is necessary because people tend to resist change, even when it is necessary or beneficial. Lewin argues that change follows resistance and that group forces (the field) prevent individuals from embracing this change. At this stage, the leaders should prepare the organization for change by highlighting the need for change, whether the driving factors are financial, managerial, or organizational. This is a necessary step and can be achieved by:

1. Recognizing the need for change, and then
2. Creating awareness among their employees

The key here is to create a compelling narrative that explains why the current way of doing things cannot continue. This is easier to convey when you can point to falling sales numbers, poor financial outcomes, negative customer satisfaction surveys, or other similar data. To properly prepare the organization, leaders should begin with the fundamentals – the vision, mission, values, ideas, business models, attitudes, and behaviors that define the organization. Using a construction analogy, a leader should first evaluate and be prepared to modify the present foundations since they may not sustain additional floors. If this is not done, the entire structure may collapse. This is generally the most challenging and stressful aspect of the change process. By pushing the company to re-examine its core values, leaders can effectively create a [managed] crisis, which can provide a strong motivation to seek out a new equilibrium. Without this incentive, they cannot gain the buy-in and engagement required to make real change. Moreover, when they start to alter the how things are done, they throw everyone and everything off balance and elicit strong reactions [resistance] from people, which is precisely what should be avoided. Therefore, leaders should agitate the equilibrium state to instigate an environment that is open to change. To unfreeze the current state, it is necessary to create a sense of urgency or dissatisfaction with the current situation. This can be done through various means, such as highlighting the negative consequences of maintaining the status quo or offering incentives for change. Lewin suggests that an emotional stir-up may disturb the group dynamics and forces

associated with self-righteousness among the individual group members. Certainly, there are a variety of ways to shake up the present status-quo, and you''ll want to consider whether you need change in an individual or, as in a company, amongst a group of people.

Change

Once you''ve unfrozen the status quo, you may begin to implement your change. The second stage is the actual process of changing, or implementing the new ideas, behaviors, or processes. This stage involves providing the necessary resources, support, and training to ensure a smooth transition. It is important to involve all stakeholders in the change process to ensure buy-in and commitment to the new direction. Organizational change is notoriously complex, so executing a well-planned change process does not guarantee predictable results. Therefore, you must prepare a variety of change options, from the planned change process to trial-and-error. With each attempt at change, examine what worked, what didn''t, what parts were resistant, etc. Furthermore, leaders should eliminate any resistance that currently exists by focusing on short-term wins and a clear communication strategy. When people are uncertain about change, they will often make choices based on their fears rather than anticipating gains or rewards. To gain support and momentum, you must be able to show that your idea holds practical value for the organization. You will typically do this by showing how it can contribute to productivity gains or increased financial performance in some way. To further engender buy-in, use a selling strategy on key influencers rather than trying to convince everyone at once. If you are successful in engaging the right people, they will help to promote your ideas and bring others on board. During this evaluation process, there are two important drivers of successful and long-term effectiveness of the change implementation process:

1. Information flow, and
2. Leadership

Information flow refers to sharing information across multiple levels of the organizational hierarchy, making available a variety of skills and expertise, and coordinating problem solving across the company. **Leadership** is defined as the influence of certain individuals in the group to achieve common goals. A well-planned change process requires defining a vision and motivation. An iterative approach may be necessary to sustain change. According to Lewin, a change left without adequate reinforcement may be short-lived and therefore fail to meet the objectives of a change process. During the Change phase, companies should:

- Communicate widely and clearly about the planned implementation, benefits, and who is affected. Answer questions, clarify misunderstandings, and dispel rumors
- Promote and empower action. Encourage employees to get involved proactively with the change, and support managers in providing daily and weekly direction to staff
- Involve others as much as possible. These easy wins can accumulate into larger wins and working with more people can help you navigate various stakeholders

It''s also important to celebrate milestones and victories along the way, which will reinforce people''s belief that they are making progress while feeling good about themselves in general. This should be done publicly whenever possible so it generates more momentum among those who have not yet been won over.

Refreeze

The final stage of Lewin's model is refreezing. This stage involves stabilizing the new changes and making them the new norm. Consequently, the organization moves from making changes to business as usual (the new status quo). This means that everyone has bought into the changes and is committed to maintaining them. The best way to do this is to use a consolidation strategy where you take time to review what has been accomplished so far, celebrate successes and resolve any outstanding issues that may have come up along the way. The purpose of the final step—refreezing—is to sustain the change you''ve enacted. The goal is for the people involved to consider this new state as the new status-quo, so they no longer resist forces that are trying to implement the change. The group norms, activities, strategies, and processes are transformed per the new state. This can be done through reinforcement, such as rewards for adopting the new behaviors or consequences for not following the new processes. It is also important to communicate the benefits of the new changes and address any remaining resistance to ensure that they are fully integrated into the organization. Without appropriate steps that sustain and reinforce the change, the previously dominant behavior tends to reassert itself. You''ll need to consider both formal and informal mechanisms to implement and freeze these new changes. Consider one or more steps or actions that can be strong enough to counter the cumulative effect of all resistive forces to the change—these stronger steps help ensure the new change will prevail and become the new normal. In the Refreeze phase, companies should do the following:

- Tie the new changes into the culture by identifying change supports and change

barriers.

- Develop and promote ways to sustain the change long-term. Consider:
- Ensuring leadership and management support and adapting organizational structure when necessary.
- Establishing feedback processes.
- Creating a rewards system.
- Offer training, support, and communication for both the short- and long-term. Promote both formal and informal methods, and remember the various ways that employees learn.
- Celebrate success!

Case Study

Lewin's Change Management Model is widely used in business and government organizations to manage change due to its simplicity, user-friendliness, and emphasis on involving all stakeholders in the process of change. Kurt Lewin's Change Management Model has been widely used in various organizations to successfully implement change. Here are a few examples of how companies have used the model to drive change:

Case - Nissan Motor Company

Nissan Motor Company was on the stage of bankruptcy due to the issues of high debts and dipping market share. During that period, Carlos Ghosn took charge as the head of the Japanese automaker who was faced with the challenge of implementing a radical change and turning around the operations of Nissan, yet by keeping the resistance to change under control which was inevitable under such circumstances by forming cross-functional teams to recommend a robust plan of change in different functional areas. For facing the business challenges, he developed a change management strategy and involved the employees in the process of change management through effective communication and reinforcement of desired behaviours. For refreezing the behavioural change of the employees, he introduced performance-based pay, implemented an open system of feedback for guiding and facilitating the employees in accepting the new behaviour patterns at work.

Case - General Electric

General Electric [GE] is a multinational conglomerate that has undergone numerous changes over the years to stay competitive in a constantly evolving market. To manage these

changes, GE has used Lewin's model by first creating a sense of urgency for change, such as highlighting the negative consequences of maintaining the status quo. The company then provided the necessary resources and support for employees to make the transition to the new processes or behaviors. Finally, GE has reinforced the new changes through rewards and incentives to ensure that they become the new norm.

Case - IBM

IBM is another large multinational corporation that has used Lewin's model to successfully implement change. In the early 1990s, IBM was facing declining revenues and needed to make significant changes to its business model. To do this, the company first unfroze the current state by creating a sense of urgency and dissatisfaction with the status quo. It then provided the necessary resources and support for employees to make the transition to the new business model. Finally, IBM refroze the new changes by reinforcing them through rewards and incentives, as well as addressing any remaining resistance to ensure full buy-in and commitment to the new direction. While Lewin's Change Management Model has been successful in many cases, it is not without its failures. Here are a few examples of failures of this model:

Case - Kodak

Kodak's digital transition: Kodak, a former leader in the film industry, failed to successfully transition to digital photography. Despite recognizing the need for change and attempting to implement new digital technologies, the company struggled to adapt and ultimately filed for bankruptcy in 2012. One reason for this failure may have been a lack of urgency in unfreezing the current state, as Kodak continued to rely on its traditional film business even as the market shifted towards digital.

Case - Blockbuster

Blockbuster's failure to adapt to streaming: Blockbuster, a former leader in the home video rental industry, failed to adapt to the rise of streaming services and ultimately went bankrupt in 2013. Despite recognizing the need for change, the company was slow to adopt streaming technologies and was unable to compete with the convenience and affordability of online competitors.

Case - Nokia

Nokia's failure to adapt to the smartphone market: Nokia, once the dominant player in the mobile phone market, failed to adapt to the rise of smartphones and was ultimately overtaken by competitors such as Apple and Samsung. Nokia struggled to unfreeze its current state and failed to provide the necessary resources and support for its employees to make the transition to the new market. These examples show that while Lewin's Change Management Model can be effective in driving change, it is not a guarantee of success. It is important for organizations to carefully assess their needs and the feasibility of the proposed changes before implementing them.

Advantages

Simple and easy to understand: Lewin's model is a straightforward and easy-to-understand framework for managing change. This makes it easy to communicate to all stakeholders and implement in organizations. **Structured approach:** The model breaks down the change process into distinct stages, which helps to ensure a smooth and orderly transition. This structured approach can help to minimize disruption and confusion during the change process. **Involves all stakeholders:** The model emphasizes the importance of involving all stakeholders in the change process, which helps to ensure buy-in and commitment to the new direction.

Disadvantages

Time-consuming: The model's structured approach can be time-consuming, as it involves a number of steps that must be followed in sequence. This may not be practical for organizations that need to implement changes quickly. **Not suitable for all changes:** The model may not be suitable for all types of changes, such as those that require a more flexible or adaptable approach. **Resistance to change:** The model does not address the root causes of resistance to change, which can make it difficult to overcome resistance and fully implement the new changes.

Success Strategies

Here are some strategies to implement change using Lewin's Change Management Model:

Create A Sense Of Urgency

To unfreeze the current state, it is necessary to create a sense of urgency or dissatisfaction with the current situation. This can be done through various means, such as highlighting the negative consequences of maintaining the status quo or offering incentives for change.

Involve All Stakeholders

To ensure buy-in and commitment to the new direction, it is important to involve all stakeholders in the change process. This can be done through open communication, collaboration, and consultation.

Provide Resources And Support

To facilitate the transition to the new changes, it is necessary to provide the necessary resources and support, such as training and guidance. This will help employees to understand the new processes or behaviors and feel confident in their ability to implement them.

Reinforce The New Changes

To ensure that the new changes become the new norm, it is important to reinforce them through rewards and incentives, as well as consequences for not following the new processes. It is also important to communicate the benefits of the new changes and address any remaining resistance. Overall, these strategies can help to ensure a smooth and successful implementation of change according to Lewin's Change Management Model.

Summary

Lewin's 3 Stage Model of Change provides an intuitive and fundamental understanding of how changes occur, in context of the social behaviors observed at an individual and collective level within a group. Since the theory was first introduced in 1951, change management has taken both supportive and opposing directions. When change management initiatives are less effective during specific use cases and business needs, consider the fundamentals of human and social behavior when affecting change.