Towards a Conceptual Change Model to Support Organizational Change Efforts

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Abstract

“Perception is reality” – Lee Atwater

Many projects fail because employees and managers have different understandings of project “success” or “value”. Other projects fail because managers are unable to effectively align organizational values with those of their employees. This problem is widely understood, but there is little empirical research that specifies the nature and effect of this variation in the way managers and employees define project “success” and “value”. This research provides empirical support for the assumed difference between managers and employee definitions of project “success” and “value”. This research also proposes a novel approach to organizational change that harnesses empirical knowledge of the gap in project success definition, to develop a strategy for organizational change that is based on changing individual mindset. This approach deviates from the current one-size-fits all, group-focused approach, in which over 70 percent of change projects result in failure.

The objective of this thesis is twofold. First, definitions of successful organizational change projects are characterized by individuals at different levels of the Rasmussen Socio-technical Framework, and by individuals from academic and non-academic organizations. Second, an approach is developed for promoting individual conceptual change as a means to achieve self-sustaining improvements that propagate through the organization. Given the nascence of this work on achieving conceptual change as a means for organizational-level change, there is a need for a model that guides research and practice. Furthermore, there is a need to address other factors including metacognitive, motivational, and affective processes that are integral to facilitating conceptual change. Research findings identify key discrepancies between how individuals at different Rasmussen socio-technical levels define value in change projects as well as variations between individuals from academic and non-academic organizations. Furthermore, this thesis highlights the importance of ensuring both the human and technical aspects of a project are satisfied, as well as discussing the applicability of the proposed conceptual change model to an organizational change project. Conclusions provide suggestions for managers and academic professionals to improve the success of organizational change projects.

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