

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS FOR CHANGE IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Public sector is an area of work where employees are generally regarded as being unresponsive or resistant to change (Starbuck & Hedberg, 1977 as cited in Shinwon et al 2015, p. 179). They are conventional in their mode of operation and respond poorly to anything new – a new model, technology, innovative idea, system or policy that alters their usual operational system (El Badawy & Attia 2014). The cliché of “as it was before, so shall it be forever” resonates loudly with them. However, a change momentum is created once in a while and stakeholders in the public sector are expected to adapt to it (George et al 2014). This is an indication that change is a constant factor (Mika 2015) – it may be delayed but it will inevitably come. In general, people tend to resist change both in the private and public sector but the degree of resistance tends to be less in the private sector than in the public sector (El Badawy & Attia 2014; George et al 2014). Also, organisations that fight change do not usually last – they fold up (George et al 2014)

In Nigeria, the public sector comprises organisations run and regulated by the Nigerian government or a representative of various ministries created by the Nigerian government to operate in different capacities (Ogoh 2014). These organisations are not profit – oriented and are established by an Act of Parliament to provide basic and essential services for the populace (Nwoye 2011 as cited in Ogoh 2014). They are meant to be self – accounting, managing their receipts and expenditures accordingly (Aminu et al 1999). The economic and social development of the country are largely hinged on the growth, development and management of the Nigerian public sector (El Badawy & Attia 2014). In some instances, public organisations are set up to help the government to achieve its basic responsibilities towards the citizenry (Ogoh 2014). Organisations such as the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS), National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), Federal Housing Authority (FHA), Power

Holding Company of Nigeria, Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria (FAAN), Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC), Nigerian Postal Services (NPS), Asset Management Corporation of Nigeria (AMCON), Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) and Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) are examples of publicly – owned organizations, that is, organisations operating in the public sector of Nigeria (Ogoh 2014).

Generally, public organizations in Nigeria have a history of inefficiency, financial impropriety and corruption, weakened bureaucratic system, political interference, poor capitalization and so on (Aminu et al 1999; Ogoh 2014). The nature and size of these challenges vary from one public organization to the other – they are more pronounced in some public organisations than others. These challenges are largely human related. Tackling these problems, therefore, requires necessary and immediate changes to, in some quarters, the modes of operation, recruitment system and rewards and recognition schemes of these organisations. Without change, the aforementioned problems will persist in the public sector and undermine its relevance and productivity (George et al 2014).

What is change or change management? It is regarded as “a structured approach to transitioning individuals, teams, and organizations from the current state to the desired future state” (Sacheva 2009 as cited in Nograšek 2011, p. 14). Hiatt 2010 (as cited in Nograšek 2011, p. 14) defined it as a process directed at encouraging employees to be receptive to changes in their respective business environments. It can be reactive or proactive; and can comprise a hard and a soft side (Sacheva 2009; Dias de Lima, 2009). A reactive change management implies that organizations respond to business macro environment while a proactive change management indicates that organisations achieve their goals on continuous and programme basis (Sacheva 2009 as cited in Nograšek 2011, and Dias de Lima, 2009 p.14). The hard side of change management refers to

“the processes, systems, strategies, tactics, and technologies that will help to implement changes” (p.14) while the soft side entails “persuading, reassuring and communicating, identifying and addressing emotional reactions, influencing and motivating; leading to instill change and inspire people to rise to the occasion” (Dias de Lima 2009, p.14). An organizational change undergoes three stages – unfreezing, change and refreezing stage. The unfreezing stage points out inappropriate forms of behavior in an organization; the change stage deals with the replacement of old and inappropriate behavior with new forms of behavior in the organization – it may take the form of training and re-equipping employees with new skills while refreezing stage evaluates and measures behavioral change in the organization (El Badawy & Attia 2014).

The focus of this chapter is to identify key success factors for change in the public sector as stated in the literature. This is necessary because factors responsible for change in the private sector may not necessarily bring the needed change in the public sector. This is hinged on the fact that private and public sector are two different entities, operated for separate objectives – profit making and welfare maximization respectively (Ogoh 2014). Similarly, the private sector is more receptive to change than the public sector.

Sergio & Hal (2006) stress that identifying the need to change is critical to the success of any change programme. Studies prior to Sergio and Hal’s also affirm that the implementation of a change programme starts with leaders identifying the need for change and persuading all stakeholders of the need for change (Burke 2002 & Laurent 2003 as cited in Sergio & Hal 2006). The identification of the need will culminate into a vision for the organization (Sergio & Hal 2006). Without identifying any need for change, there will not be any push to change anything in the sector.

El Badawy & Attia (2014) emphasizes the use of innovative and digitalized technology in the public sector. It transforms the traditional process of operation to an e-government style. According to them, the adoption of technology has tremendous effects on the service quality of the public sector. The use of email facilitates communication and the transmission of information from the top to the least person in the public sector and within public stakeholders; website creation helps the public to have access to basic information about various activities and policies of public organisations without necessarily visiting any of them, and a general online platform enhances efficiency in the public sector by cutting off bureaucracy associated with public firms (El Badawy & Attia 2014). Even the issue of transparency in the activities of public firms is relatively resolved.

Another important factor for change in the public sector is the participation of public sector employees in the implementation of change programme. According to George et al (2014), employee participation is pivotal to any organizational change. Alhaqbani (2013) suggests that employees should be allowed to participate in the decision making process to institute a change because it helps to prevent any resistance from employees. Employees can be integrated into a change programme through training (Kash 2014). It is therefore pertinent to say that employees will be committed to any change programme to which they contribute.

Furthermore, Kash (2014) conducted a study on success factors for strategic change in the healthcare system. Sixty one individuals with different levels education – PhD, MSc, BSc and Associate degree participated in the study. He adopted a qualitative approach in which respondents are allowed to express their views on the subject matter. The outcome of the study indicates that leadership is a major success factor for change. A public organization will easily create, implement and sustain changes in selected areas of work if the organizational leadership

is strong. In other words, leadership is highly correlated with the success of a change programme (Stewart & Kringas 2003)

In their work on how to manage successful organizational change in the public sector, Sergio & Hal (2006) pointed seven key success factors to a in a definite order. They are designed to be a roadmap for managers who are daily burdened with the issue of change. These factors include – ensuring the need for change, providing a plan for change, building internal support for change and overcoming resistance, ensuring top management support and commitment, building external support, resource provisions, institutionalizing the change and lastly, pursuing competitive change. If these steps are closely followed, change is inevitable.

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