

Applying Change Management Theory in Schools to Meet the Requirements of Educational Innovation and Training in Vietnam



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ABSTRACT: The application of change management theory to the management of teaching and learning activities in schools in Vietnam in recent years has attracted much attention, but this theory has not been systematically and clearly defined. The purpose of this article is to establish a theory of change management in schools to apply to school management in the context of education and training innovation in Vietnam today. Based on the approach of the Theory of Change, the article builds a system of theoretical issues on change management in schools. The research aims to establish directional criteria on change management capacity, requirements for change management, and methods of practicing change management. The research results provide a systematic approach to change management in schools that is suitable for the requirements of current education innovation in Vietnam.

KEYWORDS: Change, change theory, change management, educational innovation

1. INTRODUCTION

American novelist Louis L'Amour (1908 - 1988) once said, "There is one thing that never changes, and that is change ." Change is a characteristic of development. Changes are constantly occurring in all areas of a rapidly developing society. The education and training sector , with schools at the center, is no exception. In the context of globalization and the 4.0 Industrial Revolution, the Party advocates fundamental and comprehensive innovation in education and training . The fundamental and comprehensive innovation in education and training is a macro-level change that requires the entire system to change, in which the change taking place in schools is the core factor. In this process, educational management plays a leading role in ensuring that the entire education system operates in the right direction and reaches its destination. In order for this system to change in a positive, modern and effective direction, the management method must be changed. This requires local authorities and school managers to create all conditions to help them effectively perform their functions and tasks. In response to the requirements of current educational innovation, school managers must shift from traditional management methods to change management as an innovation in management work to manage people who implement educational and training innovation in specific conditions and circumstances. Change management in an organization in general , in schools in particular, is an issue of contemporary management science and is approached from many different perspectives. The approach to change management theory to apply to school management research in Vietnam has been of interest to researchers in recent years, but at a rudimentary level, the change management theory system has not been systematically defined, so the approach is not suitable for the context of educational innovation (Dang Xuan Hai, 2005); (Dang Xuan Hai, 2007); (Le Thi Thanh Thuy, 2018); (Nguyen Long Giao, 2021). From the perspective of change theory, the paper studies some theoretical issues on change management in schools in Vietnam to provide a systematic approach in the context of fundamental and comprehensive innovation in education and training today.

2. RESEARCH RESULTS

2.1. Theory of change

Theories of change emerged in the 1990s and have had a significant impact on the study of school change. They are concerned with complex developmental challenges that are often caused by multiple factors and layers that are deeply embedded in the way societies operate. The term " Theory of Change" was used by Weiss in one of his books as a way to describe a set of assumptions that explain both the small steps that lead to the long-term goals of interest and the connections between program activities and outcomes that occur at each step of the organizational change process. Weiss challenges designers of complex community-based initiatives to articulate the

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theories of change that guide their work and suggests that doing so will improve their overall evaluation plans and increase their ability to take credit for the predicted results. Weiss's research spurred some of the groundwork for using this technique—later called the “Theory of Change approach”—in evaluating community change initiatives. (Weiss, C, 1995)

Previous studies of organizational change have tended to focus on the changes rather than on the analysis of change (Pettigrew et al., 1992). Simply put, more attention is paid to what is being changed in the organization (content) than to how the change is implemented (process). In fact, this is especially the case with design approaches that aim at change by providing solutions to problems but underestimating the implementation process (Boonstra, J., 1997). Developmental approaches pay more attention to the process aspects of change (French and Bell, 1995). Regardless of the change approach being used, it is important to assess the characteristics of the process.

In recent years, research on change theory has become more extensive and has become a topic of interest for the largest international organization on the planet, the United Nations. Based on the research of experts on Change Theory (Valters, 2014; Stein and Valters, 2012; Rogers, 2014; Grantcraft, 2006...), the United Nations Development Group has published the Change Theory Guide to implementing leadership innovation in international organizations under the United Nations.

According to the UNDG (United Nation Development Group), Theory of Change can be used in the following situations: (1) *Developing a development strategy for an organization or unit*. By clearly articulating the causes of the development challenge, Theory of Change makes explicit assumptions about how the proposed strategy is expected to deliver results and testing these assumptions against evidence - including what has worked well or not in the past - Theory of Change helps ensure a sound logic for achieving change; (2) *Adjusting the strategy during implementation*. Theory of Change also helps to adjust course if the chosen approach is not effective or if anticipated risks materialize. New lessons and experiences from monitoring and evaluation help refine assumptions and inform decisions about how to adjust the approach to deliver the intended results. Adjustments to the theory of change should also be made in the context of changing circumstances, especially in response to crises and shocks, as well as as part of regular monitoring; (3) The theory of change *is a means of developing and managing partnerships and collaborative strategies*. The process of agreeing on a theory of change will establish different perspectives and assumptions among program planners, beneficiaries, donors, program staff, etc. This process can foster consensus and motivate stakeholders by involving them early in the planning process and by showing them how their work contributes to long-term impact. It can help others understand and support the organization's contribution to change, as well as enhance collaboration with other organizations contributing to similar outcomes, leading to new or stronger partnerships and better complementarity and coordination (United Nation Development Group, 2022).

A theory of change clearly presents a shared vision and strategy for how change can happen. A theory of change map or short text is a concise representation of the purpose of an organization and communicates that purpose to its members. It emphasizes real change over counter discussions that focus solely on resources, activities, and outcomes for organization members.

The practical method of the Theory of Change is a hypothetical structure with the pair of relations “If” - “Then”. If this is done, then these are the expected results. The outcome path is a set of necessary conditions related to a certain field of action, placed in a diagrammatic form in a logical relationship with each other and connected by arrows that acknowledge the causal relationship. The results along the path are also prerequisites for the results above them. Thus, the initial results must be available to achieve the intermediate results; the intermediate results must be available to achieve the subsequent results; and so the outcome path represents the logic of change and its basic set of assumptions. (Taplin et al., 2013)

Change theory has a great influence and is therefore applied by many agencies and organizations in change management. Change management is a process of applying Change Theory in 4 steps as proposed by the United Nation Development Group (2022): (1) Focus on the goal of change, (2) Analyze change, (3) Clarify relevant assumptions and clearly identify risks, (4) Identify partners and key actors. Determining change management solutions must be based on evidence and that evidence must be measured reasonably and objectively. The following change management issues focus on building a school development strategy in the context of fundamental and comprehensive innovation in education and training.

2.2. Change in schools and change management capacity

2.2.1. Changes in school

Schools in general are relatively stable, when perceived as a stereotypical organization. Rules, regulations, and standards bind schools in measures of management and professional bureaucracy. Change in schools always has a cause, and researchers in the Theory of Change tend to confirm the evidence for change as a reverse cycle of finding causes. Change in schools means that it must happen decisively, excluding scattered, isolated improvements. Approaching the causes of change in schools, we can identify the following three cases of change:

- *Change due to stagnation*. Muscella views the school as a learning environment, as an ecosystem that is crucial if we are to gain a holistic view of the events that make up learning. The school ecosystem has many components (students, teachers, curriculum,

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administrators, environment, and other types of education) and these components interact with each other in many different ways; therefore, intervention in one part of the system will have consequences for other parts of the system. This requires a radical change to create new quality, restore value, and restore customer trust in the school (Muscella, 1989).

Strategic change. Strategic change in education often begins at the macro level, when educational philosophy has been reviewed to suit development trends and the times. Strategic change with political significance requires the participation of many different subjects, of which school subjects are only one component and is mandatory. Strategic change requires schools to make changes from their mission, vision, goals to the content and methods of education, activities and conditions to support the change. This requires school management to also change to meet the strategic motto, "fundamental and comprehensive innovation".

- *Change by process*. The operation of educational activities in schools is repeated over the school year with improvements to overcome limitations, promote advantages and positives in school activities is considered as a change. The implementation of educational reform programs can also be changed by process because it takes time to implement it effectively. When faced with the task of implementing a new educational program, educators must determine how they will use the new program effectively. Their adjustment to the application and implementation is hierarchical, first paying attention to concerns about how a new program will affect them personally until finally teachers consider how the new program affects the learning process.

2.2.2. Changing the school curriculum

The most disruptive and impactful change is curriculum change, which every country in the world has to undergo to reform its education system. Curriculum innovation strategies involve stakeholders (teachers, students, parents, administrators, politicians), subject or pedagogical experts (scientific community) or collective organizations (e.g., ministries of education and training, local authorities, school boards, teachers' associations) involved in or affected by curriculum change. The involvement of these stakeholders refers to their involvement at different stages, from curriculum design to curriculum implementation. Involving multiple stakeholders in curriculum change helps to reduce resistance to this change (OECD, 2019).

The central figure in implementing the reformed educational program is the teaching staff. According to (Fullan, 2015), the implementation of the educational program corresponds to the means to achieve the desired goals and for the new educational program to bring results, it needs to be applied in practice in the classroom. The topic of implementing curriculum change has been widely studied in fields such as public administration, public policy, organizational change, and education. Echoing the traditions and debates in these fields, curriculum reform has traditionally been viewed from a "top-down" perspective, in which the "success" of implementation is measured by the degree of "fidelity" and "adherence" to the reformed curriculum by implementers, such as teachers. However, this approach is inconsistent with the trend toward school autonomy, which includes autonomy in curriculum development. Teachers are no longer the implementers but the central players in the curriculum development process, "as policy makers and intermediaries, rendering the notion of fidelity obsolete" (Braun et al., 2010). Thus, curriculum change in schools is not simply a matter of replacing one curriculum with another, but rather how the change takes place and the context in which it is implemented. The interest in curriculum reform stems not only from the need to ensure that students have the skills and attitudes appropriate to the 21st century, but also from the potential impact of implementing a particular curriculum on student learning outcomes. According to (Fullan, 2015), curriculum reform is demanding in terms of implementation, as it requires multifaceted changes that may challenge existing beliefs and subjective realities deeply rooted in individual and organizational contexts.

To implement school management to implement the reform education program, according to (Akker, 2010), managers must conduct policy planning on change management. According to him, in the school change policy, it must be based on 10 components to address ten specific questions about planning for student learning: (1) Theoretical basis or Vision: Why do students learn?; (2) Purpose and goals: What goals are students learning towards?; (3) Content: What are students learning?; (4) Learning activities: How do students learn?; (5) Teacher role: How do teachers facilitate learning?; (6) Materials and Resources: What are students learning with?; (7) Grouping: Who are students learning with?; (8) Location: Where are students learning?; (9) Time: When are students learning?; (10) Assessment: How to measure learning progress?

To ensure that the reform education program is implemented in schools, mobilizing resources to focus on this change is the task of managers based on management functions. However, experience-based management is a barrier to implementing reform education programs. On the other hand, the challenge for school managers is personal history as they have experienced the educational environment of the past and are performing management activities in the current educational environment but have to realize future educational goals. Analyzing the challenges of education in the 20th century, (Beare và Slaughter, 1993) it has pointed out the absurdity of vision when "We are very good at looking back at the past but we are not good at looking forward to the future with the same time period". This is a problem for the school management capacity of the management staff. In order for school management to effectively implement changes in the educational program, the leader must have certain standards of management capacity, which is the capacity to manage change.

2.2.3. Change management capacity

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From the perspective of school management, the application of Change Theory to school change management focuses primarily on the qualities and leadership abilities of the manager.

- In terms of qualities, (Hartog và cộng sự, 1997) identify four leadership qualities when implementing change management: (1) Charisma, which provides vision and a sense of mission, encourages dignity, gains respect and trust, and enhances optimism; (2) Inspiration, which involves the leader's ability to act as a role model for followers, communicating the vision, and using symbols to focus efforts; (3) Individual concern, which means the leader's use of individual concern is linked to the individual subordinate's maximizing their potential; (4) Intellectual stimulation, which provides followers with a challenging flow of new ideas that are generated to encourage rethinking of old ways of doing things.

- In terms of competencies, (Leithwood et al., 1999) it has developed into a change management model with 10 aspects: (1) Competency to develop the school's vision and goals; (2) Competency to provide intellectual stimulation; (3) Competency to provide personal support; (4) Competency to represent professional practices and values; (5) Competency to demonstrate high performance expectations; (6) Competency to develop structures to encourage participation in school decisions; (7) Competency to manage human resources; (8) Competency to support teaching; (9) Competency to monitor school performance; (10) Competency to focus on the community.

As a component of the education system where school leaders are responsible for the curriculum and provide instructional leadership (OECD, 2016), school leaders play a key role in initiating, communicating and persuading teachers to implement new educational programs. The role of school leaders in coordinating the implementation of educational programs is crucial, as they can create a culture of change, initiate and sustain improvements at the school level (Thompson et al., 2004). More importantly, they can establish school processes for teachers to collaborate in curriculum development, for targeted training and development to take place at the school level, and for the reformed educational program to be incorporated into their school improvement plans (OECD, 2020). In systems where the principal's role is more administrative, school leaders can support curriculum implementation by supporting teacher professional development, fostering professional learning communities, creating an open forum for discussion of reform, and facilitating the development of a collective consciousness. The Theory of Change approach to school improvement in the context of curriculum change creates change for the learning community and professional practice. This can be beneficial for curriculum reform because they can bring together school-based professionals to focus collectively on curriculum development and implementation.

2.3. Managing school change in Vietnam in the context of educational reform

2.3.1. Requirements for school change management

A theory of change can be established for school management in the context of changing educational goals. To ensure that the educational program innovation is successfully implemented, approaching the perspective of the UNDG (United Nation Development Group), we identify some requirements for change management as follows:

(1) Understand the nature of change:

- Change is complex, requiring managers to recognize that the starting point of change is need rather than individual perspective. The needs of an organization such as a school are related to the needs of each individual in relation to the needs of development. Meeting the needs of the organization in relation to the needs of the individual is what ensures that change is made.

- Risk anticipation requires leaders to make assumptions: if failure occurs, the leader takes responsibility instead of blaming the people under his or her management. Risk anticipation is one of the ways to demonstrate the manager's vision in the change management process. Accepting risks is inevitable, managers must have backup plans. This helps change management to be carried out continuously without having to wait to resolve risks.

- Change does not accept improvisation or suddenness, but requires time and time for subordinates to understand. When the change, especially its necessity, is understood, then action is firmly established.

(2) Focus on specific goals. The specific goal for change management is to determine the nature and requirements of each type of goal. School management in the context of fundamental and comprehensive innovation in education and training aims at the following 3 types of goals:

- Strategic goal: managing change to achieve national goals: fundamental and comprehensive innovation in education and training, which means political change in the field of education, so it is expressed by consistent guiding ideology. In Resolution 29-NQ/TW of the Central Executive Committee, there is a very important thesis for educational management: "Fundamentally innovate the management of education and training, ensure democracy and unity; increase autonomy and social responsibility of educational and training institutions; attach importance to quality management"(Central Executive Committee, 2013)

- The primary goal: to improve the capacity and quality of the teaching staff so that this force can successfully implement the goals of change. Resolution 29-NQ/TW sets out the requirement to "Strongly innovate the goals, content, methods of training, retraining, fostering and evaluating the learning and training results of teachers according to the requirements of improving quality, responsibility, ethics and

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professional capacity" (Central Executive Committee, 2013)

- Core goal: the quality of education is achieved according to the requirements of the orientation and goals of fundamental and comprehensive innovation in education and training. This goal is emphasized in Resolution 29-NQ/TW: "Educating Vietnamese people to develop comprehensively and best promote the potential and creativity of each individual; love family, love the Fatherland, love compatriots; live well and work effectively" (Central Executive Committee, 2013).

(3) *Ensuring the principle of change*. The principle of change must ensure the objective, that is, change to create new quality suitable for the context. This principle is reflected in management behaviors to ensure that the assurance of the principle can be measured and evidence provided. Behaviors ensuring the principle of change management are expressed as follows: Assessing quality based on new goals to have a basis for making decisions on change; Assessing students' learning needs and teachers' teaching needs to set reasonable goals; Combining the educational environment with the experiential environment to create conditions and opportunities to implement the new educational program; Sharing responsibility to create consensus among all members on the policy of change; Being consistent with the new model (management and teaching) so that mistakes of traditional methods do not have the opportunity to repeat; Providing necessary services to meet the needs and goals of the new educational program; Develop, implement, test, and evaluate the feasibility and effectiveness of new technology; Develop the capacity of teachers and promote the formation of active teacher groups; Identify barriers and identify ways to break down barriers to change in schools; Improve the organizational environment to promote the belief that student learning is the central goal of all members of the school

From the above issues, it can be seen that the Change Theory approach to change management in schools needs to be clearly defined, focusing on improving the quality of education based on the context of change as the frame of reference for this management method.

2.3.2. Practical methods of change management

Applying the Theory of Change, the practice of this theory is carried out in 04 steps as follows (United Nation Development Group, 2022):

(1) *Focus on vision and goals*. For school change to take place as expected, managers must first identify core goals. The core goals of school change are in the system of strategic change goals, that is, the goals of fundamental and comprehensive innovation in education and training. This educational innovation strategy is most clearly demonstrated in general schools, which is the innovation of educational programs. Managers realize that the new educational program focuses on developing the qualities and capacities of learners. Thus, which basic factors in the entire educational system of the school aim to develop the qualities and capacities of learners must be focused on to achieve the goals of implementing the new educational program. From here, the future of school development is to ensure the quality of education based on the goal of developing students' qualities and abilities.

(2) *Analysis of change*. The factors involved in school change in the context of educational innovation include: people (human resources), conditions supporting change (material resources), policies (legal). Among these factors, the human factor has the central meaning in governing change, and is also the driving force of change. The analysis of the human factor also needs to determine the role and position of each subject participating in the change process and which subject has the meaning of creating real change. The first human factor mentioned is the team of managers, teachers and students. The chain reaction from the team of managers to the team of teachers and from the team of teachers to students is the effect of change to achieve new goals, according to the requirements of the new educational program. The impact assessment of change is done in the reverse order: student performance reflects the quality and effectiveness of the teaching staff, the quality of education and the quality of the teaching staff reflect the quality of the school; the person responsible for the quality of the school is the manager. Can the analysis of these two-way change factors provide evidence of change management that it has been implemented? If so, to what extent?

Change occurs in a process, with a beginning and an end. Therefore, change in schools follows the structure: cause - action - result - feasibility. The "cause" factor can be the agent that creates change that requires corresponding action. Changes identified through evidence are considered effective because they are proven. When the change has met these three factors, it can be affirmed that the method of implementing the change is feasible. This is how change is analyzed through the implementation of change management.

(3) *Clarify assumptions and anticipate risks*. Establish and clarify the key relevant assumptions that underpin the theory of how change occurs and the key risks that may influence it. This includes identifying why solutions are the main drivers of change in a given context and the factors that may influence these drivers. Assumptions are taken for granted, accepted as certain things that will happen. It is particularly important that the assumptions that underpin proposed causal relationships between different outcomes and other factors are made explicit (if X, then Y, because Z) and evaluated against the available evidence (United Nation Development Group, 2022). There are 04 types of assumptions that can be applied to change management for schools in the context of educational innovation: "Cause - effect" assumption: using the pair of if - then relationships to identify factors belonging to the impact conditions that bring about the desired results for change; Implementation assumption: to determine the suitability of measures to implement change; External impact and influence assumption: identify the advantages and difficulties encountered in the implementation of change measures; Risk assumption: identify

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uncontrollable obstacles that require additional measures or support from participating parties. Types of risks include: environmental and political (e.g. due to policy changes), lost opportunities (e.g. timing or partner selection), technical errors (e.g. program design, plans are flawed, lack of information or incomplete), relationship losses (e.g. conflict of views or conflicts of interest). Identifying risk assumptions helps managers prepare for corrective actions, correct assumptions, take advantage of opportunities, and eliminate threats.

The assessment of assumptions must be carried out and adhere to the principles: transparency (can it be explained?), reasonableness (are they related to the measures of change?), and validity (are they testable?).

(4) *Identify key partners and actors.* Identify partners and actors by reviewing each outcome, including the risks and assumptions involved. Focus in particular on key actors that are likely to play a direct role in determining the success or failure of the change effort (United Nation Development Group, 2022). Applying this perspective to school change management in the context of educational reform is to assess the contributions of members to the change and how effective (or beneficial) are those contributions? For example, when considering whether teachers have become partners in managing change, evidence is provided that they have implemented innovative teaching methods and whether the effectiveness of these innovations meets the requirements of the new educational program? From there, it is possible to identify the main factors such as: awareness of the nature and process of education when implementing the new education program, teachers' ability to change before the requirements of the new education program, and teachers' motivation to make this change.

In managing change in schools, it is impossible not to consider partners from outside the school. Because these partners not only support school change but also participate in acknowledging that change has occurred. In addition, external partners of the school have the ability to participate in shaping and directing the change. Through these partners, the influence and spread of the school to society, is recognized or denied by society. From identifying the partners and agents that create change, managers can make appropriate adjustments in the process of managing change at school.

3. CONCLUSION

Change is an inevitable part of existence and development. Change in an organization in general, and in a school in particular, is a complex thing. Without a tool to control change, it is impossible to make the organization or school change. Any change in an organization must start from its operating mechanism, that is, management activities. Managing change in a school involves many organizations and individuals in a complex relationship. Managers must have both sufficient capacity and a firm grasp of the principles and requirements of change in order to direct and manage these individuals and organizations to realize the value of change and the need for change in order to actively participate in the change of the school. The school is both a social organization and a professional agency, so the change of the school has a strong impact on the lives of people and society. To successfully manage change in schools, it must be within the system of change in education, taking the strategic goal of educational innovation as a guideline to operate the school system in the change process.

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