

Leadership Communication During Organizational Change: A Case Study of a Manufacturing Industry Sales Division

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ABSTRACT

Organizational change is inevitable in the modern business world, particularly in the manufacturing industry, as it continually adapts to market dynamics and technological advancements. Effective leadership plays a crucial role in communicating change to employees, ensuring smooth transitions, and minimizing resistance. This study examines leadership communication strategies during organizational change processes within the Sales Division of a manufacturing company. Utilizing a qualitative case study approach, the research incorporates in-depth interviews with both managers and employees. Findings reveal that successful organizational change significantly depends on three key factors: open communication, clear visionary leadership, and active employee engagement in the change process. The study's implications emphasize the critical importance of transparent and persuasive leadership communication in enhancing employee adaptation to organizational transformations.

Keywords: Leadership Communication, Organizational Change, Manufacturing Industry, Communication Strategy, Case Study

INTRODUCTION

Companies and organizations undergo dynamic and continuous change processes. Whether in their environment, timeline, or human resource needs, all aspects must evolve. This phenomenon compels both individuals and organizations to continually adapt and implement changes to address existing challenges while ensuring their sustainability. Organizations with rapid adaptation capabilities will continue to develop even in challenging circumstances, including crisis situations (Holbeche, 2015). Such adaptability is considered more vital than mere strength, as adaptable organizations can adjust themselves to all surrounding changes.

Change can originate from various sources, such as technological progress, shifts in work methods, or regulatory and legal updates. Organizations capable of responding swiftly to change gain a competitive advantage in sustaining their operations and extending their longevity. Consequently, it is critical for organizations to establish robust mechanisms and strategies to identify, assess, and implement necessary changes, ensuring they remain relevant and competitive in a constantly evolving environment. Within this context, adaptive leadership and effective communication emerge as pivotal elements in guiding organizations through change and steering them toward future success (Hackman & Johnson, 2013).

An organization, as an entity operating in a dynamic environment, must continuously evolve and respond to change positively and proactively. A crucial aspect of ensuring sustainability and

effective adaptation is developing superior human resources—individuals who possess not only strong competitive performance but also a high dedication to organizational objectives. Individual readiness to face organizational change is a key determinant of successful adaptation to an ever-changing environment. In this context, leadership plays a pivotal role, as change-oriented leaders provide the direction, motivation, and support employees need to navigate transitions effectively (Indriastuti & Fachrunnisa, 2020).

Several factors influence an individual's readiness for change, including the content of change, **the** process of change, contextual shifts, and individual characteristics. However, the role of organizational leadership in facilitating change is paramount. Effective leaders who understand change dynamics, provide a clear vision, foster a supportive work environment, and encourage employee involvement and participation are critical to successfully managing organizational change (Mansaray, 2019).

Communication becomes a key element in management functions, alongside planning, supervision, and organization (Ruben & Gigliotti, 2017). This highlights the crucial role of communication in ensuring effective and efficient organizational operations. Two-way communication is essential to guarantee that messages from communicators, such as leaders, are accurately received and understood by the communicants or subordinates. Effective communication goes beyond message delivery—it also involves understanding the recipient's background, needs, and preferences to tailor the message and choose the right method. Whether conveyed verbally, in writing, or through symbols, selecting the appropriate form enhances communication effectiveness. Persuasive communication aims to encourage the recipient to perform a task or take action willingly, emphasizing the importance of building trust, support, and motivation.

Internal communication, as the process of delivering messages among members of an organization, including between leaders and subordinates, among leaders, and subordinates, is an important element in building strong relationships and achieving shared objectives within an organization. It is specifically directed at organizational members, with messages received by individuals who are part of the organization, highlighting that the focus of internal communication is to strengthen connections among members and support the achievement of collective goals (Santiago, 2020).

The manufacturing industry plays an important role in the global economy through its significant contributions to gross domestic product (GDP), job creation, and technological innovation. Amid rapid technological development and shifting market dynamics, manufacturing companies are also faced with the need for organizational change to remain competitive. This process of change requires effective leadership, particularly in communication, to ensure that the vision, goals, and strategies for change are clearly understood and embraced by all members of the organization (Kanter et al., 1992). In this context, leadership communication becomes a key factor in successfully addressing challenges and seizing opportunities during periods of transition.

Previous studies have highlighted the importance of leadership communication during organizational change, but have not given enough attention to the role and influence of two-way communication between leaders and subordinates, particularly within the sales division (Ophilia & Hidayat, 2021). These studies tend to focus on a general organizational level, without examining specific divisions, which limits their practical insights. This underscores the need for further research that explores specific aspects such as the role of leadership in communication and the dynamics of interpersonal communication between leaders and their teams. Such a focus can offer a fresh perspective on leadership communication during organizational change within the sales division of the manufacturing industry.

METHODOLOGY

This research employed a case study method to comprehensively investigate the organizational change process within the sales division of PT XYZ, a manufacturing company, initiated in November 2023. Data was gathered through interviews and document analysis to achieve an in-depth understanding. Case studies are suitable for "how" and "why" questions, examining contemporary phenomena in real-life contexts (Yin, 2008) and providing a holistic view of complex interactions (Yin, 2003). The descriptive method was used to examine the status of phenomena at a specific time (Whitney, 1960). This descriptive case study approach aimed to provide a detailed exploration of the change within its real-world context (Nayar & Stanley, 2024), guided by theoretical understanding and rich data collection (Creswell, 2014). The case study allowed for an in-depth analysis of how leadership communication was understood, implemented, and its impact on the organizational change success, exploring internal dynamics and leader-team relationships.

The population comprised all thirteen (13) sales team members at PT XYZ (Rossi et al., 1983). A purposive sample of five (5) individuals was selected based on their relevance to the research objectives (Campbell et al., 2020): the Vice President of Commercial, the General Manager of the Sales Team, two Key Account Executives, and one Sales Administrator.

Data sources included key informants (leaders) and informants (organizational members) who provided insights through their experiences and documents (Scott & Lewis, 2017). The study focused on leadership communication during organizational change at PT XYZ, examining communication strategies, implementation, and employee responses. Data was collected through face-to-face or virtual semi-structured interviews, document analysis (notes, reports, emails, infographics, announcements), and archival records.

Primary data was collected via semi-structured interviews, exploring leaders' communication methods and strategies for gaining team support, trust, and involvement, as well as employees' experiences receiving change information. Open-ended questions were used to gather deeper understanding and diverse perspectives (Kettler, 2019).

Data analysis involved identifying patterns, themes, and meanings within the data, considering the broader context (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Qualitative data analysis focused on understanding the dynamics, challenges, and effective strategies of organizational change. The analysis followed Creswell's (2014) three interrelated aspects: data reduction, data presentation, and data interpretation. Dimensions analysis utilized Strauss and Corbin's (1990) coding process: initial coding, axial coding, and selective coding, to organize and interpret interview data.

Data validity was addressed through triangulation, member checking, and thick descriptions (Golafshani, 2003). Data verification employed triangulation (FitzPatrick, 2019), involving multiple data sources and methods to cross-check findings. Transferability was ensured through detailed reporting, and dependability through auditing the research process. Data triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) was the primary technique to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings by integrating various data types and information sources, reducing bias, and providing a comprehensive understanding.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study will examine how leaders convey organizational change and how employees perceive these changes. Additionally, the research will explore how the company guides leaders in communicating change to their teams. Many organizations have written policies regarding internal communication, which emphasize the importance of communication methods and information delivery to employees. If employees are able to understand the changes in the work environment and adapt quickly, it can help prevent discomfort or disruptions that might arise during the implementation process. By focusing on both the communication strategies used by leaders and the employee responses, this study aims to uncover the dynamics of change management within the organization.

Leader's planning and message delivery process in addressing organizational change

In facing the change organization, the planning and delivery processes message holds a crucial role to ensure that change can be accepted and implemented successfully by all members organization. Leaders play a central role in directing and communicating change.

Effective organizational change requires thorough planning and strategic communication to ensure successful implementation. As Appelbaum et al. (2017) emphasize, "the planning process and communication are critical to ensure the change will be accepted and properly executed by all organizational members." Leaders play a central role in this process by first conducting a comprehensive review of the current organizational state, identifying strengths and weaknesses, while designing an ideal structure that considers people, job descriptions, and KPIs (Groves & Feyerherm, 2022; Oreg & Berson, 2019). As one leader in the case study stated:

"In the organizational change process, I review the current organizational conditions, including strengths and weaknesses, then design the future organization by considering talent/people, workload, and individual KPIs." (TAW)

Change communication must be delivered transparently and participatively. According to Carreño (2024), leaders should explain the strategic rationale behind changes, including improving organizational effectiveness, efficiency, and business recovery. As explained by AT:

"Organizational change communication involves: (1) explaining the current organizational state with supporting facts, (2) presenting the future organization and team roles, and (3) highlighting the positive impacts of change." (AT)

Two-way communication is equally crucial to reduce resistance. Leaders should not only disseminate information but also actively listen to team feedback (Marbun et al., 2023). As Heuvel et al. (2020) note, "when employees feel involved in the change process, resistance decreases and adaptation motivation increases." Continuous communication ensures shared understanding and addresses implementation challenges (Fry, 2003).

Through strategic planning and adaptive communication, organizational change can achieve its objectives while strengthening team collaboration (Yue et al., 2019; Szabla et al., 2023).

Communication dynamics or barriers within the sales division during the change process

Communication barriers can significantly hinder the effectiveness of organizational change implementation if not properly addressed (Khurram, 2024). In sales divisions, for instance, confusion and resistance to change often stem from unclear instructions, lack of transparency, and poor team cohesion and coordination. Additionally, misalignment in understanding new goals and strategies among team members can slow adaptation. To overcome these challenges, consistent open communication and active engagement with the entire team, through regular meetings, digital platforms, or leadership that fosters participation, are essential to ensure all members understand and effectively implement organizational changes.

"Some employees are reluctant to change, requiring a mindset shift. If they don't clearly understand the purpose and impact of the change, they'll likely resist or perform half-heartedly due to anxiety." (TAW)

Resistance to change often emerges as a natural employee reaction to what they don't fully comprehend (Burnes, 2015). This phenomenon was evident at PT. XYZ, where some employees displayed reluctance toward ongoing transformations. Unaddressed, such resistance can impede progress and create unproductive work environments. A key issue lies in unclear communication about change objectives and their impact on individual roles (Hawkins, 2021). As Yue et al. (2019) emphasize, employees need a comprehensive, transparent understanding to actively engage with change rather than passively accept it.

Structural changes particularly trigger anxiety when employees perceive threats to their positions or increased work complexity (Schumacher et al., 2015). At PT. XYZ, such concerns manifested clearly:

"They worry the new structure and processes might complicate their work or jeopardize their positions." (AT)

A critical mistake in change management is relying on one-way communication, which widens the leader-team gap and strengthens resistance (Ejimabo, 2015). Recognizing this, one PT. XYZ leader shifted to participatory approaches:

"Not everyone embraces change immediately. Some need more time, requiring us to involve them beyond just giving instructions." (TAW)

Cross-divisional communication gaps present additional challenges. Uneven information flow between B2B and Wholesale teams at PT. XYZ created dissatisfaction and confusion, as AT noted:

"Information isn't distributed evenly. Some teams receive updates faster, leaving others feeling behind."

Effective change communication requires clarity and accessibility (Littlejohn, 2002). TAW highlighted this challenge:

"Ensuring change-related messages are clear and easily understood is crucial. Technical or complex explanations hinder comprehension."

At the organizational level, these communication challenges reveal deeper complexities. One-way communication creates unhealthy information dependence, while inter-team disparities hinder coordination (Holck, 2017). Without consistent messaging about the change vision, employees perceive transformations as burdens rather than opportunities (Will, 2015).

Timing significantly impacts communication effectiveness. Premature announcements cause unnecessary anxiety, while delayed information fosters feelings (Seeger & Sellnow, 2019). Cultural factors also play a role, as entrenched norms about information sharing and authority distribution create invisible barriers (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017).

Addressing these issues requires a structured, multidimensional communication strategy (Lasswell, 1958). This includes: clear, relevant content tailored to different units, appropriate channel selection, multi-level engagement, timely information dissemination, and genuine incorporation of feedback into decision-making.

As Indriastuti & Fachrunnisa (2020) stress, change communication must build both emotional and rational understanding across all organizational levels, not just among leadership. Implementing regular two-way communication forums can enhance engagement and understanding among stakeholders. Additionally, simplifying technical messages without losing their essence ensures that the information is easily understood by all parties. It's also crucial to standardize information distribution across divisions, ensuring that all teams receive consistent and uniform messages. Cultural and timing aspects must be carefully considered to ensure effective communication in various contexts. Lastly, measuring communication effectiveness through feedback mechanisms allows for continuous adjustments and improvements. This comprehensive approach can transform communication from a barrier to change into a powerful driver of implementation.

Leadership communication strategies for effective organizational change

Leaders play a crucial role in guiding organizations through change, and their communication strategies are essential in ensuring that the change process is successful. Effective communication not only informs employees about the changes but also facilitates their understanding and acceptance, reducing resistance. Leaders employ a variety of communication strategies to ensure that messages are effectively delivered and positively received by their teams. These strategies go beyond simply disseminating information—they aim to create an environment where employees feel engaged, supported, and prepared for the changes ahead.

One of the key strategies employed by leaders is personalized coaching sessions. By conducting one-on-one sessions with employees, leaders can address specific concerns, provide tailored support, and build trust.

"One-on-one coaching helps me understand each team member's capabilities and challenges, allowing me to provide targeted support during change." (TAW)

This personal approach helps leaders identify the underlying reasons for resistance, whether it stems from workload anxiety, performance concerns, or job security fears.

"Personal approaches help identify whether resistance stems from workload anxiety, performance concerns, or job security fears." (AT)

These sessions create a safe space for employees to voice their concerns without fear of judgment, while also allowing leaders to customize their communication strategies to meet individual needs (Brandes & Lai, 2022; Jit et al., 2017).

In addition to personalized coaching, visual communication tools are also vital in ensuring clarity and understanding of the change process. Leaders often use visual presentations to help employees better grasp complex information, such as the current state, reasons for the change, new structures, and the expected benefits.

"Visual presentations help teams clearly understand current states, reasons for change, new structures, and expected benefits." (TAW)

The use of visual aids significantly reduces ambiguity and enhances comprehension, making it easier for employees to understand the rationale behind the changes being implemented (Eriksson & Fundin, 2018).

Focus group discussions (FGDs) are another important communication strategy employed by leaders. These discussions encourage peer learning, knowledge-sharing, and collective sense-making, which helps transform the change process from a potential threat into a shared challenge.

"FGDs allow knowledge-sharing between team members, transforming change from a threat into a shared challenge." (AT)

By providing a forum for employees to discuss their concerns and experiences, FGDs help to reduce anxiety and build a collaborative approach to adaptation, leveraging social proof to increase acceptance of change (Naeem, 2020).

Finally, HR partnerships play a pivotal role in ensuring the consistency and clarity of change messages. HR is responsible for aligning communication efforts, addressing employee questions, and managing concerns about welfare.

"HR is crucial for aligning messages, answering questions quickly, and addressing employee welfare aspects." (AT)

HR ensures that official announcements are made through established systems, ensuring that employees receive consistent and transparent information at the same time across the organization (Yue et al., 2019).

Key insights from these strategies emphasize the importance of two-way communication in reducing resistance more effectively than top-down approaches (Ejimabo, 2015). Consistent messaging across all levels of the organization is essential to prevent misinformation (Galli, 2018), and timely visual and verbal communication caters to different learning styles (Touitou, 2020). Additionally, collaboration with HR bridges the gap between strategic goals and employee welfare, ensuring that both perspectives are addressed in the communication process (Cowan, 2017).

The successful implementation of organizational change requires leaders to adopt a multifaceted approach to communication. By combining personalized coaching, clear visual communication, collaborative forums, and strong HR partnerships, leaders can transform communication into a tool for building trust and driving change adoption. This approach ensures that the change process is not only understood but also embraced by employees, leading to a smoother transition and long-term success (Chadwick & Raver, 2015).

Employee interpretation of leadership messages during change

Employee interpretation of change messages is influenced by the leader's delivery, communication clarity, and the relevance of the information provided (Littlejohn, 2002). In the sales division, employee responses varied.

"When our new leader first joined, there were many questions among us about what would change and how it would impact our jobs. But what I appreciated was that he didn't immediately make drastic decisions, but rather took the time to understand the situation on the ground before finally explaining the changes that would be made. This made us feel more valued." (NN)

From the beginning, the leader strived to communicate the reasons for the change clearly as a comprehensive transformation, with structured stages, as another employee conveyed.

"He didn't just tell us there would be big changes, but also explained the steps one by one. We were given an overview of what would happen in three months, six months, up to a year ahead, so we could be better prepared for the changes." (AS)

This effective initial communication built trust among employees (Nedelko & Brzozowski, 2017).

Changes to the work system became a primary focus. An employee (NN) initially found the new system more cumbersome but later realized its efficiency:

Previously, our work style was more flexible, but lacked structure. With the new leader bringing in a more organized system, there are clearer targets, and everything is also better documented. Initially, we found this more troublesome, but gradually we realized that this way of working could actually make the job much more efficient."

A mindset challenge also emerged, with the new leader encouraging proactivity, as stated by (LS), *"I feel the challenge isn't just about the way of working, but also about the mindset. This new leader is teaching us to be more proactive and not just wait for instructions. This is different from the previous culture, where many decisions were made by superiors without much discussion with the team."*

The leader introduced more structured and data-driven work methods (Hawkins, 2021). The shift in orientation from intuition to data was felt by employees:

"The previous leader relied more on experience and intuition, while the new leader is very data-oriented. Initially, we found this a bit rigid, but after seeing the results, we understood that this approach is indeed more effective in objectively measuring performance." (LS)

"He often gives direct feedback after seeing our reports or presentations. Sometimes it seems critical and harsh, but we learn more about what needs to be improved and how to enhance our work." (NN)

"I was quite surprised at first by his very structured and detailed leadership style. But gradually, I got used to it and felt clearer in my work. There was no more confusion about what needed to be done or what was expected of us." (AS)

Adaptation was a natural challenge

"When I first heard about these changes, I felt a bit worried. I was used to the old ways, so it took time to adjust to this new way of working." (NN)

However, support through training and opportunities to ask questions aided the adaptation process.

"We were given training and opportunities to ask questions anytime there were things I didn't understand. There was no pressure to be perfect immediately, but rather an emphasis that I should keep learning and adapting." (LS)

Support from colleagues also played a role.

"I was initially reluctant to change because I felt the old way was good enough. However, after colleagues helped and shared a lot, I admitted that this way is more effective." (AS)

The leader took steps to facilitate the transition through training and open communication (Yue et al., 2019), as well as addressing the challenges of changing mindsets with effective communication strategies (Roberson & Perry, 2021). Over time, employees began to feel the benefits of the changes, as expressed by (NN):

"I am now more accustomed to the new system and feel that my work is more structured. We now know better what is expected of us and how to achieve it."

"What I appreciate most is our leader's openness. He didn't just announce the changes and leave us to adapt on our own, but always provided updates and listened to our feedback. This made me feel that these changes weren't made to make things difficult, but to make the company better."

Over time, employees became more open to the changes, recognizing the increased work efficiency and role clarity (Yue et al., 2019). The understanding of change is influenced by individual environment, experiences, perceptions, and expectations (Jit et al., 2017). Effective leadership communication builds emotional connections and provides a sense of certainty. Clarity of the message at the beginning of the change is crucial (Seeger & Sellnow, 2019), and delivering information in stages aids comprehension (Moran, 2014). The interpretation of change is personal, influenced by age and experience. The reasons behind the change must be communicated clearly and persuasively (Indriastuti & Fachrunnisa, 2020). Dialogue and active employee participation can reduce resistance to change (Chadwick & Raver, 2015; Harb & Sidani, 2019). Training, group discussions, and mentoring are effective means for deepening understanding (Moran, 2014). Emotional support from leaders is also important in addressing anxieties that may arise from change (Mansaray, 2019), and appreciating employee efforts can increase motivation to adapt (Hawkins, 2021). The true acceptance of change is marked by the emergence of a sense of ownership and responsibility for the success of the implementation, as well as a shift in how employees refer to the new system as "our way of working" (Igbaekemen, 2014). Involving employees in the change implementation process, including seeking their input, can enhance commitment to the change (Usman, 2020).

Employee interpretation of messages during organizational change significantly determines their response and adaptation (Heuvel et al., 2020). Employees who interpret change positively will adapt more quickly and seek ways to contribute to the new system. Conversely, if the dominant interpretation is that the change only adds workload without clear benefits, resistance may increase. Chien (2015) states that a good interpretation of organizational change correlates with increased employee engagement, higher job satisfaction, and more effective change implementation. Continuous adaptation requires ongoing time and support from leaders (Quirke, 2017), as well as regular evaluations to identify and address potential obstacles. Employee understanding and acceptance of change is not an instant outcome but a series of processes involving cognitive, affective, and social aspects (Yue et al., 2019). Therefore, leaders play a central role in ensuring that change communication is not only informative but also capable of building engagement and care among all employees. With clear and consistent communication, open dialogue spaces, adequate emotional support, and opportunities for employees to feel ownership of the change, the adaptation process will proceed more smoothly and effectively. Ultimately, well-understood and accepted change will be internalized as part of the new work culture, where employees not only follow new rules but also find meaning and motivation in the updated system (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2015).

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion

The conclusion of this study affirms that leadership communication plays a central role in the success of organizational change, particularly within the sales division of a manufacturing company. This research analyzed the communication strategies employed by leaders during the organizational change process at PT XYZ through a case study approach and in-depth interviews with various levels of management and staff. The findings highlight that information transparency, a clear vision, and active employee involvement are key factors in minimizing resistance and enhancing readiness for change. The study contributes to the literature on organizational communication by demonstrating how personal approaches, such as one-on-one coaching sessions and the use of visual presentations, can

improve understanding and acceptance of change. It also underscores the importance of collaboration between leaders and the human resources department in delivering consistent, transparent messages that foster employee trust in the restructuring process. However, the study's limited scope—focused on a single division within one company—may affect the generalizability of the findings, and the qualitative approach, while offering rich insights, does not establish statistical causal relationships.

Suggestions

For future research, it is recommended to expand the study across multiple organizations and different divisions to enhance the diversity and applicability of the findings. Integrating quantitative methods could also strengthen the generalizability and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of leadership communication during organizational change. Additionally, developing a leadership communication model based on empirical findings would offer valuable insights for managerial practices, particularly in navigating the complexities of organizational change across various industrial sectors.

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