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Flash Tech Inc. Seeks to Change the Ways They Do Cyber Security: A Literature Review of the Leading Change Management Models

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Introduction

Flash Tech Inc. is a leading-edge company that has invented a building process that aims to revolutionize the way buildings are constructed. The company recently migrated its head office from Winnipeg, Manitoba where it began as a family owned and operated business, to Vancouver, British Columbia where it has grown quickly to 75 employees. The medium-term vision for Flash Tech Inc. is to develop its product and take the company public.



Problem Statement

Much of the proprietary product research and development, design details, and confidential information are all stored online and accessed by the many employees distributed across the various interprovincial office locations. Management now realizes the way information is stored and accessed poses risks to their intellectual property. This risk is sufficient enough that Flash Tech Inc. wants to undergo a formal change in the way valuable digital information is handled, shared, and stored within the company.

Thus far, management has been reluctant to share information about this change or their motivations with the staff with the exception of just a few employees that they are dubbing as security champions, because they believe that sharing would formally expose the existing vulnerabilities in the company's IT infrastructure. Flash Tech Inc.'s management has determined that the **implementation of a new encrypted documentation and communication technology will be the primary catalysts they employ to drive employee adoption of cyber security through the change process.** Management believes that the introduction of a new technology process will instigate the procedural changes they desire pertaining to how sensitive information is handled within the organization. Flash Tech Inc. recognizes that employees are very busy with their current responsibilities but the company doesn't have the budget to hire additional staff to dedicate to this change initiative, however, they expect the changes to be done quickly and without a significant interruption to current workflow.



Research Question

How can a Change Management process be developed for Flash Tech Inc. to support employee adoption of a new cyber security program?

Literature Review

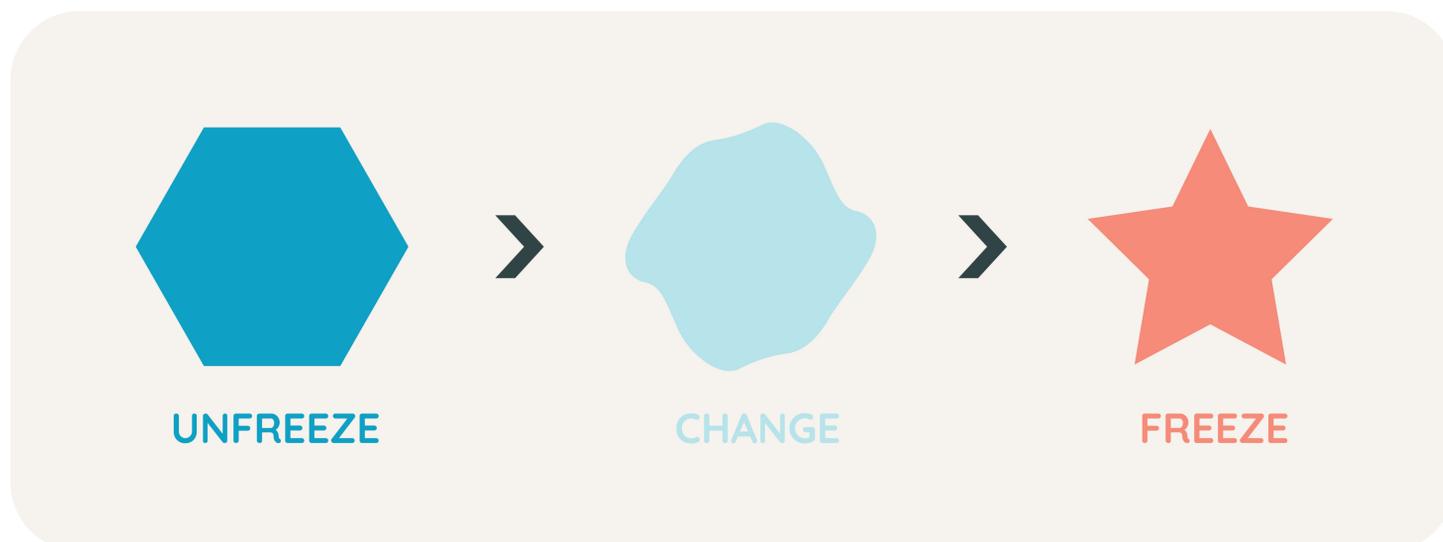
This literature review focuses on various change management models that would encourage employee adoption of the new technological processes. The relationship between the some of the models in the area of change management will be explored as well in this section.

Change Management Models

Change Management is an area of great interest to many researchers, and the benefits of a well-executed change have a significant and positive impact on the operational outcomes and overall capacity of organizations in general. Some researchers like Lewin have tried to distill the elements of change to an irreducible minimum in an effort to make to make them practical and effective (Galli, 2018). Others such as Kotter have endeavoured to illuminate the precise elements of change to empower organizational awareness through the process (Galli, 2018), while models such as Bridges and the ADKAR model (Bridges & Mitchell, 2000; Galli, 2018) have focused on the impacts of the change process on the people directly involved.

The best change management initiatives are ones that, while arriving at their desired destination, also produce adoption in the people who are engaged in the process and outcomes of the change management initiative (Duan et al., 2014; Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002; as cited in Morin et al., 2016, p. 841; Markus, 2004; Noland & Phillips, 2010). Change management models generally fall into a couple of distinct categories, distinguished by their approach, and their areas of focus. Lewin and Kotter both approach change management from the top-down, meaning that the primary impetus and direction for the change come from the leadership or management of the organization (Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015 p. 249).

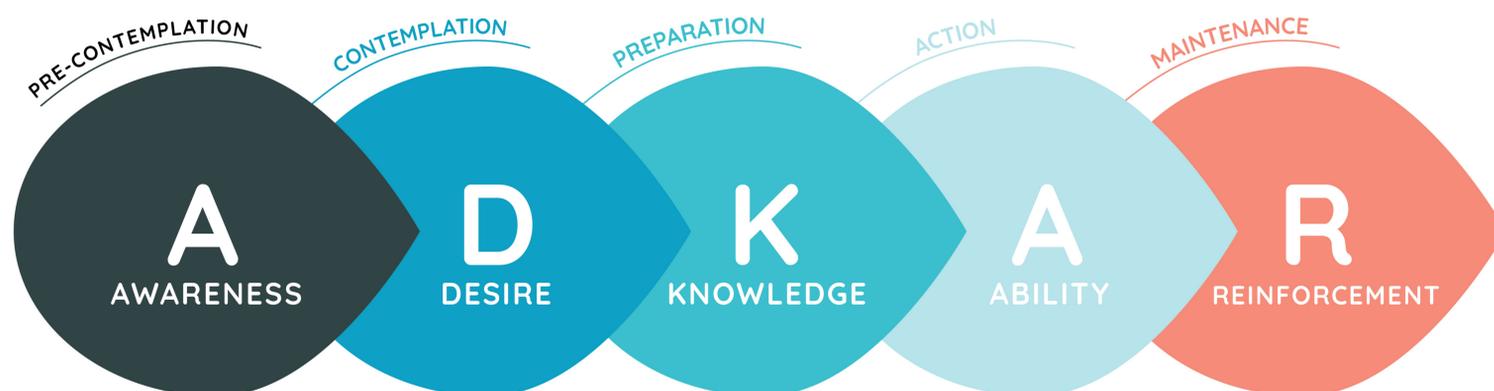
Lewin outlines a 3-step model for change, including preparation for change which he calls “**unfreeze**”; the “**change**”, where the real transition takes place, and the “**freeze**” step where there is acceptance and implementation of the change (Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015; Belyh, 2019). While Lewin’s model is sometimes criticized for being an over-simplistic approach, it has nonetheless stood the test of time because it offers a crystal clear and relatable ideology for change management leaders to follow (Galli, 2018).



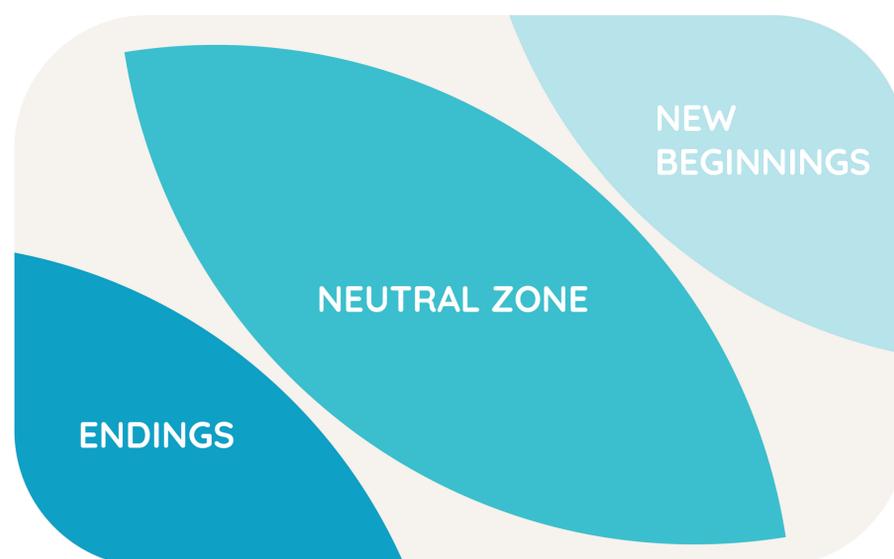
Kotter goes into greater depth by outlining eight steps that accentuate the nuances of the Lewin’s 3 step process (Galli, 2018). These steps including the following: **Increasing urgency**, which creates a motivation towards the objectives; **build** the right team of people with the right skills and knowledge on the team: get the **vision** correct and strategically focus on creativity and emotional connection as the objectives; **communicate** with the people affected by the change; **get things moving** by empowering action, removing roadblocks, and implementing feedback; **focus on short term goals** by turning the overall goal into smaller parts to make success achievable; don’t give up because **persistence** is key even when things get tough; **incorporate change** to reinforce the change and make it part of the new culture (Folz, 2016; Galli, 2018).



The ADKAR model, which is an acronym for: **A**wareness of the need for change; **D**esire to bring the change to reality; **K**nowledge of how to achieve the change; **A**bility to incorporate the change; and **R**einforcement to keep the change implemented, allows organizations to specifically track the progress of individual employees through the change management process, and to apply additional assistance as required along the way, aiming to boost employee adoption of the change effort that is under way (Galli, 2018).



Bridges’ model specifically emphasizes the importance of transitions. Noting that “change happens in an instant, while transitions take time” (Belyh, 2019). Bridges’ 3-step approach starts the process of change with “saying goodbye” which means letting go of the way that things used to be (Bridges & Mitchell, 2000, p.31). The “neutral zone”, is where people - and leaders in particular- are uncomfortable and inexperienced (Bridges & Mitchell, p. 31). Finally, there is the stage of “new beginning” where employees embrace the change with commitment and understanding of importance, which are essential elements of employee adoption of the undertaken change (Belyh, 2019; Bridges & Mitchell, 2000 p. 32). There are correlations in the 3 steps that Bridges outlines, and the 3 steps that Lewin (Galli, 2018) outlines, in as much as there is the necessary pre-work before the change takes place, whether it is at the process or people level, Lewin would call that “unfreezing”, Bridges would call that “saying goodbye”; then there’s the in-between time of the old and new that constitutes both a change and a transition; and finally there is a refreezing at the end that embodies a new beginning.



Al-Haddad and Kotnour describe **three primary domains** that define change management strategies: **content**, which are systems, technologies, strategies and work practices; **people**, who are the humans involved in the change, and their actions when engaging with change; and **process**, which consists of the procedures and actions undertaken to implement the change (2015 p. 244).



Lewin’s model is the most specifically focused on the process (creating a structure for change – then the people will follow), whereas Bridges’ model is the most people-centric of the four main models discussed above (focusing on the felt experience of transitions and the impact this has on the people involved in whatever change is taking place). Kotter and ADKAR are both blended models that try to offer guidance for including both people and process in the change-effort, in order to arrive at a successful outcome (Galli, 2018).

Notably absent from these 4 main models is an inclusion of “content” as the focus for change management, which according to Al-Haddad and Kotnour (2015) is one of 3 essential elements. Given that technology change initiatives are so heavily dependent on systems, technology, and processes, including this element is essential to overall success. Markus enters the discussion by outlining that “unlike other conventional change initiatives, effective technochange (change management involving technology) requires that processes inside the business also adapt alongside the implementation of new technology” (2004, p. 6). Therefore, organizations need to take into account the comprehensive impact that will occur within the operation such as the flow of information, and the nature of human interactions as a result of the changes that the technology will necessarily introduce.



Analysis

Consistent with the research, the initial vision and planning stages of Flash Tech Inc.’s change management process began at the top of the organization. Lewin and Kotter believe that the leadership of the organization is responsible for creating the urgency and outlining the vision of success (Galli, 2018). Flash Tech Inc.’s management has determined that the risks to the organization associated with not employing a new and more comprehensive cyber security protocol for the company poses a significant risk to their future viability and competitive advantage.



In contradiction to the change models, Flash Tech Inc.'s management has been reluctant to share the full extent of the planned initiative, fearing that the currently known vulnerabilities may be exploited if they become commonly available knowledge. By doing so they have neglected many of the essential elements that occur in the Unfreeze phase of change, as well as missing the opportunity to create a sense of urgency amongst the team. There has also been no effort made to foster a desire in the team, or make space for the inevitable transitions that the employees will need to make as a result of this change. Instead, management has chosen to lean into the technological aspects of the change, namely that technology and change can be complementary agents for a company that wants to undertake an evolution in its work process, because adopting a new technology necessitates the simultaneous adoption of a new way of doing things (Markus, 2004, p. 17).

Considering the new technology-driven change that Flash Tech Inc. is hoping to implement, there are downsides. **Markus warns that “many technochange solutions simply cannot be adopted and used easily at all, because they conflict with existing organizational structures, cultures, or practices” (2004, p. 14).** To this point Flash Tech Inc.'s management has neglected to take a full inventory of the current culture and organizational structures that would be impacted by this new method of conducting business.

Flash Tech Inc. believes that healthy and full adoption of this new technology will come from people inside the organization who act as champions for the project and who are intimately familiar with the project's technical components. Therefore, Flash Tech Inc. has undertaken to compile a group of people inside the organization who will be initially responsible for the change. The “security champions” are people primarily from the intellectual property (IP) department, as that is the area this change will be piloted within the organization. Building a team that is responsible for the change aligns with what Kotter believes to be best practice, in as much as there is a dedicated group of people responsible for the initiative. However, Flash Tech Inc.'s management have deviated from Kotter's model because they have **not lightened the workload** to facilitate getting things going or made additional hires to ensure the momentum of change is carried through to completion. Additionally, **no personnel on staff are trained in the particular level of cyber security** that Flash Tech Inc. has chosen to implement, resulting in notable knowledge gaps and missing skill sets within the team.



Discussion

As Flash Tech Inc. considers the successful adoption of their new cyber security process, the leadership of the company will need to do more than simply imagine the desired outcome, they will need to reconsider their ideal approach as well because as Markus highlights, “It is a much better idea to **try to prevent resistance** than to hope you will be successful in eliminating it after it arises” (2004, p. 14).

Flash Tech Inc. will foster more adoption if they reconsidered their choice to remain quiet on the true urgency of the change that they are planning to implement. All of the change management models discussed highlight the need for high quality communication from the planning process through to completion. Mayfield adds some specifics pertaining to communication that would be valuable for management to consider; namely the ongoing inclusion of “**honest, open, respectful, engagement of stakeholders** as a vital part of the firm’s strategy” (2014, p. 16). The partial, or indirect approach of communicating currently used by management will inevitably interfere with employee’s adoption of the change management initiative. It is also clear through the research that the success of Flash Tech Inc.’s management in fostering adoption will come through the “**critical element of building employee’s approval** for the whole transformation process” (Morin, 2016, p. 840) that comes along with technochange.

In successful technochange, according to Markus both the solution and the process of arriving at the solution are important, who also goes on to elaborate why Flash Tech Inc. needs to consider this change management through a non-traditional lens, which means including the unique characteristics of **blending technology with the change effort** and cautions that “treating technochange situations solely as organizational change programs also does not work” (2004, p. 9).

It also cannot be understated that considering all the research, the success of a Change Management initiative in fostering adoption in its employees is in large part determined by the engagement of employees as stakeholders (Duan et al., 2014; Nolan & Phillips, 2010). Markus directly addresses this issue when he notes “once we understand that engaging stakeholders is a necessary part of strategy, **for a firm to determine its strategy without having first engaged its stakeholders would be, literally, to disengage it’s mission and vision from its identity**” (2004, p. 14).

These are strong words but underscore the earnest and important fact that Flash Tech Inc. will need the full engagement of its employees throughout the change, implementation, and adoption of its essential cyber security program, now and into the future. This also builds into what Lewin's highlights are crucial elements of the refreeze phase of a change process, namely that the changes are accepted and embraced so that they can be normalized as the organization re-stabilizes.

In consideration of how Flash Tech Inc. could successfully foster adoption with its internal stakeholders, the research regarding the value of psychological empowerment (PE) and its impact on adoption through change management processes is a valuable consideration. Morin describes two pathways and the positive impact they have on fostering employee commitment to the change which will also serve to bolster their adoption to the change (2016). "The first pathway" is likely to emerge from top-down communication approaches aiming to build employee approval for the change initiative" (Morin 2016, p. 858), which confirms the approach outlined by Lewin's and Kotter (Galli, 2018), who emphasize the value of having a clear vision that is well communicated and justified from the top-down. Furthermore, Morin offers a link that ties what Markus has been saying about the unique requirements of the type of technochange the Flash Tech Inc. is undertaking, as distinct from a typical change management process; specifically that it must fit the "culture and structures of the business" (Markus, 2004, p. 14).

The "second pathway" that Morin describes generates from the bottom of an organization and works its way up. Morin points out that the people who are responsible for doing the work likely have the pre-required understanding to implement the appropriate measures in the first place, thereby supporting and sustaining the cultures and structure of the organization (2016, p. 858).

If Flash Tech Inc. chooses to neglect the best practices outlined in the major theories pertaining to organizational change from Lewin, Kotter, Markus, ADKAR and Bridges, they will undoubtedly wind up bumping into employee resistance to the change effort. That resistance will come from the people involved in the process being disconnected from the vision management has for the change. Given the frameworks for successful change there is no need for Flash Tech Inc. to unnecessarily encounter the draining forces of employee resistance which can be substantially mitigated with the right approach.



Recommendations

Flash Tech Inc. should follow through with the main themes outlined above: focuses on **improving the quality of communication** from management to the employees; creates a clear vision; allows employees to **see the vulnerabilities** in the organization; lets **employees connect with the urgency** to adopt the new change; **bolsters the team** that is responsible for implementing the change; allocates the **appropriate time and training resources**; **ties the value** of this undertaking **to the employees**, and allows them to **shape the solutions that fit their context**; and empowers the employees to **lean into the commitment** of management for ongoing support through the cyber security change management initiative that Flash Tech Inc. plans to undertake, they stand to not only be successful at avoiding the risks that precipitated the change, but also capture the many “expected (and the unanticipated) benefits of technochange” Markus (2004, p. 10) that come from healthy employee adoption.

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