

Managing Organizational Change in Pakistan: Insights from the Work of Kurt Lewin.

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Main objective of this paper is to review the literature on the theories of Kurt Lewin with special focus on three-step model and discuss relevance of this model for Pakistani organizations

Background: Kurt Lewin, a prominent social psychologist has been regarded as father of planned change. His seminal work in planned approach to change management and resolution of social conflicts has received considerable attention of academics and practitioners alike.

Design/ methodology/Approach: this study used deductive approach to draw conclusions from available literature. This study begins by searching relevant studies and extract relevant information.

Findings: this study has found that theories of Kurt Lewin especially three-step model is still relevant to managing organizational change in Pakistan. This study also suggests a model which may be used by leaders as a tool to implement planned change in Pakistan.

Research limitations/implications/ recommendations: this study has not used any empirical data therefore future research may continue to test empirical validity of Lewin's three-step model

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INTRODUCTION

The term 'Change' is regarded as a fundamental improvement. It is a deviation from current state of being to a new state which may have some distinct features. It is movement of company

from current situation to a desired future situation of the competitiveness (Hill & Jones, 2001). In today's dynamic and rapidly changing environment, managing change has attracted more attention from organizational researchers and practitioners alike. In order to be successful in competitive environment, organizations need

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to be innovative, flexible, continuously improve quality, and win the competition by offering innovative products and services otherwise they will be prone to extinction (Robbins & Judge, 2013).

In classical organization theory, organizational change problem was not given much importance. Change was not welcomed properly and regarded as a temporary feature which needs to be addressed in way to return to previous or slightly adjusted new horizon. All employees were supposed to work on adjusted paradigms. This traditional approach did not bring any fruitful results. Rather it encouraged resistance to change initiatives, and failed to exploit emerging opportunities. This problem was resolved by the studies of resistance to change (Lawrence, 1969). Lewin (1958) emphasized on the role of group as facilitator in resolving group conflicts arising from introduction of new ideas. Groups are the source of early information needed in the change initiatives and later stability required for relative permanency of change to be effective.

Recently scholars emphasized to commemorate the work of Kurt Lewin to let people know his contribution about planned change literature and make better world (Burnes, 2015; Burnes & Bargal, 2017). Main purpose of this paper is to summarize the theories of Kurt Lewin with special focus to relevance of his three-step model of the change in Pakistani organizations and leaders

This study adopts method of literature review and provides some empirical insights from published literature. It begins by reviewing literature, documenting strengths and weaknesses of Kurt Lewin model and providing theoretical and practical implications and future directions. Next section discusses literature on planned organizational change and development of three-step model.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Planned and emergent change

Change has become an important feature of organizational settings. In today's world change is more frequent and greater in magnitude than in the past (Giesen, Riddleberger, Christner, & Bell, 2010). Managing planned change is reported to be point of great concern for CEOs to manage their companies (Van de Ven, Angle, & Poole, 2000). Concept of Planned change was first introduced by Kurt Lewin. He distinguished change initiative which was consciously applied by organizations as opposed to changes that are initiated by organizations in response to some accident, unavoidable condition or force not under the control of organization which they undertake unwillingly (Marrow, 1969).

Planned Change, therefore is "a process by which organizations identify an area which needs to be evaluated for their weaknesses and may require a Change to be undertaken" (Burnes, 2000, p. 341). In the views of French and Bell (1995) planned change is systematic approach in which leaders strive to achieve particular set of goals through hard and diligent efforts keeping in view organizational dynamics. They know how to change these dynamics.

Emergent Change

Emergent approach to Change is advocated by processual analysts mostly from the work of Pettigrew (1973). Processualists argue that every event in organization is a result of a sequence of interrelated activities, actions and events emerging in given time and context called process (Pettigrew, 1997). They discard the prescriptive and pre-planned approaches to change and support the notion that change is not a stand-alone activity rather it is product of interrelations of individual, group, organization and society as a whole (Dawson, 1994).

Planned Change Process

This section describes the process of implementing planned organizational change. Organizational change literature is profusely rich with different process models used by academicians and consultants as a tool to implement planned change. Most popular among them is classical three step model presented by (Lewin, 1947c). This section begins by elaborating background of Lewin's classical three step model and brief detail of its each step. It will also discuss how other authors based their models on work of Kurt Lewin. In last, some limitations of the model are also highlighted.

Work of Kurt Lewin

Kurt Lewin said to be founding father of Planned Organizational Change (Bakari, Hunjra, & Niazi, 2017; Burnes, 2014) was a social scientist who devoted half century of his life to theoretical and practical underpinnings of organizational change literature. His model was first ever endeavor towards organizational change (Lewin, 1947c). His work was centered on a critical theme that individual perceptions and feelings are developed in the ground of group, an individual belongs to. He presented force field analysis model in which he argues that organizations are typically in the state of equilibrium. There are two major forces: driving forces and restraining forces which maintain that status quo. Those elements of organizations which initiate and support organizational change are in the first category i.e. driving forces and the force which emphasis organizations to maintain equilibrium are called restraining forces. This mutual pressure between contesting forces if equal keeps the organizations in fixed and static state. If any of force is stronger than other, disequilibrium occurs which results in change. Organizations once experience disequilibrium returns to new state of equilibrium.

Field Theory

According to Lewin, 'Unfreezing' is necessary for group behavior to change. The forces which restrain to change such as personal defense or group norms are to be unfreeze (Weick & Quinn, 1999). Behavior tends to be static because there are restraining forces which strive to maintain status quo. When restraining and driving forces are equal there is state of equilibrium. In order to break this statuesque the driving forces should be greater in force than restraining force. Figure 1 shows how these two forces interact. Lewin argued that Group behavior is product of these interactions which take place in particular environment which he termed as "*Field*". The field is a collection of all interdependent and interconnected facts which exist in same situation (Lewin, 1946, p. 240). The views of Lewin emphasize the leaders or change agents to focus on the environment where such forces interact and have impact upon the group behaviors. For the internalization of change by employee leaders need to break the status quo by creating need for change (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999), decreasing resistance for change (Oreg, 2006) and generating support for change (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002) so that such behaviors may be not be reversed (Burnes, 2004a). In this way organizations move from previous state to new desired state where employee behaviors are changed and become permanent.

Group dynamics

Group as defined by Lewin was not similarity and dissimilarity of individuals gathered for common cause but it as per the Lewin was interdependence of individuals. In other words, group dynamics works as organizational policies effect almost everyone in particular group therefore individuals follow the collective wisdom of the group and shape behaviors as per their group benefits or losses. Lewin in his group dynamics theory addresses two questions: 1) about the nature of group which make it

responsive to particular situation or force 2) how these group forces be addressed to illicit desired behaviors? (Kippenberger, 1998). According to group Dynamics theory Lewin postulate that in managing change main focus of intervention must be group rather than the individual (Dent & Goldberg, 1999). Focusing on individual would not be beneficial as it is the tendency of individuals to follow the group norm.

Action research

Action Research is the process through 1) group recognizes that the change requires and action that may lead to achieving this. 2) and for action to be successful there is need to analyze situation correctly, identify all possible alternative and selecting the best viable option out of them (Bennett, 1983). For change to be successful there must be 'felt need' (Burnes, 2009, p. 336). (Armenakis, Harris, & Feild, 1999) describe it as felt discrepancy. When employees perceive that there is felt need or discrepancy, it provides a logic for action towards destabilizing the status quo and moving towards new direction thus providing primary basis for the legitimacy of change. Action Research is iterative process through which change unfolds. In this process Action is subject of research and after the evaluation it further leads to research (Research – Action – Evaluation – Further research).

Three Step Model

This phenomenon is best described in 3-step model presented by him. This 3 step model for planned change which was though criticized for many reasons but still is relevant to the present situations in the organizations (Burnes, 2004b). Critics to his model argue that this model assumes organizations to work in stable conditions, it is best suited to small scale and short-term projects rather than a big organization, it does not assume power of politics in the

organizations, and it is the top-down approach not welcoming feedback from bottom.

Despite the criticism, this model still attracts many researchers and practitioners of change management. Lewin (1947a) comments that change in any group performance is short lived and due to small reason it may reverse to previous state, therefore it is necessary that such change becomes permanent for certain period of time. It is therefore Lewin presented change model which comprise three steps which gradually take to a desired goal of change.

First step: Unfreezing

Lewin argues that before learning new things it is necessary to unlearn and discard old behavior. Therefore, it is necessary to unfreeze the status quo and create the desire of change. Human behavior resides on quasi – stationary equilibrium where opposite force for and against the change always interact each other. There are forces which restrain any drive for adopting new behaviors. Different approaches are needed for different situations. An emotional stir up is needed to remove the prejudices and feeling of self-righteousness.

Second Step: Moving

As noted by Schein (1996), “Unfreezing is not the final objective, it is rather a means to end” (p. 62). It is to develop motivation to learn new behaviours but as Lewin argues, there are complex forces involved in the process of change therefore it is difficult to realize concrete result of planned change process. In order to change be permanent behaviour, reinforcement tends to be obligatory. Without this any change initiative will fail forthwith due to involvement of complex opponent forces and psychological processes

Third Step: Refreezing

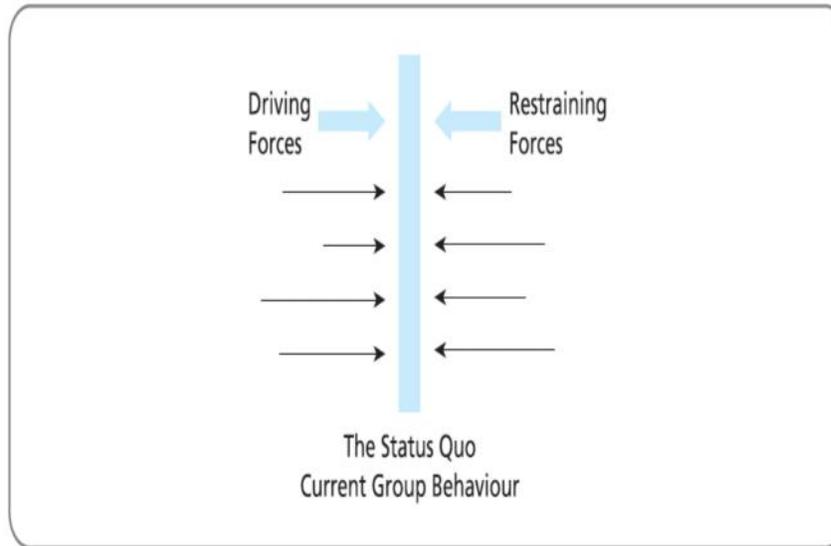


Figure 1: Force Field Analysis

It is a process by which new change behaviors learnt through destabilizing status quo and reinforcement drives get a new relatively permanent change in behaviors. In this final stage change moves from an individual phenomenon to a group matter. Lewin suggests that routines and

norms regarded by group are supposed to be altered at this stage. Such behaviors are to be programmed in a manner that these become part of set of new routines and stabilized free from fear of regression (Burnes, 2004b, p. 986). In organizational perspective refreezing means

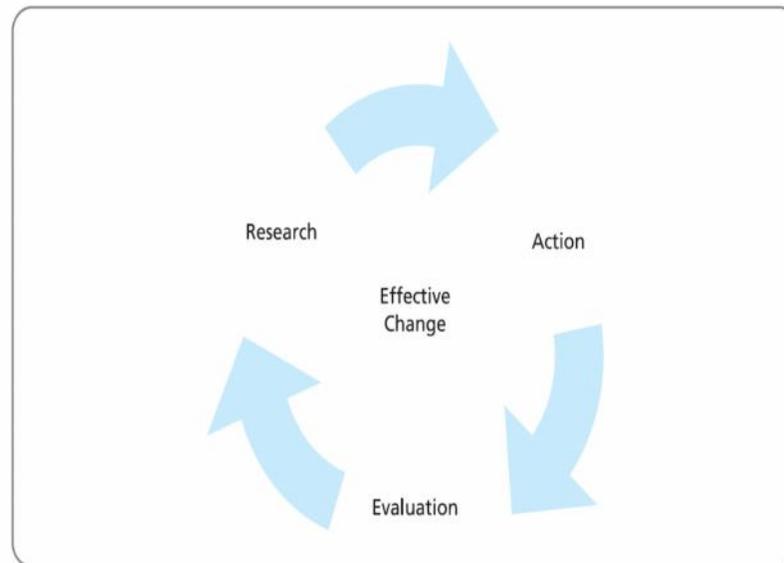


Figure 2: Action Research

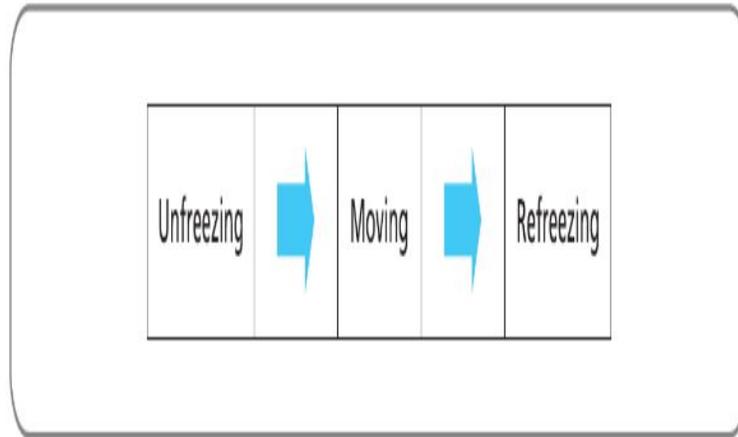


Figure 3: Three-Step Model

stability at new stage of equilibrium that brings change in organizational culture, and procedures (Cummings & Worleym, 2009).

Summary of Lewin's Work

Lewin was a social scientist primarily concerned for resolution in social conflicts through altering behaviours (Burnes, 2009). Whether these conflicts were the subject of particular organization or greater of sphere of society as a whole. To achieve this goal, he developed four theories. Field theory and Group dynamics answer the questions related with formation of groups, their interdependence, motivations and maintenance of enduring relationships. Other two theories i.e. Action Research and Three Step model of Change advocate altering behaviours to cope with new challenges of organizational change. Three step model is more popular as it provides basis for inclusion of leadership as change agent which may use this model as a tool to implement change. It also supports that statusquo is the main stage of driving and restraining forces where leaders and employees interact each other as former strives to break it

and latter to maintain it. Lewin proposed that process of change starts with process of Unfreezing the current state of organization.

Limitations of Lewin's Model

Lewin's model though widely used in change literature has been criticized by some authors (Bartunek & Woodman, 2015) for its linearity and teleology (Palmer & Dunford, 1996). By linearity they argue that model assumes change is sequential and always progressing and by teleology they argue that model assumes that change agents know the direction of change effort. These assumptions are not fulfilled by the model (p. 709). Weick and Quinn (1999) argued that Lewin's model may be suitable for episodic change but it is not suitable for changes which are occurring continuously which need to refreeze first then get rebalanced and ultimately unfreeze. Some other scholars object on the concept of freezing as time does not freeze rather changes in organizations are continuous and unending. There is nothing like freezing (Kanter, Stein, & Jick, 1992; Purser & Petranker, 2005). Some authors raise concerns regarding

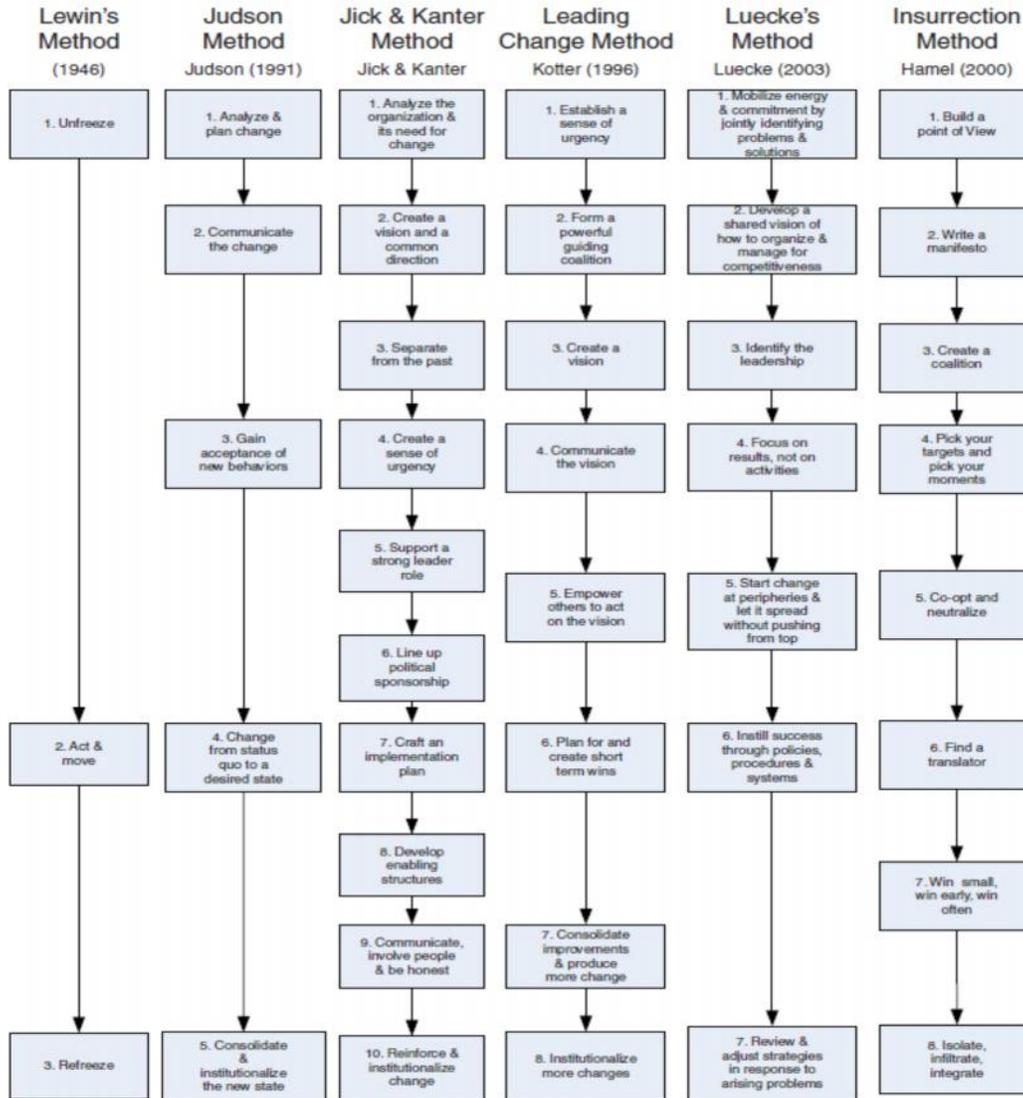


Figure 4: Change Management Models (Adopted from Al-Haddad & Kotnour (2015) with permission

inability of the model to incorporate temporal aspects of change. Bartunek and Woodman (2015) argue that beyond traditional sequence of Unfreezing-change-refreezing there is also a sequence of time, pace and rhythm (p.162). Besides criticism this model provides simpler

path for change agents to follow the sequence of planned change.

Cummings, Bridgman and Brown (2016) in a recent article raise very different issue and argues that Lewin never proposed three-step model, such concepts are infiltrated by later works mainly attributed to his students such as Ronald Lippitt

and Edgar Schein. Lewin, as author argues thought change being a continuous and fluid in nature. However, author accepts the reality that three step-model is popular and widely used in variety of change management text books. Whereas, they agree that recent (unfreezing - changing – refreezing) model is only ‘33 percent right’ as Lewin only wrote ‘unfreeze’, one may raise an eye brow that if Lewin believed in Unfreezing then how other two steps may be invalid as unfreezing occurs where something is already ‘frozen’.

Comparison of Lewin’s Model with Some Other Models

In line with Lewin’s Model many other authors have proposed change management Models. For example, five-phase model of Judson (1991), 10-step method of Kanter et al. (1992), eight-step model of Kotter (1996), seven-phase method of Luecke (2003) and insurrection model of Hamel (2000) to name a few.

Three-step model of Armenakis et al. (1999)

In line with Lewin (1947b), Armenakis et al. (1999) proposed a model which also incorporates elements Social Learning theory (Bandura, 1986). First stage is named as Readiness which refer to enhancing readiness and decreasing resistance. Two other elements are adoption and institutionalization respectively (Armenakis et al., 1999). Holt, Armenakis, Harris and Feild (2007) argue that success of organizational change implementation is based on this three stage process i.e. readiness, adoption, and institutionalization. By readiness they refer to enabling environment, favourable organizational structure, and receptive attitude of organizational members which ensure acceptance of change. Adoption occurs when organizational members display behaviours which conform to change expectations after altering previous attitudes and behaviours and institutionalization is a condition

when stability in employees’ behaviours is achieved after successful implementation of change initiative (Holt et al., 2007).

Implementing Change

Implementing planned organizational change successfully is regarded as greater challenge for organizational leadership (Naotunna & Arachchige, 2016). There are different arguments by researchers and authors as how to implement Change in the organizations. Ford and Ford (1994) argue that it is the Logic of Dialectics which enables the process of Change. Two conflicting forces for and against the change struggle at each other until the domination of one. Point of origin in this model is dissatisfaction with status quo. Once people are not dissatisfied with present condition drive for change will not prevail.

Relevance of Three-Step Model in current Era

Fernandez and Rainey (2006) outlined an eight steps process for successful management of planned change in public sector organizations. They argued that role of leaders begins with communicating the need of change, followed by a comprehensive plan, building support and commitment at internal, top management and external level, providing adequate resource base and then implement a comprehensive change involving all subsystems in a larger perspective. Armenakis et al. (1999) presented a model while incorporating Lewin’s (1947b) model and Social learning theory (Bandura, 1986), with a purpose to create a readiness for change, envisage adoption strategies and institutionalization of change. Holt et al. (2007) argue that readiness reflects a condition where organizational environment, structure and members’ attitude are such that they develop perceptions which are conducive to embrace change. Adoption refers to the stage where employees’ previous behaviors are altered and they tend to follow and conform

to norms of the change. Institutionalization is stage when employees' behaviors regarding change become stable and permanent.

Bakari et al. (2017) have integrated theory of planned behavior, readiness for change model and incorporated Lewin's classical change model in it. This model includes stage of readiness for organizational change (Holt et al., 2007) as surrogate to Lewin's first stage of 'unfreezing' (Armenakis et al., 1999). Then they considered commitment to change as synonymous to Adoption stage which is again synonymous with Lewin's moving stage (Brown, 2009). As third stage of Lewin (1947b) and Armenakis et al. (1999) introduced stage of institutionalization and their study placed behavioral support for change (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002) as surrogate to the both concepts. Study while analyzing responses from employees of health sector organizations of Pakistan found authentic leadership positively related to readiness for commitment to and behavioural support for change. Authors suggest that the three-step model of Kurt Lewin still proves to be valid and practicable and may serve as tool for leaders to manage planned organizational change.

DISCUSSION

Kurt Lewin, a prominent social scientist is well known about his works related to planned organizational change. Most significant theories of his planned change approach are field theory, group dynamics, action research and three-step model of the change (Burnes & Bargal, 2017, p. 4). Besides his work in planned change, he was thought to be more concerned to resolution of social conflict to build a better world (Burnes & Bargal, 2017). Recent research has raised questions whether or not the concepts and theories of Kurt Lewin after the 70 years of his departure are still relevant to present day organizational development. Recent studies have provided an empirical and theoretical evidence that concepts of Lewin especially three-step

model is still applicable to planned organizational change management and leaders may use it as a tool to undertake organizational change and yield employee behavioural support. This study has reviewed the literature on planned change models, with special focus on work of Kurt Lewin. Main limitation to this paper is that it has not provided an exhaustive review of literature which is indeed not possible to provide in a single journal article. Future research is needed to unearth relevance of Lewin's planned change models in Pakistani settings. Although study of Bakari et al. (2017) has provided evidence of relevance of three-step model in Pakistani health sector organizations, still there is need to implement this model and modify it as per peculiar environment prevalent in Pakistani organization. Moreover, there is need to incorporate political environment of organizations in models aimed to stimulate behavioural support for implementation of planned change initiatives in Pakistani settings.

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