

Business Communication Strategies for Organizations in Transition: A Systematic Review of Theory, Practice, and Organizational Performance

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Abstract

This study uses a systematic review method to evaluate the relevance of the Lewin Model in organizational change management amid business disruption and the role of business communication strategies in supporting organizational performance during the transition period. Lewin's model consisting of unfreezing, movement, and refreezing stages is a relevant basic framework, but needs adaptation to make communication more participatory and responsive to rapid change. In this context, effective communication is defined as an open, transparent and two-way communication process that promotes employee engagement and reduces resistance to change. Transition performance refers to an organization's ability to maintain productivity and collaboration during the change process. A review of 23 articles between 2018-2024 showed that adaptive communication strategies and leadership that supports active dialogue accelerate change success and improve organizational performance. This research recommends the integration of responsive and participatory digital communication in Lewin's model to fit the current dynamics of disruption. Future research directions should focus on developing specific digital communication models, such as the use of real-time collaboration platforms and artificial intelligence in large-scale and heterogeneous organizational change management.

Keywords:

Lewin model, business communication, disruption, change management, organizational performance, transition.



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INTRODUCTION

Today's business environment is in a time of uncertainty and rapid change. Disruption, characterized by rapid technological developments, shifts in social dynamics, profound political and economic changes, has created huge challenges for organizations around the world. In the face of this disruption, organizations are required to adapt quickly in order to remain viable and relevant. In response to these dynamics, change management becomes a crucial component in achieving organizational success. In this case, organizational communication plays a very important role, especially in ensuring that every member of the organization can understand and support the ongoing changes. Since the introduction of Lewin's model of change management, it has become one of the classic theories used to manage and assess change in organizations. This model is known for its three very popular stages, namely 1). unfreezing, 2). movement and 3). refreezing. Lewin emphasized the importance of unfreezing the status quo, moving towards the desired change (movement) and ensuring the change is embedded and stable in the organization

(refreezing). Despite being an old theory, Lewin's model is still widely adopted in many organizations, however, with the rapid development of disruption, the question arises whether this classic theory is still relevant to be used in the increasingly dynamic change management in the current era. A review of existing literature shows that although many organizations have adopted Lewin's model, the biggest challenge faced today is how to apply the model in more complex and disrupted situations. (Hofmann & Jaeger-Erben, 2020) stated that classic change management theories, including the Lewin model, may need to be adapted to the context of disruption in the business world. (Hofmann & Jaeger-Erben, 2020) highlight the importance of open and participatory communication in the face of change, especially when organizations face rapid and unexpected disruption. Research (Haumer et al., 2021) says that tailored communication can increase the effectiveness of change, especially when organizations have to face significant cultural and operational changes. In this context, clear and timely communication is an important factor to reduce resistance to change and increase employee engagement.

Research conducted by (Haroon & Malik, 2018) says that effective communication can improve organizational performance by facilitating a clear understanding of the changes that are taking place. This is in line with the findings of (Oreg & Berson, 2019) which show that a leadership style that supports open communication and knowledge sharing can accelerate the success of change. However, many organizations still face challenges in managing communication during transition, which can hamper organizational performance. It is therefore important to examine whether the Lewin model can still be applied effectively for change management in this time of disruption. Based on the existing literature review, there is still a gap in the understanding of how the Lewin model can adapt to the rapid business disruption and how effective communication strategies can support the success of organizational change. (Mellita & Elpanso, 2020) emphasized that it is important to understand the relationship between classical change theory and the dynamics of disruption that occur in organizations. (Mellita & Elpanso, 2020) proposed that the Lewin model needs to be reviewed by adding a more effective communication dimension in order to remain relevant and adaptive to current technological and socio-cultural developments. This research offers a new perspective by re-examining Lewin's model in a more modern context of disruption, specifically by looking at it through the lens of effective business communication strategies in supporting organizational change. By adding communication elements based on engagement and collaboration, this research aims to present a more adaptive approach in facing the challenges of disruption. The problems addressed in the research are: 1). Is the lewin model still relevant in facing disruption in modern organizations? 2). How can communication strategies support change management implemented through the lewin model during organizational transition? 3). What is the impact of effective communication on organizational performance in a transition period affected by disruption?. This research also has the following objectives: 1). Assess the relevance of the lewin model in managing organizational change in the midst of disruptions that occur in modern business. 2). Analyzing how the communication strategy implemented in the organization can support the change process carried out through the lewin model. 3). Identify the influence of effective business communication on organizational performance during the transition period affected by disruption. By examining the classical theories of the lewin model in the context of change influenced by business disruption, the researcher hopes to provide new insights into the importance of communication in change management and how classical theories can adapt to increasingly complex business challenges.

METHOD

This research uses a systematic review method to examine the role of business communication strategies in organizational change management with a focus on the Lewin Model in the midst of business disruption. The methodology was carried out in several stages as follows: 1). Literature Search: Literature was collected from Google Scholar database using keywords such as "Lewin model," "business communication," "organizational change," and "disruption." The search focused on publications published between 2018 and 2024 to ensure relevance to modern business conditions. 2). Selection Criteria: From the initial search that yielded approximately 50 articles, a screening process was conducted based on the following

inclusion criteria: Studies that address Lewin's Model in the context of organizational change and business communication, Articles published in peer-reviewed journals, Indonesian and English language research, Studies that contain valid and relevant empirical data or theoretical studies. Based on these criteria, 23 articles were eligible and analyzed further in this study. 3). Data Analysis: Data from the 23 selected articles were thematically analyzed. The analysis focused on: The relevance of Lewin's Model in facing business disruption, Communication strategies applied in the process of organizational change, The impact of communication on organizational performance during the transition period. The synthesis was done in a narrative manner with critique and assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the findings from each article to obtain a comprehensive picture of the topics studied. The following is a summary of some of the findings conducted by this research.

Table 1. Summary of Study Findings

No.	Author (Year)	Study Focus	Methods	Key Findings	Limitations
1	(Hofmann & Jaeger-Erben, 2020)	Lewin's adaptation to disruption	Literature review	Lewin's model is relevant to adaptive communication	Lack of discussion of digital technologies
2	(Haroon & Malik, 2018)	Communication and organizational performance	Quantitative	Open communication increases employee engagement	Focus on traditional organizations
3	(Mellita & Elpanso, 2020)	Adapting Lewin's model to disruption	Theoretical studies	Need participatory communication for relevance	Lack of applicability to digital organizations
4	(Oreg & Berson, 2019)	Leadership and communication	Meta-analysis	Supportive leadership accelerates change success	Lack of exploration of agile contexts
5	(Sariani, 2020)	Communication in organizational change	Case studies	Open communication accelerates the change process	Limited to small company contexts

The table above summarizes the 23 main articles analyzed in this study. The studies cover a range of methodological approaches, from literature reviews, theoretical studies, to quantitative research and case studies. The main focus of the research is how Lewin's Model is applied in the context of organizational change amid business disruption and the role of communication strategy in supporting successful change. While most studies show the relevance of Lewin's Model, there are limitations especially in accommodating the dynamics of digital organizations and agile methods that require a more adaptive and participatory approach to communication.

This explanation forms the basis for the synthesis and critique developed in the research discussion

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research aims to explore business communication strategies in organizations undergoing transition and analyze their influence on organizational performance, focusing on the relevance of Lewin's Model in the current context of business disruption. The study was conducted through a systematic review of 23 selected articles that met the inclusion criteria from the Google Scholar database, for the period 2018-2024. The analysis focused on three main themes: the relevance of Lewin's Model in the era of disruption, the role of communication in supporting the change process, and the impact of communication on organizational performance.

The relevance of Lewin's model in the face of disruption

Lewin's model known as the three stages of Unfreezing, Movement, and Refreezing remains relevant as a basic framework in organizational change management, especially in the midst of rapid and complex business disruption. This model puts forward the concept of preparing the organization for change (Unfreezing), implementing change (Movement), and stabilizing the change in organizational culture (Refreezing). Below illustrates the model visually, showing a systematic and structured sequence of change processes. The following is Lewin's model of change management:

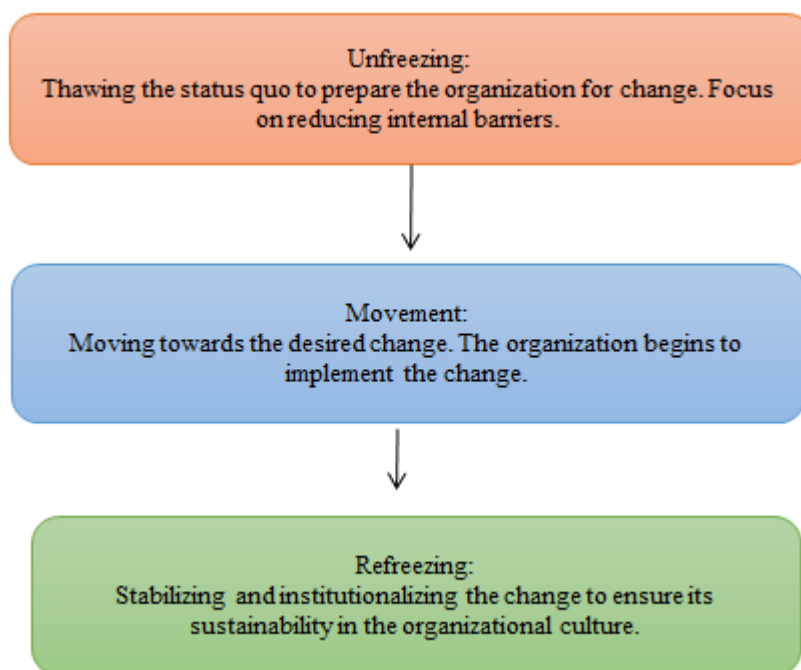


Figure 1. Lewin's model of change management

Research from (Hofmann & Jaeger-Erben, 2020) and (Mellita & Elpanso, 2020) confirms that the model remains a useful framework, but needs to be accompanied by more adaptive and participatory communication approaches. To enrich the understanding of change management, it is also important to contextualize Lewin's model with other popular change theories, such as Kotter's 8 step model and ADKAR. Kotter's model emphasizes the urgency and vision of change in detail, while ADKAR focuses more on change at the individual level. The integration of principles from these models can increase the effectiveness of Lewin's model, especially in the face of rapid and dynamic change due to disruption. In addition the organizational context is an important factor in implementing communication strategies. Startup organizations with a more flexible structure and a culture of innovation require more informal and rapid communication, while bureaucratic public institutions require a formal and gradual approach to communication. Therefore organizational culture and industry characteristics must be key considerations in order for communication strategies to be effectively implemented in context. By incorporating additional theoretical

perspectives and organizational contexts, change management approaches can become more comprehensive and relevant for today's challenges.

A Deep Critique of the Limitations of Lewin's Model in the Digital and Agile Age

While Lewin's Model provides a good foundation, there are several limitations that need to be considered when applied in modern digital and agile organizations. First, Lewin's Model is linear and sequential, which does not fit the needs of digital organizations that move in iterative and simultaneous change cycles. The change process no longer ends at the refreezing stage because the fast-changing business environment demands continuous innovation and adaptation without a long period of stabilization. Second, Lewin's model does not explicitly accommodate the role of digital communication technology which is now central to collaboration and interaction in organizations. Communication that occurs in modern organizations is real-time and multi-directional, using digital platforms that allow for quick and flexible responses, so communication strategies must be adjusted to be effective. Third, the refreezing stage, which is oriented towards stabilizing change, is unrealistic for digital organizations that must continue to innovate. Instead, the change model should be able to support agility and continuous change. Fourth, Lewin's model is less sensitive to cultural and demographic diversity in large, geographically dispersed organizations, which require communication tailored to the characteristics of different employee groups to support successful change.

The Role of Communication in Supporting the Change Process

Effective communication plays a vital role in reducing resistance to change and increasing employee engagement. Research by (Haroon & Malik, 2018) and (Oreg & Berson, 2019) shows that open and transparent communication, as well as leadership that supports two-way dialog and knowledge sharing, can accelerate the change process. Inclusive and participatory communication processes build employee trust and commitment, reduce uncertainty, and increase understanding of the purpose and benefits of change. Communication that is tailored to the needs and characteristics of the audience also increases the effectiveness of the change process.

Impact of Communication on Organizational Performance

Good communication during transition has a positive impact on organizational performance. (Li et al., 2020) say that organizations that have clear and systematic communication tend to be more efficient in operations, and have better performance in the face of change. This is also in line with research (Kalogiannidis, 2020) which states that effective communication is directly related to improving employee performance, which in turn improves organizational performance. Effective communication ensures that every individual in the organization understands their role in the change process. When the roles and goals of each member of the organization are clear, they can work more focused and efficiently. Transparent communication also ensures that communication disasters that often occur in transition periods are minimized, which increases trust and collaboration between organizational members. The propensity to improve organizational performance through communication can change depending on the social and cultural context of the organization. Some organizations that are not yet accustomed to open communication will experience more barriers to change acceptance. (Sariani, 2020) showed that in BHR Law Office, open communication during the transition accelerated the change process and improved administrative performance. The following is the effect of communication on organizational performance

Table 2. Effect of Communication on Organizational Performance

Communication Factors	Influence on Organizational Performance
Open and transparent communication	Increase understanding, reduce resistance to change
Leadership that supports engagement	Increase employee motivation and engagement in change
Knowledge sharing within the organization	Improve collaboration, accelerate change implementation
Customized communication	Improve the effectiveness of organizational change and adaptation

The table above illustrates the relationship between communication factors and their impact on organizational performance. Open and transparent communication, as well as leadership that supports employee engagement, is proven to accelerate the change process and improve organizational performance during transition. Previous research such as that conducted by (Yue et al., 2019) underlines that transformational leadership accompanied by transparent communication can increase employee openness to change. This is in line with the findings of this study, which suggests that leadership that supports engagement and knowledge sharing is key to reducing resistance to change and improving communication effectiveness in transition. However, while this study is in line with previous research results, it emphasizes the importance of adjusting communication in the face of rapid technological disruption, which requires a more agile and adaptive response. Based on the analysis of 23 articles, Lewin's Model remains a useful framework in managing organizational change in the era of disruption, with a note that this model must be enriched with communication strategies that are responsive to changes in technology and organizational culture. An adaptive and digital communication technology-based approach is necessary for the change process to be effective. In addition, the need for a more dynamic and iterative model in accordance with agile principles becomes very clear to overcome the limitations of the refreezing stage in the Lewin Model. Thus, the integration of adaptive communication, digital technology, and agile principles in the Lewin Model can help organizations not only survive, but also thrive amidst uncertainty and rapid change.

CONCLUSION

The objective in this study is to evaluate the relevance of Lewin's model in managing organizational change amidst business disruption and analyze the role of business communication strategies in supporting organizational performance during transition. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the Lewin model remains relevant for use in the context of organizational change, although adaptations are needed to incorporate more adaptive communications that can handle rapid disruption. Effective communication proved to be key in facilitating successful change, with an important role in reducing resistance and increasing employee engagement. In addition, leadership that supports engagement and knowledge sharing increases communication effectiveness and accelerates change success. Therefore organizations facing disruption must ensure more open, clear, and collaboration-based communication. From this study, it can be seen that the right communication strategy, combined with a customized Lewin model approach, can optimize the change process and improve organizational performance. Future research could focus on exploring the role of digital communication in supporting change management in larger organizations, as well as the influence of communication technology on the success of organizational transitions in the evolving digital age.

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