



The Role of Human Resources in Change Management: An Exploratory Study in Lebanon

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Abstract. Constant change occurs due to globalization, increased pace of competition, vibrant technological advancement, information flow and customers' awareness among others. The forces subject organizations to challenges as how to respond, handle and mitigate the negative impact of those changes. The resultant uncertainty and volatility lead to a situation where competition is souring and organizations that respond reactively narrow their competitiveness and erode their market share and sustainability chances. Organizations' preparedness and pro-activeness are key success factors in terms of resources/capabilities and their use and how these envision and deal with the aforementioned uncertainties. Amid the aggressive external environment, one of the fundamental key agents for change management is the human resource. However, the key question here concerns the roles that HR can assume, and what contribution HR has to the change process and outcomes. This study aims to assess the role of HR in the ongoing process of change in organizations, the interrelation between change management and HR practitioners as catalysts of change and to propose a framework to expose the interrelation between the concept of change and the role of HR in the change process. This is intended to be done by identifying separately the change process then the functions and roles of HR in this process and how these interrelate. This research is exploratory using qualitative analysis based on the literature reported in secondary data and primary data collected using semi-structured interviews to achieve the objectives of the current study. A convenient sample of HR experts and practicing professionals is selected based on their willingness to participate. The outcomes of this research help to identify the role of the Human Resource Practitioners in the process of change, and help to assess the nature of this effect, and how to develop it in a more effective and efficient way for organizations. HR managers and organizational policy makers may benefit from such outcomes.

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1. Introduction:

Nowadays, organizational processes characterized as open systems are heavily affected by the changing environment whereby managers seek to adapt to those changes and at the same time try to mitigate their impact. Identified changes could be internal like: structural, strategical, technological, and change in people (Robbins & Coulter, 2016) and external such as competition, technological progress, economy, politics, etc...

Irrespective of the forces or triggers that initiate the change in organizations, the change most likely will pass through a process that drives the organization to the final goal or stage resultant from adapting a certain change. According to Schein (2010), "the fundamental assumptions underlying any change in a human system are derived originally from Kurt Lewin (1947)" (p. 299). This process according to Lewin has three steps: Unfreeze the

organization from its current state, make the desired type of change, and refreeze the organization in a new, desired state (Jones, 2010).

The aforementioned steps help to drive the change in a systematic way and help to reduce the impact of change on the organization, however the problem of resistance to change arises and can negatively affect the whole process of change and might sometimes lead to undesired results. Consequently, organizations try to mitigate the negative impact of change using several organizational development techniques in order to accomplish that goal, those techniques vary according to the employees' resistance case and level, and mainly are education and communication, participation and empowerment, facilitation and support, bargaining and negotiation, and coercion, also other organizational development

techniques are used in order to promote change like counseling, training, and team building, etc.. (Jones, 2010).

The success of the mitigation process, after the identification of the triggers of change, relies on the human capital. "The dominant role of leadership and employee involvement in change process are necessary for bringing effective change in management" (Hussain, Lei, Akram, Haider, Hussain and Ali, 2018, p. 126). People who work in the organization are the key of the success or failure for implementing a certain change, where organizational development is based on human resource development, and the focus of development are humans. Furst and Cable (2008) contend that the active role of employees in organizational change tends employees toward positive feelings. This will enhance the employee acceptance for change process (Oreg, 2006).

When conducting a search in literature about the topic of the role(s) of human resource management in the process of change in Lebanon, scarce are the articles that deal with this topic. This study aims to shed light and assess the topic. It also aims to enrich the current available literature about the role of human resource management in change processes in organizations. Lebanese (and others) human resource practitioners and managers may benefit from the outcomes and recommendations for future policy creation and for the improvement of current practices in mitigation of barriers against organizational change.

Thus, the objectives of this study are as follows:

- Describe the process of change then the functions.
- Identify the role of Human Resource (Department, Managers, and Employees) in the ongoing process of change in organizations.
- Examine the linkage between the change process and the role of Human resources in this process.
- Propose a framework for the linkage between HR and change management showing the factors that affect both concepts and the impact of HR of the process of change.

This study is conducted based on the theory of the open system, where an open system interacts with the macro environment of the organization in addition to the micro environment, this study will also depend on the behavioral theory of management where it is mainly concentrating on humans and will also be under the frame of the contingency model management.

2. Literature Review:

Hussain et al. (2018, p. 123) contend that when addressing organizational change it refers to the explanation of the movement of an organization from a current known state to an unknown desired future state. While Jones (2010) defines it as the process by which organizations move from their present state to some desired future state to increase their effectiveness. And the required change management according to Cook & Macaulay (2004, p. 1), is the daily bread of today's organizations,

where technological advancement, extensive rate of competition, globalization, and many other factors govern the way organizations operate and change. Similarly, change management defined by Moran and Brightman (2000) is the process of continually renewing an organization's direction, structure, and capabilities to serve the ever changing needs of external and internal customers. Furthermore, change management according to Benedict (2007), is the formal process for organizational change, including a systematic approach and application of knowledge. Change management means defining and adopting corporate strategies, structures, procedures, and technologies to deal with change stemming from internal and external conditions. Further, today's business environment demands that every leader and manager be involved for a smooth organizational transformation, a fact asserted by Pierce et al. (2002) who state that stimulation of the process necessitates that all employees must have to be addressed about change. The leaders should educate, communicate, participate, involve, task support, provide emotional support and incentives, manipulate, co-optate and coerce the employees about change. Hence, employee's involvement will be more effective if they are empowered in authority and responsibility (Mathieu, Gilson, & Rubby, 2006).

Human Resources practitioners are aware of the aforementioned requirements for the success of change, actually they are a major part of it and they play an important role in the process and outcomes of change, after all any type of change will influence first and last the human capital in that organization. Dave Ulrich in his book 'Human Resource Champions' published in 1997 asserts that HR practitioners and professionals are major and essential change agents in any organization that is ongoing a change process, where he considers HR professionals to be strategic partners in that organization.

It is very important to define the concepts and terminology of this study for the sake of clarity, therefore, after the introduction, the next section will be defining the necessary concepts:

Change: the word change carries various meanings depending on varying processes, such as to alter, modify, adjust, convert, switch, replace and transform. The word and its various connotations are often applied generically to all aspects of change issues (Poon and Rowley, 2010).

Change agent: The individual or group that undertakes the task of initiating and managing change in an organization is known as a change agent. Change agents can be internal, such as managers or employees who are appointed to oversee the change process. In many innovative-driven companies, managers and employees alike are being trained to develop the needed skills to oversee change (Tschirky, 2011).

Resistance to Change: is any attitude or behavior indicating no willingness to support or make a desired change (Yılmaz & Kılıçoğlu, 2013). In fact, resistance to

change is a resistance to loss of something that is valuable or loss of the known by moving to the unknown. Sometimes, people resist the imposition of change that is accepted as a universal truth (Burke, 2008). Nonetheless, resistance can be passive resignation or deliberate sabotage (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2010).

Human Capital: is the human factor in the organization; the combined intelligence, skills and expertise that gives the organization its distinctive character. The human elements of the organization are those who are capable of learning, changing, innovating and providing the creative thrust which if properly motivated can ensure the long-run survival of the organization (Kucharčíková, 2011).

Human Resources Management: is the use of individuals to achieve organizational objectives (Mondy & Martocchio, 2016).

Leadership: Leadership is a process by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs the organization in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent. Or it is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal (Sharma & Jain, 2013).

Leader: A leader is one or more people who selects, equips, trains, and influences one or more follower(s) who have diverse gifts, abilities, and skills and focuses the follower(s) to the organization's mission and objectives causing the follower(s) to willingly and enthusiastically expend spiritual, emotional, and physical energy in a concerted coordinated effort to achieve the organizational mission and objectives (Winston & Patterson, 2006).

2.1. Change as a process

Kurt Lewin (1951) is credited for his model, the planned approach to organizational change which emerged from his work related to group decision-making, implementation and social change. This three-step model is associated with intentional change in the organization and change initiators may choose to use a range of strategies to implement the intended change. Though, according to Lewin, the first step in the process of change is to unfreeze the existing situation or status quo. The status quo is considered the equilibrium state. Unfreezing is necessary to overcome the strains of individual resistance and group conformity; the second step of this process is movement. In this step, it is necessary to move the target system to a new level of equilibrium. The third step of Lewin's three-step change model is refreezing. This step needs to take place after the change has been implemented in order for it to be sustained or "stick" over time (Robbins & Judge, 2013).

Another model for change is Kotter's model which was introduced in 1995, for the first time in his paper "Leading change: why transformation efforts fail." This model is considered more as a sequence of actions that organizations can adopt during the process of change, it is considered by some researchers and academics as a

checklist for implementing the process of change, but according to Burnes (2017) these eight steps were considered to be a process by Kotter and not a checklist. The eight steps model as Kotter suggested are: Create sense of urgency, form a powerful coalition, create a vision for change, communicate the vision, getting rid of obstacles, create short-term wins, build on change and Institutionalize new approaches (Kotter, 1995, p. 61).

A third model that addresses the change process is what Anderson and Anderson in 2001 created, where their model of planned change provides a comprehensive coverage of the entire process of change and equally explains the whole process of change as a cyclical process. Anderson & Anderson (2001) list four critical factors that must be in place for planned change to be effective: "charismatic leadership, organizational crisis, an understanding across the organization of the urgency of the situation, and a trusting relationship between the leader and the organization members" (p. 151). This model briefly views change based on three perspectives namely content, people and process and is divided into nine cyclical phases as depicted in Exhibit 1.

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| Phase 1 - Preparing to Lead the Change Initiative |
| Phase 2 - Defining the Organizational Vision,
Commitment and strengthening the
Capabilities |
| Phase 3 - Determine the Design Requirements by
Assessing the Situation |
| Phase 4 - Enabling achievement of the Vision by
Creating the Desired Design State |
| Phase 5 - Analysis of the Impact |
| Phase 6: Masterminding the implementation plans,
integrating various actions for achieving
efficiencies and optimizing resource
utilization |
| Phase 7 - Implementing the Change Plans |
| Phase 8 - Celebrating as well as integrating the New
State |
| Phase 9 - Learning & Correct Course |

Exhibit 1. Nine phases for Anderson & Anderson Model

Source: Anderson & Anderson (2001, p. 15)

2.2. Triggers of Change

An important concept to understand about change is where does change comes from, Oakland & Tanner (2007) suggested that there are two types of factors of change, the external change drives and the internal change drives of the organization, where the external change drives include: Customer requirements; demand from other stakeholders; government; regulatory demands; and market competition. While the internal drives include: Improving operational efficiency; need to improve the quality of products and services; and process improvement.

Researchers tend to discuss the external factors of change more widely, where they affect organizations the

most, and according to McMillan (2004), most organizations are faced with uncertainties that are synonymous with the modern world brought about by globalization and modern technology.

2.3. Levels of Change

Cameron & Green (2009) contend that change occurs in organizations on three main levels: Individual level, Team level and Organizational level.

Individual level:

Cameron & Green explain the individual level of change linking it with the external environment. However, though change has been coming from the external world, the perception and reactions toward change arises internally, and therefore this puts the individual to a central position in explaining the level of change. The external world is dynamic and subject to constant changes. The individuals, as a part of the environment, also encounter these changes and need to adopt themselves. From this point, individuals constitute one of the most important levels which the idea of change needs to be analyzed and understood. Cameron & Green describe four theories to explain this level namely, Behavioral approach; Cognitive approach; Psychodynamic approach, and Humanistic Psychological approach.

Team level:

Cameron & Green (2009) state that organizations consist of different types of working groups who are involved in the change of organizations. Cameron & Green listed nine different types of teams namely, work teams, self-managed teams, parallel teams, project teams, matrix teams, virtual teams, networked teams, management teams and change teams. However, Todnem, Kuipers and Procter (2018) contend that teams form an essential part of organizational change as they are a means to initiate and successfully create and implement change, and subsequently are an important level of analysis to understand organizational change, successful or not. Moreover, on a practical level, the role of managers in implementing and fostering change particularly takes place within the teams they are part of or the teams they are managing (Neil, Wagstaff, Weller and Lewis (2016).

Organizational level:

The world changes very fast, so the organizations must have to be changed quickly for the development and surviving of the organization (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008). The analysis of organizational level change has constituted the core part of change management analysis of researchers. In general, organizational change efforts are classified into three different approaches as stated by Hamburger & Yitzchayak (1998). The first approach comes from classical management theory that focuses on the empirical facts and practical results by describing organizations as the formal unit. The second is the

sociological approach that analyzed the sociology of organizations by focusing on the different identities and classes within the organizations, which create conflicts with the basis of socio-economic differences. The third approach that we will also use for our description comes from the psychological approach, which focuses on the individuals and their psychological conditions in order to describe the organizations.

2.4. Resistance to Change

Resistance to change is any attitude or behavior indicating no willingness to support or make a desired change (Yılmaz & Kılıçoğlu, 2013). In fact, resistance to change is a resistance to loss of something that is valuable or loss of the known by moving to the unknown. Sometimes, people resist the imposition of change that is accepted as a universal truth (Burke, 2008). Nonetheless, resistance can be passive resignation or deliberate sabotage (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2010).

According to Robbins & Judge (2013), employees resist change because they are afraid to lose something that they value, they do not understand the change and its implications, they do not believe that the change will make sense in the organization, or they find it difficult to cope with either the level or practice of change.

Dent and Goldberg (1999), quoted Zander (1950) who offered six causes that foster employee resistance to change, which are depicted in Exhibit 2 below.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a- Resistance occurs when the nature of the change is not made clear to the employees who are going to be influenced by the change. b- The change is open to a wide variety of interpretations c- Employees influenced feel strong forces deterring them from changing d- Employees influenced by the change have pressure put on them to comply instead of having an input in the nature or the direction of the change e- The change is made on personal grounds f- The change ignores the already established institutions in the group |
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Exhibit 2. Six causes of employee resistance to change
Source: Dent and Goldberg, 1999, pp. 34-35.

Jones (2010) states that resistance to change occurs on the three levels of the organization, organizational, group (or team), and individual levels, where every level of resistance have a different strategy to handle according to its severances. Moreover, Smith (2018, Para 3-5) classifies resistance to change along three entities which may cause damage to the intended change in any organization namely, employee resistance, executive resistance and customer resistance.

2.5. Human Resource Roles in Change

Ulrich in his book "Human Resource Champions" states that "change happens" (Ulrich, 1997, p. 151) and considers HR professionals as change agents in that process, where they make sure that initiatives are defined, developed, and delivered in a timely manner, and that processes are stopped, started, and simplified, and that fundamental values within the organization are debated and appropriately adapted to changing business conditions. Ulrich stated that while the intellectual commitment to change is easy to make, the practical efforts involved in change are difficult. Successful HR change agents replace resistance with resolve, planning with results, and fear of change with excitement about its possibilities.

On the other hand, Maxwell and Watson (2006) argue that business partnership between human resource specialists and the employees have emerged as the dominant model for human resource operations within organizations. They outline the role of human resource experts as working alongside other members of the organization to help them reach their goals by crafting strategies to maximize productivity through alignment of corporate resources to these goals. Moreover, the human resource experts' involvements in successful change management offer several benefits to organizations namely,

1. It enables them forge closer relationships with other managers in the organization which promotes a partnership model towards managing employees.
2. It encourages gifted managers to use their initiative and become more involved in day-to-day workplace management decisions and problems or issues that can be resolved speedily before they escalate.

Enablers of human resource experts' involvement in change management include:

- Greater degrees of responsibility and task variation.
- Human resource information systems.
- Close relationships with employees.
- Formation of strategic partnerships.

Benedict (2007) asserts that "change management leaders must promote awareness and understanding of the change initiative to influence employees' willingness to embrace the change. HR is the obvious candidate for the role of leading the people side of change" (p. vii). Furthermore, she studied the involvement of HRM in change management and deduced nine important roles of HR in change management which are depicted in Exhibit 3.

Lockwood (2007) stresses on the fact that, "HR has the ability to make a significant impact and contribution to the organization by initiating change, leading change and measuring change effectiveness. The top five areas where it is essential for HR to demonstrate value for change management are 1) clearly communicating plans and goals regarding change initiatives; 2) hiring and developing good

leaders; 3) designing and implementing transparent reward systems; 4) giving people the opportunity to be involved in the processes; and 5) overall, making each interaction with internal clients a positive experience" (pp. 31-32).

More recently, Adeniji, Osibanjo, & Abiodun (2013) consider that the role of HRM in change is to make use of performance metrics such as, financial results, operational efficiency, leadership commitment, communication effectiveness, and the perceived need for change to design appropriate strategies, to avoid change failures or solve troubled change projects. Further, Baran (2016) contends that "it could be argued that "HR agility" is at the root of all of many if not all of the HR competencies [Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) Competency Model] related to change and change management. What we do know for certain is that the ever-evolving world of organizations requires HR to continue to evolve as well" (Para 17).

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a- Improve employee understanding of change. b- Improve communication between managerial and non-managerial employees. c- Increase employee satisfaction. d- Increase trust between managerial and non-managerial levels of employees. e- Improves employee's skills and proficiency. f- Recognizing and rewarding employees for the successful adoption of change. g- Increase the cohesiveness of leadership. h- Reducing unplanned staff turnover. i- Sustaining change and its results for a long-term period. |
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Exhibit 3. Nine roles of HR in change management

Benedict reports that when "HR is involved in processes related to major organizational changes, it performs a variety of functions associated with the communication, implementation and tracking of such changes" (p. 7). A detailed involvement scheme is depicted in Figure 1.

3. Methodology

The previous section shed the light on the different aspects of the literature related to the topic. The purpose of this research is to elucidate the role of HR in change management. However, to the best of the researchers' knowledge the aforementioned research is not conducted in Lebanon. For that, primary data is needed to be collected from the field. Hejase and Hejase (2013) contend that "through exploratory research, a researcher acquires deeper knowledge as to how to convert the problem of not having facts about the subject into a structured one" (p. 80). Therefore, this study is exploratory conducted to study the topic using an inductive approach and a qualitative research methodology.

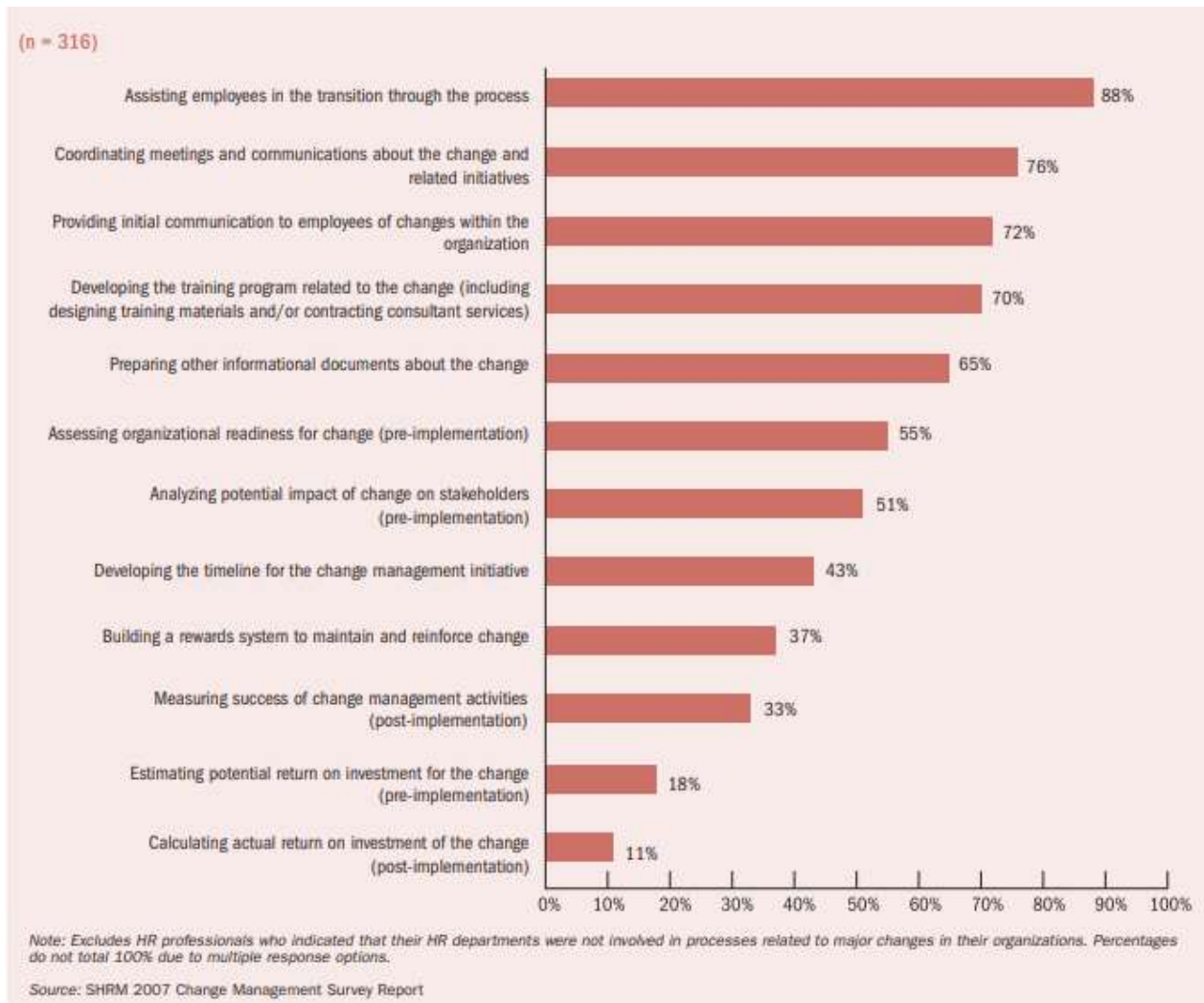


Figure 1. HR roles during major organizational changes
 Source: Benedict, 2007, p. 9.

3.1. Interview design

Primary data collection was performed using semi-structured interviews based on a structured questionnaire in order to gain information on the topic. Questions selected were sequentially ordered, carefully worded, and open-ended. This reduces the differences in responses from different individuals due to the choice of words on the part of the interviewers, where this technique minimizes the variation in the questions posed by them to different interviewees.

The content of the questions was designed based on the research questions and literature assessment so as to address the topic and process of change and develop a better understanding for the topic, and then focusing on the role of human resource management in the process trying to finally integrate and link the concept as well as to propose a framework from the findings. 11 questions in total addressed definitions of organizational change, change management, process of change, role of HR, role

of HR in the change process, initiatives to reduce resistance, leadership roles, link between HR and change and finally proposition of a scheme.

3.2. Sample size

Nonprobability convenient purposeful sampling is used as a sampling strategy in this study, where participants were selected based on their willingness to participate as well as based on their experience and knowledge of the topic. Qualitative content analysis was used while reviewing the literature, and narrative analysis approach was used to analyze the content from interviews focusing on using the stories and experiences shared by people to answer the research questions.

All participants were chosen from the human resource professionals and managers in addition to experienced academics in human resource management and change management. A total of twelve professionals

were approached, however only 7 were committed to an interview whose duration was two hours. Therefore, the response rate was 58.30%.

All participants were informed that their responses are confidential and will be only used for this study.

4. Results and Findings

Change Triggers

The triggers that stimulate change in organizations are derived from the environment whether the internal or external environment, the organization after all is not isolated, but it is living in the real world and conducting its operations in that world, “organizations have a certain vision, and the organization top management plans strategically for five years and sometimes for three, this time line changes and varies and becoming less according to the rapid change in the environment in today’s world, and when any unique change occurs in the environment that effect the organization, the top management must modify its plans to adapt to that change thus it ensures its existence, those triggers could be either security issues, political changes, economic factors, financial or technological changes, it all depends on the nature of the organization and the nature of the changes occurring where it is vital for that organization to adapt to changes occurring to insure the organizations sustainability” (Interviewee 1, 7).

Other professionals suggest that some of the important triggers that simulate changes initially in organizations are competitors and competition in a certain business, “where any business strives to initially innovate in its domain rather than follow up competitors, but if competitors lead the market in a certain way let’s suppose introducing any technological enhancement in a certain domain the organization must at least follow up to ensure sustainability in the market” (Interviewee 2, 4).

Professionals and academics agree that the environment is what triggers change, either the external or the internal environment, “triggers of change vary a lot, and every event that affects the organization can be considered a trigger of change, whether it had a positive effect or a negative effect and whether it was on an individual level, team level, or organizational level, those events could be either external like an increase in the competition, economical changes, technological changes, socio-cultural changes, political changes, or even changes in the regulation of the country the organization operates in, also there are many events that can affect the organization and can be considered internal triggers for change such as a change in systems, processes, management, or introducing new talents to the organization among other things” (Interviewee 3, 5, 6).

The inputs fit what researchers have reported in their research that organizations are affected by both internal and external forces which may include many different specific

triggers (Oakland & Tanner, 2007; McMillan, 2004; Robbins & Coulter, 2016).

The General Role of HRM in Change Management

Professionals tend to believe that the general role of human resources in the change process and managing change is different nowadays, so they believe that it is not sufficient anymore to act classically to a certain threat, but human resources professionals must be proactive rather than reactive to handle today’s world. To handle change one must handle core functions in human resources that can affect the change process, human resources used to approach change management reactively, but today the whole approach is different, “today’s challenges differ from what was happening in the past, and the human resource approaches are whole different, we are out of the personnel box and trying to be strategic, some of the modern challenges and changes that we encountered and still facing is the technological advancement. In the past as a media organization, we used to focus on television, but a change occurred that made a real challenge to the whole crew, which is the emergence of social media which affected television widely, but with good planning and change management we were able to keep-up with those changes” (Interviewee 4). Others see that the general role of human resources in change management is not just to trigger the change process, but human resources must follow up that process to reach a final phase of mergence between the change and the behavior of the employees, “Human resources must follow up with the change process, and they have to reinforce it all the time and make sure to reduce the resistance levels so eventually this implemented change becomes part of the organizational culture” (Interviewee 3).

In general academics and professionals agree that the general role of human resources in the change process is managing change with a methodology that reduces resistance to its lowest levels possible (Interviewees 1 to 7), because human resources must understand people and their concerns and fears, where some consider human resources as the facilitator of the change process (Interviewees 2, 6) while others consider it to be supportive (1, 4, 7).

According to Zafar, Iqbal, Azad, & Afsar (2014), top management envisions the broader picture and motivates the change audience through change agents. However, it is the HR function which spreads around this change vision. “HR communication should be quick, precise and clear that can be understood by a wide range of people” (p. 57). Interviewees both professionals and academicians, are clearly aware about the role of HR in the quest to reduce resistance and the endeavor to clarify the reasons and process of change to lower the organization’s community.

The Specific Role(s) of HRM in Change Management Based on the Five Functions

Interviewees were asked about the specific role of HR in change management according to the five HR functions namely, Workforce Planning, HRD (T&D + Performance Management), Total Rewards, Employee & Labor Relations (ELR), and Risk Management. Their responses were as follows:

Workforce Planning (WFP)

Starting by the first function, in the change process human resources play a very important role in work force planning (Interviewees 1, 3-6), where in strategic planning HR must base their work force plans (recruiting, selecting, succession, etc...) based on the change concept, where they should get out of the rigid fixed hierarchies and job descriptions, and try to plan based on the flexibility concept. Interviewee 4 contends that “employees used to do their jobs according to their job description where their tasks are listed and prioritized, they used to abide to the tasks on that description which in past days used to be sufficient for them to do their jobs, nowadays for the same job those tasks are more than they used to be, a lot more, so the focus must be on the job itself not on the tasks related to the job, the general role of HR here is to try to write a job description that adapts with all variables and changes possible, at least for a certain period of time, also hierarchies in organizations used to be rigid where it used to be planned for ten even fifteen years sometimes, but nowadays an organization must plan and implement a flexible hierarchy that can deal with today’s changes”. Interviewees 2 and 3 added, On an operational level, recruitment when needed in implementing a certain change must be adaptable with those changes, where in this process the human resource department must determine the needed numbers of employees with the needed knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA’s), and we need to recruit people to help us with the change needed, “at this stage we should look for people matching the change we want to apply in our organization”.

Also, job rotation is essential when trying to implement change, where an organization could use its internal assets to reach the objectives and goals from that change introduced, “Job rotation while in the change process helps to implement the change in a better way using the experienced workers to help in the implementation process not to mention reducing the costs of that change and reducing resistance levels” (Interviewee 4 and 5).

Professionals and academics (All Interviewees) agree that right recruitment and right selection is essential for an organization not just in the change process but in all stages of the organizational life, that is because making the right selection will reduce costs and increase productivity in the organization which is the goal of the recruitment function when filling a vacancy, but in the change process this action could be more sensitive due to the threats and

instability of the organization during the change process which could increase costs dramatically or reduce productivity in the same way, “making the right choice in selecting the worker during a change process will make all the following functions easier, and eventually reducing costs for the organization, where training costs will decrease, performance appraisal will be an easy process and turnover will be reduced, therefore human resources in the change process must recruit and select talents and workers with competences that belongs to the same culture of the organization that can lead to a smooth transition in the change process” (Interviewee 1). Interviewee 2 stressed, “it is agreed upon that any change process is implemented by humans, where those humans are the core of the change process therefore selecting the right people leads to make changing right”.

Human Resource Development (HRD)

At the level of human resource development function, the role of human resources is extremely important in the change process, where human resource development has two main functions which are training and development and performance management, and when implementing any change an emergent need for training arises no matter what the change is, whether it was in culture, structure, processes, technology, operations, etc... where employees must be trained for those new changes. Interviewee 6, asserts that the role of human resource management is “setting up training and development activities required to function change,” while Interviewee 6 adds that it is “important to approach the training and development program in change management step by step after conducting a training need analysis,” in addition, Interviewee 4 contends that “the modern trend in training and development is conducting module training through workshops”.

The aforementioned responses must be put in a clearer context especially that foreign HR experts warn about dealing with change as a set of separate projects including training and development of employees, for example Walcroft (2017) in his comments about the “Challenges and Opportunities facing HR in 2017” report, quotes Alison Carter, principal research fellow, Institute for Employment Studies, who believes part of the problem is that organizations aren’t able to keep the momentum of change management programs going. “Change is often seen as an initiative or series of programs, which may or may not be connected to each other, and each one can often run out of momentum,” she says. This is something Andy Swann, a workplace consultant at BDG, agrees with. “Because many organizations still see projects as isolated schemes, they focus change management on information and training, rather than inspiration and connection.” Walcroft (2017, Para 4).

At the level of performance management, change management must be basically approached through the

whole performance management system from the initial strategic planning, where the performance appraisal system must insure that people are guided towards change, and part of the appraisal must be in terms of how eligible they are in handling change, “the most important aspect to appraise in the change process is the ability to handle and accept and contribute to change and the productivity that the employee offers during this process, in addition to the quality of the production during this phase, this will lead to certain measures that will classify employees in order to manage their performance and guide them to enhance their performance among change implementation” (Interviewees 4 and 7). Worth noting that the “Challenges and Opportunities facing HR in 2017” report quotes Matt Jenkins, head of consulting at Foot down, says it’s important that organizations are aware that employees go through the change curve at different speeds. “Adjust your strategy so people are supported through change and communicate with them as much as possible,” he recommends (People Management Insight, 2017, p. 11). The views are fundamental to reduce resistance though the challenge becomes providing full information and involvement in the process since the initial steps.

Total Rewards (TR)

Korn Ferry, a global organizational consulting firm, contends that “for a rewards strategy to be truly effective, it must be implemented using a change management process that drives understanding, eases adoption and utilization, and keeps a laser focus on delivering intended results” (2019, Para 1). Interviewees in this research, agreeing with the aforementioned, contend that when evaluating the total rewards application which the HR function addresses, it is built up initially in the organization and rarely modified unless there is an external factor like new governmental laws, or an economic inflation in the country that the organization operated in, those rewards systems must be built up initially to motivate change and change agents, “an organization surely must set up a rewards system that supports and motivates change” commented Interviewee 5. Further, Interviewees (1, 3-5) stress that it is extremely important to motivate change agents through financial benefits, whereby Interviewee 3 asserted, “an organization can give bonuses and allowances to encourage people for adapting or initiating change”.

Employee and Labor Relations (ELR) and Risk Management (RM)

In terms of employee and labor relations, Interviewees 6 and 7 stressed that “employee and labor relation is a base for the change process.” The aforementioned is true whereby Andy Swann, a workplace consultant at BDG, quoted in “Challenges and Opportunities facing HR in 2017” report, asserted that “When people own change, they engage positively with it” (p. 10). ELR is fundamental because this function is

responsible for communicating the change process to employees where if the change is not communicated adequately, it cannot be implemented, “during the change process employee and labor relations carries an important role where communicating the change and applying conflict resolution strategies during the change process is essential to ensure a smooth transition” (Interviewee 2 and 3). In addition, ELR role in change strives to ensure communication between management and employees and vice versa, “employee and labor relations aims to establish supporting relations between employees and managers and employees themselves, in addition for setting up good communications processes and conflict resolution techniques” (Interviewees 1, 4 and 5). Furthermore, ELR makes sure that those changes do not have a negative impact on employees where “they can resist them and form informal groups and lobbies and try to negatively affect the change process” (Interviewee 6).

As for risk management, HR management must ensure lowering the risks that comes with change where their role in this function is to “mitigate risks during and after the implementation of change” (All Interviewees), in addition “work life balance is a part of risk management during the change process” (Interviewee 3).

Leadership, HRM, and Change Management

Leadership have pivotal part in the change process, academics and professionals agree on that leadership is essential in the change process, where “without leadership we cannot have change, because we need change to be lasting, a leader enlists a vision and people follow that leader and the change that he wants thus initiating and sustaining the change, and human resources can play the role of the leader because they know people well and they have the ability to convince those people that this change is an opportunity not a threat” (Interviewee 3). Knowing that the style of leadership differs because every situation needs a certain style of leadership but “leadership is a must” (Interviewee 4, 6-7), those styles differ from being autocratic to democratic to transactional but “today’s leadership trend is the servant and transformational leadership styles” (Interviewee 1-3).

“Organizational change is constantly taking place thus it is directly linked to HRM that provides and supports the people managing the change process” (Interviewee 5), human resource management facilitates change management and the link between change management and human resource management is firm and durable and the two concepts are firmly bonded with each other because “whenever change takes place, HR is there to play a key role” (All Interviewees), and when talking about that bond “human resource management must integrate all the changes with the HR functions in order to implement change” (Interviewee 3).

Deshler (2016) reports that, “Forbes in 2013 revealed some surprising insights. For example, although

55% of leaders felt the changes met initial goals, change management initiatives over the long term were successful only 25% of the time. More than 87% of leaders trained their managers to oversee the process of change management, but the changes, once implemented, didn't last. A third of those understood the reasons for organizational change, but they never fully trickled down the message to middle managers or front-line supervisors" (Para 2).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study was carried out to assess the relation between Human Resource Management and Change Management and shed light on how a selection of Lebanese HR professionals deal with the aforementioned relation. In-depth semi structured interviews revealed that the professionals transmitted the actual view of Lebanese companies' practices related to HR management key roles in change management. However, the realities of the matter lead to what Deshler (2016) have reported that "many leaders learn through trial and error how to lead effectively during change. Unfortunately, their learning curve can be at the expense of the organization" (Para 6). The reason, which has been observed in many Lebanese organizations matches what Deshler (2016) found as well, "Having and practicing a change management mentality are two different things. Lots of leaders want change, but only a select few actually help make it happen" (Para 4).

This study was based on an open systems model, whereby the results stressed on the impact of the external and internal environments of the organization, fitting triggers for change management as defined by Moran and Brightman (2000); McMillan (2004); and Robbins & Coulter, (2016). The purpose is continually renewing an organization's direction, structure, and capabilities to serve the ever-changing needs of external and internal customers. In addition, the focus of the study was to identify the role of HR management in the ongoing process of change in organizations. The general role of HR management in the process of change was asserted by the interviewees and summarized by the fact that organizations continuously seek innovating change and keeping up with it to monitor and correct any observed gaps as asserted by Lockwood (2007).

Special emphasis was stressed on the role of coupling the change process to organizational strategy as recommended by Adeniji, Osibanjo, & Abiodun (2013). HR role is generalized by facilitating and supporting change until reaching the desired status. As for the specific role that HRM has in this process it is distributed among its five functions (WFP, HRD, TR, ELR, RM) which were deliberated clearly by the interviewees. HR practitioners and professionals are aware of the barriers which may cause serious problems to the success of the process of change in the organization, where the change would not be positive and sustainable if HR did not act upon its roles

correctly. Interviewees warned against not involving employees fully in the process. Korn Ferry (2019), strongly recommends organizational leaders to "employ critical communications strategies that weave new programs into the fabric of the organization and define and reinforce each person's role in implementing smart rewards strategies for a bright and successful future" (Para 2). Furthermore, employees' engagement is reinforced positively by rewarding success. Korn Ferry stresses on the importance of "Successful rewards strategy depends not only on program design, but how it is communicated and implemented" (ibid).

6. Recommendations

Suggested HRM Roles in Change Framework:

The proposed framework shows the organization and its environment (external and internal) and the pressures (forces) that the environment puts on the organization that in turn triggers the change process where external forces like competition and technological advancement along with the other forces are external pressures that trigger the change process in the organization, also shown are the internal pressures exerted by the organization on the organization that trigger change as change in management and staff, those forces and pressures are as well applied on the HRM department which in turns deal with the change process according to the five major functions (WFP, HRD, TR, ELR, RM), thus implementing in each function the optimum decision to handle the change process as shown in the framework, where HR implements, monitors and guides the implemented process, controls the process by acquiring feedback, and the final step is either to adjust or refreeze the changes implemented, all that process is coordinated and monitored by leaders in the HR department. Also shown in the framework the relation between the HRM department with the other departments (Finance, Operations, Marketing among others) in the organization and the mutual connections between them.

Using this framework as a reference when handling change in any organization by managers and/or human resources professionals can help to plan the steps needed for change management, and when implementing them based on the process shown in the framework can help to pinpoint gaps leading to a smoother transition from status quo to the new desired state in the organization.

Managers and HR professionals must be knowledgeable of the change process, so they can fully understand this framework and plan change based on it, also they must have compatible leadership skills to ensure the smooth transition of state, thus, leading to reduction of resistance and increasing productivity. One golden rule here is the full engagement of employees. People Management Insight (2017), quotes Andy Swann, a workplace consultant at BDG, in "The challenges and opportunities facing HR in 2017" report, saying "It's not a

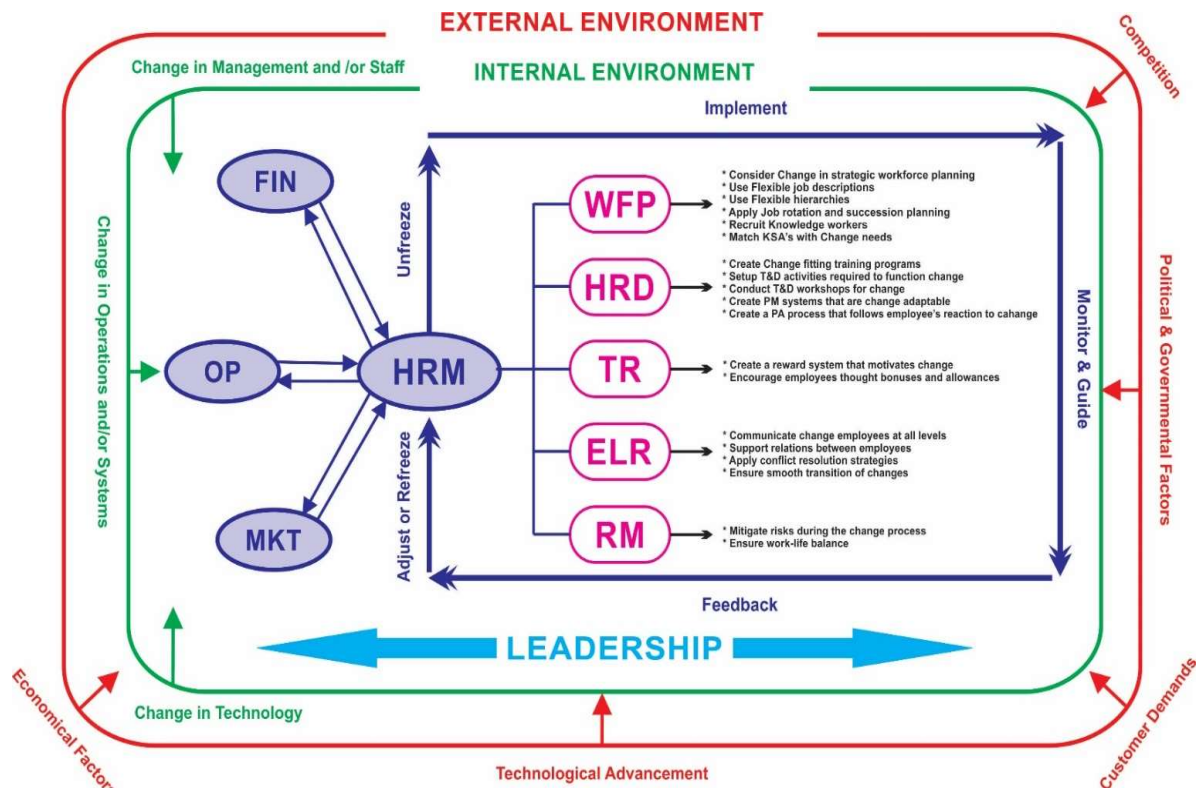


Figure 2. HRM Roles in Change Framework

case of completely changing an organization’s structure to allow constant, natural evolution, it’s more a case of unleashing people through the flow of information up, down and around the organization. It’s not so complicated and when this happens, change can be adopted much more easily”. Swann has five golden rules for companies undergoing a change management program: 1 Put people first; 2 Consider the impact; 3 Give everyone ownership of the change; 4 Communicate constantly and openly; and 5 Think differently” (p. 11).

Another recommendation is to run a full-fledged quantitative study across the economic sector institutions of Lebanon to assess best practices and explore to what extent these organizations may use the approach delineated in the proposed framework.

The findings of this study and the proposed framework could be validated in future studies and research where researchers from Lebanon and abroad are invited to explore and assess to what extent organizations are aware about the change management approaches with the HR function acting as a change agent.

7. Research limitations

This research is exploratory in nature based on qualitative analysis of primary data collected from a small sample of interviewees, a fact that limits the generalization of the outcomes.

8. Implications

The purpose of this research was to assess the role of the HR function in change management. Findings support that not only HR practitioners are concerned but all other HR professionals including consultants as well, though outcomes suggest that awareness about topic as related to the HR profession is high. HR practitioners, professionals and consultants are aware of change management applications in the Lebanese institutions however applications differ and at the same time are highly aware about the future challenges which will necessitate proactivity to get ready with new competencies which will be highly necessary to deal with the continuous change.

This research is considered an eye opener and therefore with positive contribution to the scarce literature about the HR role in the change management in Lebanon. The outcomes are encouraging though exploratory in nature necessitating that researchers in Lebanon as well as the region run similar studies to create a clearer view about the awareness of the HR role and the understanding of change management process and its requirements. Furthermore, explore the readiness of the Lebanese and the regional job markets to deal with changes in all aspects and the needed competencies for consultants and strategists.

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