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THE APPLICABILITY OF KURT LEWIN'S CHANGE MODEL TO LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CENTRES

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ABSTRACT

Life would not be what it is now without change. The Stone Age did not end because there were no more stones, it ended because of the ability to embrace change. Libraries and information centres should not be lagging behind in embracing change. It is the duty of this paper to give the direction of how libraries and information centres can apply the Kurt Lewin's change model in their information management.

KEY WORDS: *change, organisational change, libraries, information centres, Kurt-Lewin's change theory model, information management. Force Field Analysis, Librarians.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The future is not beyond, it has already begun and what organisations should do is to carry out appropriate change management processes to fit well in the competitive and turbulent environment. Libraries and information centres without a change mindset are at a disadvantage in today's business world. They should not be left out in taking part in the management of change. Nickles (2000:1) advocates that to change by definition calls for a configured response, not adherence to prefigured routines. The automation of libraries is taken as demonstration of how Lewin's change model can be applied in libraries and information centres. The change will be a transition from manual operations to automated library and information services. The impetus for the changes comes with the application of Lewin's change model.

2. ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE

Robbins and Coulter (2005:360) defines organisational change as "any alterations in people structure, or technology". Mullins (1999:82) observes that change is

a pervasive influence. Organisations are also subject to continual change of one form from another. Change is an inescapable part of both social and organisational life". Stoner (2008:442) asserts that "changing is discovering and adopting new attitudes, values, and behaviours with the help of a trained change agent, who leads individuals, groups, or the entire organisation through the process". There are three kinds of companies, those that make things happen, those that watch things happen and those that wonder what has happened (Anonymous). Peters and Waterman (1982) argue that "great companies are all driven by changing pressures in the market place". Kotler (2005: 1) observed that "the future is not ahead of us. It has already happened. Unfortunately, it is unequally distributed among companies, industries and nations". Louis Pasteur avers that "change favours the prepared". Change management is a systematic approach to dealing with change, both from the perspective of an organisation and on the individual level. Change is therefore inevitable and is a way of life and to ignore it

is to ignore life. Change effort is a change project that an organisation lodges. Balogun and Hailey (1999:3) expounded that organisational change has three main components which are as follows:

- The change context is the reason for change. These refer to social, economic, political, technological, environmental, legal and competitive environment in which the organisation operates.(Johnson and Scholes, 2004:102).
- The change content is the what aspect of change, and refers to choices that need to be made about an organisation’s product range, the markets in which it competes, how it competes and how it should be structured.

- The change process is concerned with how organisations change.

3. KURT LEWIN’S CHANGE MODEL

Kurt Lewin’s change model uses the analogy of an ice cube to explain the change processes of an organisation. Lewin explains that the ice cube in its original shape represents the current state of the organisation in this case libraries and information centres. In order to change, the ice cube must be unfrozen, melted to its new shape and then refrozen. Thus, an organisation, in order to change positively, must eliminate any forces which resist change and create a climate of acceptance and that will reinforce or refreeze the new state of the organisation.

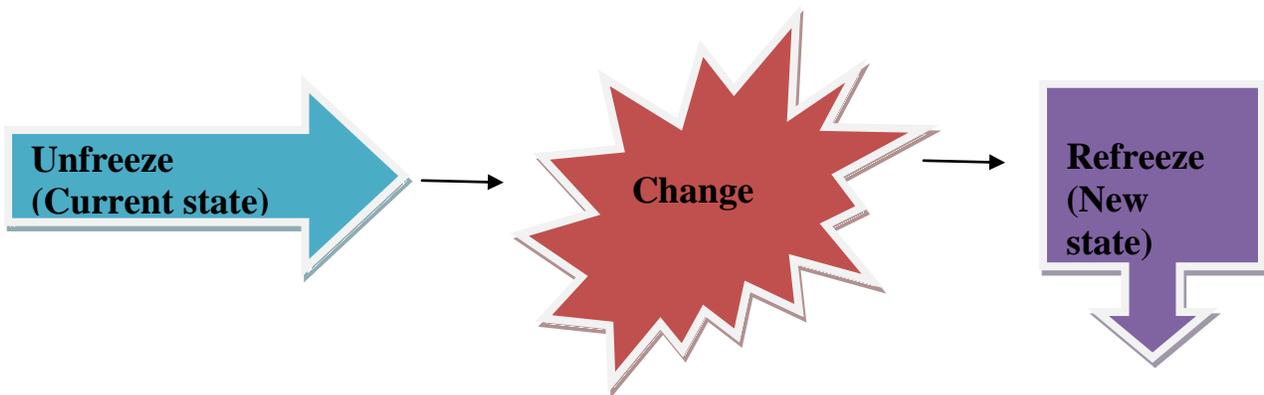


Figure 1: Kurt Lewin's Change Model

The model defines three stages in the process of change. It assists organisational change by allowing the process to be understood, providing milestones for evaluating progress towards the change being able to be used for all types of change. The change effort is the automation of libraries from manual systems. The employees are used to manual library operations. Using the change model of unfreezing, change and refreeze in conjunction with the force field analysis to come up with the expected change is appropriate in organisations including libraries.

3.1 Unfreezing

Step one is called the **unfreezing** of the present level. Mazhazha-Nyandoro and Matanhire (2002:39) proffer that this is the stage where the organisational members recognize the need for change. Lewin believes that the stability of human behavior was based on quasi-stationary equilibrium supported by a complex field of driving and restraining forces (Burnes, 2004:274). He argues that the equilibrium needs to be destabilized (unfrozen) before old behaviour can be disowned and new behaviour successfully adopted.

Bettis and Prahalad (1987) assert that to learn or unlearn, organizations should be removed from their point of equilibrium. This is the reducing of those forces which maintain behaviour in its present and recognition of the need for change and improvement. In order to archive this Lewin’s force field analysis has to be applied.

Libraries should develop an awareness of the need for change and should show the urgency for the change. The libraries need to increase the production output to meet the demand supply by its customers. The clients also want new products since the information seasons always change. To meet these needs there is need for efficient and effective services which calls for the library automation. An awareness of the need for automation is made taking into consideration the needs of those affected and giving direction on progress as well as indicating how progress will be monitored.

The Library staff might fear that some of them will lose their jobs since automation will quicken the

library processes. Some had never operated an automated library before. Employees view their jobs as an important source of stability in their life therefore was afraid of layoffs. They also feared that they will not be able to achieve the same level of success under new circumstances or whether their existing skills and experiences will be adequate to support and thrive in the new environment. The management explains to those affected employees how their needs are going to be addressed. Employees were trained so as to meet the new requirements of the new environment. They were given user manuals to check on how they should operate an automated library. It was clearly indicates that no one was going to loose/his job. This made the employees to buy in the idea.

3.2 Change or Movement

The second stage is called moving/changing. This stage is called for when the negative forces have been reduced and then move towards the desired goals. At this stage actual implementation and operational mechanisms are applied. The new position has to be stabilized otherwise the original state would re-occur. This process involves the organisation developing new attitudes or behaviour and the implementation of the

change. The management defines problems, identify and implement solutions. The library, after realizing that the employees and all other stakeholders had bought in the idea, implementation of the change started showing the appropriateness of the change mode.

3.3 Refreezing

This is the process of stabilising change at the new level and reinforcement through supporting mechanisms. Robbins (2004:565) opines that “the objective of refreezing, then, is to stabilize the new situation by balancing the driving restraining forces”. Once change has been accepted and implemented by the library, the initiators of the change must keep working with the members and emphasize the positive effects of the change. This is done to avoid going back to the original stage of using the manual library system.

4. FORCE FIELD ANALYSIS

Lewin comes out with the force field analysis to facilitate and compliment his unfreeze, change and refreeze change model which provides a framework for determining factors or forces that influence a situation. This force field analysis can be used at every stage of the Lewin’s three step change model.

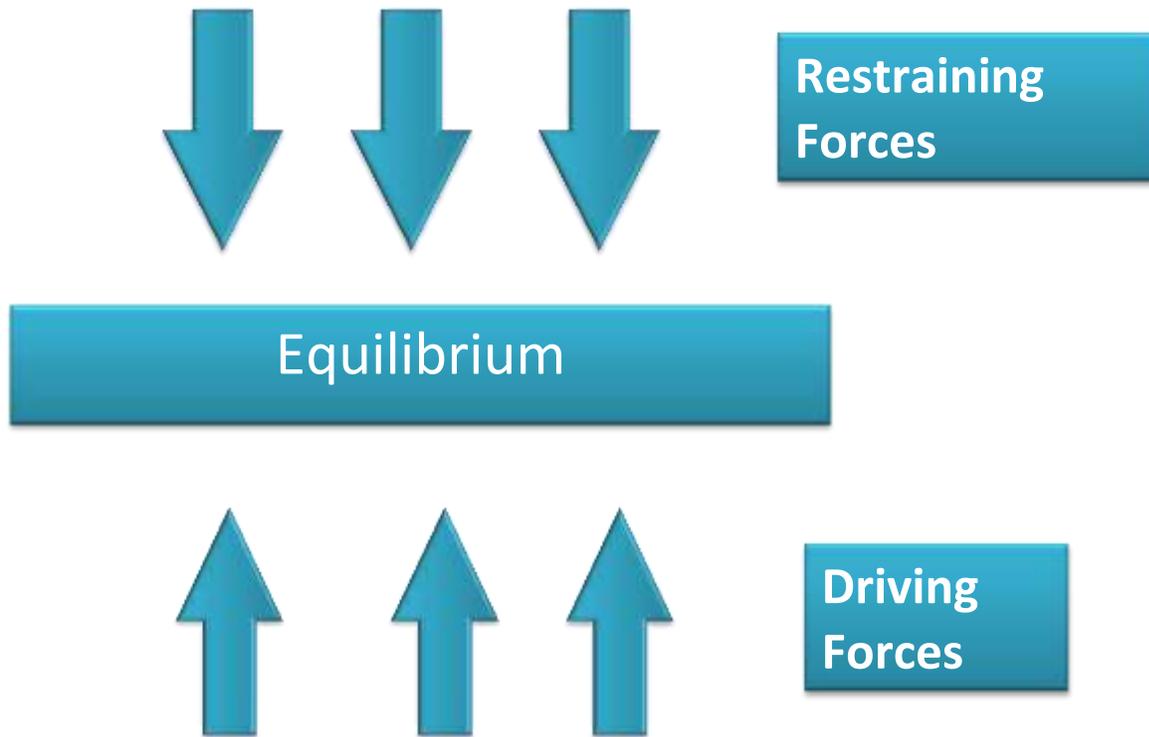


Figure 2: Force Field Analysis

It looks at the forces that are either driving movement toward a goal (helping forces) or blocking

movement toward a goal which are hindering forces. Force field analysis is employed in the automation of

library services by eliminating hindering forces through the employment of the efficient change agent and also giving the warning for change to the librarians.

The library management rebuilt relationships. They assessed the results of the changes that is, whether the desired results had been achieved. Whether people were coping with the new machines and are getting more familiar with the rules and regulations when using the machinery. This was done to make employees used to the library automation. This would make it successful and appropriate as most people due to practice and experience enjoyed the automation of library services.

5. SIGNIFICANCE OF LEWIN'S CHANGE MODEL

The models can easily be understood and those undergoing the change process can recognise the stage they have reached. It also allows the process of change to be discussed as well as the outcomes. The restraining forces for change are eliminated before the implementation of the change.

6. LIMITATIONS OF LEWIN'S CHANGE MODEL

However Lewin's change model has got its own limitations. Lewin's planned approach is too simplistic and mechanistic for a world where organisational change is a continuous and open-ended process. This model would not be appropriate for a revolutionary change.

The model is meant for a planned change, however in the case of an unplanned change, Lewin's models will not be appropriate. Lewin's unfreeze, change, refreeze model and force field analysis assume that organisations are static but in actual fact they operate in a dynamic environment. It was also observed that too much reliance on Lewin three step model

ignores the political and cultural aspects of change. Lewin's change model does not prescribe the nature of the change, the speed of the change, the number and type of people involved in the change.

7. CONCLUSION

Kurt Lewin's models of change with the assistance of the force field analysis can be applied in libraries and information centres to achieve a desired change. This assists the librarians on how best they can manage the change.

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BIO DATA

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