Transforming Food: A Change Management Study in Food Production

The Impact of Food Systems

Earth's population is expected to continue growing. To meet growing food demands, and changing diets of the population[1], the food systems need to ensure that they are well prepared to weather the volatility and changing demands of their customers.

The food production systems has many impacts on the larger ecosystems, which include:

- Land conversion and land cover changes[2];
- High water consumption levels [3];
- Energy usage levels from production[4].

Each of these impacts affects the planetary boundaries for safe operating spaces for humanity[5] and can contribute to returning, or staying within the safe operating spaces.

Change Management Theories and Applications

Change is a natural and integral part of life, but humans can fall into complacency[6] or inertia[7]. It has been estimated that 70% of all change initiatives fail, and can be just as hard to maintain[8] .

Many researchers have attempted to clearly define what change looks like. Whichever theory is considered appropriate for an organization, there remains the need to have a structured approach to the change through.

Frameworks for change range from a twelve step model for creating change, to five stages of change. Both models share similarities in that change starts with an idea, or an internal awareness that a change needs to occur. This is where the similarities end, as Mento, Jones & Dirdorfer focus on an organization, whereas Hiatt focuses on personal change, which contributes to organizational change.

Research Objectives

The research objectives were to:

1) Identify the qualitative factors that may contribute to the success of a sustainability transformation in food production; and
2) Develop a framework that may be used across food production organizations to improve their rates of success when transitioning to more sustainable businesses.

Institute for Management & Innovation
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
MISSISSAUGA

MScSM
Master of Science in Sustainability Management UofT

Methodology

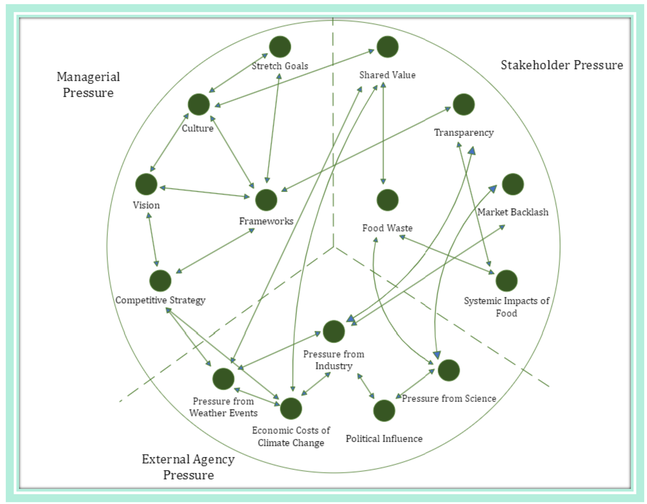
1) Case studies were reviewed to identify representative quotes that suggest themes that may have contributed to success.
   a) Maple Leaf Foods, Cargill, Danone, Nestle, Arcor, and Coronilla case studies acquired from the HBR Case Study repository were reviewed for themes that may be contributing to success.
2) CSR reports were reviewed to identify whether a case study, or comparable organization was more sustainable through their CSR strategy.
   a) CSR Reports from the previous 10 years were reviewed for accessibility, verifiability and comparability.
   b) Overall, comparability between all organizations was challenging due to lack of full direct comparability measures.
3) Interviews were conducted when possible to gain depth to the themes identified through the case studies.
   a) Interviews were used as primary research opportunities to verify and validate themes identified through case study reviews.

Findings

Overall, 14 themes were identified from representative quotes throughout the case studies. These themes suggested that they may be factors that influenced the change. These themes are as follows:

Stretch Goals	**Pressure from Industry**
Systemic impacts of foods	**Pressure from weather events**
Food waste	**Political influence**
Frameworks	**Market backlash**
Culture	**Vision**
Economic costs of climate change	**Transparency**
Shared value	**Competitive Strategy**

Secondary themes were identified to group themes with common elements. Each of these elements are interconnected, and the interconnections of these themes are represented in the graphic below. Understanding how these factors influence each other can help an organization develop a comprehensive strategy before undergoing their sustainability transformation.



Conclusions

Awareness

Awareness stems from the understanding that there is a problem. This can be framed in any number of ways that suit the goals of the organization, using the external pressures. Awareness of the problem and how an organization plans to address it also needs to stem from the company culture and vision.

Desire

Creating a desire to change, for an individual, means making sure that it is clear why it is important. Again, creating the desire can be linked to the external factors identified. A common question to ask through a change is "What's in it for me?"

Knowledge

Knowledge for how to change is a key factor that was found in the case studies. This knowledge piece was created through frameworks which showed the path to follow. The frameworks were vague enough to allow departmental flexibility, but also provided a longer term vision for the change. Knowledge also includes providing any process tools that employees might need to help see the change through.

Ability

Ability is removing any potential blockers for employees to help fully install the change.

Reinforcement

This is a critical and ongoing step as researchers have found sustaining a change can be just as difficult as installing a change. Case study organizations have made these sustainable transformations central to their organization and purpose, which show their commitment, and embeds the culture of sustainability into the organization.

References

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Contact

Tina Elliott, HBASc Industrial Engineering
Masters of Science in Sustainability Management
tina.elliott@mail.utoronto.ca
MScSM Research Paper Course - SSM1100Y
Supervised by Professor Ann Armstrong
Course Coordinators: Dr. Damian Maddalena & Dr. Soo Min Toh