A Research Framework That Examines Work Life Factors of Academics and Transformational Change.

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Research in social and work life factors that are accepting of change and the application of social exchange theory would expand change management theory beyond an examination of factors that cause resistance to change. A new research model is proposed that would identify factors that contribute to facilitating acceptance of dramatic or transformational change. The new model could be applied to organisations considering introducing transformational change to assess the suitability of existing employees to this type of organisational change.

Field of research: Change Management

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to propose a research strategy that explores the work life factors of Australian academics that lead to the acceptance of transformational change. Of particular interest will be the relationship between academics involvement in universities and their perception of how they regard themselves. Transformational change management will be further researched in the light of academics' personal, work related and environmental factors and how these affect a more accepting perception of dramatic change. The context of the research strategy will be the Australian higher education sector. The conceptual framework of the research can, at a later stage, be applied to an organisation that is considering introducing change to assess whether the organisation's employees are suited to an easy transition to dramatic change.

The key research questions will be:

What particular work life factors of academics have a bearing on the acceptance of transformational organisational change?
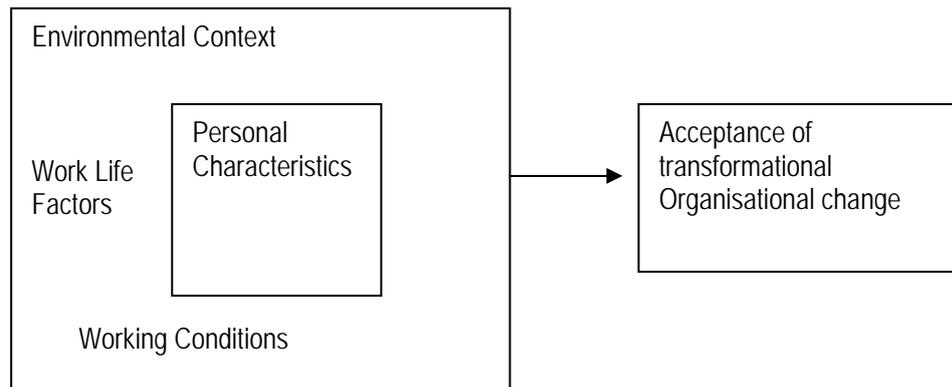- Do the career aspirations and work life history of academics have any bearing on their likely acceptance of transformational change?
- Does the balance of research, teaching and administration and other working conditions for academics have an effect on the acceptance of dramatic organisational change?

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- Does the context of the work environment namely the shift from collegial to managerial management style have an impact on the acceptance of transformational change

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────┐                  ┌──────────────────────┐
│ Environmental Context                    │                  │ Acceptance of        │
│                                          │                  │ transformational     │
│            ┌─────────────────┐           │  ──────────────> │ Organisational change│
│ Work Life  │ Personal        │           │                  │                      │
│ Factors    │ Characteristics │           │                  └──────────────────────┘
│            │                 │           │
│            └─────────────────┘           │
│         Working Conditions               │
│                                          │
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Rationale For The Research Strategy

The key fields of literature that the research strategy will investigate are academic's involvement, transformational leadership and transformational organisational change management. Although considerable research has already been completed in these areas they remain pivotal to the running of a successful organisation. A gap still remains in the literature with respect to the work life factors that contribute to the acceptance of transformational change and the challenge to human resource practitioners is to create a work environment in which employees accept rather than resist transformational change (Iverson 1996).

Academic work environment

The metamorphic changes that universities have been made subject have had a negative impact on the workloads and morale of academics. The new demands that have been placed on universities have impacted on academic resources and have had marked effects on academic staff (Clarke 1997). Higher performance measures with fewer resources are taking their toll on academics (Harman 2003). Academics feel less in control of their own destinies (Ramsden 1998) and they are losing control over the balance between teaching, research and administration (Bellamy 2003). Weller & Van Gramberg's (2007) research shows that employee involvement by academics in the Australian higher education

sector has diminished markedly over the period of transformational organisational change. Further research is needed in order to paint a more accurate picture of what engages academics in the workplace and what work life factors contribute to creating a more positive working environment.

Transformational organisational change and leadership style

Metamorphic organisational change requires a transformational leadership style and so the strain of the change process can have a deleterious impact on workplace morale and job satisfaction(Hart 1996).

Organisational change not only involves modifications, often quite dramatic, to an organisation's structure (Carnall 1986; Dunphy 1990) but just as significantly the capacity of employees to adapt to these changes. Much of the change literature has researched employee resistance to change (Coch 1948; Lewin 1951; Gardner 1987; Dawson 1994). This change literature (Lewin 1951; Bennis 1969) is mostly concerned with incremental organisational change and does not address large-scale strategic change. Later, Golembiewski (1979) studied different levels of change and proposed three categories of change, alpha, beta and gamma. Gamma change described transformational change that involved a quantum shift in work practices. Bartunek (1988) describes transformational change, which is the area this project will focus, as a basic shift in attitudes, beliefs and cultural values. The Organisational Development model (Dunphy 1988; Stace 1991) highlights the participation of individuals as being integral to the change process. Wilson (1992) argued that this model is too normative and overlooks the antecedents to change. The gap in the change literature is again concerned with the lack of empirical evidence concerning the work life factors that lead to the acceptance of transformational change and the success of these programs.

Leadership style

The style of leadership is integral to a successful change process; the greater the change the more significant the leadership style. The research that Hart (1996) presents, investigates the notion that there is a positive relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction in an organisation undergoing dramatic change.

Transformational leaders can mitigate the distress and low morale that can be felt by employees undergoing transformational change and so help them achieve an easier transition to change.

The relationship employees have with their management has a significant effect on the success of transformational organisational change. Dramatic, transformational organisational change brings employees and management closer together as they become more reliant on each other to construct new cultures as a result of the change process (Hendry 1996).

Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory and life story defines social change as a series of negotiated exchanges between involved parties. Homans (1958), the initiator of the theory, saw social behaviour as a process of goods exchange with the intention of arriving at a final equitable balance that would satisfy all parties. The series of exchanges between actors can result in a number of contingencies where actors may need to modify their resources to meet the expectations and needs of their fellow actor. Power plays a role in the exchange process (Emerson 1962; Blau 1964) but it doesn't reside with any one actor. According to Emerson (1962) power resides implicitly in the other's dependency on the exchanged resource.

Social exchange theory will be used in the project's research to help develop a better understanding of what are the work life factors that lead academics in the Australian Higher Education sector to more readily accept transformational change.
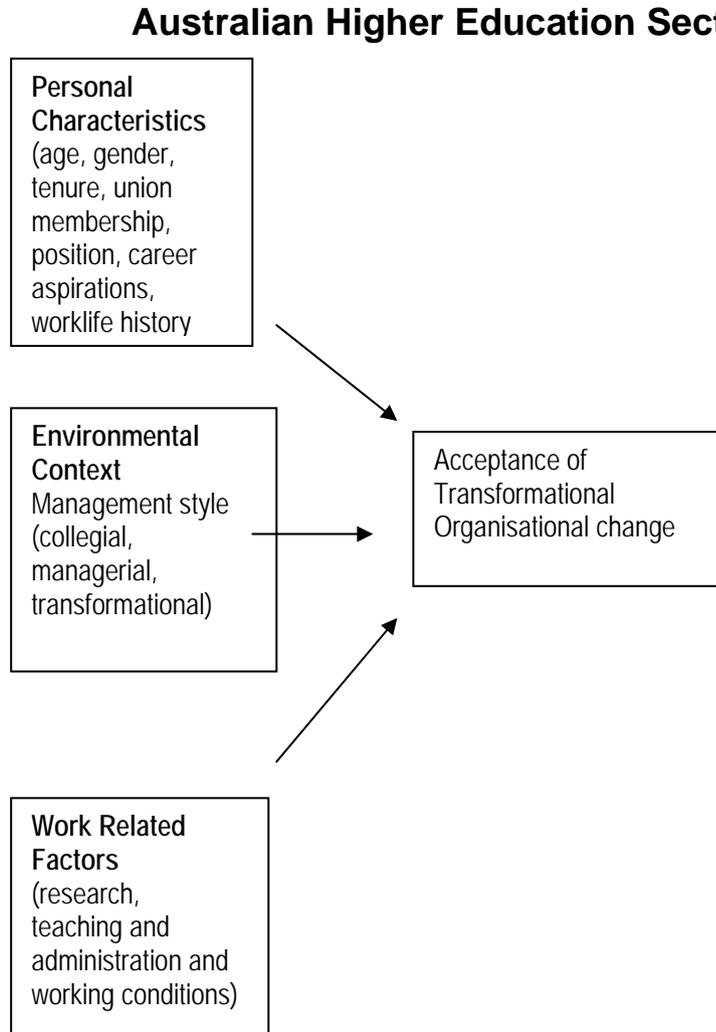
Reciprocity Theory

Reciprocity theory is concerned with fairness and the reward of kind actions and the punishment of unkind ones (Falk et al 2005). In interpersonal exchanges between people there is account taken and evaluation of actions between parties not only in terms of resulting consequences but also in terms of intention. Fair intentions in the interaction between people who are dealing with each other are significant in creating a perception of 'kindness'(Falk et al 2003, McCabe et al 2003).
Reciprocity theory will be used in the project's research to help evaluate the fairness of interactions between employees and management.

Conceptual Framework

The research strategy model will be based on the work related variables derived from current literature on change management and organisational commitment (Porter 1974; Cotton 1990; Iverson and Roy 1994).

Figure 1 provides a graphic illustration of the conceptual framework.

Australian Higher Education Sector

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┌────────────────────┐
│ Personal           │
│ Characteristics    │
│ (age, gender,      │
│ tenure, union      │
│ membership,        │
│ position, career   │
│ aspirations,       │
│ worklife history   │
└────────────────────┘
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                         ╲
┌────────────────────┐    ┌────────────────────┐
│ Environmental      │    │ Acceptance of      │
│ Context            │    │ Transformational   │
│ Management style   │ →  │ Organisational     │
│ (collegial,        │    │ change             │
│ managerial,        │    └────────────────────┘
│ transformational)  │    ╱
└────────────────────┘   ╱
                        ╱
┌────────────────────┐
│ Work Related       │
│ Factors            │
│ (research,         │
│ teaching and       │
│ administration and │
│ working conditions)│
└────────────────────┘
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(Figure 1)
Specific areas of interest and gaps in extant research are as follows:

Personal Characteristics

 A body of research (Cordery 1991; Cordery 1993) has established that age and tenure have a negative impact on the acceptance of change. It is hypothesised that this is true of academics but remains to be tested with respect to transformational change. Research on gender and its relationship with organisational change (Cordery et al. 1991; Cordery et al. 1993) has had

inconsistent findings. A gap remains in the literature as to whether women cope better with transformational organisational change than men, particularly academics. The other characteristics, (union membership, position, career aspirations and worklife history) are included to highlight differences in motivation and stress related issues between academics.

Environmental Context

Management style and the way managers use people in the organisation have a significant impact on employees' motivation and morale and employees expressing their voice in the workplace (Marchington et al 2005). Purcell's (2008) research looks at the links between people performance management and organisational performance. Zeffane (1994) and Deery (1992) argue that a harmonious industrial relations climate represented a feature of management style and is related to organisational commitment. There has been significant research completed on 'top down' management style that examines the effect managers have on employees but there has been little research completed on the 'bottom up' effect of why employees respond to particular management styles and not others particularly with respect to transformational change.

Australian Universities have undergone recent transformational change and one outcome of this change is the movement from a collegial to a more managerialist style of organisational control. A collegial management style is participative and inclusive whereas a managerialist style has a more narrow decision making focus (Miliken 2001).This has had a negative impact on the working environment of most academics but others have embraced this change. Further research is needed to investigate why some academics have a more positive attitude to transformational organisational change and whether this has to do with managerial style.

Work Related Factors

An academic's ability to balance the demands of research, teaching and administration duties has a significant impact on their autonomy in the work place and their response to their working conditions. Autonomy is a measure of the amount of control employees have over their work and remains a significant buffer against work related stress (Miller 1990; Ray 1991)

The increased work demands create an imbalance of time spent on research, teaching and administration and can have a negative impact on morale and attitude to change. Academics are becoming increasingly dispirited, demoralised and alienated from their organisation (Halsey 1992; McInnis 1992) and so further research is needed to explore how academics are coping with their workloads and why some academics accept these dramatic changes in working conditions.

Proposed Research Methodology

The research strategy will take a constructionist epistemological approach and begin by requesting academics at two (Melbourne and Monash) out of the eight Group of Eight universities to participate in a series of semi structured interviews that seek to investigate how their work life factors impact on their attitude to the

transformational change recently experienced by their university. It is envisioned that there will be 10-15 academics from each of the two universities who will be willing to participate in the research. The final selection of research candidates, probably between 20 and 30, will represent a cross section of all academics inclusive of gender balance, different academic levels, different age groups and length of service at the university. The semi-structured interviews will be flexible, iterative and continuous as characterised by Rubin and Rubin (1995) in their qualitative interviewing guidelines and will later form case studies.

The two universities are chosen from the Group of Eight to maintain homogeneity of sample as well as provide a contrast between the older Melbourne University and the relatively new Monash. The objective is to test factors identified from the extant literature that lead to the acceptance of transformational organisational change and identify any new factors not researched previously. The analysis will result in the classification of the four universities in accordance to academics' perception of the success of the transformational change process. To further validate the interview findings a series of focus groups will be conducted in an effort to provided better understanding of the issues raised in the case study research.

The following key areas will be examined in the research model to isolate the work life factors that most contribute to the acceptance of change and explore to what extent academics have accepted the transformational organisational change process at their university.
- Degree to which the personal attributes, work related and environmental factors impact on acceptance of transformational organisational change.
- Evidence of transformational leadership style and general acceptance of dramatic change process

Research results will be triangulated with extant theories to lead to new theory extension and adoption. The identification of new factors that lead to new theory formation incorporates grounded theory (Glaser 1967). Grounded theory utilises qualitative research methodology with the intention of generating theory from the data derived from the research process.

Conclusion

Much has already been researched in the area of change management but little has been done recently with respect to investigating transformational change using the methodology derived from social exchange theory. An investigation of the work life factors of academics that result in an acceptance of transformational change would help address gaps in the existing literature. The research strategy that has been proposed provides a structure that can be later applied to further analysis as well as contribute to further theory building in the area of change management.

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