THE PERCEPTION OF CHANGE IN UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENTS

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The purpose of this study is to identify perceptual differences between hierarchical levels in organizations in general and in university departments in particular, and to analyze their consequences on the relationships between the need for change, the implementation of change, and the assessment of the success of change.

Three different models are developed and tested. The first model examines the amount of change in the various aspects of change at different types of departments. The second model examines the factor structure of the various actors in the system. The third model tests separately for each perceiver the magnitude of relationship between the different aspects of change and the success of change.

The implications of the models and their empirical tests to future studies of organizational change are discussed and elaborated.

Key words: organizational change; university department; perception

THE PERCEPTION OF CHANGE IN ORGANIZATIONS

Many studies use only one source of information per organization. This information is usually taken from the head of the organization or from heads of certain units within the organization. The assumptions behind the structural analysis of organizations are that the interviewed sources have the necessary information, and all other actors in the system share the same information (or perceptions) and behave accordingly. These assumptions lead to global theories of rational organizational change (Downs, 1967; Hage & Aiken, 1970; March & Simon, 1958). These theories emphasize three elements: determining the need for change, the process of change and its implementation, and the assessment of change and its routinization. The model developed by these studies includes three steps. First, the need for change is deter-
mined by a gap between desired and actual performance. Second, the
initiation and implementation of various aspects of change are influ-
enced by the need for change; the higher the need, the higher the
probability of initiation and implementation. Third, the assessment of
change and its routinization are determined by successful initiation and
implementation of the various aspects of the desired change.

The major failure of the rational model is its assumption that all ac-
tors in the organization perceive change similarly. Under this assump-
tion, the perception of change and its processes remained a relatively
understudied area. Wieland and Ullrich (1976) argue that the perception
of change received generally little attention from behavioral scientists.
Both macro- and micro-research has stressed objective change and has
failed to identify the criteria that people use for making subjective es-
timates of the necessity of change, the process of change, and the as-
essment of change (successful or unsuccessful).

The analysis of the perception of change is important for at least two
reasons. First, organizational decision-making regarding the need for
change, its initiation, and its implementation are dependent on the ac-
curacy of perception of the situation by the various actors in the sys-
tem. Differences in perception may result in adopting the wrong
courses of action and create untoward consequences. Second, research
on the perception of change can assess the cognitive relevance of ob-
jective change by comparing factors which affect the process of change
by various actors in the system.

The purpose of this study is to identify perceptual differences be-
tween two hierarchical levels in university departments and to analyze
their consequences on the relationships between the need for change,
the implementation of change, and the assessment of the success of
change.

TOWARD MODELS OF CHANGE PERCEPTION IN UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENTS

The major variables in our models are:
1. the paradigmatic development of the field
2. the perceivers of change
3. need for change
4. aspects of change
5. success of change

Several studies indicate that the physical and social sciences differ in
their paradigmatic development and that these distinctions account for
different functioning patterns (Lodahl & Gordon, 1972, 1973; Neumann,