Culture Change Drivers in the Public Sector

Karen Ann Somerville and Lorraine Dyke
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Abstract: Continuous change has become the norm for many organizations (Rossi, 2006). Unfortunately, success rates, even for small scale change initiatives, are unimpressive (e.g., Hirschhorn, 2002). These poor success rates may be attributed to the lack of clear guidance regarding the key independent variables, or change drivers, that are available for manipulation in order to effect change (Porras & Hoffer, 1996; Kemelgor, Johnson & Srinivasan, 2000). According to Rodrigues (2006), very little is known about how organizational culture changes over time and what drives the process. We report on a study of a large-scale organizational culture change initiative in the Canadian federal government. In a sample of 51 organizations, we examined changes in nine dimensions of organizational culture over a six-year time period. Seven possible drivers of culture change were examined: vision, leaders’ actions, changes in leadership personnel, turnover of personnel, changes in human resources practices, communication, and enabling changes in structure and processes. Data on these change drivers were collected from multiple sources including questionnaires sent to each organization and data held by government central agencies. Results suggest that the key drivers of organizational culture change are changes in leadership personnel and changes in human resources practices. Contrary to much of the literature, our results suggest that changes in leadership personnel may have a negative impact on culture change.

Keywords: Organizational Culture, Organizational Change, Change Drivers, Public Service, Change Management

Organizational Culture began to attract widespread attention from researchers in the 1980s (Schumacher, 1997) and interest in organizational culture has exploded in the past 20 years (Sorensen, 2002). Various researchers have found that organizational culture is an important means of enhancing organizational performance by securing greater commitment and flexibility from employees (Kanter, 1983; Willmott, 1993). Alvesson (2002) suggests that most contemporary organizations regard organizational culture as a crucial element of good performance.

Culture is manifested at different levels in organizations. Schein (1999) identified three levels of culture including: 1) artefacts, such as the visible organizational structures and processes; 2) espoused values, such as strategies, goals and philosophies; and 3) underlying assumptions, which are the taken-for-granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts and feelings that are the ultimate source of values and actions. Given the complexities of organizational culture, culture change is a significant challenge (Cummins & Worley, 1997).

Organizational Change in the Public Sector
The public sector faces many of the same forces for change that apply to the private sector such as new
information and communication technologies (Larson & Coe, 1999); globalization (Isaac-Henry, Painter & Barnes, 1993); and changes in the economic, social and political environment (Isaac-Henry, Painter & Barnes, 1993). As a result, much of the general organizational change literature is relevant for the public sector. The public sector also, however, faces some unique external pressures. A key consideration relates to the election process which can lead to the rapid turnover of government leaders (Lau, 2000) and which often shifts the focus of government leaders away from operational issues (Osborne & Gaebler, 1993). Given that successful change often takes an extended period of time (Nadler & Tushman, 1997), this frequent refocusing is a key issue for governmental organizations undertaking change.

The majority of public service change initiatives until the end of the 1980s were intended as fine-tuning (Goodstein & Burke, 1991). By the 1990s, however, research was suggesting that the public sector required deeper, sustained change (Taylor, Snellen & Zuurmond, 1997). A study conducted by the OECD (1993) concluded that "radical" change in public service organizational culture was required if efficiency and effectiveness were to be further improved. Ingstrup and Crookall (1998) argued that change management, not historically a key competency of the public service, was now a necessity. Despite a wealth of advice related to change management, successful fundamental change is rare (Reger, Mullane, Gustafson & Demarie, 1994). Success rates, even for small scale change initiatives, are unimpressive (Hirschhorn, 2002). Sirkin, Keenan and Jackson (2005) estimated that two out of three transformation efforts failed. Dismal results for change management initiatives have also been noted in the public sector. For example, Savoie (1998) found that rarely have public sector change efforts experienced success. Various reasons have been cited for these failures, such as a flawed guiding theory of change (Beer, Eisenstat, & Spector, 1990), insufficient attention to various organizational systems (Porras & Hoffer, 1996), the absence of change management competence (Griffith, 2002), and a poor understanding of the independent variables that are available to management to effect the change (Kemelgor, Johnson & Srinivasan, 2000). The internal levers of organizational change which are available to the organization’s management, such as leadership and human resources practices, are typically referred to as change drivers (Whelan-Berry, Gordon & Hinings, 2003). It is the drivers of organizational culture change that are the focus of the current study.

Research Model and Hypotheses

An analysis of previous research on organizational change and culture change, in the private and public sectors, revealed five main categories of change drivers: vision, leadership, human resources, communication, and enabling changes in structure and processes. The model depicted in Figure 1 below includes seven independent variables related to these five drivers of culture change. Each driver and the associated hypotheses are discussed in turn below.

![Figure 1: Change Driver Model](image-url)
Vision involves developing a clear picture of the desired end state of the change initiative (Schein, 2000). Researchers studying change have noted that organizations with clear and persuasive visions are more likely to be successful in transforming their culture (Harvey & Brown, 1996; Kotter, 1995).

H1: The more clear and persuasive the vision, the greater the cultural change.

Leaders can facilitate change by actions, such as displaying behaviours that are supportive of the change initiative (Schein 1992), making it possible for others in the organization to make necessary changes (Hennessey, 1998), and managing resistance to the change initiative (Beckhard & Harris, 1987). Some researchers have hypothesized that changes in leadership personnel are necessary to facilitate culture change as new leaders are more likely to introduce new values and practices (Dyer, 1984; Kotter & Heskett, 1992).

H2: The more that the organizational leaders take actions to lead the change initiative, the greater the cultural change.

H3: The more changes in leadership personnel, the greater the cultural change.

Human resources relates to a number of practices such as recruiting and selecting new employees (Schneider, Gunnarson & Niles-Jolly, 2001), socializing newcomers (Cummings & Worley, 1997), rewarding employees (Porras & Hoffer, 1996) and training employees (Zamutto & O’Connor, 1992). Changes in these practices can facilitate changes in the attitudes and values held by employees. Turnover of personnel can also be a source of new cultural values (Schwartz & Davis, 1981).

H4: The greater the employee turnover, the greater the cultural change.

H5: The more modifications to human resources practices that are made to support the change initiative, the greater the cultural change.

Communication is an important means of increasing organizational members’ understanding of, and commitment to, a change initiative (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). Communication effectiveness includes a number of considerations such as the content of communications (Schein, 1985), the frequency of communication (Schumacher, 1997), and the channels of communication employed (Sathe, 1985).

H6: The more extensive the communication about the change initiative, the greater the cultural change.

Enabling changes in structure and processes include numerous actions that may be taken to support the goals of the change initiative, such as developing performance measures related to the change initiative (Cameron & Green, 2004), restructuring the control systems (Nadler & Tushman, 1990), and modifying the organizational structure (Hall, Rosenthal & Wade, 1993). Previous researchers (Fernandez & Rainey, 2006; Nadler & Tushman, 1989), have hypothesized that without alignment of all organizational subsystems, fundamental cultural transformation will not occur.

H7: The more modifications to organizational structure and organizational processes that are made to support the change initiative, the greater the cultural change.

The seven independent variables in the research model – vision, leaders’ actions, changes in leadership personnel, turnover of employees, changes in human resources practices, communication, and enabling changes in structure and processes – are all hypothesized to be directly associated with the dependent variable of organizational culture change.

The Research Context

The focus of this research is a large-scale Canadian federal government culture change initiative which began in 1999. According to the government minister in charge of the initiative, the goal was:

“… a workplace culture where public service values are clear and all employees are treated with dignity and respect…” (Treasury Board of Canada, 2002b).

Public statements indicated that the government expected the culture change to take 10 years (May, 2003).

Integral to this change effort were Public Service Employee Surveys (PSES). Beginning in 1999, all public service employees were invited to express their views on a wide range of issues reflective of the health of the overall public service, as well as individual organizations and work units. The PSES has been administered three times using the same general approach – in 1999, 2002 and 2005 - generating very large data bases of approximately 100,000 responses for each survey.

In conjunction with these surveys, Canadian federal public service organizations undertook a variety of initiatives to foster change such as communication enhancements, employee services and management training. The central agency charged with promoting the change initiative identified over 100 initiatives developed in response to the 1999 initiatives alone.
Methods and Measures

The values and assumptions which comprise organizational culture reside in individuals yet can only be understood to constitute “a culture” when they are shared. Thus culture is inherently an aggregated phenomenon. Further, change drivers managed by organizational leaders such as vision and leader actions are typically applied across the entire organization. Thus the unit of analysis in this research is the organization.

Four sources of data, including a mix of primary and secondary data, were used to test the model. Measures of the dependent variable were obtained from the federal government database of 1999 and 2005 PSES results. These surveys included various indicators of organizational culture which were aggregated across all respondents from each organization. By comparing the two time periods, changes in culture over time were identified. There were 51 Canadian federal government organizations for which data on both the 1999 and 2005 PSES results were available. These organizations constitute the research sample.

The other three sources of data provided information on drivers of culture change. Organization charts were used to identify changes in leadership personnel. A government central agency provided turnover statistics for the relevant organizations. The final source of data was a questionnaire that was sent to the sample organizations to assess vision, leaders’ actions, changes in human resources practices, activities related to communication, and enabling changes in structure and processes. Figure 2 provides an overview of these data sources in relation to the research model.

Measures of Organizational Culture

Researchers (e.g., Lim, 1995; Schein, 2000) have noted a variety of shortcomings in the measurement of organizational culture. These include disagreement regarding how culture should be measured, an absence of published data on the validity of questionnaires, and generally poor psychometric properties of these instruments (Lim, 1995). In contrast, organizational climate has a long history of measurement validation (Schein, 2000). Although organizational climate measures do not tap into unconscious beliefs, they do assess the first two levels of Schein’s (1999) three levels of culture – visible structures and processes, plus espoused values. Thus following the advice and practice of a number of researchers (e.g., Desatnick, 1986; Goodman & Svyantek, 1999; Pat-
terson, et al., 2005), our measures of culture change are based on existing measures of organizational climate.

Thirty-nine questions from the 1999 PSES were repeated in 2005 and were considered for inclusion in the research. These questions were first sorted into groups that reflected various dimensions identified in past research. The final assignment of items to culture dimensions was based on decision rules that included comparability to other published scales, scale reliability calculated on the individual level data (Cronbach’s alpha from the 1999 data), a unidimensional factor structure in factor analysis of the individual level data, and face validity. This resulted in measures of nine organizational culture dimensions which are listed in Table 3 along with the Cronbach’s alphas from the 2005 data. To create the dependent variable measures, the individual data was aggregated across all individuals in each organization and the items within each dimension were averaged. Finally, the 1999 values were subtracted from the 2005 values to derive the measure of culture change. In addition to the 9 dimensions listed in Table 3, a measure of global culture change across all dimensions was also examined.

### Table 3: Reliabilities of Culture Dimensions (2005 Data)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture dimensions</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clarity of goals</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance feedback</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive supervision</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career development</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairness</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workload</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovation and flexibility</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: n = approximately 106,000 individuals

### Measures of Change Drivers

Two change drivers were assessed using secondary sources. Data on the annual rate of turnover for each organization was provided by a government central agency and was averaged across the 6-year time period. Changes in leadership personnel were measured by comparing organizational charts from 1999 and 2005. The rate of change for the leadership team was expressed as the percentage of 2005 leadership team members who were not on the team in 1999. The leadership team included all managers at or above the level of a director general, that is, someone who would manage a major branch of the organization.

The other five change drivers were measured using 49 questions contained in a questionnaire developed for this research. After pretesting with senior government officials, questionnaires were sent to the senior civil servant in each of the 51 sample organizations. The questions were explicitly focused on the period 1999 to 2005 with frequent prompts reminding respondents of the time frame under consideration.

### Control Variables

Two control variables were included in this research: organization size and organization type. Smaller organizations may be less bureaucratic (Pugh, Hickson, Hinings & Turner, 1969), enabling them to change more quickly (Bloodgood, 2006). Organizational size was measured by the number of employees. These data were provided by a government central agency.

The most common type of organization included in this study was a government department, but there were also other types of organizations such as agencies, tribunals, commissions, a court, and a Crown corporation. These other organizations typically enjoy greater autonomy and flexibility than government departments due to less onerous rules and less political interference. While some of the agencies, tribunals, and commissions have a smaller number of employees, organizational type is distinct from organizational size and thus was included as a separate control variable.
Analyses

Bivariate correlations were first reviewed. Only those independent variables which were significantly correlated with the dependent variables were included in the regression analyses. Hierarchical regressions predicting each of the culture dimensions were run in two steps. In the first step, the control variables were entered if they were significantly correlated with the dependent variable. In the second step, the independent variables which had significant bivariate correlations were entered into the equation.

Results

Forty-four organizations completed the survey. The reliability of the five independent variables measured in the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Reliabilities of Independent Variables Included in the Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables Included in the Questionnaire</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vision</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders’ actions</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in human resources practices</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enabling changes in structure and processes</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since data for the other independent and dependent variables were available for the organizations that did not complete surveys, we chose to retain all organizations in the analysis, in order to preserve power. Thus the subsequent analysis is based on all 51 organizations from the sample frame. Table 5 displays the means scores for the seven change drivers.

Table 5: Means of the Independent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vision (out of 7)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders’ actions (out of 7)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in leadership personnel (cumulative percent)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnover of personnel (annual rate, percentage)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in human resources practices (out of 7)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication (out of 7)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enabling changes in structure and processes (out of 7)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 summarizes the significant correlations between the dependent variables, the control variables and the independent variables.
Table 6: Significant Correlations amongst the Control Variables, the Independent Variables and the Dependent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variables</th>
<th>Organization size (CV)</th>
<th>Organization type (CV)</th>
<th>Changes in leadership personnel (IV)</th>
<th>Changes in human resources practices (IV)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Changes in clarity of goals</td>
<td></td>
<td>.36*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in learning</td>
<td>-.37*</td>
<td>.28*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in involvement</td>
<td>-.33*</td>
<td>.29*</td>
<td>-.40**</td>
<td>.33*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in workload</td>
<td></td>
<td>.31*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in innovation and flexibility</td>
<td>-.29*</td>
<td>.41**</td>
<td>-.57***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global measure of culture change</td>
<td>-.29*</td>
<td>.30*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: The statistic displayed is the correlation coefficient; * p ≤ .05; ** p ≤ .01; *** p ≤ .001

Significant correlations were found between some change drivers and four dimensions of culture change – changes in clarity of goals, involvement, workload and innovation and flexibility. The two change drivers which had an impact on these culture changes were changes in leadership personnel (4 significant relationships) and changes in human resources practices (1 significant relationship). Contrary to our hypothesis, changes in leadership personnel had a negative impact on two dimensions of culture – involvement and innovation and flexibility. Further, although the sign on the relationship between changes in leadership and workload is positive, an increase in workload is typically regarded as a negative organizational change.

Table 7: Regression Analysis for Changes in Involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>( R^2 ) - Control variables</th>
<th>( R^2 ) - Independent variables</th>
<th>( \Delta R^2 )</th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(DV) Changes in involvement</td>
<td>.11†</td>
<td>.31***</td>
<td>.20**</td>
<td>- .04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(IV) Organization size</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.29†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(IV) Organization type</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.32**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(IV) Changes in leadership personnel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.33**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(IV) Changes in human resources practices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: † p ≤ .1; * p ≤ .05; ** p ≤ .01; *** p ≤ .001

Discussion and Conclusions

Two of the seven hypotheses were supported for at least some dimensions of culture change. As predicted, changes in human resources practices increased involvement. The fact that changes in human resources practices did not affect other dimensions of culture such as workload and career development may reflect the limitations of a highly unionized environment. Nevertheless, involvement is a highly valued workforce attribute and the results indicate that involvement may be shifted through changes to human resources practices even in unionized environments.

The strongest results pertained to the effects of changes in leadership personnel. Although changes in leadership personnel had a positive impact on clarity of goals, leadership turnover had negative effects on involvement, innovation and flexibility, and workload. Thus, the effects of changes in leadership personnel were predominantly negative in this research. This is a very important finding given that most of the literature (e.g., Neuhauser, Bender & Stromberg, 2000; Mader, 2006; Sliwka, 2007) suggests that changes in leadership personnel have a positive impact on change initiatives.
The most likely explanation for the negative impact of changes in leadership personnel is the high rate of leadership turnover. On average, 77% of the leadership team had changed over the 6-year study period. Although high rates of leadership turnover are common in public sector organizations (Nutt & Backoff, 1993), recruiting and briefing new leaders can divert considerable organizational resources from other priorities. Lack of familiarity with the organization and the change initiative may prevent new leaders from taking the actions required to support change initiatives. Further, few events in organizations are as important, as visible or as stressful as when a leader departs (Hesselbein, 1997). In some cases, leader turnover may serve to undermine employee attention and commitment to previously initiated changes.

The positive relationship between changes in leadership and clarity of goals suggests that new leaders have a positive effect on the articulation of organizational goals. This may be the case for some leadership transitions, however, in the Canadian federal government case, the increased clarity of goals during this period may also be due to a new system of performance management for federal executives which was introduced in early 2004 (Canada Public Service Agency, 2008; Zussman, 2008).

There was no support in these data for the impact of the remaining five change drivers. It is possible that the high rate of leadership turnover diverted attention from these other drivers of change and thus inhibited their effects. For example, new leaders may not have made their commitment to the vision sufficiently clear thus limiting the impact of the vision (H1). The need to invest time in learning about the organization may have limited new leaders’ ability to undertake actions in support of the change initiative (H2), to communicate with employees regarding the change initiative (H6), and to make modifications to organizational structures and processes (H7). Even the impact on culture change of the turnover of personnel (H4) may have been undermined by new leaders if they did not have time to direct the process of recruiting and socializing new organizational in ways that support the change.

The data indicate relatively low means for most of the change drivers other than changes in leadership personnel. While there was variability across organizations in the level of effort invested in the change drivers, the low average level of effort may have limited our ability to detect effects if there are threshold effects for some variables. For example, it may be that a vision partially supported is not supported at all and that for a vision to have an impact, it must be fully and persuasively supported. Perhaps with more time and effort, this threshold level will be realized in these organizations, and the impact of the vision on culture change will become evident. In a similar vein, much of the research suggests that a very high level of leader action is required to effect organizational change. The modest average level of leader actions in this group of organizations may have been lower than the threshold required to have an impact on culture. A comparable argument could be made for the other non-significant change drivers, namely, turnover of personnel, communication and enabling changes in structure and processes. The latter two drivers had particularly low mean scores.

The timing and continuity of effort may also have affected the impact of some change drivers. According to Kotter (1995), “until new behaviors are rooted in social norms and shared values, they are subject to degradation as soon as the pressure for change is removed” (p. 67). It may be the case, for instance, that leaders invested significant effort in supporting the change effort when it was initiated but as priorities shifted, efforts were redirected. In this case, it is possible that employees initially supported the new cultural values but as leaders’ efforts waned, employees reverted to their earlier values. Under this scenario, the data would show a modest level of leader actions averaged over the 6-year period and no sustained change in culture leading to the conclusion that leader actions do not affect culture when in fact they may have an impact but it was not maintained over time.

Another possible explanation for the lack of effects for some of the change drivers may be that multiple drivers need to work in concert. The need to anchor new behaviours in other organizational practices such as reward systems (Harrison & Carroll, 1991), mentoring relationships (Bernick, 2001) and role modelling (Williams, Dobson & Walters, 1989), suggests the possible interdependence of various change drivers. For example, turnover may provide the opportunity to recruit and socialize employees to support new cultural values but if these new values are not reinforced, new employees may be socialized by continuing employees to adopt the organization’s previous values. If this is the case, then the lack of effects for some change drivers such as leaders’ actions or vision may be the result of low levels of effort on other change drivers such as communication or enabling changes in structure and processes.

There are a number of implications of this research. The most significant implication relates to changes in leadership personnel. Although most of the literature on change discusses changes in leadership personnel as a positive change driver which adds new energy and ideas to the organization (e.g., Hesselbein, 1997), our results suggest that high levels of leader turnover are detrimental to culture change. Kim (2002) hypothesized that a culture change initi-
ative will fail if employees, management and unions sense a lack of active commitment from the organization’s leaders. A high rate of leadership turnover may contribute to a perceived lack of leadership commitment. This may heighten resistance to change, particularly since public servants often believe that they can simply wait out leaders who they distrust or disagree with (Nutt & Backoff, 1993). Since major change initiatives are almost always met with controversy and resistance (Fernandez & Rainey, 2006) and public sector organizations typically hold deep cultures which are difficult to change (Claver et al., 1999; Schein, 2000), the leadership team needs to play a significant role in reducing resistance to change (Recardo, 1995; Strebel, 1996), not increasing it by placing a revolving door on the executive suite.

Another implication of this study concerns the impact of leaders’ actions on the change initiative. The strong impact of leadership turnover suggests that leadership matters. Further, the bivariate correlations amongst the independent variables suggest that leaders’ actions are closely linked with vision, changes in human resources practices, communications and enabling changes in structure and processes. These results are consistent with the literature that suggests top managers play a key role in effecting changes in organizational culture (e.g., Kim, 2002). Leaders drive the culture through various mechanisms including structure, systems, policies and procedures (Kim, Pindur & Reynolds, 1995). Leader actions may have significant effects on culture change which are mediated through other change drivers but which were not detected in this study due to low levels of effort for several of the change drivers.

As discussed earlier, there is little agreement in the literature relating to change drivers (e.g., Kemelog, Johnson & Srinivasan, 2000). According to Rodrigues (2006), very little is known about how organizational culture changes over time and what drives the process. As well, there has been a dearth of literature in public administration journals that explicitly addresses the subject of organizational change (Fernandez & Rainey, 2006). The results of this research strengthen this literature by identifying change drivers that significantly impact organizational culture dimensions in the Canadian federal public service. Changes in leadership personnel, and modifications to human resources practices should be priorities for those embarking on a culture change initiative. Given the parallels found in the public sector change literature and the private sector change literature, these results should have relevance for both public and private sector organizations.

The effective management of organizational change is one of the central challenges facing today’s managers, particularly given the absence of change management competence (Griffith, 2002) and the low success rates for change initiatives (Hirschhorn, 2002). By identifying appropriate drivers of change, management can better focus their resources and energy related to change initiatives. Focusing on these change drivers should result in a number of benefits for the organization and for those who work in them. For example, change initiatives may be expedited and may be less costly. Organizational leaders and managers who understand the importance of these change drivers, and who implement them properly, should experience more frequent success in their culture change initiatives.

Changing an organization’s culture is enormously complex (Bate, 1994), consumes considerable organizational resources (Claver et al., 1999) and is very time consuming (Schein, 1999). However, changing an organization’s culture may be the decisive factor in improving the organization’s service (Claver et al., 1999). The results of this research contribute to better understanding of what is required to successfully implement a culture change initiative by identifying meaningful culture change drivers.

References


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