Absorbing the Wave of Change: A Grounded Case Study in Explaining Change Behavior in Organization

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ABSTRACT

In the era of new global world, change and development become parts of organizational life. Organizations need to continuously align its strategy to deal with change. Understanding the dynamic process underlying such strategy would be beneficial in gaining some insights about specific behavior of the organization within change context. This study offered a qualitatively based analysis to explain organizational adaptive strategies emerging in conditions of significant organizational flux. The approach known as grounded case study was employed to analyze behavioral phenomena of an organization in dealing with change. The analysis revealed seven themes or metaphors describing the strategy of how individuals and organization should absorb change whilst maintaining their effective performances. Reanalyzing the themes, it was concluded that all strategies were basically progressed toward the attainment of a new level of efficiency and survival. These themes provided frameworks for understanding how and why individuals and organizations behave as they did during periods of flux and transition.

Keywords: grounded case study, change behavior

Background of Study

Within a new global world, change and development become parts of organizational life. Organizations faced new and increasing demands from its environments in developing its businesses. Increased uncertainty, customization of its products and services to customer's demands, and other changing phenomena became parts of day-to-day organizational operations. Consequently, organization format and structure should be shifted toward more flexible networks that can facilitate and absorb all changing situations, and turned them into manageable operations. They all reflected the adaptive mechanism in aligning organizational capabilities to deal with changing environmental demands (Carnesvale, 1991; Pullan, 1990; Dow, 1995; Himam, 2002; Cummings & Worley, 2005).

There were many approaches involved in explaining how and why many organizations should develop

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certain strategies in dealing with change. Nevs et al. (1985) approach the organization as a learning system, which implied that change should be perceived as learning experiences. Gulden (1994), on the other hand, incorporated cultural concept in explaining how change should be managed in an organization. Culture, as a hared system of beliefs, values, and symbols widely understood by the members of organizations, was perceived as an integrated concept that explained the behavioral dynamics within organizations.

However the quest for satisfactory answers was still far from enough. Experts were still wonder and debating their arguments in explaining how change should be dealt with by an organization. Jones (2001), for example, argued that change strategies should underlie the development of structural stages experienced by an organization. Organization in the midst of growth should have different change strategies compared to organization that is already in the decline stage of functional structure.

Understanding these tendencies, this study was not directed purposefully to increase the “heat” of the arguments, rather it was directed toward exploring further and deeper explanations and developing some propositions concerning to the behavior of structural-organizational processes in dealing with the demands from its relevant environment. It was designed to stimulate some basic understanding about the ground-nature phenomenon of the dynamic of change behavior in organization.

In order to tap the whole descriptions of the processes, Grounded Case study was applied, rather than using quantitative-statistical approach, since: (1) this study concerned with dynamic of change behavior that needs to be interpreted within multiple perspective views and also needs to be approach as an emerging phenomenon rather than fixed-defined variable (Creswell & Miller, 1995); and (2) it assumed that contextual setting of change behavior was essential in understanding the phenomenon (Bogdan & Biklen, 1990; Stake, 1995; Creswell & Miller, 1995). In short, understanding on-going process of organizational change could not be appropriately approached by taking distance from the phenomenon under study, since it would loose the essence of the holistic movement of the organizational dynamics.

Based on the above understanding, the purpose of this study was to explore the major sources and processes of change behavior in an organization. It tried to develop a theory that explained change processes in the management of this organization.
Research Design and Procedures

As the purpose of this study was exploring the ongoing process of organizational change through time and different contextual setting, and this exploration was directed to generate theory from the data as it “spoke” rather than testing hypothesis, the application of Grounded Case study would elegantly appropriate to underline the interacting process of change phenomena in organization. Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) stated that in developing such Grounded approach, there would be some actions or interactions that characterized this approach.

It was a cyclical process that led to the development of a comprehensive data base that lends itself to the exploration of analytic question, within which data collection and analysis should take place concurrently (Hosler & Scales-Love, 1989). It provided an image of how to deal with data collection and data analysis in a continuous way (i.e. “zig-zag”; Creswell, 1997) until the information became saturated and the theory was integrated.

Relevant to the design and the purpose of study, managers from a housing organization were purposefully selected as study participants and were interviewed. They were the persons whose positions made them involved directly in the change process. They served themselves as change planners, change agents, facilitators, or key persons who got involved directly in organizational change processes.

Data analysis procedure was developed by using Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) Grounded Theory approach in coding procedures. The ultimate outcome of the analysis is generating rich, highly woven, explanatory propositions that closely approximate the reality it represents. The coding procedures (i.e. open, axial, and selective coding) are representing the operations by which data are broken down, analyzed, closely examined, conceptualized, and put back together in new ways.

In order to satisfy the validity and reliability issues, the data obtained were verified for the sake of explaining their accuracy of the information (internal validity), generalization (external validity), and replication (reliability). The accuracy of the information gathered could be explained by building trust with research participants, learning their culture, and checking for reconfirmation. Generalization issue was underlined by establishing rich and thick descriptions of the study (e.g. by developing purposive sampling strategy that allowed searching data from the richest sources). By doing this, it will be up to the readers to make decisions about the possible transfere-
bility of the findings (Creswell & Miller, 1995). To satisfy any questions related to the replication of this study, purposive sampling in selecting research participants, clarifying the specificity of the context under study, clarifying my limitations, and reporting in detail the protocol for data collection procedures gave some understandings about how this study might be replicated in another settings (Creswell, 1997).

Research Findings

Based on the open coding process, the data was extracted and classified into six categories of experiences in dealing with change. These categories were broken down into specific properties and dimensions (See Table 1: Open Coding on How Organization Experiences Change). They were, then, grouped into two broader categories: (1) organizational level of experiences, i.e. efficiency, managerial styles, survival; (2) individual level of experiences, i.e. personal attitude, quality of behavior, survival.

The concept of efficiency came to participants’ mind, as the manager of the organization, when they should deal with change. Within changing situations, efficiency should be achieved by the organization in order to maintain its daily operations. There were three forms of efficiency actions taken by the organization. (1) developing total quality in services. It meant that high quality in serving customers’ needs should become the core function of organization operations. Customers’ satisfaction was an indicator that needed to be achieved; (2) cost effective. Since financial budget in maintaining daily operations was limited, every action taken should consider the cost-benefit analysis, the ratio between costs and services delivered; (3) consistency. This concept referred to the standard of performance that needed to be delivered to customers. It should be reliable and persistent across time and places.

In terms of managerial styles, the management developed certain kind of styles in order to meet the changing demands of quality services from the customers. There four functions developed that reflect the managerial styles:

(1) Decision making. The styles that could absorb the dynamic changes of customers’ demands were developed. These styles were less centralized in decision making, delegation of authority among employees, less hierarchical and considering the inputs came from employees (bottom-up style).

(2) Communicating. As employees were more experienced, having higher education, the communication processes were developed to be more open and verbal since they could be perceived as effective in
<p>| Table 1: Open Coding on How Organization Experiences Change |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>BROAD CATEGORY</strong></th>
<th><strong>CATEGORY</strong></th>
<th><strong>PROPERTIES</strong></th>
<th><strong>DIMENSIONALIZED EXAMPLES</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organizational level of experiences</td>
<td>1. Efficiency</td>
<td>a. Total quality in services</td>
<td>satisfactory level in term of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b. Cost effective</td>
<td>customer’s perceptions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>c. Consistency</td>
<td>direct link between money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Managerial</td>
<td>a. Decision making</td>
<td>spent and expected results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Styles</td>
<td></td>
<td>b. Communicating</td>
<td>standardized services across</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>c. Coordinating</td>
<td>places</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>d. Evaluating</td>
<td>delegated – centralized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Survival</td>
<td>Massaging job descriptions</td>
<td>hierarchical – bottom-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>flexibility in defining the job</td>
<td>open – limited, verbal –</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual level of experiences</td>
<td>Positive attitude</td>
<td>written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Personal</td>
<td>Negative attitude</td>
<td>vertical – horizontal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attitude</td>
<td></td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>well-planned – unplanned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Quality of</td>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>behavior</td>
<td></td>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Moving on</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Survival</td>
<td>Comfort zone</td>
<td>wide – restrictive zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>active – passive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

dealing with those employee’s characters compared to written and less open ones; (3) coordinating. Coordinating organizational activities within the flux of change could serve as a way to stimulate the creation of group activities rather than individual activities per se. That was why vertical type of coordination was less desirable than horizontal one since it could eliminate unnecessary hierarchy or bureaucracy, and could stimulate high
degree of employees’ involvement (4) evaluating. In some cases, change would lead to developing strategies to deal with environments’ new demands or influences. Addressing these demands, the management needed to develop well-planned rather than unplanned evaluation processes. This strategy was necessary to be executed in order to filter out any unexpected influences that could affect the whole performance of the organization.
Furthermore, the survival served as the major condition that needed to be achieved by the organization. It was the main duties of the management to ensure the survival of the organization when it should deal with chaotic side of change. One survival strategy was to "massage the job description". It meant that when a new changing situation affected the daily work activities, job roles and descriptions needed to be redefined in order to create a sense of flexibility in working on the new job.

As an individual, when participant should deal with change, the developed a kind of personal attitude as expressions of her feeling and emotion in how she should adjust herself to unfamiliar situations. It perhaps served as a representation of her subconscious part of her behavior. This attitude lies on a continuum: from positive to neutral to negative. Positive attitude came up as the participant felt happy or optimistic the future and the impact of change upon her personal life. Change was perceived as having some potential advantages to the development of her well-being. She felt really excited about her change experience. Negative attitude, on the other hand, served as the reflection of fear and feeling unsafe about change phenomena. Participant felt frustrated with her new work condition. Her attitude led to conflict and she became apprehensive. Neutral attitude was a kind of "act on the spot". It was a way to deal with change without holding any presumptions to it. It was a kind of play safe behavior. Be open, learning to be receptive, "soak up" everything came toward her life were the attitude expressed by the participant.

Compare to personal attitude, quality of behavior represented more the conscious part of participant behavior. It was related to how to maintain high quality of performance as an individual worker within changing situation. Some examples of the behavior were being creative, flexible, moving on within job context.

Individual survival was one major theme that needed to be achieved in dealing with change. It reflected an effort to develop a "comfort zone" (an imaginary-perceived space where individual felt safe, felt at home) within changing situation. Survival in individual context was different compared to organizational survival. It was more related to establishing personal comfort to work rather than maintaining individual existence within changing situation.

Discussions

Explaining change experiences in organizational level meant that the macro system of the organization was explored, the interdependency of the organization with its relevant environ-
ment was emphasized, and the emphasis was also put upon the basic-major functions that comprise the organization (Rummel & Brache, 1990).

Within this level of experiences, the major issue aroused was the needs of the organization to align its daily activities and performances to the evolving demands of the environments. Environments put some pressures upon which the organization was forced to respond, otherwise its existence in the next future time and space would be in great danger. Basically, the needs came from its inventions to survive within the context of interactions with the surroundings, and it only could be done by aligning its performance to meet the expectation of its environment.

Reviewing and reanalyzing the data, there were some contextual signs that led to how organization should develop its performance. They included: disseminating new technologies, realigning its vision and mission, developing new rules and regulations in handling the work, developing cooperation with other organizations. These factors, to some extent, contributed to the development of strategies in maintaining and adapting the organization operations to correspond to the environmental demands. Harmony and non-harmful situations would be enforced.

Within individual-micro level, the dynamic experiences of employee in changing situations came from the urge to get along with, to adapt to, or to create a safe-comfortable climate to work on. Change could be perceived as a challenge to individual-personal values, perception, or even individual capability to work. That is why, when participants could not avoid to work without change, they developed many kinds of personal attitude or work behavior (e.g. be receptive, apprehensive, creative, autonomy) that were adaptable to the characteristics of the demands of change. The focus of their behavior was on how to learn & change situation and how to survive. Based on the understanding about the dynamics of change behavior, a theoretical model of how organization experiences change was introduced (see Figure 1). As shown in Figure 1, the central logic of this model explained that the central phenomena (i.e. experiencing the process of change in organizational and individual level) served as a consequence of the causal conditions (i.e disseminating new technology, realigning its vision and mission, developing new rules and regulations, new demands for service quality).
Figure 1: Theoretical Model of How Organization Experience Change

The Context:
Organizational vision and mission, holistic views towards future organization existence

Causal Conditions:
Disseminating new technology, redefining vision and mission, developing new rules and regulations, new demands for service quality

Central Phenomena:
Experiencing the process of change in organizational and individual level

Strategies:
total quality in services, cost-effective mode of operations, participative managerial styles, personal attitude, quality of work behavior

Outcomes:
efficiency and survival (in organization level); and survival, learning, and getting feedback (in individual level)

Intervening conditions:
individual values and perception toward change, individual capability in dealing with change

These situations related to the development of strategies (i.e. total quality in services, cost-effective mode of operations, participative managerial styles, personal attitude, quality of work behavior), which also affected by some contextual influences (e.g. Organizational vision and mission, holistic views towards future organization existence), and the influence were strengthened by some intervening conditions (i.e. individual values and perception toward change, individual capability in dealing with change). Those all strategies were concentrated to achieve the desired outcomes.
efficiency and survival (in organizational level), and survival, learning, and getting feedback (in individual level).

These logics led to several theoretical propositions and sub propositions that needed further evaluations to examine the validity and applicability in organizational settings. They are:

1.0. The type of experiences of change in organizational level will lead to increasing or decreasing organizational efficiency and its capability to survive.

1.1. The closer the experiences toward the strategy to align organizational activities with customer demands, the higher the possibility of the organization to be efficient and to be capable to survive.

1.2 The closer the experiences related to building environmental cooperation, the higher the chance of the organization to survive.

These propositions explain the interrelationships among change experiences, strategy to deal with the relevant environmental influences, efficiency, and organizational survival. This understanding confirms the theory described by Carnevale (1991) and Das (1995) that the future of organizational performance and survival are heavily influenced by the capability of the organization to experience change as stimulus towards developing flexible and adaptive networks that are responsive to environmental demand.

2.0. The experiences of change in individual level will influence the rate of learning process and the survival of individual employees.

2.1. The more the individuals experience as positive to enhancing their quality of behavior, the more possible the individuals will survive and increase the rate of their learning processes.

2.2. The more the individuals experience change as positive to developing their quality of behavior, the more the individuals will perceive change as rewarding.

These propositions suggest that positive experiences toward change, learning and individual survival within organizational lives are interrelated. It provides an understanding that positive experience of change will foster the quality of work behavior and, in turn, it will increase the attachment of individuals to the organization as individuals perceive change as rewarding.

This understanding is relevant to the concept of stages of growth in organization desired outcomes: efficiency and survival (in organizational level), and survival, learning, and getting feedback (in individual level).
Van de Ven & Poole, 1995). Organization as learning system (Senge, 1990; Nevis, et al., 1995). As the implications, it can be understood that in order to enhance individual performance and higher involvement to organization, learning as rewarding experience should be attached and absorbed within the policy of the organization, or should be developed as the part of organizational culture.

References


