ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE:  
A STRATEGY FOR  
SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION

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*ABSTRACT:* This paper examines the major problems and issues in implementing planned organizational change. It highlights the current debates in the literature on change and itemizes the most important factors which need to be considered by those responsible for implementing change. However, in addition the paper argues that while this provides an initial direction in attempting to bring about organizational change there are, nevertheless, limitations in the literature. The paper overcomes these by developing a broader eight steps model based on case study examples which should provide those responsible for change with a realistic framework of implementation.

Organizational change is an important topic. In a rapidly changing economic environment, adaptation to changing circumstances is fundamental to survival. It is not surprising, then, that much has been written about organizational change and the techniques which might be used to implement change successfully. However, anyone interested in understanding this area will meet several problems. Much of what has been written emphasises ideal solutions without seriously evaluating the difficulties and limitations of the ideas suggested. Moreover, the area overall is far from cohesive and in parts confused.

One reason for the lack of cohesion is partly due to differences of interpretation about what is meant by organizational change. The notion of change can be seen as all encompassing and at the most general level it can refer to merely altering something. Hence it is something which occurs continually. Thus, from this perspective, the whole area of organizational behaviour and development might be thought to be concerned with organizational change in one form or another.

However, to see organizational change in this way means that any
discussion of the major ideas and issues will be too broad and superficial. Thus, the focus of the paper has been narrowed and it concentrates on discussing ideas which will be useful to those having to implement major change within organizations. The first part of the paper briefly considers some of the more popular frameworks concerning change, while the latter part presents an eight step change model. This model is developed in the light of a research study which looked at 7 major manufacturing organizations in different sectors of UK industry undergoing contraction/decline as a result of economic recession and provides the change agent with a realistic picture of the critical steps which need to be considered to achieve change successfully.

Current Approaches

In looking at organizational change it will be useful to consider the literature in terms of the following threefold framework.

a) The why of change—why change at all, reasons and expectations about change outcomes.

b) The what of change—what is impacted upon and what it is that is changed.

c) The how of change—how change is brought about in terms of the overall process, style and methods used and the timing involved.

The Why of Change

Attempting to understand why an organization should undertake change in the first place and the expected outcomes of the change is an activity which much of the literature encourages. Indeed, being clear about objectives is an instruction which is applied to a whole range of organizational and individual work issues. While in theory this would seem to be an obvious first step, there is a great deal of debate about whether formulating clear objectives is possible or necessary in considering organizational change (1). Frequently the major reason offered in the literature as to why change should be undertaken is because of a lack of “fit” between the external environment and the internal organizational activity. The aim should then be for the organization to readapt and reestablish an organizational/environmental fit. For private companies the outcome of this if done successfully would be an increase or return to profitability.

However, such an approach seems rarely to be adopted in practice and objectives, if formulated at all, are often based on inadequate information, faulty reasoning and a political process which may demand a