

What Happens in A Change Management Process? Revisiting Ghana's Polytechnic Education

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Abstract: This paper reviews literature on the processes of change management considering polytechnic education in Ghana, and the changes that took place in reforming the polytechnics in the 1990s and beyond, in relation to the factors of a successful change management as outlined by Fernandez and Rainey. The change management of the polytechnics employed a legal structural approach. Little attention was given to the employees and students who were major participants. This led to much resistance which affected the progress of the change. Furthermore, as outlined by developers of planned change management, for the success of a change management, the needed resources for the change should be provided for the change. However, it could be seen that, the resources, including human resource, financial resource, equipment, infrastructure, and modern laboratory were not adequately provided at the time. This to a large extent affected the change process, which led to the change not meeting all its set targets. It could be stated that, all the factors within the change management process are important and as such, all the factors should be given maximum attention in ensuring the success of any planned organizational change management. There should be much communication with all participants, including top management, senior staff and junior staff of the organization. This ensures and promotes the success of the change.

Keywords: Education, Change Management, Ghana, Polytechnic Education, Factors.

INTRODUCTION

Change management explains an approach or perspective which is structured in ensuring transitions within organizations, teams, societies, as well as individuals from the present state to a state which is desired (Nauheimer, 2007). Kotter (1995:59) also defines change management as “making fundamental changes in how business is conducted in order to cope with a new, more challenging market environment”. Change management therefore is an important organizational element which can help in restructuring an organization to meet its current development needs.

According to Bender (1997) change remains an essential element in the competitive world that is constant. This paper employs a qualitative approach in reviewing literature and examining polytechnic education in Ghana in the 1990s within a change management perspective. The change was made with the view of meeting the manpower needs of the country and the world economy at large as the situation of the polytechnics in the 1990s were not adequate for meeting Ghana’s manpower needs, because their courses were mainly craft and basic technician programmes. The paper employs the change management processes as outlined by Fernandez and Rainey (2006). These processes include ensuring the need, providing a plan, building internal support, overcoming resistance, ensuring top management support and commitment, building external support, providing resources, institutionalizing the change and pursuing a comprehensive change.

The paper examines the extent to which the change managers employed the change management processes outlined above in instituting the change. In doing this, the level to which each stage of the change management process was used, and the nature to which it was applied and the outcomes that came up by considering or not considering a particular stage are examined. This will help in understanding how the processes outlined within the change management could be adapted in ensuring a successful change management. The paper is structured into three broad sections. Section one looks at the introduction and a background to polytechnic education in Ghana. Section two examines how the change management processes were applied in the change. Section three looks at the conclusion by

considering the outcomes of the change management. In the next section, I discuss the background to polytechnic education in Ghana.

BACKGROUND

Ghana's educational system has witnessed several changes in terms of its content, focus and structure dating back to the 1987 educational reforms in the country. This included a restructuring of polytechnic education in Ghana within a change management perspective in meeting the country's manpower needs. As noted by the National Education Forum Report- NEF, (1999:9) the content, focus and structure of Ghana's education was implemented with a focus of redressing the shortfalls of Ghana's educational system which was seen as more of an elitist structure that gave little attention to technological, vocational and agricultural education.

Tertiary education in Ghana as at 1990 was only limited to the three universities at the time. These were University of Ghana, University of Cape Coast and University of Science and Technology. With the implementation of the Tertiary Education Reforms of 1991, it led to an expansion of tertiary education (MOESS, 2008:11). From this, the Advanced Teacher Training Colleges were aggrandized to a tertiary education with a new name, the University of Education, Winneba. Another university was established in the northern part of Ghana, with the name University of Development Studies (MOESS, 2008:11). However, polytechnics were only seen as second cycle institutions, as their programmes were mainly craft and technician courses and were not meeting the manpower needs of Ghana. The polytechnics were run by principals under the Ghana Education Service bureaucracy with no management boards. As a result of this, a real change management was needed in restructuring the polytechnics.

The change was led by the ministry of education and the management of polytechnics. The six polytechnics in the country at the time were upgraded to the status of tertiary institutions by the education ministry and support of the management of polytechnics (Honyenuga, 2001:16). The polytechnics were the Kumasi Polytechnic, Takoradi Polytechnic, Accra Polytechnic, Ho Polytechnic, Cape Coast Polytechnic and Tamale Polytechnic. Later, four additional polytechnics were established in Bolgatanga, Koforidua, Wa and Sunyani which made the total number of polytechnics ten. In the next section, I examine how the change management within the polytechnics employed the factors of change management as outlined by Fernandez and Rainey (2006).

APPLYING THE ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK TO THE CHANGE MANAGEMENT OF THE POLYTECHNICS

In this section, I critically examine the change management within polytechnic education in Ghana in the 1990s, considering how the change management factors outlined by Fernandez and Rainey (2006) were employed in instituting the change. The factors that would be discussed are ensuring the need, providing a plan, building internal support, overcoming resistance, ensuring top management support and commitment, building external support, providing resources, institutionalizing the change and pursuing a comprehensive change. The extent to which these factors were employed and outcomes that came up in the course of utilizing or not utilizing the factors will be assessed.

ENSURING THE NEED

As noted by Fernandez and Rainey (2006:169) within any change management, the need for the change should be ensured. With this, there should be critical assessment of the organization's current situation, competitive position, technological trends and financial performance (Fernandez and Rainey, 2006:169). The results of the assessment should be verified to ascertain the need for the change. The need should then be approached in a broader sense in encompassing all significant aspects. Above all, there should be communication between the change managers and the other participants. As noted by Lewin (1947) a process of a planned change must employ a strategy of unfreezing which stands as a first stage in the change process. It represents a first attempt in getting participants to recognize the urgent need for change (Burns, 2004). That is, the need for change should be well communicated to participants,

particularly internal employees, stakeholders and external partners (Burke, 2002; Laurent, 2003). This will help in creating awareness and getting their support.

In relating this to the change management of the polytechnics, it could be realized that, there was a clear need to change the polytechnics to meet the manpower needs of Ghana. The polytechnics which were mainly seen as second cycle institutions were not able to meet the manpower needs. The change was led by the management of the polytechnics together with the education ministry. A committee was set up to see to the change process. The setting up of the committee affirms the point made by French and Bell (1990) and Mullins (2002) that numerous organizational change are enhanced by the necessity to adjust to obstacles and chances that are determined particularly by an external environment with regards to the essence of managing anticipated challenges.

The committee pinpointed the following problems. The polytechnics were offering craft and technician courses which did not meet Ghana's manpower needs. They lacked a legal framework and management boards. The tutors within the polytechnics were under the Ghana Education Service bureaucracy and this was not suitable for a tertiary institution. For a substantial improvement of Ghana's economy, modern technology with the requisite skills were needed (Country Paper, 1992).

With regards to communicating the need, it was realized that, the need was communicated to top management and the education ministry. There was less communication with the employees, particularly the junior staff and students (Honyenuga, 2013:30). This brought much resistance to the change as staff and students who were major participants were not communicated to.

To conclude with this section, it can be argued that, the need for change was clear. However, it was not well communicated to the junior staff and students. A legal structural rationalist approach was employed and as such, little attention was given to junior staff and students. This affected the change to some extent.

PROVIDING A PLAN

In any planned change management, a clear plan should be provided in meeting the required targets of the change (Lambright, 2001). This involves the development of a course of action with plans for achieving the set goals (Fernandez and Rainey 2006:169). Furthermore, the strategies should be made specific. This will help in clearly establishing a connection with regards to the initiatives that are to be employed and the outcomes that are expected.

In relating the factor of providing a plan to the change management of the polytechnics, it could be seen that, there was a plan that was initiated in meeting the set targets. The major plan was to upgrade the polytechnics to full tertiary institutions by introducing new programmes that were technology and modern science-driven. The new programmes included engineering, computer science, business administration, mechanical engineering, information communication technology, etc. Polytechnics were taken out of the Ghana Education Service bureaucracy. The polytechnics were given administrative, institutional, operational and financial autonomy to some extent (Honyenuga, 2013:29). A management board was set up for each polytechnic. These were referred to as councils which acted as a managing body to steer the affairs of the polytechnics.

Furthermore, with regards to the management of the polytechnics, a rector was to lead each polytechnic. The rector was to act in consultation with the council. Academic, financial and administrative issues of the polytechnics were to be decided by the rector together with the management board (council) (MOESS, 2008:18). In attending to the administrative and financial management of the polytechnics, two persons, namely the registrar and financial officer were to assist the rector (Honyenuga, 2001). An academic board was set up to see to the management of new programmes that were introduced. A convocation was further set up to see to the general improvement of the polytechnics. This was made up of senior members and senior staff of the polytechnics. They mainly discussed matters that affected the polytechnics that needed concern.

BUILDING INTERNAL SUPPORT

In any planned organizational change, it becomes important to build a strong internal support in ensuring success. There should be a commitment towards the change from superiors, colleagues and subordinates (Fernandez and Rainey 2006:170). All groups within the organization, including superiors and subordinates should be made aware of the need for change in order to win their support. This can be done through effective communication. There should be communication from top to lower level staff in getting the needed support (Johnson and Leavit, 2001).

In relating this to the change management of the polytechnics, it was realized that there was support mainly from top management and some senior members. However, there was not much support from the junior staff and students who are major participants (Honyenuga, 2013:30). There was less communication with the students and junior staff and as such, they gave less support towards the change. This affected the change process. Therefore, it can be argued that, for a successful change, all participants should be included in gaining their support (Bunker and Alban, 1997; Pasmore, 1994).

OVERCOMING RESISTANCE

Overcoming resistance is key for any organizational change. There should be appropriate measures to overcome resistance that may come up in the process of the change (Fernandez and Rainey, 2006:170). With this, there should be regular communication for both superiors and subordinates in gaining their support. With regards to the polytechnic change management, little was done to overcome resistance particularly from the junior staff and students. A legal structural rationalist approach was adopted (Honyenuga, 2001). This did not give attention to the socio-economic needs of the participants particularly, employees and students (Honyenuga, 2013:30). As noted by Lewin (1947) a planned change management comes with resistance and as such, appropriate measures should be employed in dealing with the resistance.

There was much resistance from students and employees in the form of demonstrations, strikes, and boycott of lectures. The students even argued that, they were not informed about the nature of the certificate they were to receive after their programme (Honyenuga, 2001). The lack of integration of employees and students affected the change to a larger extent.

ENSURING TOP MANAGEMENT SUPPORT AND COMMITMENT

There is the need for ensuring that there is substantial support from the top management. Their commitment, with regards to the change is necessary for successfully instituting the change (Fernandez and Rainey, 2006:171). In relating this to the change management of the polytechnics, it was seen that, there was much support and commitment from the top management of the polytechnics. The top management were committed to upgrading the polytechnics in meeting the manpower needs of the country (Honyenuga, 2001).

BUILDING EXTERNAL SUPPORT

Getting the needed external support is another key factor in ensuring the success of a planned change. There should be a comprehensive mechanism of communicating to the external environment (Fernandez and Rainey, 2006:171-2). This should be done through traditional means of communication, including television adverts, newspapers, radio, and other contemporary forms of communication. Stakeholders, external partners and other groups within the external environment should be included in order to secure their support.

The polytechnic change management had a greater support from the external environment, particularly from the government and the Ghana Education Service (GES) (Honyenuga, 2001). The government and the GES were committed to the change and as such, supported the process in upgrading the polytechnics. There were deliberations with top management of the polytechnics, education ministry and GES. Golembiewski (1985), has noted that securing government support by public organizations is challenging

and therefore, management of public organizations should demonstrate adequate strategies, in order to secure external support.

PROVIDING RESOURCES

There should be much investment with regards to provision of sufficient resources before, during and after the change process (Fernandez and Rainey, 2006:172). The resources should include human, financial and material resources. Without the needed resources, change is likely to be unsuccessful. With regards to the polytechnic change, the needed resources including qualified teaching personal, technical support, modern infrastructure, and equipment were not adequately provided (Honyenuga, 2001). This affected the change to an extent. Financial resources remained a major problem to the change. For instance, in 2006, government provided 727,991 billion old Ghana Cedis for public universities but only 636 billion old Ghana Cedis were provided for the ten polytechnics (NCTE, 2006).

INSTITUTIONALIZING THE CHANGE

For a successful change, there is the need for effective institutionalization. This enhances and sustains the change. This should incorporate new innovations into the activities and patterns of behavior of the organization (Fernandez and Rainey, 2006:172). The new innovations should be effectively employed to replace the old practices (Kotter, 1995). A pilot-based approach may be employed in institutionalizing the change. Regular data should be gathered in tracking the development of the change. With regards to the change management of the polytechnics, new innovations including the setting up of a management board (council), an academic board and an industrial liaison office were done (Honyenuga, 2001).

Furthermore, the polytechnic management together with the Institute for Education Planning and Administration (IEPA) of University of Cape Coast, provided for a capacity training programme that saw to the capacity training of management, leadership, teaching and non-teaching staff of the polytechnics (MOESS, 2008:14). The capacity building programme was relevant due to the fact that, the polytechnics were not initially provided with such capacity training. (Honyenuga and Kowenhoven, 2009).

PURSuing A COMPREHENSIVE CHANGE

To ensure success of the change, there is the need for comprehensive change. This should encompass all aspects of the organization within the change process. A complete revamping of all the sub-categories and units of the organization should be ensured (Fernandez and Rainey, 2006:173). In doing this, the organization becomes effective in developing the strength for a larger pattern of changes that may come after (Fernandez and Rainey, 2006:173). In relating this to the polytechnic change management, it could be seen that, some attempts were made at ensuring some broader scope of change, which included providing some form of skills development for management, junior and senior staff (Honyenuga, 2001).

The polytechnics were granted autonomy in mounting their own academic programmes with the approval of the National Accreditation Board (NAB) (Honyenuga, 2013). However, the comprehensive change was not adequate in making the change a complete success as junior staff and students were not fully included in the process. This affected the progress of the change.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have discussed the change management of polytechnics in Ghana, in relation to the factors of a successful change management as outlined by Fernandez and Rainey (2006). The change management of the polytechnics employed a legal structural approach. Little attention was given to the employees and students who were major participants. This led to much resistance which affected the progress of the change.

Furthermore, as outlined by developers of a planned change management, for the success of a change management, the needed resources for the change should be provided for the change. However, it could be seen that, the resources, including human resource, financial resource, equipment, infrastructure, modern laboratory, etc, were not adequately provided. This to an extent affected the change process, which led to the change not meeting all its set targets. In conclusion, it could be stated that, all the factors

within the change management process are important and therefore, all the factors should be given maximum attention in ensuring the success of any planned organizational change management. There should be much communication with all participants, including top management, senior staff and junior staff of the organization.

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