Leading Changes: Why Transformation Explanation Fails

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ABSTRACT:

This critique is for the article entitled of "Leading changes: why transformation explanation fails" written by Dr. Mark Hughes, who constructs it to illustrate why identification of leadership errors in Kotter's model fails to explain the failure in transformation efforts. Kotter's model of change has developed from a business perspective, for this, the power is concentrated in the top management hands, so it forces people to follow the change or leave the organization. Unlike Kotter, Hughes was able to recognize the changeable world when he looks for organization and leadership changes. Also, Hughes concludes that the Kotter's model does not encourage change rather calls for improvement and has suggested evaluating of his eight-step model especially he does not share his work methods. On the relationship side, Kotter was able to understand the map of relationships inside organizations and how to use it. Change is about influence and both leadership and change is about relationships. Hughes focuses on the reasons behind the change "why" and the goal of change "target", while Kotter emphasizes on how the top management should carry the change. Hughes is more a scientist, but Kotter is more practical.

Keywords: **Leadership; Eight-Step Model; Transformation; Failure; Changes.**

1. Introduction

Organizational change is not just a personal choice but also a necessity for growth and survival. Changes in the environment have serious effects on organizations which requires understanding and absorbing these changes and respond to it (Kotter, 2008). Researchers have developed several theories and models to carry organizations changes Hassan, K. (2019). Kotter's work and the model became the best-selling book ever and one of the most cited research according to google scholar (Clay, 2017). However, since the year of the model creation until now, Kotter still defends and promotes his model as the successful model for changes. Researchers have developed several theories and models to carry organizations changes Hassan, K. (2019). Kotter work and the model became the best-selling book ever and one of the most cited research according to google scholar (Clay, 2017). However, since the year of the model creation until now, Kotter still defends and promotes his model as the success model for changes. However, many researchers disagree with Kotter stating his model is old and out-of-order (Hughes, 2016). In Hughes article entitled of "*Leading changes: why transformation explanation fails*", he illustrates why identification of leadership errors in Dr. John Kotter fails to explain the failure in transformation efforts. Kotter stated there are eight steps leaders needs to follow when they want to make changes. If they do not follow them, they fail. To develop his article, Hughes has reviewed Kotter and other scholars' work such as: Harzing, Bass and Riggio; Bass and Avolio; Podsakoff et. al., and Lewin (Hughes, 2016).

The purpose of this article is to critique Hughes' article by reviewing and analyzing based on the understanding of Kotters work and models. The critique depends on secondary data resources and aims to share in the ongoing discussion over leadership and organization change. This article has the five sections: the second section summarizes the eight step models, followed by Hughes notes in section three. Section four presents both researches (Kotter and Hughes) understanding of change based on equation of why and how. The next section discusses the importance of empirical data in building theories and models, followed by section seven emphasize the fact that changes are possible, and ends with the conclusion of the article.

2. Kotter's Eight-Step Model

To initiate changes, Kotter has developed the eight step-model for leading change over organization to ensure sustainability of businesses. The model aims to create a new vision, structure, culture and behavior and facilitates the leadership succession. The model starts from raising a true sense of urgency among influential people, then establishing a guiding team who leads the change. The guiding team works to spread the urgency for change among other teams in the organizations after formulating a clear vision and strategy. Communicating with this strong team continue with stakeholders to attract more people and cut the resistance against the change. The teams move towards the implementation process to accomplish some wins in short terms. Wins in the short-term is fundamental to accomplishing change in order to start rooting the change and gain more support. Training employees and rewarding staff who endorse and carry change are essential too. Increasing and deepen change initiative to make sure that change is happening via formulating a new culture and new behaviors. This new culture needs alignment with the structure and process with the implementing vision; in other words, institutionalized the change and makes the new behavior steady (Kotter, 1998).

3. Hughes Notes

The author finds that "*leading change*" is an important publication and source for both scholars and practitioners, but it failed to identify the eight - errors and explain why the failure occurs in leading change. The Author states several findings and has supported it from the literature. According to Hughes (2016), Kotter speaks much about the changeable world and situation, but misses this in his publication; it's not changeable though. Also, Kotter does not tell why leading change fails in organizations; he just stated they did not follow the eight steps. In addition, the finding shows that his model has developed from a business perspective, for this, the power is concentrated in the top management hands. This power is willing to fight resistance in a way force people to follow the change or leave the organization. It seems that the Kotter's model is based on a contingency situation which requires more power to make changes. Thus, failing in carrying out the changes is because of the model, not the implementation (Hughes, 2016). How could Kotter be in full confidence of his eight-step model in 2008 more than before? Hughes (2016) criticizes Kotter that his model is based on unstable assumption. Add to that the absence of sharing research methods, so scholars and readers do not know how the model is constructed and cannot validate the results. The article concludes that *leadership change* is an attractive topic to study, but does not fit with the current situation and still stuck in the past. It does not encourage change rather calls for improvement. Hughes acknowledges the Kotter framework and list it within the classical – improvement of leadership, not transformation and has suggested evaluating of his eight-step model (Hughes, 2016).

4. Change: Why and How

In order to write his article and come up with the above main points and a conclusion, Hughes reviewed more than a hundred articles. There are no data coming from primary methods. The author reviews the literature, using secondary resources. Hughes reviewed all Kotter's work and followed his publication history as a timeline from 1982 until 2008. Also, he read, analyzed, classified, compared data, including scholar's opinions argument, and synthesis followed by his own argument. Therefore, the author has supported his work using secondary quantitative data when using statistics for numbers of scholars' citation to show different scholarly work ranked with comparison to Kotter's publications. Hughes (2016), agrees that the two publications for Kotter have ranked high citation in few years, especially his book "leading change" which was published in 1996.

Practitioners and leaders will follow scholars when reviewing their articles. So, it is not enough for them to know that the change has worked, but the most important is to know why to carry the change and why the change has worked (Hughes, 2016). In the first place, organizations will remain under the hijack of their consultants who will tell them to do this according to the model. If they succeeded, then it's ok, but when it fails, the explanation is the change initiative does not follow the model (Hughes, 2016). People who engage in change initiative should know what, then know how and then know why. The implication on the leadership is that leadership can be learned and the door is open for who can adopt changes to become a leader unlike the time that leaders was limited to only a few people. The author suggested evaluating of his eight-step model.

5. Empirical Data

The article informed me that when a model drawn from a theory or empirical data, it looks strong and convinces scholars and practitioners. Empirical data means that a primary data is gathered and constructed from the field. This can easily convince scholars when asking how they can make change, including changing people behaviors, the answer should come from the research, empirical data from the field. Leaders and people engage in development and change needs to have descriptive data to formulate. However, Kotter's supporters can argue that the consultant does gather data from the field to develop them. They argue that his model is based on reality to accomplish change in behavior through techniques of see, feel, and change. No doubt that the model has created from Kotter experiences both consulting and using some research methods as implied by his publication at Harvard. (Hughes, 2016; Harvard Business School, www.hbs.edu).

Having a theory means taking a side, following one of the theories developed by other scholars. Consultants, not all of them, seek data from different employees inside the organizations. Consultants form a plan, set methods for gathering data such as personal interview, focus groups, meetings with key people and top management. Some consultants go behind and seek data for different stakeholders such as clients, citizen, residents, service providers, ... etc. so consultants gather data from the field. Depending on how deep the data is and how it is gathered, it will illustrate the purpose and usage, clarifying the nature of change looking for, light or deep. Theory means guidelines based on research and formulated for practitioners to adopt and carry out. Grounded theory requires huge data to gather from the field, both qualitative and quantitative (Martin et al., 2018). So, it might Kotter construct his theory first, then build his theory. Bhamani (2012) and Hughes (2016) disagree with this speculation, saying Kotter and his publications are absent from research methodology and methods. Readers want to know how he constructs his work, theoretically or empirically. This has to put Kotter always under criticism. Keep in mind that the model is prepared from a business perspective (Bhamani et. al., 2012), for handling threats and hunting opportunities that come from complex- changeable environments. The business environment has been changed several times, but the model still unchanged. Same to the driven forces that lead.

6. Change Is Possible

Practitioners learned that change is possible, they need to have real intent to change and influence over people to make it. Thus, change is about influence and both leadership and change is about relationship. Relationship means people, without them no leadership status can exist, and without people no change can be driven (Al-Ali et al., 2017). Kotter was able to understand the relationship inside organizations and how to use it. He recognized that key people are the change agents inside the company. So, he attracted them using different ways, including benefits for the role of changing.

In regard to honesty, Kotter stated leaders should be honest. Theoretically, practitioners agree with the sentence, but they believe that in the reality and implementation for making change, they need supporters more than being honest. Being honest or not, this is up to the change agents to decide what stories they want to sell to people. Companies, organizations, government officials are always lying. The most important things from their side that they make the change and the tool is selling lies to people (Keley, 2015). Also, human rights are not protected, when it comes to benefits, companies and government do care for what they phrase such as change at any price, causality of change – referring to

employees who are forced to leave or are kicked out from their jobs, causality of war when the government attacks countries and took over their resources, has high voice at my ears. There is no ethic and always there is a legal justification by who are called technocrats, lawyers, who serve under current leaders and leadership style.

In addition, it's clear that the author has successfully used previous literature. Literature is linked together and builds on each other to create a new article. The author cannot write his articles without tens of scholars' work (Abbas & Asghar, 2010). Finally, Greiner (1967) and Glor (2014) agree with his compassion among authors shows that there is similarly for the change pattern. It starts from diagnoses, which will lead the change initiative and ends with the changes. The differences are in the approaches and the tools.

7. Conclusion

In summary, change models seem to have a similar pattern; it starts from diagnoses, finding people who will lead the change initiative, and ending with changes. The differences are in the approaches and the tools. Hughes was right to criticize Kotter model and work, illustrating his model in not suitable to carry out the needed changes. One major weakness in Kotter's model perspective is the dependency on the power of top management where to lead this change in which it can be summarized in this slogan (follow or get punished). Hughes focuses on why the change and where should go while Kotter work is focused on how the top management should carry the changes. Hughes is more a scientist, but Kotter is more practical.

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