

The Impact of Change on Organisation Commitment in Zimbabwean Universities

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Abstract

This paper sought to establish the impact of change on organisation commitment amongst state university lecturers in Zimbabwe. The paper examined current thinking amongst lecturers with respect to changes that have been introduced in the university education sector in Zimbabwe. This research focused on the determinants of organisation commitment which are: shared vision & culture, Emotional attachment, Training & development, Reward systems & Emotional attachment. A total of 500 respondents were purposely selected from the country's ten state universities and it was established that the teaching staff generally lack commitment towards their employer. This is mainly because of changes that are implemented using a top down approach.

Introduction

Organisations need to change in order to survive and to be effective in an ever changing environment (Dumaz, 2007). In today's world, organizations are faced with a plethora of operating challenges largely emanating from the globalised world. The fast changing technological environment, workforce diversity, changing customer tastes and preferences as well as cut throat competition are some of the business complexities confronting management today. To overcome these challenges organizations have to change in response to the dictates of the environment. However, organization change affects employee attitudes and behaviours because of transferring a situation from the known to the unknown which can build up uncertainty, strain and anxiety among employees. It therefore means that for the change to be successful employee attitudes and behaviors to accept change should be considered (Berneth, 2004). There is therefore a growing consensus that the success of an organization depends directly on effectively leading human resources (Hersey & Blanchard, 2001). This importance of human capital means that, in this rapidly evolving environment, organizations cannot afford to ignore the effects of organization change on employee attitudes.

Most people argue that organizational change will be a hapless endeavor without the participation and commitment of individuals. In order for change to occur in any type of organizational setting individuals must change (Haugrimsson, 2008). Individuals must think differently and do things differently. This individual implication therefore makes organizational change intrinsically personal.

Rationale of the Study

The attitude of employees during the change process plays a vital role in the implementation of new ideas in the organizations (Rebeka & Indradevi, 2013). However many a time, the problem is that some business managers implement change initiatives without adequately taking cognisance of the impact of the changes on employee attitudes. Many change managers know very little about how different groups of employees react to these changes and how employees' health and well-being can be affected by them. This is even more astonishing given that it is well recognized that the success of organizational changes often rests on the motivation and commitment of employees themselves (Armstrong-Stassen, 1998; Kozlowski, Chao, Smith, & Hedland, 1993). All too often, employees are told to accept change programs that they had no input into .The lack of employee participation results in views and concerns going unheard. This leads to no sense of ownership being generated amongst employees which then causes change programs to fail due to lack of commitment. Negative attitudes to change created as a result of non-participation becomes a real challenge for business managers as resistance to change increases. In light of this it has become increasingly important in today's world to understand the impact of organization change programmes on employee attitudes. This study therefore seeks to establish the impact of change initiatives on organisation commitment of employees in Zimbabwean universities given that strategic changes have been implemented in this sector in the recent past. A number of changes are being implemented in this sector which includes:

- 1) That every lecturer must have a PhD by 2017.
- 2) That every lecturer must have a tertiary teaching diploma.
- 3) That every lecturer must publish a certain number of articles in peer reviewed journals in order to be tenured.
- 4) That a Masters Degree should be aligned to an undergraduate degree for a lecturer to teach in any given degree programme.

All these requirements have been made against a background of limited funding to both the universities and individual lecturers. Furthermore a top down approach has been used to formulate and implement the changes.

Little effort has been made to consult the generality of the teaching staff who are affected by the changes. To the researcher's knowledge no study has been carried out to examine the impact of organization changes on employee commitment in this sector. The present study therefore seeks to bridge this lacuna.

Main Objective

To establish the impact of organisational changes on the commitment of employees in Zimbabwean Universities.

Secondary Objectives

- 1) To analyse the impact of shared culture on employee commitment towards organisational change
- 2) To ascertain the effect of a shared vision on the commitment of employees towards organisational change
- 3) To determine the impact of reward system on the commitment of employees towards organizational change
- 4) To find out the influence of training and development on employees commitment towards organisational change

Research Questions

Main Research Question

What is the impact of organisational change on the commitment of employees in Zimbabwean Universities?

Sub Research Questions

1. What has been the effect of a shared vision on the commitment of employees towards organisational change?
2. What has been the impact of reward system on the commitment of employees towards organisational change
3. What has been the impact of training and development on employees commitment towards organisational change
4. What has been the impact of shared culture on employee commitment towards organisational change

LITERATURE REVIEW

Organizational change

According to Greenberg and Baron (2002), organisational change refers to planned or unplanned transformations in the structure, technology and / or people of an organisation. In general, the aim of an organisational change is an adaptation to the environment and / or an improvement in performance (Del Val and Fuentes, 2003).

People's reactions to organizational change

According to Bovey and Hede (2001), when people are personally confronted with major organisational change, they go through a reaction process. This process consists of four phases: initial denial, resistance, exploration and eventually commitment (Bovey and Hede, 2001; Reynolds, 1994). Also, O'Connor (1993) says that individuals respond to the threats of change with unconscious processes. People unconsciously use well-developed and habitual defence mechanisms to protect themselves against change and the feelings of anxiety caused by change (Oldham and Kleiner, 2001). Changes lead to a great deal of uncertainty and stress among employees, also due to feelings of no control over the situation engendered by uncertainty. Uncertainty, defined as the inability of an individual to predict something accurately due to lack of knowledge about current or future events undermines this ability to influence or control these events. Negative consequences such as anxiety, psychological strain, learned helplessness and lower performance are the result (Bordia et al, 2004a). The defence mechanisms against these negative consequences might obstruct and hinder an individual from adapting to change (Halton, 1994). This negative behaviour is strengthened by poor communication prior and during the change process.

Resistance to Change

Many studies have posited that resistance to change is negative and should be removed or minimized. For example, Coch and French's (1948: 521) view on resistance to change is that it is a combination of an individual reaction to frustration with strong group-induced forces. Similarly, Zander has defined resistance to change as "a behavior which is intended to protect an individual from the effects of real or imaged change" (Zander, 1950: 9). In the same view, Agócs (1997) has defined resistance as a process of refusal by decision-makers to be influenced or affected by the views, concerns or evidence presented to them by those who propose change. In summary, resistance to change generally refers to the behaviours of individuals or groups of individuals who are opposed to or unresponsive to changes that top executives want or decide to implement in the organizations.

In the literature on organizational change, several factors are thought to be determinants of resistance to change; they include fear of real or imagined consequences (Morris and Raben, 1995), fear of unknown consequences (Mabin, Forgeson, and Green, 2001), a threat to the ways in which people make sense of the world (Ledford et al., 1989), a threat to the status quo (Beer, 1980; Hannan and Freeman, 1988; Spector, 1989), a threat

to social relations (O'Toole, 1995), distrust toward those leading change (Bridges, 1980; O'Toole, 1995), and different understandings or assessments of the situation (Morris and Raben, 1995). Thus, it can be reasoned that a person does not resist organizational change but rather the consequences of organizational change. It can therefore be concluded that much of the resistance to change is due to the perceived impact of change on the individuals or people in the organisation hence the need for managers to take people as a centre of analysis in organisations. If change is poorly managed people tend to develop certain negative behaviours towards their jobs and or organisations.

Attitudes

This is a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favour or disfavour (Judge & Kammeyer, 2012). For any change to be effective, people's beliefs, and attitudes must be challenged and clarified because significant and sustainable change relies on the human system at the core of every business system (Juechter et al., 1998). This study looked at the impact of organization change on employee commitment to change

Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment is widely described as a key factor in the relationship between individuals and organizations (Sharma & Bajpai, 2010).

Organizational commitment is a feeling of dedication, willingness to go the extra mile, and an intention to stay with the organization for a long period of time. It is a multidimensional concept that provides a comprehensive insight into the link between employees and work-related behavior (Meyer & Allen, 1991). It is very beneficial for the organization as it reduces the absenteeism rate and turns over ratio, let alone enhancing the organization's productivity (Jernigan et al., 2002). The employee who is highly committed to the organization contributes to the organization performance (Freund & Carmeli, 2003).

Organizational Commitment & Change Management

There is evidence in the change management literature identifying the role of organizational commitment in a change context. Many authors indicated that organizational commitment plays an important role in employee's acceptance of change (Darwish, 2000; Cordery et al., 1993). Meyer & Allen (1997) assert that employees of high affective commitment demonstrate emotional attachment and identification with their involvement in the organization. This may explain why these employees are less likely to engage in withdrawal behavior and are more willing to accept change (Somers, 1995). If employees are committed to making it work, organizational change can be successful. To develop high levels of commitment there should be communication of changes to employees.

Methodology

The survey design, which utilised the quantitative approach, underpinned this study. The survey research design was appropriate for this study not only because it allows the involvement of many participants as was in this case study (N=500) but also because it allows the collection of people's views at a particular point in time. This research drew participants from the country's ten state universities. The researcher purposely selected 50 participants from each university. The participants were Masters Degree holders. The idea was to establish the impact of the changes on the commitment of the teaching staff to their employer.

Results and Discussion

Vision

The employees had negative attitudes towards the organizational vision. The vision of the employees is at variance with the vision of most universities. This is because they do not feel that the vision for changes is well communicated to them. Changes in the tertiary sector are cascaded downwards from the authorities. Therefore in most instances a sense of belonging does not develop amongst the university teaching staff.

Reward System

Mottaz (1988) advocated that tangible rewards are the most useful way to facilitate and motivate employees to perform tasks and remain with an organisation. This also confirms the finding that employees are more satisfied by intrinsic job rewards revealed by Yoon and Thye (2002). In this research, the respondents showed dissatisfaction with their remuneration because the remuneration package is below their expectations. Furthermore, they felt they were not rewarded according to the effort they input. As a result, they were not motivated to perform better and be committed to change. It was established the government took long to pay their salaries. The pay dates were established to vary month by month. In some instances payments for block release programmes took more than nine months to be honored in some universities. This dealt a heavy blow to the commitment of employees. In other universities in the region university teaching staff are well supported financially when they publish in peer

reviewed journals. This is not the case locally where personal funds are used to fund publications the reason being that the university budgets are not well funded.

Training & Development

A very important facet in any education system. Training and development is an effective way of building commitment through investing in employees to learn and grow thereby making a success in their loyalty (Olajide, 2000). However from the results not much support is being channelled to the development of the teaching staff. Against a backdrop of limited funding to institutions of higher learning, the teaching staff is using their own resources to advance themselves. This has dampened the spirit amongst university teaching staff affecting the organisation commitment levels.

Emotional Attachment

Giacalone et al (2004) argues that clear and compelling vision enhances capacity of, and instigates towering passion in organizational members, to drive their organizations to success despite daunting challenges posed by the external environment. It has been stated already that the vision of university employees is at variance with their employer's vision. This has affected the emotional attachment between the teaching staff. It was established that the staff were not prepared to talk positively about their employer.

Conclusion

Organisation change affects the commitment of employees to the organization. Changes that have occurred at state universities have not been communicated well hence employees have not embraced the changes. University authorities have applied the top down approach in formulating and implementing the change hence affecting the level of commitment. The teaching staff has not had any input into the changes that have been introduced. Low levels of organization commitment leads to absenteeism, high workplace turnover and resistance to change. To minimize resistance to change & other undesirable workplace behaviours, It is highly recommended for Zimbabwean state universities to come up with strategies to improve the commitment of its employees. The employee who is highly committed to the organization contributes to the organization performance (Freund & Carmeli, 2003).

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