

Organisational Change Management of the Transition of Polytechnics in Ghana to Universities of Technology: A Theoretical Framework for Managing Transitional Challenges

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Abstract

This article is a theoretical examination of the concept of change management and how the concept can be used to manage the change confronting the polytechnics in Ghana today in their quest and transition to Universities of Technology. The Government of Ghana has set up a National Committee, chaired by Dr George Afeti, a former Rector of Ho Polytechnic and the Chief Executive of the Inspectorate Board of the Ministry of Education, to provide a blue print for the transition of the Polytechnics to Technical Universities. The article takes a look at Kurt Lewin's Three Step Model of change management that is - unfreezing, moving and refreezing-with emphasis on the kind of changes to make through strategic thinking, building a coalition of the change agents, identification and management of resistance to change and the strategies for enlisting co-operation to ensure a successful change management agenda. New management and higher responsibility positions like; Vice-Chancellor, Pro-Vice Chancellor, registrar, development officer, librarian, dean of faculty, finance officer, estate officer, assistant registrar and assistant lecturer, lecturer, senior lecturer, associate professor and professor, requiring new knowledge, skills and attitudes are emerging within the polytechnics in readiness for the transition to Universities of Technology. Staff of the old system, in most cases, do not possess the required qualification to occupy these new positions of higher responsibility. Managing these transitional changes and challenges would need a firm theoretical grounding or expertise in change management. This need has become even more imperative in view of the impending transition. The article examines change management process in the polytechnics and concludes that if organisational change management, in the transition of the polytechnics to Universities of Technology, is to be successfully accomplished, stakeholders and practitioners should be 'converted' from the old ways of doing things, and made to 'confess' the need for change. 'Beneficiaries' and 'victims' should be involved in the process of change, surprises should be avoided, individuals or groups most likely to resist change should be involved or co-opted, through the use of incentives, into a coalition of allies to lead the change agenda.

Keywords; change agenda; change management; change agents; coalition of allies; resistance to change.

Introduction

Tertiary education in Ghana encompasses the universities, university colleges, the polytechnics, theological and tutorial colleges. Tertiary education plays a vital role in the socio-economic development of the nation, including the creation, dissemination and application of knowledge, as well as the adaptation of knowledge for meeting national development needs and aspirations. (Republic of Ghana 2002) After their upgrading in 1992 to tertiary status, the polytechnics in Ghana were confronted with the challenge of managing the change of the existing polytechnics, from Ghana Education Service (GES) second cycle institutions, to reputable diploma awarding tertiary institutions, in an atmosphere of uncertainty and instability. Managing this change to achieve the strategic objectives of the polytechnics has been a major headache for all stakeholders, particularly the councils and management of the polytechnics.

The polytechnics in Ghana were upgraded to tertiary status in 1993 with the promulgation of the Polytechnic Law, PNDC Law 321, 1992. They were charged with responsibility for producing middle level manpower in manufacturing, applied science and technology and business and commerce for national development. The polytechnics are also to encourage the study of technical subjects at the tertiary level and provide opportunity for research and publication of research findings (Polytechnic Law 1992). The polytechnics started in most cases with staff of the Ghana Education Service (GES), who after some screening exercise, opted to stay. The role the polytechnics were expected to play was not clarified nor were the needed structures put in place before their upgrading. The polytechnics were therefore confronted at birth with problems of lack of qualified staff, inadequate classroom and staff accommodation facilities, equipment for their workshops and laboratories, the absence of conditions of service for staff, inability to attract and retain qualified staff because of the poor conditions of service and the generally low morale associated with working in the polytechnics. (NCTE 2001: 14) The polytechnic environment in the first 10 years of their existence was characterised by instability on both student and staff fronts. Students embarked on several boycotts of lectures in support of their demand for job placement, academic progress, cost sharing with government and opposition to the new grading

system for the polytechnics (NCTE 2001: 15)

The staff also declared numerous strike actions to demand improved conditions of service, promotion criteria and book and research allowances among other grievances. This situation of persistent strikes and boycotts has created a public impression of the polytechnics as strike-mongers. The atmosphere of uncertainty makes the change management in the polytechnic precarious and even risky. George Afeti, (2004) has identified certain barriers to change in the polytechnics namely; the absence of a shared institution vision, absence of a goal setting culture, fear of causing disaffection, the weight of tradition and lack of exposure or limited knowledge of innovative practices in tertiary education by the management team. This article which is a theoretical examination of the concept of change management, it discusses some strategies for confronting the transition of the Polytechnics to Universities of Technology.

The Concept of Change and Change Management

Change management in the opinion of Samuel Certo (1992:349) is the process of modifying an existing organisation to increase effectiveness in the accomplishment of its strategic objectives. This modification he stated, can involve virtually any aspect of the organisation, including changing the lines of organisational authority, the levels of responsibility held by various members and the established lines of organisational communication.

Most experts of change management agree that if an organisation is to be successful, it must change continually in response to significant developments such as public expectations, technological breakthrough and government regulations. Change management in the opinion of Samuel Certo (1992: 349) is integral to leadership capacity building because all managers are confronted with the task of changing their organisations. Leaders who are able to determine the appropriate changes to take place in their organisations and cultivate the strength of character to implement such changes, make their organisations more flexible, innovative and equal to the task of accomplishing their strategic objectives

The process of managing change, according to Allen Elkin (1989: 62), requires a degree of social and political stability for long term success. Adaptation and stability are necessary ingredients in the change management process. An organisation without stability to complement change is likely to suffer serious setbacks to the achievement of its objectives. When stability is low, the probability for organisational survival declines. Change after change without stability, results in confusion and agitation among employees, no matter how versatile the change managers might be.

The dexterity with which change managers handle the major factors to be considered when changing an organisation determines, to a great extent, how successful the process of change will be. Some of these factors according to (Samuel Certo 1992: 351) include:

- the change agent
- determining what should be changed
- the kind of change to make
- individuals to be affected by the change
- evaluation of the change.

The Change Agent

In the opinion of Michael A Hitt, Duane Ireland et al (1999: 394), change agent might be a self-designated manager within an organisation who tries to effect change, or an outside consultant hired because of a special expertise in a particular area. Special skills are necessary for the success of change agent. These special skills include the ability to determine how a change should be made to solve change-related problems through the use of behavioural science tools to influence people appropriately during the process of change.

Determining what should Change

In determining what should change in the process of change management, Samuel Certo (1992: 353) observes that, managers should make changes that increase the organisational effectiveness. It has generally been accepted that organisational effectiveness is the result of three main factors:

- (i) People - quality and calibre of human resource available,
- (ii) Structure - institutional and physical, and
- (iii) Technology – equipment and processes

Managing Change the Change Agenda

According to Bateman and Snell (1999) organisational change is managed effectively when:

1. The organisation is moved from its current state to some planned future state that will exist after the change.
2. The functioning of the organisation in the future state meets expectations; that is, the change works as planned.
3. The transition is accomplished without excessive cost to the organisation.

4. The transition is accomplished without excessive cost to individual organisational members.

Change is difficult and efforts to effect transformational change in many organisations have failed. The challenge for members within organisations is to create, develop and sustain an environment that facilitates change processes. This necessitates attention to the unique complexities and risks that are inherent in change initiatives. There are a number of key influences that managers and change agents must be aware of when planning and implementing change: People are the key to successful change. It is the people that will finally determine the fate of the organisation. Whether an organisation is poised to be great or just to survive, people have to care about its fate and perceive how they can contribute. It is only the leadership that should be involved in the change process. The entire organisation should be involved in the process of change. In small organisations this is easy but as the organisation gets bigger there needs to be a permanent rekindling of individual creativity and responsibility. The essential task is to motivate people fully to keep changing in response to new challenges posed by the environment.

There are three main kinds of change in an organisation: technological change, which emphasises modifying the levels of technology in the management system for efficiency and effectiveness and the use of management information systems to competitive advantage; structural change, which emphasises increasing organisational effectiveness and people change which aims at increasing organisational effectiveness through human resource capacity building (Glueck W.F, 1969: 440).

Individuals affected by the Change

A fourth major factor to be considered by managers when changing an organisation is the people affected by the change. A good assessment of what to change and how to make the change could be wasted if organisation members do not support the change. To increase the chances of employee support, chief executives should be aware of;

- the usual employee resistance to change
- how this resistance can be reduced
- the three phases usually present when behavioural change occurs. (John Alpin & Duane Thompson (1974:61))

Evaluation of Change

Evaluation of change involves watching for symptoms that indicate that further change is necessary. If organisation members continue to be oriented more to the past than the future; if they recognise the obligation of rituals more than the challenges of current problems or if they owe allegiance more to departmental goals than to overall strategic objectives, the probability is relatively high that further change is necessary (Samuel Certo 1992: 364).

Kurt Lewin's Model of Change

Kurt Lewin developed a three-stage model of change that is widely cited (Lewin, Kurt. 1951). He argues that successful change is dependent on following three steps: unfreezing, moving, and refreezing. In the unfreezing stage, change agents prepare for change by establishing a plan that will help manage employees' resistance to the change, articulate a path for implementation and establish measures for the outcome of the change. Organisations may use driving forces to direct behaviour away from the status quo-for example, promotions, or increases in pay- or employ restraining forces, which hinder movement from the existing equilibrium (Lalith Weeratunga 2003).

Unfreezing, according to Lalith Weeratunga (2003) involves breaking away from the old ways of doing things; moving involves the actual action of instituting the change and refreezing involves reinforcing and supporting the new ways. In the unfreezing stage, management realises that its current practices are no longer appropriate for achieving strategic organisational objectives at a competitive advantage and the organisation must break out of (unfreeze) its present mould by doing things differently. Unfreezing often results from an assessment of the organisation's adjustment to its present environment and its readiness to meet future challenges. If management concludes that there is a compelling performance and productivity gap in the achievement of organisational objectives vis-a-vis its competitors, then change is imperative

An important contributor to unfreezing is the recognition of a performance gap, which can be a precipitator of major change. A performance gap is the difference between actual performance and the performance that should or could exist. A gap typically implies poor performance. Another form of performance gap could exist when performance is good, but someone realises that it could be better. Thus the gap is between what is and what could be. Moving is the actual action of instituting the change by establishing a vision of where the organisation is heading. The vision can be realised through strategic, structural, cultural and individual change (Kelly LeCouvie 2002).

Refreezing involves strengthening of new behaviours that support the change. The changes must prevail throughout the organisation and they must be stabilised. Refreezing also involves implementing control systems that support the change, applying corrective action when necessary and reinforcing behaviours and performances that support the agenda. The ideal new culture to be instituted through change is one of continuous

change. The behaviours that should be refrozen are those that promote continued adaptability, flexibility, experimentation, assessment of results, continuous improvement and competitive advantage for the organisation (Lalith Weeratunga 2003).

Identification and Management of Resistance to Change

By far the greatest challenge confronting the change agent is difficulty in identifying the right time for change and strategies for managing resistance. The following may be considered.

- **Inertia.** Usually, people do not want to disturb the status quo. The old ways of doing things are comfortable and easy, so people do not want to shake things up and try something new.
- **Timing.** People often resist change because of poor timing. If managers or employees are unusually busy or under stress, or if relations between management and workers are strained, the timing is wrong for introducing new proposals. Where possible, managers should introduce change when employees are receptive.
- **Surprise.** One key aspect of timing and receptivity is surprise. If the change is sudden, unexpected, or extreme, then resistance may be the initial – almost reflexive – reaction. When people have time to prepare for the change, the resistance may be less.
- **Peer pressure.** Sometimes, work teams resist new ideas. Even if individual members do not strongly oppose a change suggested by management, the team may band together in opposition.
- **Adherence to bureaucratic ‘habits’** related to delegation, legalism, procedural regulation; the need for caution and security:
- **Scepticism** – often legitimate – about management.
- Difficulties due to multiple levels of authority, accountability and reporting.
- **Tendency to push decision making upwards.** This conflicts with approaches that seek to increase self-control and self-direction.
- **Relationships** are guided by the interests of stakeholders.
- **Conflicting interests**, agendas, alliances, reward structures and values.
- **Financial support** for change management programmes is difficult to obtain.

(Lalith Weeratunga 2003).

Other causes of resistance may arise from the specific nature of a proposed change. Change-specific reasons for resistance stem from what people perceive to be the personal consequences of the change. Some of these reasons are:

- i) Self-interest. Most people care less about the organisation’s best interest than they do about their own best interests. They will resist a change if they think it will cause them to lose something of value.
- ii) Misunderstanding. Even when the management proposes a change that will benefit everyone, people may resist because they do not fully understand its purpose.
- iii) Different assessments. Employees receive different - and usually less – information than management receives. Such discrepancies cause people to develop different assessments of proposed changes. Some may be aware that the benefits outweigh the costs, while others may see only the costs and not perceive the advantages (Kelly LeCouvie 2002).

Three categories of organisational members are most likely to resist change. They are:

- i) Older members who might fear that they are too old to new knowledge, skills and the right attitudes that might be occasioned by change;
- ii) The less well educated, who might doubt their self worth, or their value to the organisation, or their ability to benefit from retraining; and
- iii) Junior staff who might be the least informed and the most vulnerable to rumour and to cynicism from older staff that have ‘seen it all before’ and may advise junior staff to keep their heads down and wait for the change to go away (Kelly LeCouvie 2002).

Resistance to change within an organisation is as common as the need for change. When managers decide on making organisational change, they typically face employee resistance aimed at preventing the change from occurring. This resistance generally exists because organisation members fear some personal loss such as a reduction in personal prestige, a disturbance of established social and working relationship and personal failure because of an inability to carry out new job responsibilities (Margaret Russell, 1990: 18).

Reducing resistance to change is very important since resistance accompanies any proposal for change. Samuel Certo pointed out that it behoves on managers to manage resistance to change tactfully and decidedly. Resistance according to him can be reduced considerably using the following guidelines:

- Avoidance of surprises. Whenever possible, individuals who will be affected both positively and negatively should be informed about the intended change well in advance of the announcement of the change.
- Promotion of real understanding is imperative to success in change management. When fear of personal loss related to a proposed change is reduced, opposition to the change declines.
- Setting the stage for change is important and management needs a positive attitude as a powerful

weapon for reducing resistance to change.

- Making of tentative change as a strategy for reducing resistance is useful and beneficial to the change management process. This approach offers a trial period for members to work under the proposed change before voicing their support or opposition to it (Samuel Certo 1992:363).

Strategies for Enlisting Cooperation in Change Management

The success of any change agenda is contingent on cooperation of the people involved in the change process. No change agenda, no matter how well crafted it might be, is likely to succeed without the cooperation of the individuals involved in the change process. It is important to be acquainted with strategies or approaches for effectively managing change and enlisting cooperation of organisational members to ensure success. These strategies are:

1. **Education and communication.** Management owes it a fundamental duty to educate organisational members on proposed changes well in advance before they occur. It is good practice for management to communicate not only the philosophy underlying the change but the time-table for implementation as well. This process can include one-on-one discussions, presentations to groups, reports and sensitization programmes.

2. **Participation and involvement.** It is important to listen to the people who are affected by the change whether they are junior staff, senior staff or senior members. They should be involved in the design and implementation of the change. Whenever practicable, management may use the advice of staff when it is considered credible.

3. **Facilitation and support.** Management should make the change as easy as possible for employees and should be supportive of their efforts. Facilitation involves providing the training and other resources needed to carry out the change and perform their jobs under the new circumstances. Authority should be decentralised and people empowered. Offering support involves listening patiently to problems and guiding employees through difficulties that might confront them.

4. **Negotiation and rewards.** It is good management practice to offer concrete incentives for cooperation with the change. This could be in the form of scholarships for further studies for staff most affected by change, capacity building and orientation for those put in new positions, facilitation of applications for promotion, a higher salaries and other workplace benefits. This strategy notwithstanding, care must be taken to avoid creating the impression that the change is meant to reward loyalists of management and victimize or punish critics especially in the appointment of heads of department, director of institutes, coordinators of project etc. This is because such a perception would undermine the integrity and credibility of the whole process of change.

5. **Manipulation and co-optation.** It is interesting to point out that management may use more subtle or covert tactics to implement the agenda for change. One form of this tactics is manipulation and cooptation of 'powerful' individual or pockets of individuals, who are most likely to resist change. Such people could be given critical roles in the change process to play. It is not uncommon for the leader of a resisting group to be co-opted onto the change agenda team. This would redirect his thinking and energies toward lending strategic support to the comparative advantage of management.

6. **Coercion.** It is a normal change management strategy to apply punishment or the threat of punishment to organisational members, who deliberately and mischievously resist change because of certain vested group or personal interest. With this approach, management uses force or the threat of force to make people comply with the agenda for change or be swept away by change. (Lalith Weeratunga 2003).

Leading and Controlling Change

The business of successful change management requires a coalition of committed, effective and knowledgeable leaders to carry out. The essential activities involved may be summarised as follows: establishing a sense of urgency, establishing the guiding coalition, developing a vision and strategy, communicating the change vision, empowering broad-based action, generating short-term wins, consolidating gains and producing more change and anchoring new approaches. (Lalith Weeratunga 2003.).

Every change leader has a crucial responsibility to establish a sense of urgency. This could be achieved by examining prevailing environmental realities of the organisation, through identifying weaknesses and strengths, opportunities and threats to the change process. A change leader must not allow his organisation to become complacent. He must create a guiding coalition of respected, conscientious, effective and knowledgeable individuals to lead the change. Experience of failure in managing change is often due to the absence of a powerful coalition of respected, conscientious, effective and knowledgeable individuals. It is imperative for top management to start the change process and enlist the support of others since not everybody would support change from the beginning. Groups at all levels must be made to appreciate and accept ownership for change agenda in order to guarantee success in the implementation.

What will direct the change process is the development of a vision and strategy. What would be in store after the change has to be made clear to everyone. This will help to dispel rumours, clarify expectations and mobilise people's energies. If you are the change leader in your organisation, never underestimate the power of a compelling vision. The clearer you are about it, the more able you will be to convince others to commit themselves to its implementation. Half the change process is accomplished when the vision and strategy for the

change are well crafted and clearly communicated to all stakeholders.

A disturbing cause of failure for most change processes had been the inability of the change leader to clearly formulate and communicate the vision, mission and objectives for change. Every possible opportunity and channel to talk to employees must be thoroughly explored to reinforce the change agenda. Empowering broad-based action means getting rid of obstacles to success. You should not hesitate to replace anything that stands in the way of the change process. They may be systems and structures, but it is important that they are replaced to facilitate the change process. A change leader must encourage others to take moderate and calculated risks, experiment and empower people by providing information, knowledge, authority and rewards.

Every change leader must aim at 'small wins' geared toward the grand success he or she is anticipating. When there are small victories the followers will have faith in the change leader and they will strive for further victories as 'success begets success.' These 'small wins' are empirical prove that progress is being made. With the well-earned credibility of earlier successes, the leader can bring about more change that supports his vision.

Finally, anchor new approaches in the emerging change culture by highlighting positive results, communicating the connection between the new behaviours and improved results to develop new change agents and leaders. The change leader should continually increase the number of people joining his team in taking responsibility for change. (Lalith Weeratunga 2003).

Conclusion

If organisational change management of the Polytechnics in Ghana to Universities of Technology by 2016, is to be successfully accomplished, stakeholders and practitioners should be properly educated on the need for change, beneficiaries and victims should be involved in the process of change, surprises should be avoided, individuals or groups most likely to resist change should be involved or co-opted, through the use of incentives, into a coalition of zealots to lead the change agenda.

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