Managing Change in Adult Education

Souad Slyman, MA, BSc, FHEA

Lecturer in Business School, University of Roehampton

Bio: Souad Slyman is an experienced educator who has a long-established record of teaching. She has a multidisciplinary background, starting with scientific studies in Mathematics and Computing (BSc), continued with Master of Arts in Education (MA) and currently conducting Doctoral research in Computer Science at Goldsmiths, University of London. Souad's research interests are in Games Design Development, business leadership, management and social change. Souad's research focuses on evaluating the impact of games that is purposefully designed to improve mathematical and computational learning in a range of academic areas (Serious Games, Human Computer Interaction, 3D Modelling, Software Engineering, Information System, Games for education, Leadership, Management and Social Change).

Abstract

This article focuses on managing change in the context of professional experience of a colleague, a former mathematics teacher working with adult learners at a South London School, who I will call Mrs. "'D'", a pseudonym. It caused me great concern to experience a challenging change, which was faced with resistance from the manager, known as Mrs. "'M'", a pseudonym. Thus, how could one manage and implement change despite resistance? In this article, I will explore change from theoretical and practical perspectives.

Key Words: Change, complexity theory, implications, leadership, management, micropolitics, professional practice, resistance, strategies.

Introduction

In order to understand change, one would require to first consider how change could be defined. There are a number of definitions which may be of help in this context. Senge (2006:1) defines change as a natural factual process of our daily life whether we "[l]ike it or not," it is coming and we "must adapt to survive." This implies that change is inevitable and irresistible routine and fact of our daily life. It also indicates that change can be initiated primarily by individuals or on organizational levels where some people might like it because it brings meaningful constructive innovations to them which their brains can digest, master, and process while others' might resist it, since it is imposed upon them and therefore brings fear, disruption, and insecurity. This is what Mullins (2007) calls resistance to change, which is discussed next.

Resistance to Change

Resistance to change, according to Mullins (2007), is common at both individual and organizational levels yet the exact reasons for resistance are unidentified. Forces of change, in general, include ignoring staff's needs and expectations, overstretching them with excessive unmanageable work, which could lead to loss of motivation and overall job satisfaction. As a former mathematics teacher, Mrs. D was overloaded with excessive work, which demotivated her and that led to her dissatisfaction and stress at work. As a result, she resigned from this job. Individual resistance could come from individuals' perception and views of the ideal organization they are working for. Another reason could be habit. For instance, if they are used to certain pattern/ hours of work, longer hours could cause resistance unless there were some extra benefits to the workers. Similarly, if the work is problematic, unmanageable, or no promotion or financial assistance is provided, this could also be faced with

resistance. In my view, and according to my personal experience, this could also lead to losing competent individuals in any organization since if staff's needs are ignored and denied, individuals will resist change. Nevertheless, Fullan (2001), Senge (2006), Mullins (2007), Evans (1996), and Preedy et al (2003) suggest that initiated change (that people like) can result in personal mastery and self-satisfaction, whereas imposed change can bring resistance and conflict because it is seen as a sign of fear from the unfamiliar and unknown. Thus, how can one manage change?

Managing Change

Managing change effectively depends on understanding the complexity of the process. There are two types of change "voluntary" (natural events) and "imposed" (deliberate) (see Fullan, 2001). This suggests that imposed change may involve bad costs and great tensions unless the meaning of change is "shared," initiated, and planned (Fullan, 2001:30). Thus,

employee accepts the value for this initiated change since innovation is multifaceted and for it to be successful, three factors should be considered, according to Fullan (2001). These are teaching resources, approaches, and teaching pedagogy. This is because it is not morally right to introduce new policies and expect individuals to adapt and follow instructions. This also runs the risk of misinterpretation because the real change involves innovations in all three dimensions of change (i.e., teaching approaches, teaching materials, and beliefs).

Like Fullan, Senge (2006) insists on adapting to survive, as change is an imminent process that is imminent whether we like or not, but what is significant is that one should stay calm, learn continually, and balance everything. It is worth noting that managing change in any organization is an apprehensive and uneasy task because leadership team must be trained appropriately to act quickly, communicate effectively, have a clear vision, think

proficiently, and be ready to face any deterring future challenges. "Training," according to Senge (1990:10-11), will increase the team's awareness of "management and leadership innovation," and empower them with effective strategies and tools to assist the efficient functioning of the management team.

Educational change is perceived as a gradual process that takes time, skills, and energy; when teachers are not involved in the process of change (see Fullan, 2001). This will lead to frustration, anxiety, and disengagement of teachers and subsequently to unproductive change. Furthermore, Preedy et al. (2003) argue that collaboration and team-teaching in schools are fundamental innovative ways of enhancing students' teaching and learning (Rosenholz, 1989, cited in Fullan, 2001).

Consequently, effective change should be based on clear understandings and agreement between individuals and organizations, i.e., "what changes to implement" and "how to implement them"

because we have to comprehend the innovation and the process of this innovation, and the "how" word (Fullan, 2001:48). In implementing change, Fullan (2001:42) recommends teachers to adopt varieties of approaches in delivering the curriculum. However, Bussis et al. (1976:59, cited in Fullan, 2001) argue that teachers focus on the aim of the curriculum without even understanding it themselves. This is what is called as "[s]urface curriculum" (see Fullan, 2001). On the other hand, innovations or new policies can be perceived as easy to implement when in reality it is more complex. This is because new approaches of teaching and new skills are required to be developed (Fullan, 2001). Therefore, I would suggest that in order to implement change, one could embrace specific objectives and aims using specific resources, such as introducing new software, because teachers could imitate the innovations without even understanding the purpose. Furthermore, Bussis et al. (1976:59, cited in ibid) recommended that

teachers should have some "feedback informational support" to empower and enrich teachers' understandings rather than dismissing it (cited in ibid). With the above in mind, to manage change in organizations, one is required to introduce a culture of change or identity guidelines to create devoted committed employees, eliminating all the bureaucracy and developing a culture of learning organization (Senge, 1990). However, introducing successful culture change may also be underpinned by tensions, especially if it is approached as a management tool to control employees. For example, Karreman and Alvesson (2004) suggest that organizational changes aimed at controlling "people's lives and their subjectivities" (cited in Morgan & Spicer, 2009:256), since frequent change of strategies is a sign of resistance in the work place (Hardt and Negri, 2000, 2004, cited in Morgan & Spicer, 2009). Nevertheless, Ford, Ford and D'Amelio (2008) oppose this point suggesting that this drives the change

forward rather than eliminating it (cited in Morgan & Spicer, 2009:256). In addition, Feenberg (1999) indicates that critical changes and strategies for implementing change, with hidden agendas, include the enforcement of new technologies (Holye, 1989) as a form of control, power, and repression of people's labor with the intention of increasing profits and extending worker discipline. Whilst others add to this the arrival of new computerized systems and the enforcement of new standards (Morgan & Spicer, 2009).

It seems that research has shown that change for some can cause pain and be predatory, while for others it can enlighten the spirit of independence, power, and creativity. This implies that there are two "emotional aspects of change": "Engaging" and "distressing." "Engaging" can make people powerful but "distressing" change can be depressing because it causes pain and stress (Brown and Humpheries, 2003, cited in Morgan & Spicer, 2009). For instance, the case study with Mrs. M was

very "distressing" and "painful" change to experience, since there was no engagement or satisfaction at work. Thus, Mrs. M seems to use her power to enforce her new innovations, in this case new programs and new IT courses that she wanted Mrs. D to teach. Nevertheless, her plans did not succeed as the wave of change, although painful at the beginning, had brought independence, power, and creativity to Mrs. D's life to look for new innovative ideas to implement her new change.

Change with hidden agendas may be manipulative, damaging, and stressing. Mrs. D has experienced this type of change on a personal level. She felt powerless, unhappy, and depressed because at the time she could not construct a mental model of what is occurring thus see the whole picture, instead she was just concentrating on her duty, i.e., teaching and delivering her lectures, since this was also the field where she was going to collect data for her dissertation for Master's in Education. This I think was a powerful force that stopped

change from being implemented. This also acts as a barrier that prevents the thinking process from progressing, thus the whole situation became multifaceted. When power is used, or abused, the theory of micropolitics may be at play, as discussed next.

Micropolitics and Managing Change

Hoyle (1989) defined micropolitics, as playing politics, or hidden agendas. This also means that micropolitics is a subject that houses social psychology, anthropology, sociology, politics, and economics. It is a "continuum" and a set of strategies through which individuals are manipulated selfishly and with perseverance by the management. It is worth noting that this micropolitics is different from conventional management such as those in schools or colleges and it has its roots in the exchange theory. Micropolitics was developed by Homans (1961) and it is summarized in the phrase "scratch my back, I scratch yours." This implies that in education, for instance, a

head can make an offer to the teacher who "can't refuse, whereby the profit of the head is greater than of a teacher" (Hoyle, 1989:69), i.e., the benefits of the head is always greater than the poor powerless teacher, no matter what the head offered. This indicates that micropolitics consist of strategies of how those in power can use their powers to control/ manipulate individuals with the aim of reaching their personal goals. Strategies for instance includes, "bargaining." "[B]argaining" is a "managerial and micropolitical strategy" and it is implicit and undertaken at the management level, as there are organizational hidden agendas, i.e., micropolitics under which the organization management operates, under certain rules and procedures. Members under managerial power/-duties have access to micropolitical strategies and the head has more strategies. Strategies are used in favor of individuals or in group interest and can range from mode of grouping students or teaching method to certain curriculum and

syllabus (Hoyle, 1989). Strategies consist of "a set of actors, a set of decisions, an assumption that each actor has a clearly defined preferred outcome" (Hoyle, 1989:3). This "bargain situation" is known as tactics. For instance, in Mrs. D's professional practice she was asked by the manager to send the lecture and lecture plan, and all resources one week before the actual implementation of the lecture. Therefore, I think that professional interests become an integral part of the process of the management (Hoyle, 1989:2). This implies that management have used "power as a form of authority" for her personal interests such as "status, promotion and working conditions" (Holye, 1989:2), as her personal interests are the motivator for manipulation as she used to promise to promote Mrs. D whenever excessive workload was introduced. Thus, this is what Marris (1975:166, cited in Fullan, 2001) refer to as:

When those who have power to manipulate changes act as if they have only to explain, and their explanations are not at once accepted, shrug off

opposition as ignorance or prejudice, they express a profound contempt for the meaning of lives other than their own. For the reformers have already assimilated these changes to their purposes, and worked out a reformulation which makes sense to them, perhaps through months or years of analysis and debate.

This implies that Mrs. M has used her power to manipulate Mrs. D. Thus, Mrs. D has implemented her change as an educational reformer and resigned since this was a turning point of her career and her change of promotion did not take place, i.e., stay manipulated with Mrs. M or find another opportunity, which she did as she is now a mathematics lecturer in a vibrant South London University. Nevertheless, a provocative question that I shall explore in the next section is that, Did Mrs. M know about complexity theory?

Complexity Theory

Theories of change can explain, predict, and control causal relations; understand and interpret the world; and critically analyze the social world. For instance, complexity theory is a survival, developmental, and transformational theory that is based on complexity science that educational settings must comprehend in order to stay alive in this ever-changing world of education (Morrison, 2002). Lucas (2000:3) defines complexity theory as a "collection of interacting parts, which together function as a whole; it has boundaries and properties" (cited in Morrison, 2002). This implies that for any organization to survive in this evolving dynamic world, networking and communication are a key to survival. Complexity theory is a holistic, natural approach of looking and solving human complexity because human as a complex system with unpredictable complex behavior can bring "restraining forces" and turbulent change to any organization (De Smet, 1998:7, cited in Morrison, 2002). By contrast, complexity theory is a holistic new way of looking at phenomena. It is a "self-organized," "self-regenerating," and "self-perpetuating," emergent, interactive,

connected with its members, creative, and open-minded learning organization that has distributed leadership instead of rigid controlling ones (Senge, 1990; Morrison, 2002:15). Controlling leadership can make "things fall apart," as "the centre cannot hold" (Yeats, 1962, cited in Morrison, 2002; Mullins, 2007). This indicates that leaders should be enabling, facilitating and empowering, not controlling or manipulative like Mrs. M. Johnson (1999:32) states that a self-organizing system should be connected where individuals "have freedom and autonomy to organize themselves in a participatory way within… the goals and incentives of the organization and can thereby learn and change" (cited in Morrison, 2002). This implies that members should have freedom to organize themselves and therefore learn and change. A principal value that was absent from Mrs. M's agenda, when she restrained Mrs. D's ability to teach creatively with autonomy and develop, as she states, "I just want them to pass the exam, nothing else." In contrast, Stacey et al. (2000) urge organizations to be self-organized and interactive, to understand individuals and support their development, learning and change because traumatizing citizens is an ineffective process since if "pressure builds on the system," "the system will explode" (cited in Morrison, 2002). This will result in staff leaving their jobs, similar to what Mrs. D did or leave on a stress-related absence. In the next section, I shall discuss implications of change on leadership.

Implications for Leadership Practice

Change is a gradual incremental and iterative process that takes time (Oakes et al., 1999, cited in Fullan, 2001) and for it to be effective organizations, as in the example of Mrs. M should have "less rigid structure" and a distributed leadership just like a "living organisms." It should be working collaboratively with common shared values and goals, striving for excellence and for the best of the entire organization where "the whole is greater

than the sum of the parts" (Lucas, 2000:3; Cilliers, 1998, cited in Morrison, 2002). This is because "[e]veryone is accountable" and responsible, as "[a]ccountability means to carry the welfare for the organization in your hands" (Peter Block cited in Senge, 2006:9; Morrison, 2002), not just for personal interests as in Mrs. M.

Senge's (2006) five disciplines are, "understand a system," "theory of knowledge," and psychology, especially "intrinsic motivation." This facilitates the development of three core learning capabilities, which are "[f]ostering aspirations, developing reflective conversation, and understanding complexity" (Senge, 2006; Morrison, 2002). This is very much linked to Lewin's (1947) ideology of unfreezing, movement, and freezing process, where one is required to identify, diagnose and understand the problem, take action, and reflect.

Furthermore, Senge (1990) regards personal mastery as a core skill in learning because people focus and transfer their

thinking to a meaningful objective and self-directed learning by focusing on the right tasks at the right time. Personal mastery, according to Senge (1990), also means approaching "life as a creative work," i.e., "living life from a creative" perspective rather than "reactive" perspective (ibid: xvi-4; Morrison, 2002). It is worth noting that staying calm, motivated, and positive, focusing on the right task at the right time and not shifting away from reality could benefit us all in mastering or achieving personal mastery. Vision and creativity are also regarded as characteristics of personal mastery that people should possess in this real world with all its complexities and ambiguities.

Like Senge (2006) and Preedy et al. (2003), Fullan (2001: 17-23) suggests that a learning organization should continually foster learning environments where actors are constantly learning together, interacting and thinking in the organizational system. In complexity theory, learning committed team should have a "shared vision," and a

"sense of mission" to construct "mental models," i.e., they think effectively outside the box and are not destructed or shifted away from seeing the whole picture of the real problems. The idea of the whole picture, "seeing wholes," is that one must learn how to think patiently and "wait for the aspirin to take effect," act and react in a constructive learning manners aiming at improving constantly (Senge, 2006:3-11). The word aspirin here implies that aspirin as a form of medication can be used to cure a type of illness, for example a "headache," a situation where one is unhappy with and it is a cause for concern. I would infer that change, as a form of remedy, will take effect progressively and slowly like an aspirin and until change is treated and cured, one must stay calm, be responsible, and learn to think (Senge, 2006). I would infer that this is linked to constructivism theory, where people/ learners have to construct mental models in their minds, a picture of their new experiences and new learning. Like Senge, De Bono (1992)

reveals the magical power of thinking and seeing the whole picture.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would argue that one must learn how to think constructively by staying calm and reflecting. This is similar to Lewin's (1947 cited in Mullins, 2007) model of change (Appendix A) of unfreezing, movement and refreezing process. Reflection should be leading to change and innovation in a cyclical process that is based on deeper understandings of what is to be learned and improved each time. This is very much linked to Fullan (2001), Senge (1990, 2006) and De Bono's (1992) ideology of learning thinking. Therefore, learning as a leader how to change problems before they become crises. For instance, Mrs. D could have used Lewin's (1947) model of change to gain insights into how she could unfreeze Mrs. M's resistance to change until she understood it and then change and refreeze the whole situation. In Senge's words, understanding how people work and their

interaction in the system, and how Mrs. D's own actions created her sadness at work, leading her to resign. On the other hand, Mrs. M should have used her power to inspire, lead and manage individuals like Mrs. D instead of constraining and overtiring her with endless workload. Mrs. M should have operated under shared vision with common goals, and used distributed leadership, collaboration, power relations, and learning organization instead of manipulations and micropolitics.

Therefore, it seems that change can be celebrated and achieved if leaders are to use various techniques and processes to manage and control change, considering any internal and external pressures by using effective communication, open-mindedness, linearity, adaptability, collaboration, positive feedback, creativity, suggestions, and providing developmental activities for its members, eliminating any traces of micropolitics and bearing in mind complexity theory.

References

Bennett, N., M. Crawford, and M. Cartwright, eds. (2003). *Effective Educational Leadership*. London, UK: Sage.

Davies, B., ed. (2009). *The Essentials of School Leadership.* London, UK: Paul Chapman.

De Bono, E., (1992). *Teach Your Child How To Think.* England: McQuaig Group Inc.

Edwards, R., and K. Nicoll, (2006). "*Expertise, Competence and Reflection in the Rhetoric of Professional Development.*" *BERJ. 32, no., (1), pp. 114-131.*

Fullan, M. (2001). *The New Meaning of Educational Change*. London, UK: Routledge Falmer.

Fullan, M. (2003). *Change Forces with a Vengeance*. London, UK: Routledge Falmer.

Gardner, H. (1999). Intelligence Re*frames: Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century*, New York, NY: Basic Books.

Slyman, S., (2017)

Gronn, P. (2003). *The New Work of Educational Leaders.* London, UK: Paul Chapman.

Holye, E., (1989). The Micropolitics of Schools, in Bush, T. (1989). eds. Managing Education: Theory and Practice. Milton Keynes, UK: Open University Press.

Morgan, G., and A. Spicer, (2009). "Critical Approaches to Organisational Change" In M. Alvesson, R. Bridgman, and H. Willmott, eds. The Handbook of Critical Management Studies. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Morrison, K. (2002). *School Leadership and Complexity Theory*. London, UK: Routledge Falmer.

Mullins, L. (2007). *Management and Organisational Behaviour. 8th*

ed. Harlow, UK: Pearson Education.

Pollard, A., J. Anderson, M. Maddock, S. Swaffield, J.Warin & P. Warwick, (2008). *Reflective Teaching, 3rd eds.* London, UK: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Preedy, M., Glatter, R., and Wise, C. 2003. ed. *Strategic Leadership and Educational Improvement.* London: Sage.

Senge, P. 1990. *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of Learning Organization.* United Kingdom: Random House Business Books.

Senge. P. (1999). *The Dance of Change*: *The Challenges of Sustaining Momentum in Learning Organizations*. London, UK: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

Senge, P., (2006). *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of Learning Organisation.*

London, UK: Random House Business Books

Stacey, R.D. (2007). *Strategic Management and Organisational Dynamics: the Challenge of Complexity*, 5th ed. Harlow, UK: Pearson Education Limited.

Steel, R. (2006). *Emergence in Organisations.* http://www.new-paradigm.co.uk/emergence-human.htm accessed March 2009.
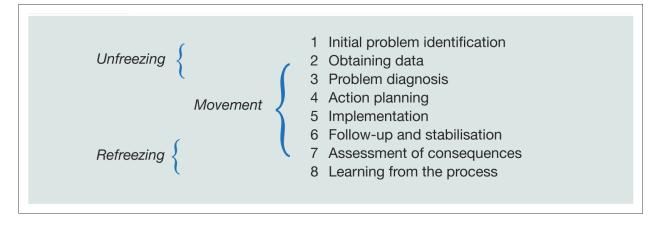
Thrupp, M. (2005). *School Improvement: An Unofficial Approach*, Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.

Appendix A

Lewin's (1947) model of change (cited in Mullins, 2007).