An exploratory study of management perceptions of the role of Kotter's urgency in creating a future change agenda.

Author:

Thomas Kerrigan

Award for which the dissertation is submitted:

Master in Business Administration

College:

National College of Ireland

Submitted to the National College of Ireland, 17th August 2021.

Abstract

At some stage, nearly all organisations will undergo some form of change to remain viable. Organisational change is the actions that a company takes to alter a major component of the organisation, such as technology, culture, infrastructure, or processes. Change management is the method of delivering change and may be broken down into three phases: preparation, implementation, and follow-through (Stobierski, 2020).

The three phases of delivering change were first introduced Kurt Lewin in 1947. Lewin believed to achieve change it was necessary to first destabilise the status quo, prepare, then execute the change and then refreeze, or embed the new norm (Cummings et al., 2015). In 1995, John P. Kotter published "Leading change: Why Transformational Effort Fail" based on a study of over 100 companies and their change management practices. Kotter (1995) stated the change process was not three steps, but instead was expanded to eight. In Kotter's framework, the preparation phase was initiated by the organisation create a sense of urgency. The senior leadership must scan the external environment, identify the need for change and lead the change agenda in the organisation.

Senior management should be in the best position to lead change within an organisation. They have the helicopter view of the organisation and can see what needs to be done strategical to maintain competitive advantage (Koene, 2017).

Whether it is through small proactive incremental or reactive transformational changes, the senior leadership must ensure that they are outward focussed. In contrast, the role of the middle management has been to deliver the product or service. They inward focussed, metric driven and directed by short-term planning. However, are these middle managers not the perfect candidates to drive the change agenda? The senior team may have the strategy, but the middle managers may be better placed and better connect to the people that need to be changed.

The aim of this study is to explore managements perceptions of change management. Having initially looked at the concept of change management, the study will then focus in on the first step. How does the organisation prepare for change? Questions such as, how is the status quo moved? How is a sense of urgency created? Is it through strategy or through creating an emotional connection with those who change effects? Finally, and possibly the most important question, who is best placed to create the urgency and achieve change?

This study has reviewed change management literature and conducted interviews with change leaders within a specific organisation. These leaders have experience in change agendas from major downsizing of infrastructure to changes is business model resulted in its highest revenues in the company's history and destroyed the competition. The author hopes that by comparing key points from the literature to the themes gleaned for the interviews that a better understand of change management and whether Kotter's sense of urgency is the key to successful change.

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

National College of Ireland
Research Students Declaration Form

Name: Thomas Kerrigan

Student Number: x19131071

Degree for which thesis is submitted: Master in Business Administration

Title of Thesis: An exploratory study of management perception of the role of Kotter's urgency in creating a future change agenda.

Date: 17th August 2021

Material submitted for award

A. I declare that this work submitted has been composed by myself. ☑

B. I declare that all verbatim extracts contained in the thesis have been distinguished by quotation marks and the sources of information specifically acknowledged. ☑

C. I agree to my thesis being deposited in the NCI Library online open access repository NORMA. ☑

D. ***Either*** *I declare that no material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.
   ~~*Or* *I declare that the following material contained in the thesis formed part of a submission for the award of~~
   _____
   (State the award and the awarding body and list the material below) ☑

Acknowledgements

To turn a dream into a reality is what we wish for. But to make it happen takes more than wishes. Over the past two year, my family have supported me every step of the way as I have pursued the MBA dream. They allowed me to lock myself away to work, attend class, read, study, and write papers, without ever grumbling or complaining. To say thank you just does not cover it. I do look forward to being given an enormous to-do list on August 19th that is now 2 years in the making.

From the idea of doing an MBA to a conversation that made it happen. I would especially like to thank Colette Darcy, Dean of the School of Business at the National College of Ireland. Any fear or trepidation I had about starting the MBA before our first meeting quickly evaporated once the conversation started. Your support and advise since that first meeting has got me this far and it has been very much appreciated.

To all my lecturers and classmates, I have enjoyed every minute of this adventure. From our first evening in the class to the migration to the virtual world, it has been a great experience. I have learned a lot and made some wonder friends. Finally, I must thank the 'A Team'. I can honestly say that being part of the team was an honour. And, in the future, it has the makings of an excellent consulting company. Any takers?

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 – Introduction

From the introduction of Kurt Lewin's 3-Step Change Model to businesses in the post-world war era to the current day, change management has evolved. The success and failure of organisations is based on their ability to innovate and successfully change to maintain competitive advantage. Once industry leaders, such as Kodak, had grown their business to be household names. An important event captured in a photograph was even described as 'A 'Kodak moment'. But where is Kodak now?

Kodak are a perfect example of a company who failed to embrace innovation and make the changes necessary to maintain their competitive advantage. Conversely, organisations such as Netflix, who started life as a mail order film rental service to generating US$25 billion in revenue through its content platform service (Netflix, 2020). Or the Wrigley's Scouring Soap of Chicago, established in 1891 to sell soap and baking soda. As early sales promotion, Wrigley offered a free pack of chewing gum with every purchase. However, the gum proved to be more popularly that the detergent it promoted. A decision was made that turned the company into the largest manufacturer and marketer of chewing gum in the world (The Guardian, 2008). Unlike Kodak, these successful organisations looked for opportunities or identified potential crisis, found where they could achieve competitive advantage and acted.

As change management models evolved, the Harvard professor John Kotter undertook a 10-year study of over 100 companies and how they managed change. What was clear from his findings was that achieving change is not easy achieved. Success rates are generally poor. The framework for change management had not changed in nearly half a century. Lewin had provided a rudimentary 3 step map for change: unfreeze, change, refreeze. However, Kotter decided to go into more specific details with the introduction of his 8-Step Change Model as his road map to achieve successful change. By following the steps change would be delivered.

The first step in the new model was to create a sense of urgency. This sense of urgency is exactly where Kodak failed, and Netflix and Wrigley succeeded. According

to Kotter (1995) an organisation must examine the market and identify potential opportunities or threats. The scope of this examination must not only be internal but external. The eyes of the company need to not only be on the road but also on the horizon. From technology to customer tastes, for the business to maintain a competitive advantage it must constantly be looking for the next move. The next innovation.

What is concerning is over 50% of all change programmes fail at the first step (Kotter, 2014). Thus, 50% of organisations are not making the necessary changes to remain competitive. Possible opportunities and being loss and causing possible crisis. And in the worse cases crisis leads to loss of the business. The new definition of 'a Kodak moment'.

For today's businesses to be sustainable, they must embrace Kotter's concept of urgency. According to Kotter (1995), the rate of change in the business world is not going to slow down anytime soon. Over 25 years later, the pace of modern business got even faster, and it is vital that today's business leaders create and recreate a sense of urgency to ensure they can achieve their goals. But this may only be achievable if the entire process is accelerated. Information must be gathered and processed quicker. Decisions must be considered and made quicker. Now, the entire process must be accelerated to stay out in front (Kotter, 2015).

However, this raises questions about the change process. Should urgency be maintained or constantly recreated? If constant, does it become part of the organisational culture, then is it part of the change process? Then the change process goes directly to step 2, the vision. These are questions some of the questions to be answered.

The reasoning for undertaking this project is based on experience. The author has over twenty years' management experience in the aviation industry. Having been involved in numerous successful and unsuccessful change strategies, the inconsistency of results has led the author developing a major interest in the topic. Now over one year on since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, innovation and

change management are more critical to business survival than ever. Before entering 2020, the aviation sector had gone from record highs. Following the impact of the pandemic, it is balance on the edge of survival. Going forward, all change initiative must succeed. Yet, the environment for change is at its most challenging.

As part of this research, the author is planning to interview senior managers at a time where their change agenda is vital for the company's survival. Exploring the perception of role of urgency at a time of crisis may deliver some interesting results and answer the key questions of this research.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Introduction

The need for organisational change when required is considered essential. However, according to Vermeulen et al. (2010) the idea of initiating change for change's sake is greeted with scepticism. Or is this due to lack of understanding of change management and change? Does the business always need to be under attack to change? Even if there are no external threats or opportunities, there may be opportunities to be proactive and fine tune the business. By creating constant change, the business is constantly learning and developing. Always, one step ahead of the competition. The organisation has a sense of urgency to get to next level that allows them to get there.

But unfortunately, this is not always the case. Kotter (1995) argues that organisations do not manage change well. The level of failure is far higher that success. And the reason given is that most organisation do not establish a great enough sense of urgency. The question is what as a sense of urgency and how is it created. The first step is to understand what is change management.

What is Change Management?

Kurt Lewin is widely considered the founding father of change management, Cummings et al (2015). The change management theory Lewin introduced has three simple steps: unfreeze, change, refreeze. According to Burnes (2004), Lewin believed the only way to achieve change was to destabilise or unfreeze the human equilibrium. If achieved, old behaviours would be discarded, and new ones adopted. Schein (1996) expanded on the unfreezing step by identifying three processes: disconfirmation of the validity of the status quo, the introduction of guilt or survival anxiety and creating psychological safety. However, the order in which these processes are implemented is critical. Establishing psychological safety must come first so to enable acceptance. What both Lewin and Schein had identified is the need to create a shock.

To achieve change, the fire alarm must be tripped. Realisation that norms are no longer a guarantee of survival must be the message and the good news is the leadership have the escape route ready. Thus, the anxiety and fears are realised, and safest outcome is to make the change.

In 1995, John Kotter published his article 'Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail' in the Harvard Business Review following a 10-year study of over 100 companies as they attempted to become a 'significantly better competitor'. According to Kotter (1995), the list of companies was diverse in size, profit, and geographic location. Each company may have a specific object, such as restructure or turnaround, the fundamental goal was change.

From the results of his study, Kotter identified that in all, but a few change projects had not been successfully achieved. The main failure was due to the change management process not being followed, (Kotter, 1995). According to Grimolizzi-Jensen (2018) change management is defined as a structure approach to ensuring the changes are thoroughly and smoothly implemented to achieve lasting change. Irrespective of the change model used, a systematic approach must be applied. Each step must be completed before the next one is initiated. As Lewin had proposed the first step of any change is to unfreeze, Kotter's first step is to establish sense of urgency. The market

and competitive realities must be examined to identify potential risks or untapped opportunities. Having successfully delivered multiple change agendas while at General Electric, Immelt (2017) stated that the need to constantly assess the organisation's: competitive advantage, market position, financial performance and both internal and external business trends. This is supported by Kotter (2009) who identified the importance of creating an outward focus. 'An innovative culture constantly focuses on the current and future customers and innovative outside organisations.' Devoting time, attention, and resources to monitoring and understanding the most innovative competitors has been the hallmark of organisations such as Amazon, Epstein and Davilla (2014).

Concentrating internally will inevitably lead to missed opportunities and potential hazards from competitors, customers, or the regulatory environment. Thus, the CEO, or change agent, must see the whole picture. The current and the future. Once an opportunity, or threat, is identified the sense of urgency must be started. This process should be applied whether the organisation is a market leader or in decline. According to Kotter (1995), at this point the danger, particularly when the business is performing well, is paralysis to act due to the fear of failure and the associated risks. Loss of morale, defensive reaction of staff or short-term business failure may deter any potential change. However, the correct response of leadership is to make the change essential and anchor commitment across the organisation, Immelt (2017). To achieve the required sense of urgency, Kotter (1995) identified the need to convince at least 75% of the management that the status quo is more dangerous than the unknown. It is the first step in Kotter's model and according to Bucciarelli (2015) the most crucial point to facilitate change. And by creating a stronger people engagement, first step is achievable. However, what must be factored in any change agenda is the pace of change.

There is a need for leaders to change their approach to change. The strict adhering to the formal steps to succeed may have to be reconsidered. For example, the pace at which technology is advancing means speed of change is off the essence. According to DeSmet and Gagnon (2018), the average large company reorganises every two to three years with implementation taking more than 18 months. In the modern business

environment, this is too slow. For the highest performing companies, speed is the objective function. This was evident is a letter from Jeff Bezos to shareholders in 2017 where it was stated that not only were quality decisions important but also high velocity decisions. When Immelt (2017) discussed the importance of leaders being allowed to soak in all the information before making decisions, this luxury of time may no longer be an option. The recent pandemic has created a crisis where businesses around the world have had to shift focus at an exponential rate, Scharsky, (2020). This has accelerated Kotter's argument for the need to create urgency. Suddenly, organisation have pivoted position quickly to survive. Passenger airlines converted to 100% cargo operations. The film industry released straight to on demand streaming services. The only way to achieve this rate of change is to be agile. Improving the process of creating urgency by enabling faster decision making is key to success. But what is the nature of change confronting organisations.

The Nature of Change Confronting Organisations

Dunphy (1996) argues that planned change is triggered by the failure of management to create a continuously adaptive organisation. Such an organisation would be referred to as a learning organisation. According to Hayes (2014) such an organisation would be self-organised and highly successful.

However, the norm is for organisations to experience episodic change which cycles between extended periods of incremental change in addition to short periods of discontinuous, or transformational change. Incremental change occurs during relatively long periods of equilibrium (Hayes, 2014). Managers consciously and proactively move forward incrementally. Their objectives are to: improve the quality of strategic decision making, control timelines, deal with resistance to change, build organisational awareness, and decrease the uncertainty around the strategic direction (Quinn, 1980). Thus, creating a learning organisation that can maintain incremental change.

The recent outbreak of COVID-19 has forced numerous organisations to abandon an incremental change strategy in favour of transformational change. Hayes (2014)

describes transformational changes as occurring during period of disequilibrium. The organisation becomes so misaligned with the external environment that it cannot continue. In the case of the airline industry, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and containment measures implemented by governments the drop in demand for passenger air transport threatened the viability of many firms (OECD, 2020). According to the author, this resulted in sudden transformational changes being implemented across the industry. Passenger airlines had to look for alternative business models to generate revenue. For many supporting the global supply chain of pharmaceuticals and personal protective equipment provided such opportunities. The business strategy was now driven by survival and only a reactive and transformation would achieve this goal. To understand this type of organisational changes, the typology of organisational change must be explored.

The Typology of Organisational Change

Both incremental and transformational change have previously been explained. However, according to Hayes (2014) based on an organisations approach to change, Nader and Tushman (1989) identified that combining either a proactive or reactive approach with incremental or transformational change would create four types of organisational change, figure 1.

Types of Organisational Change

	Incremental	Transformational
Proactive	TUNING	REORIENTATION
Reactive	ADAPTATION	RECREATION

Source: Hayes (2014)

Figure 1

Tuning occurs when there is no immediate need for change. Nader and Tushman (1989) argue changes are successfully achieved by anticipating future events. By combining an incremental and proactive approach, the focus may be on internal improvements. According to Hayes (2014) an organisation applying tuning is seeking a better way to achieve or defend the strategic vision. It is internally focussed as improvements may be made to processes, method or the implementation of time or cost savings.

The response to a pressing external demand is considered as adaptation. Hayes (2014) uses the example of an organisation adapting to a competitor's new marketing strategy. A company may have to react to a change in price, either an increase or a decrease. If change is not implemented, then there will be a risk to the ability to remain competitive.

The use of incremental change in both proactive and reactive approaches employ changes with the standard organisational framework. They are completed within the existing paradigm. However, both reorientation and recreation cause the company to either do things differently or do different things (Hayes, 2014). Reorientation is achieved with the luxury of time afforded by anticipating events (Nader and Tushman, 1989). A fundamental redirection of the organisation is required. However, although there is the need for major change, reorientation is achieved without a sharp break to with the existing frameworks. This is described as a frame-bending change.

As the impact of COVID-19 has demonstrated, sudden events that threaten the very existence of an organisation require a radical, and reactive, change strategy (Hayes, 2014). Nadel and Tushman (1989) argue that a recreation change strategy must be employed. This strategy may break the link with the past which includes shifts in leadership, values, strategy, and culture. Thus, creating frame-breaking change.

When considering a change strategy consideration must be given to this typology. The role of leadership is to produce change and effective leadership selects the correct

type of change (Kotter, 1990). However, is it possible for leadership to anticipate change?

The Need to Anticipate Change.

The development of a company is not linear. There are always strategic inflection points that, depending on the decision made, will result in new heights or miserable lows. According to Grove (1996) an inflection point is a moment when significant change occurs. The balance of forces shifts from the old structure, the old ways of doing business and competing, to the new. What must also be understood is that both the business and the external environment can create inflection points. The key to success is the ability to control and exploit them.

The 2001 terrorist attacks on 9/11, 2002 SARS epidemic and the 2008 Credit Crunch were difficult to anticipate (Hayes, 2014). According to Taleb (2010) a black swan is an unpredictable event that is beyond normal expectation and has potentially severe consequences. Such events are extremely rare, have severe impact and in hindsight could have been predicted. Taleb argues that businesses should plan for a black swan event and not just react once it happens. Consider COVID-19, was it the first pandemic? Should governments and businesses have been prepared?

According to McGrath (2019) inflection points are not easily seen in the boardroom. However, the edge of the organisation, such as the customer facing staff, will be first to see the tell-tale signs of a possible inflection point. It is important that the boardroom has access to this information. A systematic communication strategy is vital. Removing the silo and hierarchy allows information to follow from the front line to top levels. Empowering small, trusted teams with the ability to make low-risk and reversible decisions will create agility and balance in decision making. This supports the removal of corporate bureaucracy that strangles creative ideas. Finally, leaders can deliberately avoid uncomfortable news about change. This must be avoided as this will create further issues.

Change must be considered inevitable. In the modern business environment, the average large company must reorganise every two to three years with implementation taking more than 18 months (DeSmet and Gagnon, 2018). According to Gleeson (2017) companies that win at change do so by anticipating it and being well prepared. They analyse the external environment, consider the options, formulate a plan and, only then, turn the focus inwards. At this point, to deliver the leadership must create urgency.

What creates urgency not emergency?

According to Tabrizi (2014) successful change leaders are open, bold and have a clear sense of the motivation. The change leader must adopt the vision to capture people's hearts and minds. The leader must find the direction to be taken, their North Star, and ensure that this is shared not hidden. Then, the next step is to move quickly. The need for change has been identified and now the urgency must be created.

Whether it is planned incremental or sudden transformational change, according to Kotter (2009) urgency is created through outward focus. What must be done to ensure that the business is keeping up with technology or changes in customer taste, every organisation must look outwards. Only then will competitive advantage be achieved.

According to Porter (1985) competitive strategy is the search for a favourable competitive position within an industry. This strategy aims to establish a profitable and sustainable position against the determining forces that determine industry competition. There are two factors that must be considered: the attractiveness of the industry for long-term profitably and the determinants of relative competitive position with the industry. It is vital that the company has a good understanding of the industry and rules of competition.

Urgency is based on a greater purpose focussed outward to ensure competitive advantage is achieved while managing emergencies is reactionary and inward (Zwilling, 2012). According to Kotter (2015) urgency is not a frantic activity, such as handling emergencies, but a series of proactive, not reactive, activates. A sense of

urgency assumes that rapid change is required and is the norm. To the contrary, a sense of emergency is an attempt to stop or delay change.

The Need to Create a Sense of Urgency or Maintain it?

Kotter (2014) states to achieve change organisations must tirelessly develop a sense of urgency. As the business cycle accelerates, the key to leading a world-class organisation today is to maintain a true sense of urgency. Urgency must be created and recreated (Kotter, 2015). The question must be then asked if a constant sense of urgency can be maintained or constantly created and recreated? If possible, is this not a change is organisational culture thus no longer a step in the change process? The business must be constantly looking to assessing the environment, innovate and act. If a sense of urgency is constant, then is the first step is to develop a compelling vision and sell it? Over the past 26 years, has pace of business changed change management and reduced Kotter's 8 steps to 7? Is a sense of urgency now a natural state?

Urgency is about the strategic threats and possibilities. The organisation must constantly devise creative ways to relentlessly build and maintain a sense of urgency (Kotter, 2014). Silos, levels, rules, and short-term plans must be set aside to drive the need for change. The organisation, like a military operation, must be mobilised. New norms must be established as the business embraces urgency and desire to look forward with an open mind. However, this will very much depend on how the organisation connects with the staff. A strategic message may only achieve so much if the emotional message is missed.

Is the Sense of Urgency Created Through Strategic or Emotional Connections?

Hayes (2014) suggested that while leaders of change need to make realistic assessments of opportunities and constraints in a situation. However, they must also be sensitive to the needs and priorities of those who have a stake in the change.

According to Kahneman (2011) by not considering all stake holders, there will be mistakes made by leadership that may have a negative impact on the change agenda. Schein (1996) argued that change is achieved by triggering the survival instinct in people. First giving them the shock and then the route to safety. Change management must embrace the people side of change as individuals and teams move from the current to the future state. How does change impact them. How will they react? The answer to the question is humans act irrationally. They may not always make the most logical decisions and these systematic errors in thinking, by normal people, are due to emotional corruption. What leadership must consider is that a business strategy is how people throughout an organization should make decisions and allocate resources to accomplish key objectives (Watkins, 2007).

The critical piece is 'how people throughout an organisation should make decisions.' From the top of the organisation the decision is strategic. The leadership have a clear vision of what needs to be done and create a sense of urgency based on the external hazards or potential crisis. However, instead of mobilising the staff, it creates fear. This may be due to the leadership overestimating the benefits while underestimating the cost. This optimistic bias, the planning fallacy, puts rational or emotional decision making thus alienates the very staff needed to make change happen (Kahneman, 2011).

According to Taleb (2010) the narrative fallacy addresses peoples limited ability to look at sequences of facts without weaving an explanation to create a story. These explanations bind facts together making them more easily remembered. Therefore, to achieve a sense of urgency from an emotional position the narrative must be kept simple. Based on the Audrey Nikolayevich rule, keep the narrative simple. People want a story and how it relates to them. What must be understood is that people cling to habits and fear losing power and stature (Kotter, 2014). Therefore, any strategy must be 'head and heart driven.' The narrative needs to create a connection that applies to the emotions. The sense of urgency must become a vehicle that drives human desire to a bigger cause not just a bigger bottom line. A message that would be difficult for even the most ardent blocker to shoot down.

According to the author, a sense of urgency must be crafted by combining the strategic and emotional connections. It develops a bold message that connects with all stake holders though a compelling reasons to change. The next question is who is ideally positioned to create the sense of urgency?

Who is Best Placed to Create the Sense of Urgency?

Koene (2017) suggested that the initiation of change by senior management is not the best course of action. Although the strategic need for change may be identified by senior management, recent research should that it is middle management are best placed to drive the change agenda.

Senior leadership frame change in purely strategic terms. However, the rest of the organisation will focus on the impacts to jobs, working practices and social factors. Thus, there is a risk of senior management losing buy-in and support of initiatives. According to Kotter (1995) this risk can be removed by delegating the task of creating urgency to middle and lower-level managers. Where there is a strong hierarchical management system, senior management must empower lower management with sufficient autonomy to enable them to sell the vision and create the essential change coalitions. This does not provide senior management with an excuse the abdicate leadership in the change process.

From the top down, there must be a 'get to' not a 'have to' mindset. Whether it is incremental or transformational change, creating a strong sense of urgency requires bold even risky actions what is associated with good leadership (Kotter, 1995). Even though middle management may drive the agenda, it is the leadership who initiates the change and create the sense of urgency.

Conclusion

Change management should not be seen as a break glass only in the event of emergencies. Yes, Schein (1996) believed that shock created urgency, but this is not sustainable. Change must be constant. The organisation must be continually scanning

the external and internal environment in search of the next opportunity and threat. According to Kotter (2005) and Vermeulen et al (2010), change is a critical when times are good then when times are bad, and the leadership must understand this fact. Change must be made essential (Immelt, 2017).

Thus, there must be a fully understanding of the typology of change. By successfully managing the organisations needs to employ a proactive or reactive strategy to change while balancing with an incremental or transformational approach with achieve the desired results. From tuning to recreation and reorientation to adapting, choosing the appropriate change will deliver competitive advantage. But knowing when to change is the vital for the organisation's success. Identifying, as Grove (1996) described as the inflection point will put the business ahead of the curve. Implementing the required systems such a communication and removing the blockers such as silos will allow the company to, as Glesson (2017) described, anticipate, and prepare for changed. Thus, eliminating the emergencies, or frantic states, and ensuring the business is in a constant state of reality and urgency (Zwilling, 2017 and Kotter, 2015). The next question is how is this achieved and by who? From a leadership perspective, how goals are achieved are strategic. Yes, there needs to be buy-in from the staff (Kotter, 1996 and 2015) but can the leadership get it. The senior leadership start the process. They identify the opportunity and create the sense of urgency. However, they are not best placed to execute it (Koene, 2017). This is the role of the middle management. They have the connection with their staff that the senior management do not. They must be given the tools and resources to educate the teams and take away the fear of change. This does not mean that the leadership are abdicating power and responsibility to the middle management. Instead, they are allowing them to use their emotional connections and craft the right narrative to the safest route to change.

Chapter 3- Research Questions

This chapter aim to set out research aims of this dissertation in more detail.

The primary question to be answered is:

An exploratory study of management's perceptions of the role of Kotter's urgency in creating a future change agenda.

The importance of delivering change cannot be ignored. The author's objective to get an understanding of how management view change management. How do they prepare for change and the role of urgency in their agenda?

The researcher aims to address, through the lens of the organisation, the following objectives, based in the research that is available

- A qualitative approach to attain a comprehensive understanding of management's perceptions of the role of Kotter's sense of urgency in creating a future change agenda.
- Establish how 'urgency' is implemented by management in the setting the strategic direction of the organisation.
- Identify if senior management are best placed to create and deliver the sense of urgency or should they establish the need for change and delegate the creation of urgency.
- What are the possible impediments to senior management in delivering the change agenda?

Chapter 4 - Research Methodology

Introduction

Methodology is the description of how research should be undertaken and includes theoretical and philosophical assumptions that the research is based upon (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015). In any research, to ensure that data is collected and analysed effectively, a systematic approach must be applied (Saunders et al, 2019).

The 'Research Onion' was developed by Saunders et al, (2019) to provide researchers a framework to follow that ensures such a systematic approach may be achieved. The author employed the 'research onion' to ensure consistent approach was used across all layers.

The inner layers of the onion aim to explore the research question. From the selection of the optimal methodology for collecting data, to the methods to be used to investigate the results. While the outer layers examine the research philosophy and the approaches taken to define the motivation behind the research (Collis and Hussey, 2013).

This research was undertaken to explore the role of Kotter's urgency in the change agenda. The objective was to understand the reality of the change agenda within the organisation, to identify gaps in the data collected and examine if the change management literature supported or contracted the findings.

This chapter will outline the research method used, including the application of the semi-structured interview and the management of the data. In addition, the chapter will also discuss the limitations of the research method and the ethical considerations applied.

Research Philosophy

Saunders et al. (2019) states that due to organisations being complex entities operating within contexts, interpretivism may be seen as the most appropriate philosophy for business research.

To understand interpretivism, the ontology, epistemology and axiology must be explored. According to Saunders et al. (2019), the ontology of interpretivism is complex, rich, socially constructed through culture and language. There are multiple meanings and interpretations. The epistemology must be focused on the narrative,

perceptions, and interpretation. While the axiology shows that the researcher must be part of the research. The interpretations of the researched is a key contribution.

The typical method for the interpretive philosophy is small samples of qualitative research. An interpretive study aims to create a rich understanding of organisation's realities which is the aim of this research.

Research Approach and Methodology

In the author's opinion, the most suitable approach for the research is inductive reasoning. According to Azungah (2018), an inductive approach to research is one that provides theories or findings based on observations or interpretations of the data which has been collected, rather than starting out with a hypothesis and either proving or disproving it. In this case, the data collected was studied to identify any patterns or themes that will help to answer the primary research question.

The design of the research project's methodology had to consider whether to use a quantitative or qualitative approach, or possibility a combination of the two. The author chose to use the qualitative method. The reasoning was based on the desire to complete an exploratory analysis of the change agenda by engaging with key managers who have been involved in both successful and unsuccessful change projects.

Method of Data Collection

Nygaard (2017) and Saunders et al. (2019) state that semi-structured interviews are useful where the research is exploratory. Due to the answers of the interviewees, there may be a requirement for the interviewer to dig further into a particular point and deviate the pre-planned questions.

Merriam and Tisdell (2015), argued that semi-structured interviews are best used when there is only one opportunity to interview participants. It also allows the author

to understand the experiences and opinions of the participants. To delve deeper, if required, outside the question and gain a better understanding of the role of urgency in the change agenda. If the research methodology had been quantitative, a survey or questions would be limited to specific questions and there would be a risk of losing critical insight. By using the semi-structed interview, the author will obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the interview's position (Collis and Hussey, 2013).

Sample Selection

The initial list of potential candidates was to include several different organisations within the Irish aviation industry. However, due to the impact of COVID-19 on the sector and the resulting restructuring of organisations, the author decided to focus on one company.

According to Bryman and Bell (2015), interviewing one person within any organisation could not be sufficiently representative and may be biased.

To complete the research, key senior managers with an organisation must be selected. According to Saunders et al, (2019), conducting multiple interviews will provide a more accurate representation. However, Boody (2016) argues that the sample size is not necessarily the most important factor within qualitative research.

The most important decision to be made was to identify the most appropriate candidates. According to Fugard and Potts (2015) the issue of sampling must be put in context. There is a likelihood that there will be a commonality in the themes raised and this may not add value to the research. In fact, it may even cause distraction to the relevant information.

Therefore, the criteria to be used to select the participants is important. It must ensure each interviewee has sufficient experience to provide insight into the research questions. Each participant shall have a minimum of 10 years' experience, with a

minimum of at least one major change management initiative. The sample group would be small but highly qualified.

To comply with public health guidelines, the interviews would be conducted remotely.

Limitations of the Data Collection Method

With the ability to conduct face-to-face interviews, there are some disadvantages to conducting remote interviews. According to Novick (2008) and Bryman and Bell (2011), the absence of visual cues, such as facial expressions and body language, via telephone is thought to the result in loss of contextual and nonverbal data. This also leads to a compromising of rapport and interpretation of responses.

Using a video conferencing application, such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom and Cisco Webex, provides a picture element. However, this does not prevent the interviewee becoming distracted or interrupted. According to Frisch and Greene (2020), virtual meetings are seen as a license to multi-task. This is particularly true where organisations are running at reduced staffing levels and any opportunity to multi-task is seen as a benefit.

The loss of face-to-face interaction is a risk. In the virtual environment, the onus is on the interviewer to manage the interview. To ensure the interview stays on point and most importantly is conducted in a timely manner. If this is not achieved, there is a risk that the interview will terminate the interview before all the questions have been asked and answered.

Requesting Participation

All candidates were contacted by the author to seek agreement for their participation in an interview for this research. Participation in the interview will be entirely voluntary.

The author will not attempt to exert any influence on a potential candidate to participate.

If a potential participant were willing to attend an interview, they received information and a consent form for review. Prior to commencing each interview, both the participant and the author signed the consent form. Once completed, the consent form was stored digitally on an encrypted device and retained, and later destroyed, in compliance with National College of Ireland policies.

Interview Process

The five interviews were held in the summer of 2021. Due the COVID-19 restrictions, all interviews were conducted on the Microsoft Teams application or telephone. Each interview was scheduled for 30 minutes. A series of open-ended were asked relating to change management. Each question offered the participant an opportunity to discuss their experience and opinion.

Data Analysis

To collate and analysis the data for the research, the author will use a thematic approach. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis is a method applied to identify potential patterns or patterns within data. This is achieved by using a 6-phase process.

First, the researcher familiarises themselves with the data. The data is then coded, and themes are identified. The themes are then reviewed and refined. Then, the themes are given final definitions and named. Finally, the final report is produced.

All data collected and findings will be managed in line with the National College of Ireland ethical consideration policies and General Data Protection Regulations.

Ethical Considerations

According to Quinlan (2011), due to the potential sensitive nature of some material there are ethical considerations that must be addressed.

The participants of the research study will be requested to partake by invitation. The purpose and goals of the study will be disclosed on the invitation. This will include how the collected data will be used and stored. All participants will have the right to withdraw, without reason, from the study at any stage. Participants will be required to discuss their roles in the change management agenda of their organisations. Therefore, all data will be considered confidential, and participants shall remain anonymous. All research data will be stored, password protected and will be destroyed in compliance with National College of Ireland policies.

All literature presented in the dissertation will be referenced using the Harvard Referencing System as required by the National College of Ireland.

Chapter 5 – Analysis of Findings

Introduction

To analysis the interview data, the six-phase frame developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was employed. Step one is to become familiar with the data, then generate initial codes and search for themes. The themes are reviewed, defined, and written up. According to Maguire and Delahunt (2017), it is important to consider that the phases are not linear and repeating specific steps may be beneficial.

Based on the analysis of the semi-structure interviews conducted, there are several themes that have emerged:

- Understanding change management.
- Types of change experienced and the outcomes.

- Seeing through the cockpit door.
- How to deliver the sense of urgency.
- Who should pilot the sense of urgency?

Understand Change Management

The first step was to get an understanding of the interviewee's perception of change management. What does it deliver and its importance to the organisation?

Over the past 20 years, change management has been used in many forms. In its purest sense, an organisation implementing a change agenda is looking to achieve or maintain competitive advantage. However, since the 1980's the changes that have been implemented within the organisation have not only been competition driven but also to ensure the company's survival.

Change management is consider a systematic approach. Whether using three or eight step, to achieve last change the theories would suggest that each step is followed. However, the ways in which change has historically been implemented within the organisation may not have followed a prescribed or linear process. From Lewin to Kotter, the critical first step is to identify the need for change and then prepare. destabilise the status quo. By generating a sense of urgency, buy in from with the organisation to mobilise. But in most cases, the agenda was driven by a focus on the objective. What would be achieved for the business was considered a sufficient catalysis for change. There was little consideration given to the need to connect with the staff, creating excitement for what was to be achieve or even why.

However, on more recent information and communication technology change projects the approach did flow a systematic approach. As these were joint project, there is possibility that the external organisations may have had an influence of the strategy.

What is clear is the strategic importance of change management. Since privatisation, acquiring the right skills set and talent was priority that has benefit the company. From CEOs to high specialised staff, the airline has looked outside the company to fill the

gaps and it has paid off. The business now constantly looks for opportunities to exploit such as joining the International Airlines Group (IAG) and creating the 'value carrier' airline model which have both been hugely success for the company. Even facing potential crisis, the willingness to embrace change has allow the business to adapt and thrive.

From the record revenues of pre-pandemic to the reconstruction of the business, change management is high in the company's priority. There is a constant focus on the external environment. The number of factors influencing decision making have exponential increased since the arrival of COVID-19. Make the right decision is becoming more challenging. With reductions to budgets and resources, choosing the right changes is essential. There is a risk that the loss of key personnel, due to the pandemic, may have a negative impact on the ability to deliver, but it is too early to tell.

Types of change experienced and the outcomes

When considering the organisation's history of change, there was limited experience over the business' first half a century of operation. Having spent years as the national airline and having the protection of the government, there was a culture of ignoring external factors that would have impacted other businesses. For example, as Ryanair's market share grow, there was no appetite for the organisation to worry about a loss of competitive advantage. The organisation was protected.

With the privatisation of the company in 2006, this mind set had to change. Suddenly, competition mattered but the organisation was not prepared. There was clear lack of experience and talent to deliver what would be a radical and transformational change for the airline. In the subsequent years, the hiring of experts, such as Christoph Mueller, introduced new blood to the business. This new blood allowed the company to deliver a series of radical changes that created the airline we see today. The radical moves have been made. Now, change is a matter of fine tuning.

As described by Hayes (2015), changes must not only be seen as incremental or transformation but also pro-active or reactive. We have seen how the organisation has had to react to multiple events, from privatisation to global crisis such as the financial crisis and pandemics. What is clear is that the company has been through the full range of changes.

Since 9/11 and the flotation to the current pandemic, the way in which the organisation has managed change has itself changed has greatly varied. Using the example of 9/11 and the global financial crisis, the responses implemented were very much a reactive and transformational approach. The company went to full recreation mode, as drastic cut had to be made to keys areas such as staff. Work practices had to be revised to deliver the cost saving required for survival. But as the world returned to normality, the need for change was maintained. With competition on key routes, such as the North Atlantic, promoted a pro-active change strategy.

Business now actively looked at the external environment and identified several opportunities that led to the creation of the hybrid 'Value Carrier' model. One of the keys to the successful implementation of this tuning of the business was the level of 'buy-in' from the staff. The business was making positive moves, and this would benefit not only the shareholders but all stakeholders. The company were on to a winner.

Even when Norwegian Airlines tried to break into the North Atlantic market in direct competition, the company was ready. Small reactive, incremental changes were quickly introduced. What has become apparent is that the business has changed. It has gone through the full scope of the change typology. But with all change, an important question is the need to anticipate it. Is the company prepared?

Seeing Through the Cockpit Door

Being able to predict the need for change is challenging. Events such as the recent pandemic were considered on the company's annual report but not treated as a realist treat. There have been success stories such as the development of the value carrier.

This tapped into the needs of the passenger and delivered. As with Christensen's 'Job to be done', the business saw what the passengers wanted the delivered it.

But overall, there is still a gap in truly being able to anticipate change. The organisation's structure is still very silo based. Being so vertical means that each department is guilty of being inward focussed and operating with a high level of self-interest. Once targets are met, it is job done. There is no consideration for anything or anyone outside your silo. If ground operation was to be outsourced, flight and crew operations would not see the downside and vice versa.

What also is a stumbling block in the strong hierarchical structure. As the company's past is rooted in the military, rank is still very prevalent. As a result, communication and the flow of information is not at its optimum. There is a very strong command and control style of leadership in most of the business. There are a few exceptions, such as marketing and social media. But as the industry is so highly regulated, the need for order and everything in its place has meant the natural position is control.

Does this damage the ability to anticipate change? The answer is both yes and no. The horizontal organisation is open and allowing communication to flow freely in all directions. The CEO and front-line staff are connected. They share ideas. Everyone is involved in the decision-making process. The business is agile and ready to move. Then we compare it to this case, where there is the cockpit door that separates command from rest. There are forms of communication available, but the metaphor of the door represents the divide between the captain and crew. The captain sets the course, then scans the horizon for threats and reacts while the rest of the crew blindly carry on doing their own task to ensure the service is delivered without any sight of the route ahead. It is only if there is an emergency will the crew be listened to.

This was given as an example of how the company operates. Although, what cannot be ignored is that this system has delivered results. The recent has shown the business has been able to tap into what the customer wants and deliver. There may not a suggest box in every office, but a smart approach to listening to the passengers has allow the business to find the right directions. The 'Voice of the Guest' is a program

was created and gives the management team a direct view into exactly what the passenger likes, dislikes, and wants. Taps directly into the 'job to be done theory' and has been invaluable as a tool to anticipate the future.

Is there really a need for the business to change its structure. The leadership would argue no. They have all the information they need to make the right decisions for the business and the track record to back it up.

Delivering the right message

Strategy and its outcome have been more commonly used to create the need for change. Whether the objective has been restructuring and costing reductions. Although within the organisation there is a strong connection to the brand, this does not seem to be fully exploited in driving the sense of urgency.

Connecting with the staff is a critical piece of achieving urgency. Looking more closely at the organisation's demographic, there is a major cohort that have working for the company for over twenty-five years. For many, they join directly from school and all they know is the company. Their colleagues are their friends. They work together. They socialise together. There is very strong emotional attached between staff and the company. However, from a change perspective this poses its own problems.

What has become clear of several projects is that staff who follow processes, report to work on a set roster pattern and have specific skill sets do not freely embrace change. One of the most recent change agenda was based on industry best practice. Instead of cohorts of staff performing specific tasks. The aim was to multi-skill entire sections, thus providing more flexibility to the operation. However, this was seen as an attacked on 'what had worked for years.' The roster patterns that suited staff were being torn up and replaced. This was 'an attack on lifestyles and family life'. The objections were raised, and the urgency had been lost. It took months, including numerous visits to the Workplace Relations Commission, to resolve.

But could an example like this have been avoid? Although this change was being executed in a highly unionised environment, in hindsight a sense of urgency could have been created. It just needed to have been thought through. There were major benefits to be gained by the business in making this change, but this was seen on the ground as the company winning at the expense of the staff. However, this was not the case. Yes, the business was gaining but so too were the staff. Upskilling the staff would increase allowance to the staff. With all staff equally qualified, the ability to swop shifts and getting annual leave would be easier. But was this information shared? Unfortunately, no.

What has been learned is that it is vital to create the right message to connect the staff to the change. Achieving competitive advantage puts the business in the right position to benefit from the change. The staff must also see that benefit. But they must also see what benefits them. There must a level of emotional intelligence used that links both business and emotional need.

Who Should Pilot the Sense of Urgency?

To achieve the necessary sense of urgency, there needs to a high level of support for the agenda. What must also be consider with any change agenda is who are the stakeholder? Who will be most affected if the change goes ahead?

The airline in the early 1990s, the Cahill Plan was created to save the airline from the brink of collapse. The company's financial position meant that drastic cut had to be made across the entire organisation. Although there were major protests, both the leadership and staff know the airline had no option if it was to survive. A sense of urgency had been created by the leadership team. However, it was created through fear.

The fallout from the Cahill Plan was that any later change initiatives were, and to some extents still are, treated with misgivings by the rank and file. The challenge for the leadership is find the right approach to initiate change. The strong hierarchical, rank based, management system may hamper changes effort as staff perceive change as

a direct attack on their value to the company. When the objective is merely to improve a process or optimise efficiencies in cost, this is seen as an attempt to low wages. However, this is far from the intent. Like any leadership team, the goal is to ensure the company's long-term success. In an industry where the margins are very narrow, there is little room to maneuverer, especially on financial matters such as price and cost. But the delivery is such message to the staff is an Achilles heel of the leadership. Bad news is generally avoided, to at least until the pandemic. This created a communication failing that is now slowly being addressed.

This communication disconnect is due to the structure of the organisation. The day-to -day operation is run by a large cohort of middle managers. The diverse range of departments means the company is in multiple buildings across the airport. Flight and cabin crew report in one building while ground staff and in another. IT have their building and so on. The senior management team have theirs. As a result, the staff's exposure to the leadership is very limited, and vice versa. So, are the senior management team really the best fit to create a sense of urgency? See the next opportunity or threat is in the hands of the leadership team. However, to deliver fast and effective change needs a different approach.

There needs to be a connect between the driver of change and all stake holders. There are manager and even supervisors that have the connection with the staff that could change the way change is delivered. There will be a need to move pieces around to ensure it works. But what needs to be realised is that is about the end goal and who it the best person to deliver it.

Chapter 6 – Discussion

Introduction

Having completed the literature review and then comparing to the themes gleaned from the interview, it is interesting to compare theory to the reality within an organisation. It is evident that as an organisation, the airline in question has undertaken and achieved both major and minor changes over its history. From a semi-state organisation to a highly profitable company, the need to manage both opportunities and threats have given some interesting results.

An Understanding of Change Management

According to Porter (1985) competitive strategy is the search for a favourable competitive position within an industry. This strategy aims to establish a profitable and sustainable position against the determining forces that determine industry competition. To achieve this strategy, the change management process must be followed.

To search for these favourable conditions, an organisation must systematically scan the external environment thus creating an outward focus (Kotter, 2009). According to Grimolizzi-Jensen (2015) it is this structed approach to change management that is the key to achieving last change and creating a change culture. Going back as far as the 1940s, Kurt Lewin identified if change was required the status quo or equilibrium must be moved. His approached consisted a three-step process: unfreeze, change, refreeze. Identify and promote the need for change, make the change and then embedded. Kotter (1995) later expanded the step to eight. However, the basic concept remained the same. Kotter's unfreeze was based on the theory of identifying the need for change and selling it or as Kotter called it creating a sense of urgency.

For the organisation in this case, change management has come in multiple form. As described, the company operates in either a feast or a famine. The reality is that not until the company was privatised did change management become a necessity. Once

the company had to stand up on its own two feet did competitive advantage become important. What was once an inward-looking organisation, had to change its focus outward and scan for not only opportunities but threats.

From the outset, the company realised there was a deficit in talent and skill sets. Kotter (1995) states that when considering the need for change it important that the organisation pays great attention to who is promoted and hired. Over the nearly two decades, the company has ensured that the CEO was the right person for the company at the right time. This included the hiring of one CEO with a long track record in organisational change, who made some of the largest and lasting changes to the organisation.

With the events of the last 18 months, the need to manage change is more important than ever. Force reductions to the labour force of over 20% has meant the processes have had to change to get me done with less. Major losses in revenue limited the companies spending power in key areas such as technology. However, the business has been through similar scenarios after events such as 9/11 and the Global Financial crisis, and this has allowed not only the management team maintain a clear direct but also the staff. Where once the unions were consistently throwing up roadblocks to change, this time is different. Although this is not the optimum environment for an airline, there is a sense of urgency across the organisation. And it is this change that will deliver the change needed for the business.

The Nature and Typology of Change and Can it be Anticipated?

According to Hayes (2014) organisation will experience extended period of steady, incremental change. The change agenda will create small, nearly unnoticed, adjusts to products and process to improve for example quality or cost effectiveness. However, events may occur as suggested by Taleb (2010) will be unexpected or so significant that an organisation may be forced to implement a transformational or radical approach to change.

The earlier example given has been the repositioning of the airline from a state supported flag carrier to a publicly traded company. The need to address multiple changes, such as structure and product offering, meant that the leadership had to invent or as described by Nader and Tushman (1989) to recreate the business. This reactive and transformational approach was successful and allow to business to develop a hybrid airline model. This model offered both quality and value, thus differentiating the business from both the low-cost-carriers such a Ryanair and five start operators such as Emirates.

The success of the recreation was followed by a period of calm within the industry. However, the business had turned a corner and was actively looking for opportunities and threats. Once one was identified, the change agenda was set. The leadership were now proactively looking for change. According to Grove (1996) it is the ability to see the inflection points as they approach then there was no need to make radical moves, it is time for tuning. This proactive and incremental approach forearmed the business for the attack by Norwegian Airlines on the Irish market. With each attempt the new competition made to increase market share, the tuning of the business model ensured the airline held it position. Competitive advantage had been defended and the new approach to change delivered it.

From a leadership perspective, the effective use of change management had taken an old business model. Recreated to make a modern and efficient business using transformational change. Then, once successful, followed Kotter (2015) who proposed that change must also be delivered when times are good. This proactive change fine-tuned the product to become a business beater and ready to take on all comers.

But is the system for change robust enough to anticipate the future. McGrath (2019) suggests that it is vital for a business to be able to anticipate the future. She suggests that senior management and not best placed to see potential threats or opportunities. However, it is the front-line, operational staff that engaged in day to day of business. They meet customers, handle questions, and fix problems. They can see the issues facing the organisation at first hand. But how do they share such valuable intelligence.

The solution is to deconstruct the management hierarch. Empower the staff so they can make quick decisions and solve problems, not create them. By striving for a more horizontal structure, the silos are removed and information flows across all levels. Everyone is a company advocate. Everyone can tell the company story, where we are and where we are going.

Success is the ability to anticipate and prepare (Glesson, 2017). Using the Southwest Airlines example, they have done exactly this. As a result, every employee, from senior leadership to the new recruits, have a clear purpose. It is not about just doing their jobs, it is about everyone being on board and knowing what it takes to complete the journey (Gallo, 2014). It is not case for every airline. There is a level of corporate culture that has emotional ties and pride in the organisation in questions. However, it has not been correctly addressed and this must be seen as an untapped resource in the future. Having the entire organisation involved in the scanning process would enable the sense of urgency to be maintained and avoid what Kotter (2015) describes as the frantic reaction to the next emergency.

Is a Sense of Urgency Driven by Strategy or Emotion.

According to Tabrizi (2014) change leaders are open, motivated and exhibit a high level of emotional intelligence. Their approach is to target both the hearts and minds of the managers and employees. There may be a business need to change but how will this message hit it target in the organisation?

The strategic need may seem to the justification for a change. However, all stakeholders must be given consideration to avoid negatively impacting the change agenda (Kahneman, 2011). Although Schein (1996) argued that change is achieved by creating a shock that triggers the survival instinct in people. But this may not have the desired positive result. Kotter (2015) suggests that all stake holders must be engaged through clear and positive statements. These statements should energise with avoid doom and gloom. They must connect with the staff through a message that inspires.

According to Kotter (2015) communication across silos is too slow. In addition, leaders must be aware that the fear of change causes people cling to habits and fear losing power and stature. To allow communication to reach their target, an organisation must ensure there are no silo or ridged hierarchies. Job parameters must be loosened, and staff empowered to make quick decision. (McGrath, 2019). Thus, they are given more power not less. Their stature is not weakened, it is strengthened.

The leadership must be comfortable to given up control to gain control. However, this is far from the case. The silos are very evident. Roles defined and staff controlled. Is this due to the strong unionised staff, which has promoted suspicion not trust for the bottom up and the top down. This has led to conflicting narratives from both sides. And as result, has created a level of emotional disconnect that does damage the potential to change.

For the business to manage change and create the required sense of change, there needs to be only one narrative. The leadership may set the change agenda, but it must be craft to ensure every employee is connected to it. Staff are people and people want a start that relates to them (Taleb, 2010). Without an understanding of this emotional connection, there is a risk that agenda will be lost.

Who is best placed to create a Sense of Urgency?

Kotter (1995) in his original article, 'Leading Change', outlined the importance of the external focus and examining the market for potential crisis and untapped opportunities. Then convince at least 75% of the managers that the status quo is more dangerous than the unknown. However, will this have the desired effect? Or will it create fear and paralysis in the attempt to drive people out of their comfort zone?

To drive change, there is a need to go beyond the management team and get 75% of all staff onboard. The problem is that this is not always a realistic option for a senior management team. In this case the high level of hierarchy has created a clear divide based on rank, a nod to the old military links to the organisation that are still evident

today. According to Nohria and Beer (2000) this top-down change management approach with no input from the lower levels or unions. And with all military organisations, the key to control and success is through the non-commissioned officers. This cohort have a directed connection with the troops, and this is also true for middle managers.

Unlike senior management, middle managers are engaged daily with their staff. They have developed emotional connections and are best placed to deal with any fears or concerns future changes may bring. As a team, they deliver results for the company and delivering change should be no different.

This is supported by Koene (2017) who argued that the change agenda is best driven by the middle management team. They have the strategic understanding of the change required. But, unlike the senior team, have necessary relationships with their teams to guide and support them through the change process.

However, in practice this approach is not fully utilitised. The strong hierarchical, command and control leadership style has taken a high level of decision making away from the middle management. Thus, not only decreasing the buy-in of the troops on ground but also the middle management themselves. The ideal candidate to drive the sense of change are being overlooked. Until this is addressed, any future change agenda is at risk. The silos need to be broken down and a less vertical structure created. What needs to be considered is the introduction of the Theory O model introduced by Nohria and Beer (2000). Participation is encouraged from the ground up. The goal is to develop organisational capabilities by building the corporate culture. Allowing everyone with the organisation to experiment and evolve. To always be ready to change, to always have a sense of urgency.

Possible Problems Creating Urgency

As has been shown, the organisation in question has a vertical structure which has promoted a command-and-control style of leadership. This management driven hierarchy may create a risk competitive complacency. As the company has shown to

be risk averse, there is considerable pressure to deliver results thus creating the possibility of false urgency. According to Kotter (2014) management driven hierarchies are built to minimise risk. They built to complete process or produce products, not to innovate. They are designed to be reliable and efficient. As a result, there are rules and process, narrow job descriptions and silos.

Silos will create blinker sections and staff. Combined with management hierarchy, silos will limit the flow of information across multiple levels. The organisation's ability to deliver the big idea or big picture will be seriously curtailed or worse, blocked. Another factor that must be addressed are narrow job parameters. McGrath (2019) discussed the important of empowering staff to make decision and drive the agenda for change and innovation. However, the author has found that the organisation has created highly defined, narrow, job descriptions. This has created a culture as described by Kotter (2014) as 'as long as you do your little job, you will be fine'. Do what you must and avoid risk or mistake. To compound this, the final problem identified is managerial processes. These inward focusses on key performance indictors and metrics, such as on time departure and reducing over time hours, creates a preoccupation for short-term goals. This will also lead managers to loss emotional connection in favour of getting the number rights.

Each one of these factors will greatly impact the managements and organisation's ability to firstly create a sense of urgency. And in turn, destroy the ability to achieve any last change.

Change management literature identifies that destabilising the status quo is the first step to achieving successful change. The concept of the burning platform conjures up the image of Hernán Cortés in 1519 burning his ships upon discovering the new world. He was sending a message to his crew, there was no turning back. The new direction was set.

But is the burning platform, or ships in the case of Cortés, really the best way to create the need for change? Is a true sense of urgency created to ensure everyone followed or a merely act of heroics? For Cortés, within two years of deciding the best course of action, he had conquered the Aztec empire (Reynolds, 1959). His sense of urgency had delivered. But is the metaphor still appropriate today? Is one man's decision the right course of action?

The need for change is driven by the need to achieve and maintain competitive advantage. From a leadership perspective, putting the organisation in the best position to be a market leader is the goal. However, for an organisation to attain the goal they must take a systematic approach to change management. In its simplest form, change management is breaking the norm, then creating the new direction that must become the new norm. This is a practice that the organisation in this study has done many times.

Kotter (1995) states that the senior management must gain the support of at least 75% of the middle management team to create the necessary sense of urgency to deliver change. However, it was later argued that executive's huge level of urgency must be true for the whole organisation (Kotter, 2015). The fact is that without the buy-in of the entire organisation, achieving last change is put at risk. From his first study of 100 firm, Kotter (1995) identified that rate of successful change was less than 30% and the driver was lack of organisational urgency.

Although the organisation is this study have successfully delivered numerous radial and incremental change, the approaches used are not in line with academic thinking.

The combination of vertical management hierarchy and strong departmental silos limits access to information across the company. There needs to a more horizontal approach to the organisations structure. Such a change would allow information to not only flow faster but also from the top down and the bottom up.

According to Tang (2019) urgency motivates subordinates and generates a sense of realism to desired change. It is essential that there is the right chemistry and mix amongst team members. While paying close attention to the levels of emotional commitment throughout the organisation. This needs to be addressed within the organisation.

There is a need to embrace the combination of Theory O and Theory E (Nohria and Beer, 2020). Where the focus is on setting the direction for above and engaging the people below. To eliminate the impediments, there must be the goal of embracing the paradox between economic value and organisational capability. The management process must be relaxed, and the job parameters widened (Kotter, 20150. The leadership must empower the staff and allow them to play their part in managing the change agenda.

The initial aim of this study was to explore change management across the Irish aviation industry. The author had hoped to complete interviews with all the Irish registered airlines, airport authorities and the aircraft leasing sector. However, with the impact of global pandemic, the study was restricted a single organisation. In the author's opinion, expanding the study to include organisations such as Ryanair, Dublin and Cork Airport Authorities or even examining the top ten airlines in the world may have resulted in different conclusion.

Since the first commercial flight in 1914, the airline industry has had to embrace change. The modern passenger now expects to be in control of their journey. For airlines to deliver, they must embrace the ever-evolving technology that has taken over the industry. Each airline must constantly seek out what will give them competitive advantage. What is evident from this study is that the concept of change management is not only understood but actively being employed. The research question focused in

on Kotter's concept of urgency and in the author's opinion the management team have embraced it to the great benefit of the organisation. Compared to the theories of change management, the leadership team and the structure of the organisation are far from textbook. But the results are being delivered. Does the organisation need to change? In the author's opinion, the high vertical hierarch must be addressed. The silos must be broken down and staff empowered. If this is the next significant change the organisation will be ready to take off.

Reference List

Azungah, T. (2018). Qualitative research: deductive and inductive approaches to data analysis. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 18(4), pp. 383-400

Boddy, C.R. (2016). Sample size for qualitative research. Qualitative Market Research, 19(4), pp. 426-432

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), pp.77-101

Bryman, A. and Bell, E. (2015). Business Research Methods. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bucciarelli, L. (2015). A Review of Innovation and Change Management: Stage Model and Power Influences. Universal Journal of Management, 3(1), pp 36-42

Burnes, B. (2004). Kurt Lewin and the planned approach to Change: A Re-appraisal. Journal of Management Studies. 41(6), pp 977-1002

Bryman, A. and Bell, E. (2011) *Business Research Methods*. 3rd edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Collis, J. and Hussey, R. (2013) *Business Research a Practical Guide for Both Undergraduate and Postgraduate Students*. 4th Ed. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Cummings, S., Bridgeman, T. and Brown, K. (2015). Unfreezing change as three steps. Rethinking Kurt Lewin's legacy for change management. Human Relations. 69 (1), pp 33-60

DeSmet, A. and Gagnon, C. (2020) Organising for the age of urgency. McKinsey Quarterly. Available at: https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/organizing-for-the-age-of-urgency (Accessed 28 December 2020)

Dunphy, D. (1996) Organisational change in corporate settings, *Human Relations,* 49(5), pp 541-552.

Epstein, M.J. and Davilla, T. (2014). The Innovation Paradox. Oakland: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Frisch, B. and Greene, C. (2020). What It Takes to Run a Great Virtual Meeting. Harvard Business Review. Available at https://hbr.org/2020/03/what-it-takes-to-run-a-great-virtual-meeting [Accessed 19 July 2021]

Fugard, A. J. B. and Potts, H. W. W. (2015) Supporting thinking on sample sizes for thematic analyses: a quantitative tool, *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 18(6), pp. 669–684

Gallo, C. (2014). Southwest Airlines Motivates Its Employees With A Purpose Bigger Than A Paycheck. Forbes. Available at: https://www.forbes.com/sites/carminegallo/2014/01/21/southwest-airlines-motivates-its-employees-with-a-purpose-bigger-than-a-paycheck/?sh=1ad868c55376 [Accessed 11 August 2021]

Grimolizzi-Jensen, C.J. (2018). Organizational change: Effect of motivational interviewing on readiness to change. Journal of Change Management, 18)1), pp.54-69

Gleeson, B. (2017). Why Great Companies Prepare For Change Now, Not Tomorrow. Forbes. Available at: https://www.forbes.com/sites/brentgleeson/2017/07/10/why-great-companies-prepare-for-change-now-not-tomorrow/?sh=10fd60094514 [Accessed 30 June 2021]

Grove, A.S. (1996). Only the Paranoid Survive. How to exploit the crisis point that challenge every company and career. London. Harper Collins Business.

Hayes, J. (2014). The Theory and Practice of Change Management. 4th Ed. London. Palgrave Macmillan.

Immelt, J.R. (2017). How I remade GE and I learned along the way. Harvard Business Review, 95(5), pp 42-51

Kahneman, D. (2011). Thinking, Fast and Slow. London, Penguin Books.

Koene, B. (2017), *Why Middle Managers, Rather Than Senior Leaders, Should Initiate Organizational Change*. Forbes. Available at: https://www.forbes.com/sites/rsmdiscovery/2017/11/27/why-middle-managers-rather-than-senior-leaders-should-initiate-organisational-change/?sh=67357ebd2188 [Accessed 04 July 2021]

Kotter, J.P. (1990). A Force for Change: How Leadership Differs from Mamangement. New York Free Press.

Kotter, J.P. (1995). Leading Change: Why transformation efforts fail. Harvard Business Review. 73(2), pp 59-67

Kotter, J.P. (2009). Four Ways to Increase the Urgency Needed for Change. Harvard Business School Cases. Available at: https://hbr.org/2009/04/four-ways-to-increase-the-urge.html (Accessed 10 January 2021).

Kotter, J.P. (2014). Accelerate. Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business Review Press.

Kotter, J.P. (2015). A Sense of Urgency. Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business Review Press.

McGrath, R.G. (2019). Seeing Around Corners: How to Spot Inflection Points in Business Before They Happen. New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Maguire, M. and Delahunt, B. (2017). Doing a Thematic Analysis: A Practical, Step-by-Step Guide for Learning and Teaching Scholars, *All Ireland Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*

Merriam, S. B. and Tisdell, E. J., (2015). *Qualitative Research : A Guide to Design and Implementation.* Fourth ed. New York: John Wiley & Sons Inc

Nader, D.A. and Tushman, M.L. (1989). Organizational Frame Bending: Principles for Managing Orientation. *The Academy of Management Executives*. 3(3), pp 194-204

Netflix (2020). Annual Report and Proxies. Netflix Investors. Available at: https://ir.netflix.net/financials/annual-reports-and-proxies/default.aspx [Accessed 01 August 2021]

Nohria, N. and Beer, M. (2000), Cracking the Code of Change. Harvard Business Review. Available at: https://hbr.org/2000/05/cracking-the-code-of-change [Accessed 19 December 2020]

Novick, G. (2008). Is there a bias against telephone interviews in qualitative research. *Research in Nursing and Health*. 31(4) pp. 391-398

Nygaard, L. P., (2017). *Writing Your Master's Thesis : From A to Zen.* 1st ed. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Porter, Michael E. (1985). *Competitive Advantage*. The Free Press. New York

OECD (2020). COVID-19 and the aviation industry: Impact and policy responses. OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-10). Available at: https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/covid-19-and-the-aviation-industry-impact-and-policy-responses-26d521c1/ [Accessed 18 July 2021]

Quinlan, C. (2011) Business Research Methods. South-Western Cengage Learning. Available   at:

http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&Authtype=ip,cookie,shib&db=cat05743a&AN=nci.17445&site=eds-live&scope=site (Accessed: 18 January 2021)

Quinn, J.B. (1980). Managing Strategic Change. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, Available at: https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/managing-strategic-change/ [Accessed 10 May 2021]

Reynolds, W.A. (1959). The Burning Ships of Hernán Cortés. Hipania. AATSP. 42(2) pp. 317-324.

Tabrizi, B. (2014). The Key to Change is Middle Management. Harvard Business Review. Available at: https://hbr.org/2014/10/the-key-to-change-is-middle-management [Accessed 01 July 2021]

Taleb, N.N. (2010). The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable. New York. Random House Publishing.

Tang, K.N. (2019) Leadership and Change Management. Singapore. Springer.

The Guardian (2008). Wrigley's sold to Warren Buffet and Mars. The Guardian. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/business/2008/apr/28/fooddrinks1 [Accessed 20 December 2020]

Saunders, M., Lewis, P and Thornhill, A. (2019). Research Methods for Business Students. 8th Ed, Harlow: Pearson.

Schein, E.H. (1996). Kurt Lewin's change theory in the field and in the classroom: Notes towards a model of management learning. System Practice, 9(1), pp 27-47

Schatsky, D. (2020). Uncertainty and innovation at Speed. How digital maturity can boost ability to innovation. Deloitte Insights. Available at: https://www2.deloitte.com/xe/en/insights/focus/signals-for-strategists/digital-business-transformation-innovation-efforts.html (Accessed 20 December 2020)

Sparr, J.L. (2018). Paradoxes in organizational change: The critical role of leaders' sense giving. Journal of Change Management, 18(2), pp.162-180.

Stobierski, T. (2020) Organizational Change Management: What it is and why it's important. Harvard Business School,. Available at: https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/organizational-change-management [Accessed 10 August 2021]

Vermeulen, F., Puranam, P. and Gulati, R. (2010). Change for Change's Sake. Harvard Business Review. Available at: https://hbr.org/2010/06/change-for-changes-sake [Accessed 20 May 2021]

Watkins, M.D. (2007). Demystifying Strategy: The What, Who, How and Why. Available at: https://hbr.org/2007/09/demystifying-strategy-the-what [Accessed 19 June 2021]

Zwilling, M. (2012). *Many Confuse Sense of Urgency with Sense of Emergency.* Forbes. Available at: https://www.forbes.com/sites/martinzwilling/2012/07/28/many-confuse-sense-of-urgency-with-sense-of-emergency/?sh=45ce2de19882 (Accessed 20 December 2020)

Appendix 1: Consent Form

Consent to take part in research project: An exploratory study of management perceptions of the role of Kotter's urgency in creating a future change agenda.

- I... voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.

- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

- I understand that participation involves completing a semi-structured interview.

- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.

- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded or notes taken.

- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.

- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.

- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the dissertation

- I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.

- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings and or notes will be retained securely in line the National College of Ireland policy.

- I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained until the grading process has been completed.

- I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.

- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Researcher: Thomas Kerrigan. Degree: Master Business Administration. College: National College of Ireland,

Signature of research participant

-- ----------------- Signature of participant Date

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

--- ---------------------- Signature of researcher Date

Appendix 2: Interview Questions

1. What is your understanding of change management?
2. A typology of Organisational Change (Nader et al, 1995)
   a. Discuss your approaches to change: Proactive or Reactive
   b. Discuss the types of change: Incremental or Transformational
   c. What types of change management takes place within your work environment?
3. According to Kotter, urgency is the first step in the change management process. What is your understanding of Urgency in the change agenda?
4. How is urgency created?
5. Is it based on strategic or emotional connections?
6. Based on your experience of the change management, who is best place to deliver urgency within the organisation.
7. Are there barriers to change management?
8. If so, what are they and have you any suggestions how to overcome?