IMPLEMENTATION OF LARGE-SCALE PLANNED CHANGE: SOME AREAS OF AGREEMENT AND DISAGREEMENT[1]

TERESA JOYCE COVIN

Kennesaw State College,
Marietta, Georgia

RALPH H. KILMANN

Katz Graduate School of Business,
University of Pittsburgh

Summary.—This article discusses the results of a study designed to identify key issues in the large-scale planned change process. 80 internal consultants, 58 external consultants, 71 researchers, and 189 managers indicated the extent to which they perceived various issues as having a positive or negative influence on the process of large-scale change. These positive and negative influence issues, as well as areas of agreement and disagreement concerning the perception of key issues are summarized.

In the past several years, interest in the management of major organizational change has increased significantly (see, for example, Kilmann & Covin, 1988). The difficulties of planning for and implementing large-scale change have been a challenge for many organizations across the country. Still, few efforts have been made to investigate issues which may be associated with the success or failure of large-scale change efforts.

While there is no widely accepted definition of large-scale change, Nadler (1988, p. 67) suggests that such efforts "require changes that encompass the entire organization, have occurred over a number of years, and involve fundamental modifications in ways of thinking about the business, the organization, and how the organization is managed." This description is similar to those offered by Barczak, Smith, and Wilemon (1987) and Ledford, Mohrman, Mohrman, and Lawler (1989) emphasizing major, systemwide changes in organizational subsystems. Consistent with these viewpoints, for the purposes of this research a large-scale change effort was defined as a planned effort designed to improve the long-term performance of an entire organization.

The goal of this study was to identify the types of issues that are perceived by participants in planned change efforts to have a highly positive or highly negative effect on the ultimate success of large-scale change efforts and to assess the consensus regarding the influence of a variety of implementation issues. The research attempts to address some of the limitations of the current planned change literature by (1) surveying external consultants, internal consultants, managers and researchers to gain a broad overview of different perspectives and (2) focusing specifically on the types of issues associated with large-scale change efforts.

---

[1]Address correspondence to T. J. Covin, Ph.D., School of Business, Kennesaw State College, POB 444, Marietta, GA 30061.

METHOD

A questionnaire was developed specifically for this study.[2] The items developed for the questionnaire were based on a comprehensive review of studies examining critical issues in planned change (see, for example, Greiner, 1967; Buchanan, 1971; Burke, Clarke, & Koopman, 1984; Kellogg, 1984; Porras & Hoffer, 1986). An initial list of over 100 issues was reviewed by faculty and doctoral students with expertise in the area of organizational change. As a result of this review, several items thought to be redundant were eliminated or rephrased. A total of 68 items were chosen for the final questionnaire. These items were thought to be most representative of the domain of important issues in large-scale change. The questionnaire was then pretested on a sample of 10 managers, researchers, internal consultants, and external consultants to ensure that directions and questions would be understood by respondents.

The sample for this study is composed of external consultants, internal consultants, managers and researchers who had attended or requested information about several different research conferences or seminars related to the topic of planned change from a large northeastern university. Because the number of researchers involved in the conferences and workshops was limited, recent books and journals related to the topic of organizational change (e.g., Consultation, Group and Organization Studies, Organization Development Journal) were examined to identify other researchers who might be involved in large-scale change efforts. As a result of this review, an additional 27 research workers were asked to participate in the study.

A multipart questionnaire was mailed to 1,005 individuals (approximately 560 managers, 185 internal consultants, 140 external consultants, and 120 researchers). Those not responding to the first questionnaire received an additional copy of the questionnaire one month after the first mailing. Of the questionnaires mailed, 67 were nondeliverable and 398 were completed and returned for an over-all response rate of 42.3%. Questionnaires were completed by 189 managers, 80 internal consultants, 58 external consultants, and 71 researchers/faculty. The average number of years respondents had spent in their respective organizations was 11.3. A total of 91 respondents indicated that they had been involved in only one large-scale improvement program, 254 indicated that they had been involved in several large-scale improvement programs, and 35 indicated that they had knowledge of but had not been directly involved in such a program. Eighty-three of the respondents had completed an undergraduate degree, 165 had Master's degrees, and 132 had doctoral degrees.

---

[2]A copy of the questionnaire has been filed as a supplement to this article in Document NAPS-04781. Remit $10.75 for photocopy or $4.00 for fiche to Microfiche Publications, POB 3513, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10017.

To ensure that the programs in which participants had been involved could be considered "large-scale," individuals also responded to a series of structured questions designed to offer a profile of a particular program. All of the cases included in the final analysis described programs which: (1) took place in organizations with at least 100 employees, (2) had multiple goals and utilized multiple methods for achieving these goals, and (3) involved an implementation time frame of at least 6 months (95% of the respondents described programs which had an implementation time frame of over one year).

Respondents were asked to rate the 68 large-scale change issues on a scale ranging from 1 (this item has an extremely negative effect on the ultimate success of most programs) to 7 (this item has an extremely positive effect on the ultimate success of most large-scale programs). Participants were asked to focus on their general experience in large-scale planned change efforts when rating these issues. Mean scores and standard deviations were computed for each of the items for the total sample. Two-tailed t tests were utilized to explore differences in responses among occupational subgroups in the sample. The data were analyzed using SPSS^{x}.

<div align="center">RESULTS</div>

Positive and Negative Issues

For purposes of this discussion, the five items identified by respondents as having the most positive and negative effects (the five items with the highest and lowest mean scores, respectively) on large-scale change are shown in Table 1. The positive effect items focus primarily on carefully setting the stage for organizational change by gaining consensus about possible changes, communicating expectations concerning the program, using a program designed specifically for the organization, and rewarding progress toward goal achievement.

A major theme evident in the items with the lowest over-all mean scores is concern over the extent to which external consultants should be involved in large-scale planned change efforts. Giving consultants primary responsibility for the program or allowing outside consultants to determine the specific goals of the program were viewed by respondents as having a negative influence on the success of these programs. Underestimating time and costs associated with the program, as well as expecting too much from an organization's human resources were also identified as issues which would likely decrease the probability of a successful effort. While there was generally high agreement among the four groups of respondents surveyed concerning which issues had the most positive or negative effects on the change process, there were several significant differences ($p < .05$) in the perception of the issues listed in Table 1. Researchers and external consultants believed that using a program designed specifically for the organization had a more posi-

tive effect than did internal consultants or managers. Managers and internal consultants believed that achieving agreement among top managers before beginning the program had a more positive influence than did external consultants or researchers. The managers believed that underestimating the amount of time necessary to implement the program had a more negative effect than did internal consultants. Finally, although all groups of respondents

TABLE 1
ISSUES HAVING POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EFFECTS

Issues	M	SD	n
Positive Effect			
Creating a shared vision with employees of what the organization will look like when the program is completed.	6.33	0.78	395
Achieving agreement among top managers that improvements are necessary before beginning a program.	6.30*	0.87	394
Communicating to employees what results are expected from the program.	6.20	1.06	397
Using a program that has been designed specifically for the organization.	6.16*	0.97	395
Publicly acknowledging employees for their contributions to program goals.	6.15	0.81	394
Negative Effect			
Allowing outside consultants to determine the goals of the program.	1.90*	1.14	391
Giving outside consultants primary responsibility for the program.	2.18*	1.22	390
Underestimating the amount of time necessary to implement the program.	2.34*	1.11	394
Underestimating the costs of the program.	2.46	1.03	391
Encouraging employees to work longer hours in order to achieve program goals.	3.09	1.29	394

Note.—1: Extremely negative impact on the ultimate success of most programs. 2: Moderately negative impact on the ultimate success of most programs. 3: Slightly negative impact on the ultimate success of most programs. 4: No impact on the ultimate success of most programs. 5: Slightly positive impact on the ultimate success of most programs. 6: Moderately positive impact on the ultimate success of most programs. 7: Extremely positive impact on the ultimate success of most programs.
*Significant differences among the four subgroups of respondents ($p \le .05$).

indicated that giving external consultants primary responsibility for the program or allowing outside consultants to set program goals would have a negative effect on the program's success, internal consultants and managers viewed these factors as having a more negative influence than did external consultants. For a more detailed discussion of the effect of occupational frame of reference on the identification of key change issues, see Covin and Kilmann (1988, 1990).

General Areas of Agreement and Disagreement

Standard deviations were calculated for each of the 68 critical issue

items. The five items with the largest and smallest standard deviations are shown in Table 2. Items with small standard deviations suggest a high level of consensus among the diverse groups of individuals surveyed in this research. Conversely, items with large standard deviations suggest a low consensus concerning the type of effect a particular issue would have on large-scale programs for change.

TABLE 2
ISSUES SHOWING HIGH AND LOW CONSENSUS

Issues	M	SD	n
High Consensus			
Creating a shared vision with employees of what the organization will look like when the program is completed.	6.33	0.78	395
Publicly acknowledging employees for their contributions to program goals.	6.15	0.81	394
Achieving agreement among top managers that improvements are necessary before beginning a program.	6.30	0.87	394
Evaluating the effectiveness of the program at frequent intervals.	6.00	0.88	394
Encouraging employees at all levels of the organization to become actively involved in the program.	5.97	0.92	397
Low Consensus			
Placing responsibility for the success or failure of the program with the chief executive officer.	4.69	1.95	391
Creating dissatisfaction among employees with the present state of the organization.	3.54	1.82	386
Allowing top managers to determine the goals of the program.	4.38	1.70	394
Depending on the chief executive officer to inspire or influence employees to support the program.	5.37	1.61	392
Releasing or demoting individuals who do not support the program.	3.20	1.61	386

These data suggest there is widespread agreement in the sample concerning the importance of creating a shared vision with employees (including top managers), encouraging employees' participation, acknowledging employees' contributions to the effort, and evaluating the program at frequent intervals. Responses show less agreement over the impact of placement of responsibility for program success (specifically whether responsibility should lie with the chief executive officer), the role of other top managers, the practice of "punishing" individuals who do not support the program, and the utility of purposely creating employee dissatisfaction to foster change.

Conclusions

This study has identified several issues which have a positive or negative effect on large-scale programs for change. In addition, several areas of consensus and dissensus regarding the effect of various issues were discussed. The findings of the study seem to warrant several recommendations.

First, individuals responsible for implementing large-scale programs for

change should take care to include employees of the organization in the planning process. Creating a shared vision of the future organization was widely agreed to have a highly positive influence on the ultimate success of most large-scale improvement programs. Communicating expectations, encouraging participation and recognizing employees' contributions were identified as additional means for fostering change.

Second, change agents should carefully consider resource constraints and the potential effects of those constraints on the change process. Failure to set the stage properly for change by making a realistic assessment of resource needs (including time, financial resources, and human resources) was identified by respondents as having a negative effect on the planned process for change. Discussions concerning the role and extent of involvement of external consultants should be an integral part of planning for change.

Finally, the lack of consensus regarding specific change-related issues, as well as the differences among the four groups of respondents (managers, internal consultants, external consultants, and researchers) suggest that the identification of key issues in the change process may well depend on whom one asks. Present findings support other work on the effects of frame of reference (see, for example, Duncan, 1974; Blackler & Brown, 1980; Bianco, 1985). These differences are important in that variable assessments of issues may affect the process for change. For example, disagreements over the role of outside consultants could lead to problems between internal and external resources.

While it may be unrealistic to expect that agreement on important issues can always be reached, it is likely that an open discussion of key concerns before beginning a planned effort for change will increase the likelihood for success. The issues discussed here provide a starting point for such a discussion as well as direction for future research. Issues which are likely to differ according to one's frame of reference (Table 1) as well as other low consensus issues (Table 2) in particular would seem to warrant further investigation.

REFERENCES

BARONE, F. J. (1986) Can conflicting values on the change team work? *Training and Development Journal*, 40, 50-53.

BARZAK, G., SMITH, C., & WILEMON, D. (1987) Managing large-scale organizational change. *Organizational Dynamics*, 16, 23-25.

BIANCO, V. E. (1985) The internal consultant and the eternal struggle. *Training and Development Journal*, 39, 51-53.

BLACKLER, F. H., & BROWN, C. A. (1980) *Whatever happened to Shell's new philosophy of management.* Westmead, Eng.: Saxon House.

BUCHANAN, P. C. (1971) Crucial issues in organization development. In H. Hornstein, B. Bunker, W. Burke, M. Gindes, & R. Lewicki (Eds.), *Social intervention.* New York: Free Press. Pp. 386-400.

BURKE, W. W., CLARK, L. P., & KOOPMAN, C. (1984) Improve your OD project's chances for success. *Training and Development Journal*, 38, 62-68.

COVIN, T. J., & KILMANN, R. H. (1990) Participant perceptions of positive and negative influences on large-scale change *Group and Organization Studies, 15,* 233-248.

COVIN, T. J., & KILMANN, R. H. (1988) Occupational frame of reference and the identification of critical issues in large-scale change. *Consultation, 7,* 174-186.

DUNCAN, W. J. (1974) Transferring management theory to practice. *Academy of Management Journal, 17,* 724-728.

GREINER, L. E. (1967) Patterns of organizational change. *Harvard Business Review,* May-June, 119-128.

KELLOGG, D. M. (1984) Contrasting successful and unsuccessful OD consultation relationships. *Group and Organization Studies, 9,* 151-176.

KILMANN, R. H., & COVIN, T. (1988) *Corporate transformation: revitalizing organizations for a competitive world.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

LAWLER, E. E. (1981) *Pay and organization development.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

LEDFORD, G. E., MOHRMAN, S. A., MOHRMAN, A. M., & LAWLER, E. E. (1989) The phenomenon of large-scale organizational change. In A. M. Mohrman, S. A. Mohrman, G E. Ledford, T. G. Cummings, & E. E. Lawler (Eds.), *Large-scale organizational change* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. Pp. 1-31.

NADLER, D. A. (1988) Organizational frame bending: types of change in the complex organization. In R. Kilmann & T. Covin (Eds.), *Corporate transformation: revitalizing organizations for a competitive world.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. Pp. 66-83.

PORRAS, J. I., & HOFFER, S. J. (1986) Common behavior changes in successful organization development efforts. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 22,* 477-494.