OBTS Conference 2016

Session Title

**Time to Put Lewin’s Change Model on Ice:**

**Teaching Organizational Change in a World of Service and Perpetual Motion**

Abstract

This session will consider the challenges in teaching organizational change when it is a constant and where the dominant theories for understanding it are based on Lewin’s outdated model of unfreeze, change, refreeze. Organizations are always changing through formal (planned) and informal (unplanned) processes. Teaching change management must transition from focusing on discrete, episodic change projects to on-going change programs and processes. Through a small group exercise, participants will explore ways to make this transition. Consistent with the principles of organization development, we will consider how promoting change that makes organizations more effective is a form of service to its employees.

Keywords

Change as a Form of Service

Continuous Change Processes

Teaching Organizational Change

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**Teaching Implications**

The distinction between episodic and continuous change as forms of organization development has previously been addressed in the organization development (OD) literature (see especially Weick & Quinn, 1999). Underlying mental models and theories for these two forms of change is some version of Lewin’s model of unfreezing/change/refreezing. Anyone who teaches change management or OD must recognize the outdated assumptions of Lewin’s model and offer students a different way of thinking about change.

Besides episodic and continuous change, other forms and typologies of change have been discussed in the OD literature (self-citation). Among other typologies, change can be formal or informal, planned or unplanned. Change can also be consistent with the values of the organization in which it takes place. Culture promotes change in informal ways that are aligned with prevailing norms and values. Formal change programs like TQM, when aligned with organizational culture, foster continuous change.

These distinctions can be depicted in a 2 x 2 matrix with formal–informal change on one axis and change that is consistent versus inconsistent with the culture on the other. The role of organizational leaders and OD specialists is to create and promote a work environment that is meaningful to employees. Doing so means encouraging all four types of change that emerge from the 2 x 2 matrix.

Participants will discuss the values and systems that promote continuous change in the organizations in which they belong. While promoting organizational improvements, systems of change must themselves evolve and change. Thus a key role of organizational leaders and OD staff is to work both in the system and on it. Ways of incorporating these perspectives in teaching change management and organization development will be discussed.

**Session Description and Plan**

At the beginning of the session, the decreasing relevance of Lewin’s change model will be discussed along with the need to teach change management using a different set of assumptions. A hardcopy of the 2 x 2 matrix representing types of change will be distributed. This framework will be explained and participants will then meet in groups to discuss different types of change . The session will conclude with brief report outs from each group and a review/discussion of shared insights including ways to use the matrix in classroom teaching.

Session Outline-Timeline

1. Introductions, discussion on assumptions underlying change models, and review of a 2 x 2 matrix on change types (20 minutes)
2. Small group discussion on teaching change based on the acknowledgment that change is constant, the assumptions underlying many popular change theories are outdated, and change can be categorized in a variety of ways (20 minutes)
3. Plenary session with brief report outs, discussion, and wrap-up, including implications for teaching change management (20 minutes)

**Application to Conference Theme**

This session is based on the view that workers are ‘serviced’ and supported when organizations change in a manner that allows them to perform in a more mindful and meaningful way.

We serve others when we support work environments in which people are able to create for themselves an organizational culture that allows them to work more productively.

People are served when they are given the authority or discretion to change their work environments to make them more efficient and rewarding.

This session will also serve in promoting a mindset about change that acknowledges how organizations are never in a state of homeostasis as suggested by Lewin’s model.