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A regional approach towards organizational transformation

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Keywords

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Introduction

It is widely known that the only thing that is certain about the future is change. Change is inevitable and can be brought about by internal or external factors. If organisations do not anticipate or plan strategically for change and change is not managed, it will have to react to or accommodate changes exerted by external preserve. Well-known examples of organisational change over the last decade is the introduction of technology driven by the rapid development of information and communication technology (ICT). The other is the adoption of total quality management (TQM), an organisation-wide effort to improve quality through changes in structure, practices and systems, and most importantly, attitudes. Now seen as a potent force for organisational change, TQM is also a well documented organisational change process.

Organisational change, even in a small way, can be complex and difficult. Management literature cites numerous examples of change that has gone wrong, some with quite disastrous results. Introducing or bringing about change in an organisation is never a straightforward matter as it involves bringing about changes in people – their skills, knowledge and attitudes. Although change is a common feature of organisational life, organisations face or experience severe problems in bringing about change.

Both forms of organisational change have been fraught with problems as they carry implications for all forms of organisational transformations:

- job redesign;
- introduction on new reward systems;
- structure;
- culture.

The strategic planning and management of organizational change is therefore critical.

Forms of organisational change

There are many forms of organisational change but most can be categorised as radical or incremental.

Radical change

This form of change relates to large-scale organization wide transformation

programmes involving the rapid and wholesale nurturing of old ways and old ideas and their replacement by new and unique ones. Radical changes are also referred to as revolutionary and discontinuous, which emphasizes not only the scale of the change involved, but also that it represents, for the entire organisation, a decisive break with the past (Burnes, 1992, p. 150).

Although radical change is characterised by speed, scale and break with the past, this form of change cannot be achieved quickly or solely by recourse to wholesale changes to structures and systems, particularly when new forms of behaviour are called for. To bring about radical change requires a coordinated programme of smaller and more localised projects, spreading over a longer period and designed to bring about, reinforce and act as the building blocks for the overall programme.

Incremental change

Incremental change projects are in comparison to radical change, small-scale, localised and designed to solve particular problems or to improve the performance of a small section or part of the organisation. The changes are evolutionary and piecemeal, less dramatic and often uncoordinated. Incremental changes by themselves usually bring about ad hoc and localized improvement in performance, and cannot bring about radical transformation without large scale and organisation-wide change as well.

Organisational transformation

The term transformation immediately suggest bringing about radical or dramatic change organisation-wide within a relatively short space of time. To transform is to make a thorough or dramatic change in the form, outward appearance, character of something. Can an organisation be transformed? Or should we perhaps ask whether an organisation can afford not to transform itself in an environment that is rapidly changing and galvanising changes in its wake?

Change experts Kanter, Stein and Jick agree and give a typical description of the vision of organisational future (Hatch, 1997, p. 35):

More flexible organisations, adaptable to change, with relatively few levels of informal

hierarchy and loose boundaries among functions and units, sensitive and responsive to the environment, concerned with stakeholders of all sorts, employees, customers, communities, suppliers and shareholders. These organisations empower people to take action and be entrepreneurial, reward them for contributions, and help them gain in skill and “employability”, overall, these are global organisations characterised by internal and external relationships, including joint ventures, alliances, consortia and partnerships.

Prerequisites of enterprise transformation

New market challenges in the present economy require companies to dominate. Domination requires them to grasp present-day cultural and technological reality and let go of yesterday's. Companies need to make fundamental improvements that will allow the enterprise to achieve and sustain an influence in its industry.

To be successful in navigating towards becoming a dominant or third-wave player, the enterprise requires deep, broad, fundamental change in operational paradigms, practices and outputs. This level of change is called enterprise transformation (ET). ET implies change in the overall company, in its business units, in its factories, and in its organisational units. It also implies coordination among these units and a shared overall objective.

Four essential features of transformation

Vollman (1996, p. 3) asserts that for change to the truly transformative – creating a dominant third industrial revolution enterprise – the change agenda must contain four essential elements:

- (1) Integration: from the strategic intent of the transformation to the detailed processes and other infrastructure requirements to achieve it.
- (2) Consistent: in terms of all activities leading to the same goal and all employees having a clear sense of priorities.
- (3) Feasible: from the point of view of resources and corporate performance.

- (4) Desirable: because it matches both enterprise and individual objectives.

The above four features – integration, consistency, feasibility and desirability – ensure that the likely outcome of a change program is fundamental enterprise transformation, and not just “better sameness”. For this to happen, there must be a definitive linkage or the “golden cord” linking these four features. The process model for transformation developed by Vollman (1965, p. 5) links eight entry points or facets to change:

- (1) strategic intent;
- (2) competencies;
- (3) processes;
- (4) resources;
- (5) outputs;
- (6) strategic response;
- (7) challenges; and
- (8) learning capacity.

The links integrate these eight change facets, ensuring consistency and integration, with dominance as the goal. The vehicle is strategically driven enterprise transformation. The process requires integration, consistency, feasibility and desirability. Transformation begins when the enterprise embraces change.

Libraries and organisational change

The papers by other authors in this issue provide useful examples of organisations from different regions of the world, including some of the world’s most important libraries, which have transformed themselves into centres of information excellence:

- The Library of Congress, USA;
- The British Library, UK;
- Shanghai Library, People’s Republic of China;
- National Library of Australia;
- State Library of Victoria, Australia;
- National Library Board, Singapore.

These papers provide an insight into the vision and challenges facing the transformation process. While there are obviously major differences in their organizational make-up and environmental background, there are some common threads that we can draw from their experience which we can learn from and which can guide us in

planning strategies for organisational transformation in the Southeast Asian region. From the abstracts of the papers provided in the conference announcement, it can be discerned that the drivers of change in these organisations include cultural and organisational imperatives:

- rapid development of technology;
- concern for quality and excellence;
- growing national consciousness;
- concern for preservation of heritage;
- development of learning infrastructures; and
- e-literate society.

Examples from Malaysia

I am quickly reminded in thinking about organisational transformation about the library at PORIM, now known as the Malaysian Palm Oil Board (MPOB), the foremost palm oil research center in Malaysia and indeed in the region. From a small special library, the MPOB library now has its own building called Palm Oil Information Centre which houses not only the library, an impressive gallery for the organisation – a large hall and a café run by the library. In addition, the MPOB library has also made its database available on-line by subscription from the early 1990s. The resilience and resourcefulness of the librarian, a dynamic and supportive organizational leadership, importance of the palm oil industry in the Malaysian economy are some of the ingredients in this organizational transformation. I am sure more lessons could be learnt by looking more closely into this success story.

Another example of planned organizational change in libraries in Malaysia is one which came about with the implementation of MS ISO 9000, the international quality assurance system standards. The government driven implementation in the public sector has so far seen the successful implementation of the standards in five major libraries in Malaysia. The libraries which have received MS ISO 9000 certification are :-

- (1) Universiti Utara Malaysia Library, Sintok, Kedah (1998);
- (2) Perpustakaan Sultanah Zanariah, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Skudai, Johor (1999);

- (3) Ministry of Local Government and Environment Library, Kuching, Sarawak (2000);
- (4) Sabah State Library, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah (2000);
- (5) National Library of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (2000).

Is the implementation of TQM the appropriate route to organisational excellence? It is noted that all organisations in the public and private sector which have won the Prime Minister's annual quality awards in Malaysia have been awarded MS ISO 9000 certification and have embraced MS ISO 9000 in their quality management. Those libraries which have succeeded in obtaining MS ISO 9000 certification will testify that it certainly helps to position the library for total quality management and eventual transformation into centres of excellence in their distinctive areas of competence.

I would also like to share my own personal knowledge of what the National Library of Malaysia has attempted to do to become a centre of excellence for Malaysiana information. In aspiring to become a world class library, particularly for Malaysiana information services, the National Library of Malaysia's strategic plan for 2001-2005 includes benchmarking with other national libraries and world class organisations, a competency development programme for libraries and other library personnel, as well as strategic partnerships for establishing a national digital library network and digitising of local content from its own extensive resources.

These initiatives and the experience of other libraries from the region, particularly the National Library Board Singapore as a leading example, could perhaps provide a basis for a regional approach for transformation of our libraries into centres of information excellence.

Regional approach for organisational transformation

A proposal for a regional approach to organisational transformation would be more feasible if each Southeast Asian country presented their views on this topic. I hope the preceding presentation by the six speakers will trigger responses from those present today,

particularly participants those from Southeast Asian countries. From examples in their own countries, or by comparisons with the situation in their libraries, we could perhaps discern some similarities, and recognise the differences in order to develop a workable approach for transforming libraries in the Southeast Asian region into centres of organisational excellence.

The Southeast Asian region faces the same challenges as its counterparts elsewhere, including:

- impact of globalisation;
- rapid development of ICT;
- digital divide;
- environmental changes;
- political, socio-economic and cultural reforms;
- need for infrastructure development; and
- urgent need for people development.

Libraries, more specifically, need to respond to challenges brought about by the digital era if they are not to "subside into gray irrelevance", to borrow a phrase by James O'Donnel from Frances H. Awcock's paper. The challenge of transforming our traditional libraries into digital libraries includes:

- integration of electronic and traditional sources;
- changing needs of users;
- digitisation of library resources;
- preservation;
- copyright implications;
- knowledge management;
- changing roles of librarians; and
- training and learning new competencies.

Based on discussions with colleagues from the region through CONSAL executive board meetings and conferences, the following initiatives are proposed for libraries in the Southeast Asian region:

- (1) Strategic plan for transformation of libraries.
- (2) National collaboration and strategic partnerships.
- (3) Regional collaboration for cultural content development:
 - digitisation of regional project output, e.g. Asean-New Zealand IILP on ethnobotany;
 - digitisation projects in areas of common interest, e.g. local history, legends, personalities;

- regional training programmes for new competencies; and
- promoting digital literacy.

regional collaboration among libraries in Southeast Asia.

Conclusion

A collaborative response to the challenges faced by libraries in the Southeast Asian region is imperative in order to address the divide in the development of libraries. In this context, the region is fortunate that it has in its midst a success story in organisational transformation, the National Library Board Singapore, to provide an effective coordinating role for regional collaboration. The fact that the CONSAL Secretariat recently established in Singapore has demonstrated its seriousness and efficiency in providing effective support for regional projects planned so far augurs well for

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