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Bashir, Jibrán and Afzal, Sara

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# ***Ethics Based Model for Change Management***

(Analyzing Various Change Management Models  
& Suggesting a New Model - in Ethics Perspective)

**Principal Author:**

**Jibran Bashir**

**Co-Author:**

**Sara Afzal**

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# **Ethics Based Model for Change Management**

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Authors: Jibran Bashir & Sara Afzal

## **Abstract:**

*Change is a common element present in all businesses despite of size, industry and age. Dynamic environment calls for a constant change and to be successful in today's challenging business world it is vital for an organization to frequently evaluate the need for initiating changes. But along with the demands for change, critical questions regarding the ethics in change management must be recognized and dealt by those who initiate and implement the change. Ethics of change is the missing component in various change models, because during change process these models require sacrifice from employees, but do not show an equal willingness to sacrifice from the employer side (Matecko: 2007). After a study of different change models in ethical perspective, this paper gives a review of three selective change management models which focus on the processes of new changes in organization. The propositions made on the basis of literature review in order to emphasize this research are; firstly; The Ethics Perspective is absent in Lewin's Model of Change Management. Secondly; the ADKAR Change Management Model does not discuss Ethics. Thirdly; the discussion of ethics is not present in Kotter's 8 Step Model of Change Management. Finally this paper suggests a new Ethics based model for change management which is supposed to curtail down resistance to change from employees and also fulfill the corporate social responsibility of the organizations towards their employees. The application of this new ethics based change model may substantially increase the likelihood of successfully generating a lasting change.*

(250 Words)

**Key Words:** Change, Change Management Models, Ethics

## **Introduction:**

Organizations today can not become completely static as they are continuously interacting with the external factors. The rapid revolutions in internal and external situations are pressurizing the organizations to adapt accordingly, so change is the name of management game today. The extent to change may vary among the organizations, but the need to adapt exists for all. Some changes are internally generated whereas most of them are enforced externally (Harvey & Brown: 1996). Gambrell & Stevens (1992) describe that organizations are changing despite of how one defines change. Change happens very quickly and there are no short phases of change followed by long

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periods of stability. It covers a broad range as it can be anticipated, unexpected, upsetting or planned. In short change is the way of life today (Scott & Jaffe: 1989) and so the competency of managing the Change has become a requirement of today's businesses (Jain: 2007).

Change Management facilitates an organization in achieving success and meeting the demands and challenges of both the external and internal environment. Thus change management as a concept is familiar to most businesses today. But, the way businesses manage change varies and depend on the nature of the business, the change itself and the people involved in the process. There are several popular approaches to managing change which are referred to as Change Models. According to Bezboruah (2008) the change models assist in simplified explanation of the changes implemented in an organization.

A number of change models exist in literature which direct and initiate the execution of major changes in organizations. But the existing organizational change models do not fully explain the organizational change process (Berry & Gordon: 2000) and the ethicality of change interventions (Klerk: 2000). Klerk (2000) also highlights the need that whenever a change is to be initiated it must be from the premise to do no harm and it must be done according to an ethical code.

This gap between change management approaches and Ethicality of Change interventions generates the need of more and more academic research in this area with special focus on Ethics as a compulsory element in change management models. This paper discusses the importance of ethics in Change Management and suggests an Ethics based Model of Change Management which is acceptable by all the stakeholders of the change especially employees of the company [where stakeholders are individuals, companies, groups or nations that cause and respond to external issues, opportunities, and threats (Weiss: 2006)].

### **Change and Change Management:**

Change is complex to define because every organization will face separate set of challenges and thus a different rationale for change. According to Robbins (2003) change is concerned with

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making things different. Whereas Ahluwalia and Joshi (2008) comment on change as “when an organizational system is disturbed by some internal or external force, change frequently occurs. Change as a process is simply the modification of structure or process of a system”. Burnes (1996), views change as a process in which an organization continually adapts to get aligned with its environment. Whereas Change Management according to Gambrell & Stevens (1992) is the term used to elucidate the processes that are designed to provide order to the human side of change.

Hiatt (2008) states that change management is a set of tools, methods and practices for managing the people side of change that are necessary to shift an individual or a team from its present state to a preferred future state and to achieve the particular objectives of an identified change. According to him change management makes the individuals and groups able to support the change and participate in it in a way that everyone fully grips the proposed state, and works toward the objectives of that change. Jain (2007) on other hand illustrates that Change management is not a stand-alone process for designing a business solution; it is about managing change to realize business results.

### **Ethics and Business Ethics:**

Ethics matter in business because all stakeholders stand to gain when organizations, groups, and individuals seek to do the right things and do the things in the right way as well (Weiss 2006). Before understanding what is meant by the term Ethics one need to first understand that the standards of an individual or group about the definition of right and wrong are called as morality; and the norms about the actions that are supposed to be morally right or wrong along with the values that are placed on the objects that are supposed to be morally good or evil are termed as moral standards. Thus the discipline that scrutinizes moral standards of an individual or a group or a community is defined as Ethics (Velasquez: 2008).

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The context of this research paper is concerned with ethics in general but as the research is about the change in business entities so a special field of Ethics - the business ethics – is to be discussed here. Velasquez (2008) defines Business Ethics as a focused study of moral right and wrong; it concentrates on the moral standards as they apply to various businesses and behavior. Weiss (2006) quoted that business ethics is the study of how individual moral norms apply to the activities and objectives of a business endeavor. In this paper the business ethics will be referred to as “ethics”.

### **Change Management Models:**

Nielsen (2008) quoted that organizational change is complex. Even little changes are not easy to undertake. Many theoretical perspectives are used in the analysis of a single process of change and the resulting theoretical fragments have made the creative management scholars confident enough to use various theories and concepts in explaining how the organizations change takes place, under different change approaches and models.

Change models and approaches play an important role in Change Management as they provide the understanding of practical change efforts. Models of change usually provide process guidance, as they exhibit the actions and steps that flow from one to another. Models are basically the road maps that provide guidance and cautionary measures throughout the way, so they are particularly useful for moving from a current state to a desired future state as they offer the steps in a sequential order. Change is seldom as linear a process as presented to any model and there will always be an overlap between steps (Biech: 2007). Bezboruah (2008) also refers to the need of change models by narrating that a change model helps in simplifying and explaining any changes implemented in an organization. According to him the models try to demonstrate different factors and inconsistencies which have a strong influence on the changes. Thus a change model must be holistic so that it can consider the factors like organizational structures, culture, leadership roles and processes, individuals, knowledge and capabilities.

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### **Ethics in Change and Change Models:**

There is a gap between the rather sophisticated and fragmented theories of change that analyze how change occurs and the practice-oriented focus of the implementation and guidance of actual change processes (Nielsen: 2008). In Practice the change interferences are un-doubtly subjected to ethical problems and they usually have upsetting effects on emotions of employees even when the employers are acting within a legal framework of implementing changes (Klerk: 2000). Once a change is initiated some ethical issues definitely arise which need to be recognized and dealt with by the researchers and practitioners. The People who are involved in an organizational change must acknowledge the underlying ethics, deal with them, and test them as they affect every change project (Nielsen, Nykodym & Brown: 1991). Organizations primarily make efforts for procedural fairness (managing change interventions in fair manner) through their change management programs; but the tools and techniques of change are mostly based on assumptions of reducing harm and avoiding the illegality. However the standards and mechanisms that avoid harm are not the same as of those promoting good or being virtuous. Moreover there is much room for improvement in the ethical way in which change initiatives are conceived, announced, implemented and executed (Klerk: 2000). Change situations need some moral and ethical investigation in order to implement the change in organizations (Bhaskar, Bhal & Ratnam: 2003). Matecko (2007) also reports that all the change models look alike and the only “missing piece” from many of these models is the ethics of change; as they ask sacrifices from the employees but do not put an equal pressure on the employers or top managers to sacrifice in the line of change.

### **Lewin’s Model of Change and Ethics:**

Cummings and Worley (2004) mentioned that Kurt Lewin provided one of the early fundamental models of change which is called the Lewin’s Three Step Change Model. Lewin conceived the change as a process that alters those forces which tend to keep the behavior of a system as stable (Duffy: 1996). Lewin views behavior as a dynamic balance of forces working in opposing

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directions; the driving forces facilitate change by pushing the employees in the preferred direction whereas restraining forces hamper change by pushing employees in the opposite direction. Thus the analysis of these forces and Lewin's three step model can help to shift the balance in the favor of change (Kritsonis: 2005). Lewin's change process consists on three steps; First, Unfreeze - which involves reducing the forces that are maintaining the existing situation or status-quo of the organization by either increasing the driving forces, decreasing restraining forces or combination of both. Second; Change - Which involves movement of the target system to the desired state of equilibrium and intervene in the system to develop new behaviors, values and attitudes by making changes to either the organization structures or processes. Third, refreeze - which is needed to sustain the change that has taken place by reinforcing new patterns and institutionalizing them through formal and informal mechanisms (Kritsonis: 2005).

Fig. 1 – Lewin's Three Step Model of Change Management



Thus in Lewin's view, the process of change could be well distinguished into three phases. Unfreezing is the first phase and involves inquiring the organization's present state, and if a dissimilar state is preferred, then equilibrium needs to be destabilized before old behavior is discarded. The second phase, movement, is a state of instability, where new behavior is adapted and fresh approaches are developed to replace old work patterns. Refreezing constitutes the final phase and requires activities to institutionalize the new behaviors and attitudes and to stabilize the organization at a new equilibrium (Ford & Greer: 2006). Lewin's model explains the effects of

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forces that either promote or restrain change. Hence, change will occur when the combined strength of one force is greater than the combined effect of its opposing forces (Robbins: 2003).

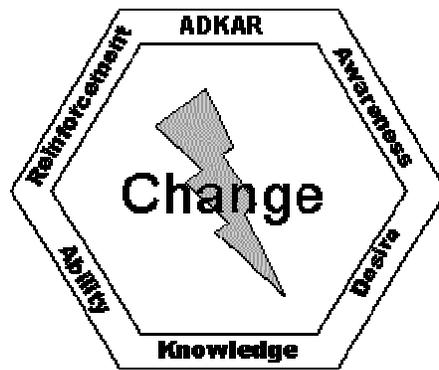
In light of the above literature review regarding Lewin's Model we can reach to the conclusion that theoretically the term ethics is not a part of any of the three stages of Lewin's Model; as it has not been mentioned in the unfreeze stage, neither it has been discussed as tools and tactics to implement change in the change phase nor it has been talked about in the Refreeze stage. Further it does not provide any framework for defining that if the change itself is ethical or not and also do not provide the guidelines that the change should be ethically executed and have same implementation on top management, middle management and lower staff. Thus it is manifested that ethics have not been discussed in any of the three steps of Lewin's model of change management; so our first proposition is;

**Proposition # 1:** *The Ethics Perspective is absent in Lewin's Model of Change Management.*

### **ADKAR Model of Change and Ethics:**

The ADKAR change management model was developed as a process for managing people through organizational change as it is a framework for understanding change at an individual level. This model describes five required building blocks for change to be realized successfully on an individual level; which are Awareness (awareness of the need for change), Desire (desire to support and participate in the change), Knowledge (knowledge of how to change and what the change looks like), Ability (ability to implement change on day-to-day basis and its required skills & behaviors), and Reinforcement (reinforcement to keep the change in place and sustain it) (Hiatt: 2006).

Fig. 2 – ADKAR Model of Change Management



*Source: Employees Survival Guide to Change  
By: Jeffery M. Hiatt (2004)*

The constituents of the ADKAR model are presented in the order of how one person experiences the change. Thus the lifecycle for ADKAR begins after a change has been identified. From this initiation point, the model provides a framework and sequence for managing the people side of change (Hiatt: 2006).

The above discussion reveals that the element of Ethics is not a part of the five constituents of ADKAR Change Model; as the paradigms of awareness, desire, knowledge, ability and reinforcement are silent on the involvement of ethics in change. Further they do not discuss whether the change itself is conceived as ethical by individuals on which it is going to be implemented. Thus building upon the argument that has been developed above, our second proposition is;

**Proposition # 2:** *The ADKAR Change Management Model does not discuss Ethics.*

### **Kotter's 8 Step Model of Change and Ethics:**

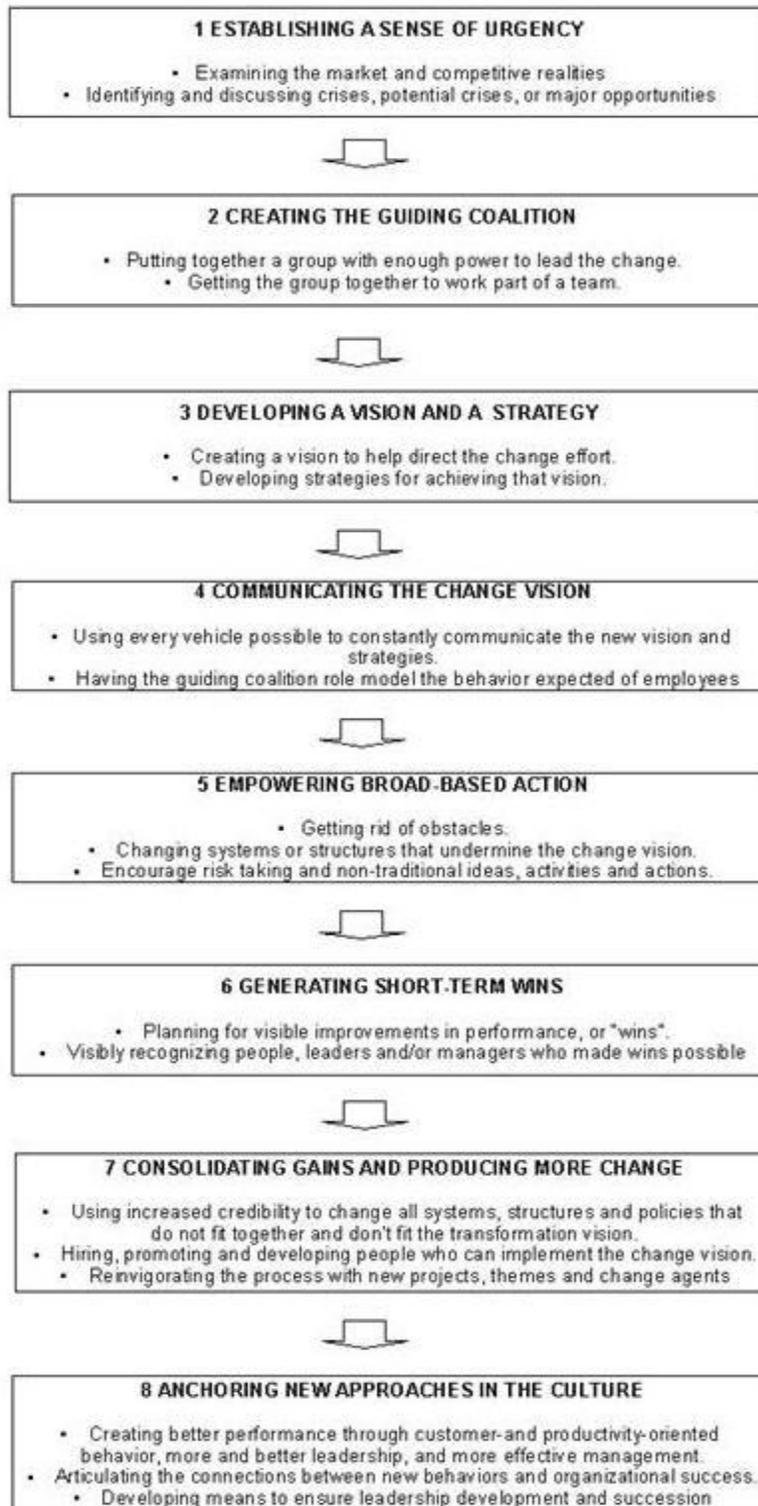
Kotter breaks down the process of creating and leading change within an organization into an Eight-Stage process of leading change. The model concentrates on some of the power issues around making change happen; highlights the significance of a felt need for organizational change; and underlines the need to keep communication levels extremely high throughout the

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process (Cameron & Green: 2004). Each of the eight stages of this process is associated with one of the eight fundamental errors that undermine transformation errors in change process. The steps are Establishing a sense of Urgency, Creating a guiding coalition, Developing a vision and strategy, Communicating the changed vision, Empowering broad-base action, Generating short-term wins, Consolidating gains and producing more change, Anchoring new approaches in culture. It is important to go through all eight stages in sequence; however, normally one operates in multiple phases at once (Kotter: 1996).

Fig. 3 – Kotter’s Eight Step Model of Change Management



*Source: "Leading Change", By: John P. Kotter (1996)*

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The first step is to create urgency for change. This means that management has to convince the employees that this change is essential for the organization to stay alive and should also communicate that the change is attainable without any harmful effects on their jobs. The next step is to build a team for the change, which has to be of some respected employees within the company who can be helpful in implementing change. The third step is to construct the vision, which will show clear direction to how the change will benefit the future of the company and their jobs, thus the third stage is about setting a clear and appropriate direction to orient and guide the change efforts. The fourth step is to communicate this vision. In order for the vision to work it must be fully understood by the employees, which means that it is necessary for the leaders of the change group to follow this vision. The fifth step is to empower the employees to execute the change. Then short term goals should be created in order to motivate the employees to accept the change by showing them progress. Rewards are very important at this step also. The seventh step is about persistence because management should influence more change even after the short term goals are met or the original plan for change will cease and die. The final step is to make the change permanent by moving fitting it into the company's culture and practices. (Cellars: 2007). Consequently out of these eight steps the first four help to thaw out an existing status quo; step five to seven tend to introduce new practices; whereas the eighth step grounds the change in the organization's structure and culture and make them stick there (Kotter: 1996).

The glimpses of literature discussed on Kotter's eight step model show that it discusses about creating urgency while enabling action, create short term wins to energize the organization and create a climate for change; but at any step from initiation to the execution of change the Kotter's model does not discuss identifying the ethics of change as a part of the process. Thus the literature provides us with a thorough support that the discussion of ethics has not been made a part of any of the process phases of Kotter's model. Thus our third proposition is;

**Proposition # 3:** *The discussion of ethics is not present in Kotter's 8 Step Model of Change Management.*

### **The Ethics Based Model of Change Management:**

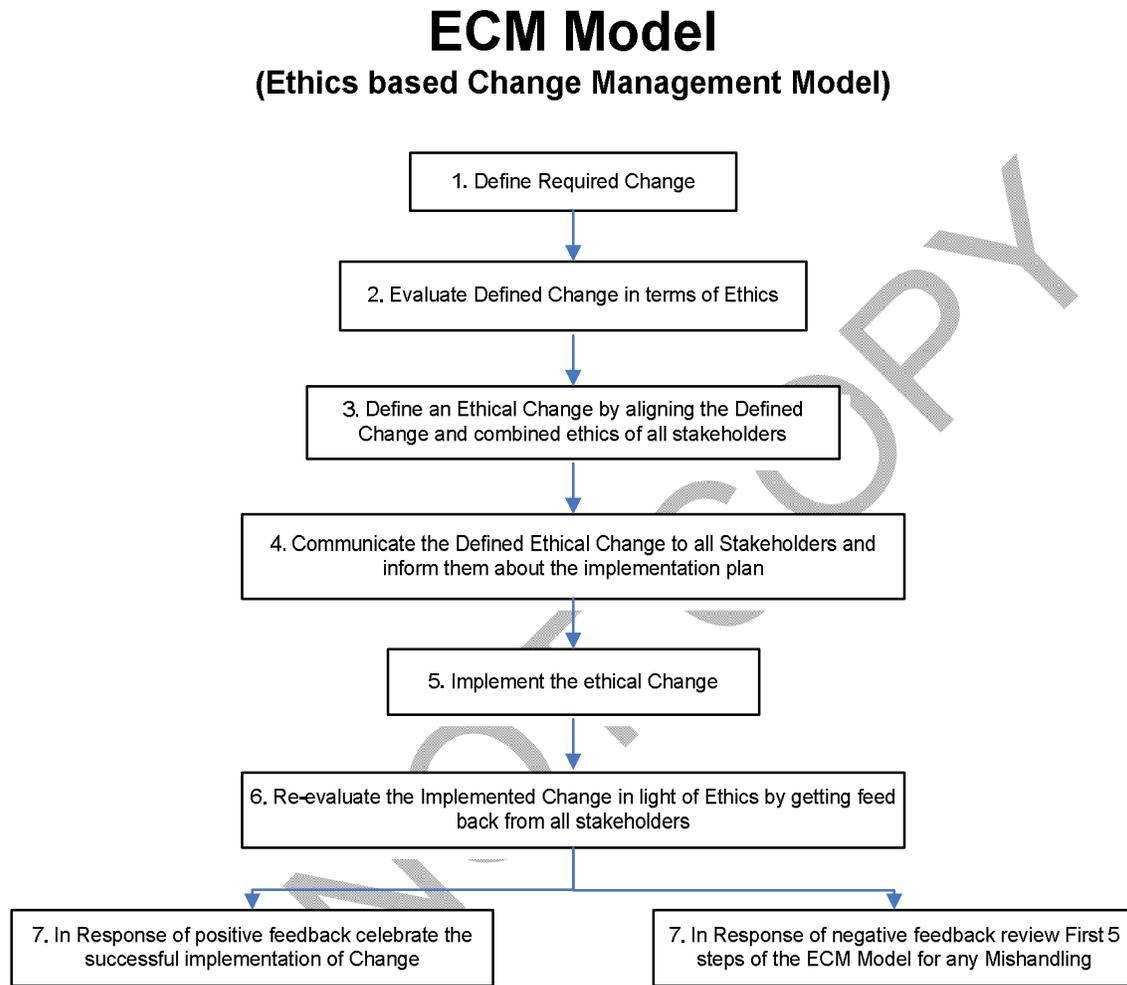
Bhaskar, Bhal & Ratnam (2003) narrate while managing change a lot of ethical issues arise related to the approach to change, target of change, the Employer's responsibilities and most importantly the manipulation of change. These ethical issues arise when managers fail to recognize that the goals and values which they are pursuing are incompatible with the members of the organization. Thus the degree of openness surrounding the change process and the degree of participation of employees in change process is a viable step to avoid ethical issues arising at the time of change implementation.

Ethics generally provide with a framework to help in determining that what is important as well as right and justified to consider. It is significant to note that ethical statements are not just meant to be single one time statements rather they are a collective declaration of all those who are to be effected by them (Biech: 2007). When the material aspects of an organization are changed they either challenge the existing state of norms and ethical beliefs or throw up newer challenges for people. Thus change situations in organizations require moral and ethical analysis to implement the material changes in people context of the organization, because a decision of bringing change that is an outcome of an ethically acceptable criteria would itself be acceptable (Bhaskar, Bhal & Ratnam: 2003). Thus after discussing the need of ethics in change management interventions the following change management model has been developed which also fulfills the corporate social responsibility by taking care of the rights of stakeholders which are not only the employees but also are a part of the society. (See: Fig.# 4)

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Fig. 4 – ECM Model (An Ethics based Change Management Model)



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## **Explanation of ECM Model:**

### **1. Define Required Change**

- Study the internal requirement and external pressures for change in order to identify the need of change that whether the change is really required by the organization or not.
- If the change is not extremely required then try to steer away from change implementation if possible, and do not disturb the existing status-quo (Klerk: 2000).
- If the change is required then define the exact change that has been figured out as need of the organization.

### **2. Evaluate Defined Change in terms of Ethics**

- Identify all the stakeholders for the defined change
- First the Employer should itself evaluate the change in terms of ethics in order to know whether this change is right and justifiable for all the stakeholders rather than being just in favor of employer and need sacrifices from employees in name of change management or organizational development. Then the change that has been evaluated and defined by employer in terms of being ethical for all (employer and other stakeholders) is then presented to all the stakeholders or the representatives of stakeholders for further evaluation (here the stakeholder means the organization's employees in specific and other stakeholders in general). Second; the stakeholders will then define the change in their moral perspective that to what extent the change is ethical for all the stakeholders.
- This step is not a mechanistic recipe but focus on the sensitivity to become aware of the ethical issues surrounding the change and making a deliberate attempt to deal with these issues in a moral way.
- Defining the ethics of change with a contribution of all stakeholders will help in designing a change with them rather than for them. After all; it is the stakeholders whose lives are going to be impacted by the change.

**3. Define an Ethical Change by aligning the Defined Change and combined ethics of all stakeholders**

- This is a step where change will be defined in such a way that no one will have an objection over it in terms of ethics, as every one would have been involved in the defining phase of an ethical change.
- This participative approach to defining ethical change will tend to decrease the fear of change and so the resistance to change by employees and make the change a win-win situation for all.
- It should be made clear while defining ethical change that the employer and stakeholders must equally share the benefits or losses that are arising from the change.

**4. Communicate the Defined Ethical Change to all Stakeholders and inform them about the implementation plan**

- The combiningly defined change is then communicated to stakeholders as a mutually agreed and shared objective for all.
- Make the people aware before final implementation of the ethical change.

**5. Implement the Ethical Change**

- Implement the change by keeping all of the stakeholders in loop.
- Involve the people in change implementation and train them.
- The change should be implemented on all, from top management to lower level staff.
- The employer, employees and other stakeholders must equally share the benefits or losses that are arising from the change.

**6. Re-evaluate the Implemented Change in light of Ethics by getting feed back from all stakeholders**

- Take feed back from all stakeholders or the representatives of stakeholders in order to re-evaluate the change implementation.

- The satisfaction rate of people regarding the implementation of ethical change will show the success percentage of the change implemented.

**7. a. In Response of positive feedback celebrate the successful implementation of Change**

- If the majority of stakeholders feel that the implemented change is a win-win scenario for all, celebrate the successful implementation of change.
- This positive response is an indication that future change projects in this manner will also run smoothly as the employers had won the trust of stakeholders by the implementation of ethical change in their organization.

**b. In Response of negative feedback review First 5 steps of the ECM Model for any Mishandling**

- If the majority of stakeholders are not satisfied with the implementation of change and perceive that this change has not ethically favored all the stakeholders then figure out the gap by reviewing first five steps of this model.
- If possible, again initiate the whole change process or learn from the shortcomings of this change process in terms of ethics and beware in future change endeavors.

**Conclusion:**

Worldwide the field of change management is very fulfilling in terms of approaches, theories, strategies and models of change management, but it is missing the clear cut and detailed studies on change management in the light of ethics. This paper addresses this issue by presenting an ethics based model for change management. This model is an attempt to emphasize the significant role of ethics in terms of people side of change (change management). This change management model is based on the idea that if the change is brought in terms of ethics, it is supposed to increase the loyalty of employees towards their organization and the employees are

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assumed to welcome the change interventions as their fear of change and thus the resistance to change is presumed to get eliminated. Several implications for organizational leaders, change agents / consultants as well as academicians can be drawn from this research. Perhaps the most important practical implication of this research is that it provides a change model which can be used by the change agents / consultants for bringing in practically successful change interventions into the organizations and winning the trust of employees. From an academic perspective, an important implication of this research is that this model can become a part of theory and literature on change management. This paper also provides the basis for researchers to do further theoretical and empirical researches on this ethics based change model in order to draw out its advantages, disadvantages, shortcomings and virtues (positive points). Future studies in this area might also increase the change management literature w.r.t. ethics and can become common in upcoming years, by having a direct and practical impact on the combination of change management and ethics.

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