MAIN RESEARCH TRENDS IN CHANGE MANAGEMENT: ANALYSIS OF EMPIRICAL STUDIES PUBLISHED IN 2011-2016

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ABSTRACT

This paper identified the most recent focal themes on change management from 2011 to 2016. The fundamental aim of this paper is to identify common themes from a broad range of change management literature as published in peer reviewed international journals. In its content it seeks to provoke thought within the profession in order to better understand current trends, basic principles and dimensions of the change. Ultimately, it is intended to inform practitioner actions and stimulate scholarly debate on the common underlying themes in change management. The approach and design of this paper identified 100 studies on change management from peer reviewed journal publications. The studies identified formed the primary data. These journal articles were searched through the internet, and classified and coded based on: Source of the journal, year of publication, key words, purpose of the study, approach design and methodology, and major findings. The approach and design of this paper identifies recent and significant developments documented as empirical studies in the field of research and learning on change management. Analysis and findings of the studies identified 10 major thematic areas: Change readiness, communication, corporate governance, culture, critical success factors, human resource functions and people issues, leadership, models, design and approaches to change, resistance and theoretical analysis. The findings revealed the top three thematic areas as: models, designs and approaches to change (56%), human resource functions and people issues (38%), and theoretical analysis (26%). Change readiness, communication and corporate governance constituted less that 10% in their respective thematic areas equally. In its quest, this paper has examined topical change management themes, focusing on the distinction and typology thematic areas on change management studies in the last five years. By and large, this study highlights core areas of change management as a profession and evolving discipline. The major perspective this paper brings is in the area of professional practice development and a consolidated overview of body of knowledge in change management in the recent past (five years) and contributes to the concept of knowledge management, defined as the sum of knowledge generally accepted on a subject for a particular discipline that would be expected of any professional within that field (Hacker, 2009).

Key Words: Change management, emerging themes, empirical studies

Introduction

Change management continues to dominate the field of business, management and organisational development, and is a common buzz word in today's world. In a world that is characterised by the constant evolution of business goals and strategies, change is inevitable and understating the dynamism of managing change is essential. Change cannot just be allowed to happen: as a discipline, it needs to be managed. To achieve that means understanding, understanding the changing theoretical foundations of change, what it is and how to use it to be effective. To this end, a number of studies have been done that form a foundational reference building block for the body of knowledge of change management. Previous studies have demonstrated that change management is emerging as a rapidly growing discipline being increasingly deployed on a global scale by all types of organizations in different organisation perspectives and conditions.

This study therefore sought to review, analyse and classify change management studies published between 2011 and 2016 into dominant themes Practical implication of this paper is to provide an empirical review of the thematic areas that are emerging or constantly being applied. The implication of this it to guide and contribute to the required alignment for change management discipline. This can only be achieved by first understanding areas of change to improving the quality of change management initiatives. In essence knowledge management in change management practise is essential.

The sources of data and the scope

The primary source of publications reviewed were journal papers. It is also imperative to note that the research conducted a random search to identify the studies. Key journal sources were; Emerald Journal, of Change Management, International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management, The TQM Journal, International Journal of Operations & Production Management, Society and Business Review, The International Journal of Logistics Management and Journal of Management Development. Based on purpose of this study, this paper is not intended to constitute a comprehensive change management literature review or empirical review of previous studies. It is an attempt to provoke ideas about the mega trends of themes in change research management through the identification and classification of common themes in related journal literature of studies done between 2011 and 2016.

Findings and Discussions

The discussion on findings has been categorised in two major sections. The first section being background information. This sections depicts analysis on the data source in terms of year of publication and major categorisation of thematic areas in terms of number of studies identified in each thematic area. The second section discusses each of the thematic areas in details.

Background information

A total of 100 studies were identified as published in the last five years on the topic of change management. Table 1 below represents the data of the articles published based on the year of publication.

Table 1: Summary of the studies by year of publication

Year	Count	Percentages
2016	36	36%
2015	23	23%
2014	10	10%
2013	7	7%
2012	10	10%
2011	14	14%
Total	100	100%

As illustrated in table 1 above, there is an increase in the number of publications on change management by an average of 13 % from 2014 to 2016,representing a significant increase on the body of knowledge on the subject of change management. Table 2 below represent summary of thematic areas identified in 100 studies reviewed.

Table 2: Summary of thematic areas

Thematic area	count	percentage
Change readiness	7	7%
Communication	7	7%
Corporate governance	3	3%
Culture	17	17%
Critical success factors	14	14%
Human resource functions and people issues	38	38%
Leadership	16	16%
Models, design and approaches to change	56	56%
Resistance to change	13	13%
Theoretical analysis	26	26%
Total	100	100

Change readiness

Seven percent of the studies (seven out of the 100) were on the theme of change readiness. Elias (2009), defined change readiness as the process of altering the cognitions of employees in order

to facilitate organizational change. However, it is imperative to note that the first necessary course of action in any change initiative is creating "readiness for change" in an organization (Armenakis et al. 1993). As such, the distinguishing thematic areas under this theme focused on: impact of change readiness, assessment of organisation readiness, influence of organisation culture on change reediness, positioning change readiness and assessing awareness creation for change.

Communication

Effective communication is considered an integral part of successful implementation of change. Studies have found out that the manner in which organizations communicate during a change initiative have significant effects on the success of change in programme (Goodman and Truss, 2006).

Findings revealed that 7% of the studies reviewed were on communication. Key aspects being: leaders' communication styles, emotions, improving change management through communication, reducing resistance to change, successfully managing change during uncertain times and managing continuity of change. Communication is a diverse area. At the centre of communication and change management is the interesting study done by (Hutt, Walker and Frankwick, 1995) on "Hurdle the Cross-Functional Barriers to Strategic Change". This study provided a detailed analysis on communication barriers that lead to information distortion or misinterpretations in a change programme

Corporate governance

The concept of corporate governance is one broad area that concerns every organisation, key purposes being accountability and transparency in relation to the organisation's internal and external stakeholders. Any change management initiative impacts directly or indirectly on the stakeholders. The theme of corporate governance and change management was identified in 3% of the studies. Key aspects of the studies were: Corporate governance changes, firm strategy and compensation mechanisms (Gloria, Jaime and Ramón, 2016), and patterns of strategic change (Marta, Galán-González, and Barroso, 2015). The relationship between studies on corporate governance and change management needs to be established. In the last ten years or so much attention has been devoted to the study of corporate governance as evidenced in empirical corporate governance review of 1,377 studies (Bebchuket al.2009)

Culture

Armstrong (2011), strongly emphasised the proposition that the effectiveness of culture change programmes largely depends on the quality of change management processes. Organisation culture dominates the practice of change management as evidenced in 17% of the studies. Application of the concept of culture in organisation varies in definition. According to Smircich (1983), culture can be simply defined in a number of different ways, but the universally accepted definition is that culture is the glue that makes up a common identity between different

individuals, which for this matter is the organisation implementing the change. Of the studies identified, the theme of change management and culture were around; cultural change management, corporate legacy, cultural analysis, employee resistance to change and culture, empirical investigation of the influence of organizational culture, meaning and identity at the workplace among others.

Critical success factors

A number of studies focused on the outcome of change management processes. In essence, these studies attempted to investigate the critical success factor of a change initiative or those factors that are integral to successful change. These studies also tested the application of models and theories of change. Studies in this category constituted 14% and were on: Managing change in hard times, participation of management and its influence, sustainability of change, successfully managing change during uncertainty, reconfiguring change management, change and transformation and leading indicators for change. In terms of critical success, there are also studies on industry wide change management. One example of such a study is one in health sector by (Kelliher and Parry, 2015) that provides a broad perspective on a sectorial approach with lots of lessons to be learnt.

Human Resource function and people issues

The role of HR in managing change can never be underestimated. Critical themes around HR function and related people issues constituted 38%, the second largest category of the thematic areas. Griffin, (2006) identified the role of management functions in the process of managing the organizational resources that include: financial resources, information resources, physical resources, and human resources. As a critical dimension of change management, the Human Resource management function continues to play a strategic role in the success of an organization to be more adaptable, resilient, agile, and customer-focused to succeed (Ullah, 2012).

Thematic topics relating to change management included: role of HRM functions, connecting HRM and change management, identifying critical HR practices impacting employee perception and commitment, hiring the ultimate game changers, sustainable outsourcing, employee impact under continuing change, pay parity, team diversity, creating leaders for successful change, and the importance of proactivity and vitality. Other thematic areas relating to people issues were identified as: Understanding the integration mechanisms, understanding employee impact on continued change, understanding emotions in a change environment, change management in mergers and acquisitions, fostering inter-organizational collaboration, understanding people's discretionary behaviours, multicultural personality, and readiness for organizational change. The ways in which people change was described by Bandura (1986).People are central in any change and as such people's reaction to change can be unpredictable, hence success of any change initiative is largely dependent on people.

Leadership

Leadership is central in change management. Of the studies identified, 16% focused on leadership in various dimensions. These included: Linking empowering leadership and change, managerial perspective influences, leader communication style, mediating effects of managers, effective leadership in managing change in public sector, creating leaders for successful change, management decision on change, top management team diversity and strategic change, academic leadership and leading international change. Among types of leadership for change, transformational leadership is found to be most effective regarding numerous criteria that enable change such as employee effectiveness, satisfaction, organizational commitment, and extra effort (Judge and Piccolo, 2004; Lowe, Kroeck and Sivasubramania, 1996).

Models, design and approaches to change

Living in a world of constant growth in the global business environment, where change has become the norm for organizations to sustain their success and existence, calls for continuous review of the models and approaches to managing change (Al-Haddad and Kotnour 2015). Studies focusing on models, design and approaches to change dominate the number of thematic areas identified: 56%. These included studies such as: review of system diagnostic model of change, re-positioning of change management, intelligent approaches for an organisation's management system change, adaptive change approach, knowledge management strategy for successful change, change management frameworks, resistance to change, patterns of strategic change, models for successful change, lessons on successful transformational change, intervention methodologies, case studies on models, designing organisational change, among other related topics. The application of existing change management models seem to be continuously evolving as organisations seek the approach that will bring the best results. This can be seen from the fact that more than half of the studies investigated or examined change management approach and designs.

Resistance to change

The shock of the new, economic fears, inconvenience, uncertainty, symbolic fears, threat to interpersonal relationships, threat to status or skills and competence, are all fears identified in the studies. Studies on resistance to change dominate the thematic areas as 13% of the studies identified focused on topical areas as resistance. Topical areas under this thematic area included: Shifting the paradigm: re-evaluating resistance to organizational change, behavioural perspectives on resistance to change, evolving responses, critical success factors, moderating effect of employee resistance to change and the role of participative management on overcoming resistance to change.

Theoretical analysis

A considerable number of studies constituting 26% focussed on theoretical analysis. There are several theories of change that define the building blocks required to achieve long-term implementation of the change initiative. Many of these theories originate from leadership and change management gurus and have evolved as tried and tested in various contexts. In these studies the application and review of theoretical models were identified specifically around: Exploring the perceived value of social practice theories, analysis of complexity of large scale change, socio-materiality of designing organizational change, critical analysis of organisation change practices, meaning and identity of work place change, factors affecting institutional change, change management and entrepreneurship, team learner styles and change management

Conclusion

In this paper 100 studies published between 2011 and 2016 on change management were identified. It is important to note that there has been an increase in the number studies on change management in the last five years. This demonstrates that there is growth in the body of knowledge of change management. The analysis of this study identified 10 major thematic areas of focus. Based on this study, the top three focal themes contributing in the body of knowledge of change are; models, designs and approaches to change, human resource functions and people issues, and theoretical analysis.

The implication of the findings of this study contributes to the body of knowledge of change management. To a great extent, the analysis in this paper has examined change management topical themes. The studies examined are of divergent backgrounds and encompass many situations that are distinguished by applying certain dimensions to establish 'typologies of change'. By categorising major themes into 10 major categories, this paper has provided a focal basis for knowledge management at a global level of the discipline that gives an opportunity for a drill down for the various thematic areas identified.

This paper has therefore presented themes on the current trends and typology of evolution on change management studies in the last five years. By and large, a summary of this study highlights core areas of change management as critical concern as a profession and a discipline that is evolving and is in dire need of knowledge management from the perspective of a growing professional practice.

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