



The challenges faced by management in managing employee resistance to change in the mining sector

Douglas Chiguvi *

Faculty of Commerce, Department of Entrepreneurship, BA ISAGO University, Gaborone, Botswana

Abstract

Change is something that cannot be avoided, especially in an organizational environment, changes will often occur. Transformation or change in an organization has become a global issue since the discovery of the industrial revolution, therefore an organizational leader must be able to carry out various organizational changes and innovations and cannot escape the inevitable changes because this is what makes a leader carry out various organizational changes and innovations and cannot escape the inevitable changes because this is what makes a leader be a winner in business competition. The focus of the study was to identify the challenges faced by management in managing employee resistance to change in the mining sector. A survey research design and qualitative research approach were employed and face-to face interviews were used to collect the data from 20 mining managers who were purposively selected. The study results revealed that managers face challenges in managing employee resistance to change like conflicts, lack of resources and commitment among others. The results of this study indicate that the impact of the implementation of change management on the organization affects the success of the company in the future.

Keywords: Change; Change Management; Employee resistance to change; Managing change

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1. Introduction

In a rapidly changing global market, the strategies of different institutions in the private sector need to be aligned with the economic demand to position itself into a competitive advantage (Laig et al., 2021; Abocejo, 2015). Some of these strategies entail product or service improvements, pricing strategies and technological enhancement of processes to cater the variety of customer needs. Adaptation to the current market trends requires continuous change process in the organization to implement the desired strategic goals. This process is easily said than done as 70 percent of the change initiatives tend to fail (Laig, et al. 2021; D’Ortenzio, 2012). Organizations see the need to change but fail to follow the appropriate sets of steps in undergoing change. Even organizations which were able to follow change steps from many literatures still failed along the process (Laig et al., 2021). Organizations desire the need to change for them to improve and grow. When an organization fails to grow, it will lose the competition and eventually the company will close. Many companies and corporations suffer this consequence such that many executives and owners seek help from change management experts to deliver the necessary change in their organization (Laig et al., 2021; Burris, 2008). In the long run, it is beneficial to the company not only on the organizational front but also in the financial perspective. Gain is always achieved by those organizations which are leading in growth.

Different market sector requires the right pace to change. Companies involved in technology and innovation require rapid change in their products where inventive ways of thinking in the organization are integral to compete in the market (Pamatong and Abocejo, 2017). In the mining and metals sector, the price of the metals is dictated by the world economic demand and supply and are also greatly affected by the currency exchange dictated by the country’s economic performance. The most important deciding factor for many mining companies to operate a mine is the operating cost needed to extract the metals from the ore raw materials which should be lesser than the price of the metal. Investments in the mining sector is huge and considered a high-risk investment due to drastic change in the price of the world market. Owners of mining companies plan all throughout the whole mine life span - from start of operations to mine closure. This is to forecast the security of the business in the long run, reduce cost and improve productivity of operations crucial to the company’s survival and sustainability.

2. Literature review

Change management has got different definitions. Laig et al. (2021), explains that change management as a structured approach to transitioning individuals, teams, and organizations from a current state to a desired future state, to fulfill or implement a vision and strategy. It is an organizational process aimed at empowering employees to accept and embrace changes in their current environment. Jansson (2013) concept of the term ‘managing change’ connotes two meanings which are 1) creating “changes in planned and managed or systematic way” and 2) “response to changes over which the organization has little or no control”. Change is an integral part of life, and it is difficult to control, a reason why change management has become more challenging where it plays a vital role in every organization. Change management has several streams of ideas which have been developed to influence the ways of change management. According to Laig et al. (2021) change management deals with implementing organizational strategies, structures, procedures, and technology to cope with change resulting from internal and external factors. This infers that this approach is used by companies undergoing a shift in vision and goal for the future. Change represents a transformation or

a realignment of the existing assets in an organisation (Bucciarelli, 2015). Change management is the process, tools and techniques to manage the people-side of change to achieve the required business outcome. Change management incorporates the organizational tools that can be utilized to help individuals make successful personal transitions resulting in the adoption and realization of change (Ali and Anwar, 2021).

2.1. Challenges faced by managers in managing resistance to change at workplace

When people hear change management in the workplace, their initial reaction is anxiety, reluctance and fear mixed with some curiosity. This on its own is one of the biggest challenges experienced by managers when managing change at the workplace. Employees are reluctant to embrace change, which makes it difficult for managers to implement changes in the workplace. Usually, managers face ignorance or denial from employees when implementing change in the workplace. Change creates anxiety and fear (Waston, 2019). Below are some the challenges faced by managers when managing resistance to change in the workplace.

2.1.1. Resistance

One of the challenges of change management is resistance. When the word resistance is mentioned, people tend to ascribe negative connotations to it (Watson, 2019). This is a misconception, but at the same time the biggest challenge faced by many managers when managing employee resistance to change at the workplace. Many employees always start by resisting any form new change, in the first place (Waston, 2019). Watson (2019) argued that in order to combat resistance; the manager first has to understand where the resistance is coming from and why. It is not as easy as sitting people down in a room to open up to explain why they think the change is unnecessary and a waste of time.

2.1.2. Planning challenges

Change will fall by the wayside without correct planning. It is difficult to accurately foresee the future and predict who or which group of employees will resist change in the organization.

2.1.3. Lack of resources

Change program requires a lot of resources to motivate staff as well as to meet the new requirements dictated by new changes. This means that for managers to implement meaningful change, they need adequate resources which most organizations do not have. This becomes a challenge when managing employee resistance to change in the workplace. Research studies have shown that poor motivation or lack of rewards is another source of employee resistance to change (Anyieni, et al., 2016; Lewis, 2011; Oreg 2011).

2.1.4. Lack of communication

Communication is vital in the execution of any new strategy (Watson, 2019). This is a challenge, especially when some employees refuse to listen or fail to understand the change program. Lack of communication results in disjointed teams and widespread uncertainty (Watson, 2019). An effective communication plan must be initiated from the top down. Transparent, honest communication is not only the quality of an effective organization, but it is a necessary step for any new roll out.

2.1.5. Lack of commitment

Initiating a plan of action is great, but it's of no use if staffs are not fully committed to your plans. Employees are resistance to change when they are not aware of the benefits or outcomes of change. This becomes a challenge for the manager to motivate the employees to accept change, hence a snag towards change management.

2.1.6. Conflicts

Change can evoke emotions like uncertainty and fear, leaving staff to take their frustrations out on each other. Conflicts are disruptive and can be thorn of fleshy towards change management in the workplace. Waston (2019) argues that change brings disorder and alters the status quo. This alone might create conflicts among staff and between management and employees, which all makes it difficult for managers to manage change in the organization.

3. Research methodology

In this research study, a qualitative research approach was employed. The qualitative research approach was used in order to help the researchers to understand the challenges in managing employee resistance to change in the mining sector. This approach was also helpful as it gives more opportunities to the respondents to respond more elaborately and in greater detail than is typically the case with quantitative methods (Mohajan, 2018).

3.1. Population and sampling technique

Thieme (2018) affirmed that a population is defined as the entire group of people, events or things that the researcher wishes to investigate. The targeted population of this study comprised of managers in the mining sector who were purposively selected. Non-probability sampling technique was used in this study. The researcher used judgmental sampling to select respondents who have knowledge and expertise in line to the study area of the research. This study was qualitative and therefore, used a small sample size to gather in depth information required for this study. Taherdoost (2017) recommended a sample size of 10 to 30 participants for qualitative research. The sample comprised of 20 respondents with more than five years of work experience in the mining sector. In an endeavour to understand the challenges of managing employee resistance to change in the mining sector, face-to-face interviews were conducted with the respondents. Thematic content analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data. Qualitative data was interpreted in a narrative form.

4. Results

Under this theme, managers were asked to explain the challenges they are facing in managing employee resistance to change at BNC. Twelve out of twenty (60%) of the managers cited communication, conflicts and planning as the major challenges they are facing when managing employee resistance in the mining sector.

Eight out of twenty (40%) mentioned lack of resources, lack of commitment and employee perceptions as challenges experienced by managers when managing employee resistance in the mining sector.

4.1. Communication, conflicts and planning challenges

Twelve of the managers indicated poor communication as the major challenge in managing employee resistance to change. One of the managers had this to say:

Some employees refuse to listen or fail to understand the change program. It is stressful to explain the benefits of change to employees who are worried about losing their jobs. Again, they cited that mining work is labour intensive and, in most cases, employees work in groups or teams, communicating to a large group of people is problematic as each individual has got his/her interests and expectations.

The managers also cited conflicts as another challenge experienced when managing employee resistance to change. One of the managers went on to say:

The greatest challenge is conflicts. Change can evoke emotions like uncertainty and fear, leaving staff to take their frustrations out on each other. Resolving such conflicts is a big challenge and, in most cases, it delays the change process to take place in the organization.

All the 20 respondents also concurred that planning is another challenge experienced when managing employee resistance to change. One manager had this to say:

Planning for change is strenuous in the mining sector because change is uncertain and mining work is complex and it is accepted by employees at different times. Therefore, continuous planning is needed which is costly and requires a lot of contingency planning.

4.2. Lack of resources, lack of commitment and employee perceptions

Eight of the managers mentioned lack of resources as a challenge experienced in managing employee resistance to change. One had this to say:

Change program requires a lot of resources to motivate staff as well as to meet the new requirements dictated by new changes. This means that for managers to implement meaningful change, they need adequate resources which most mines in Zimbabwe and the entire SADC region do not have, due to economic woes and shortage of foreign currency.

Two of the managers also cited lack of commitment as a hurdle experienced in managing employee resistance to change. One of the managers went on to say:

Initiating a plan of action is great, but it is of no use if staff are not fully committed to your plans.... Employees are not committed or do not want to be committed to things that they do not know and affect them.

Also, the respondents mentioned that employee perception is another challenge in managing employee resistance to change. One of the managers made the following remark:

Employees are always skeptical and are quick to translate anything they see to mean a threat to their jobs. The mine is really trying to make sure that people's jobs are there tomorrow and forever. It is difficult to manage and change employee perception due to social and economic challenges of the country and viability challenges of the mine. Employees view new technology as threat to their jobs and future job security.

5. Discussion

The study findings indicated that managers face a few challenges in managing employee resistance to change. The study results revealed that (60%) of the managers cited communication, conflicts and planning as the major challenges experienced in managing employee resistance in the mining sector. On the other hand, (40%) of the respondents mentioned lack of resources, lack of commitment and employee perceptions as challenges experienced by managers when managing employee resistance in the mining sector. The study findings have indicated that managers face challenges of poor communication when managing employee resistance to change. It is then difficult for the management to manage change when employees do not understand what they are communicating. This result is in line with the study findings by Watson (2019) who posits that lack of communication results in disjointed teams and widespread uncertainty. Lewis (2011) also echoed the same sentiment by stating that poor communication is a snag when managing employee resistance to change in the organization. Lewis (2011) suggested the need for transparent and honest communication to overcome this challenge of poor communication.

The study findings also revealed that managers face challenges of lack of resources when managing employee resistance to change in the mining sector. This infers that when resources are inadequate, it is difficult to manage employee resistance to change because majority will not see the benefit of accepting the new status quo and as such, they tend to resist change. This assertion was supported by Anyieni et al. (2016) and Watson (2019) who all cited lack of resources as a challenge when managing employee resistance to change. Oreg (2011) also corroborated that change program requires a lot of resources to motivate staff as well as to meet the new requirements dictated by new changes. This means that for managers to implement meaningful change, they need adequate resources which most mining companies do not have. Anyieni et al. (2016) argued that when resources are limited, it is difficult for managers to implement the change process.

The study findings also showed that employees are skeptical about the change strategies like new technologies adopted in the mining sector. They perceived them to be a direct threat to job security, hence a challenge to manage change. This finding is consistent with the view by Anyieni et al. (2016) who postulates that negative employee perceptions have an effect on employee resistance to change. This is mostly common when employee perceptions are negative. Under such circumstances, managers will have challenges in managing employee resistance to change, because they sabotage or do the opposite or not accepting that change at all. This view was also substantiated by Lewis (2011) who found that managing employees for change who have negative perceptions towards the change program is difficult, because they will take long time to accept the new norms of the change program.

The respondents also cited lack of commitment as a challenge experienced by managers when managing employee resistance to change. This study finding was supported by Waston (2019) who posits that initiating a plan of action is great, but it is of no use, if employees are not fully committed to your plans. Lewis (2011) argued that it is difficult to motivate employees who are not committed to the long-term goals of the organization. This makes it difficult to manage change.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

The study results showed that managers face some challenges in managing employee resistance to change like communication challenges, conflicts, resistance, lack of resources and lack of commitment. The conclusion drawn was that managers face some challenges in managing employee resistance to change in the mining sector. All the respondents indicated that managers face communication and lack of resources challenges when managing employee resistance to change. They also mentioned negative employee perceptions, resistance and lack of commitment as some of the challenges in managing employee resistance to change in the mining sector. This research recommends that the management in the mining sector must educate people before and during the change process. Up-front communication and education help employees to see the logic in the change effort. This reduces unfounded and incorrect rumors concerning the effects of change in the organization. Managers in the mining sector must also provide robust supporting systems during and after the change process. This support will help employees to deal with fear and anxiety during and after change process. Support systems can be in form of special training, counseling, time off work, provide the right equipment, assurance of work safety and protection, clear benefits in the case of injuries or loss of lives etc. All these will make it easier to manage employee resistance in the mining sector. Managers can also combat resistance by offering incentives to employees not to resist change, most miners need monetary rewards like profit sharing schemes, monthly bonuses etc. Training is an important aspect in managing employee resistance to change in the mining sector. Before change initiatives are put into action training must be conducted for all leaders and employees to gain the necessary skills and knowledge to successfully manage change programmes. To achieve a positive attitude towards change, management should appoint change agents. In a nutshell, to manage change effectively, mining managers must create and maintain strategies that minimizes resistant behavior and encourage acceptance and support to change.

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