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An exploration of the role of transformational leadership in times of institutionalization of change

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Abstract: In order to adapt to an increasingly competitive world, organizations need to continuously change, yet the success of the change is conditioned by its institutionalization. The institutionalization of change is the key factor to perpetuate sustainable changes. Based on the exploration of the role of transformational leadership in times of (institutionalization of) change, the objective of this study is to analyze the contribution of the components of transformational leadership on the institutionalization of change within a Lebanese private university Redundancy, engaged in an accreditation process. Through a qualitative method on a single case study, based on semi-structured interviews conducted with 15 senior executives occupying key positions in the studied university and through 15 focus groups with 85 faculty members from four disciplinary fields, we explored the role of each of the four dimensions of transformational leadership in times of institutionalization of change. Our findings highlight the essential role of intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation of transformational leadership, while the two other dimensions, idealized influence and individualized consideration, play a limited role in the university context of institutionalization of change. Moreover, individual recognition and idealized influence are essential to convince all members of the need for change and involve them in the accreditation process. This study allows us to understand the role of each of the transformational leadership dimensions in

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order to promote and escort institutionalization of change within high education sector.

Keywords: Transformational leadership; higher education; university accreditation; institutionalization of change; planned change.

I. Introduction

In order to adapt to an increasingly competitive world, organizations require change, yet the success of the change is conditioned by its institutionalization (Stirman et al. 2012). Whereas a lot of researches have been done related to organizational change and transformational leadership (TL), these two concepts studied in tandem are the subject of permanent interest for scholars. Literature about organizational change emphasizes the role of the transformational leader as a change leader. Yet, exploring the influence of transformational leadership on change institutionalization finds all its relevance in an academic context, marked by the race of universities towards accreditation. In this study, we adopted the Steckler and Goodman (1989, 34) definition of institutionalization as *“long-term viability and integration of a new program within an organization”*. Through a review of the literature on institutionalization of change and transformational leadership, we offer a conceptual framework to explore and understand the role of TL on the institutionalization of change.

Thus, by referring to leadership theories, particularly the one developed by Bass (1985), we are interested in understanding how can the transformational leadership be an enabling factor in the institutionalization of change, in particular, how university accreditation can be institutionalized through transformational leadership?

The objective is to verify the extent to which the theory transformational leadership is valid in the context of institutionalization of change. As a first step, we will explain the transformational leadership and institutionalization of change, and conclude by drawing the connection between institutionalization of change and the transformational leadership.

As a second step, we expose the empirical study. We adopted a qualitative method through a case study (Pettigrew, Woodman, and Cameron 2001; Pettigrew 1985). We will expose the results of the 15 interviews carried out with the senior leaders of the university, in order to understand and highlight the role and the contribution of each of the four dimensions of transformational leadership that might shape organizational change and influence its institutionalization.

Finally, we will answer the research question and present the contributions of this research to the theory and the practice. This research fills an important

gap in the literature and adds new insights to our understanding of how to achieve more performance in the higher education sector through institutionalization of change.

II. Literature review

II.1. *Organizational change and the institutionalization of change*

II.1.1. Organizational change

“Organizational change can be defined as an alteration of a core aspect of an organization’s operation. Core aspects include the structure, technology, culture, leadership, goal or personnel of an organization” (Helms-Mills, Dye, and Mills 2008, 4).

This study is an in-depth case study. It explores the role of the leader in the change process (Kezar and Eckel 2002a; Rajagopalan and Spreitzer 1996). In higher education, Kezar (2009) mentions changes resulting from the accreditation process. We understand organization change as an intentional process with defined actions that would change the state of an organization from a current to a desired one (Harigopal 2007; Kezar and Eckel 2002b). Even though there are many universities that are adopting change, very few are able to institutionalize it. In their study of 26 universities that went through a transformation, Eckel and Kezar (2003) showed that only 6 universities were able to maintain in time.

Many authors (Burnes 2017; Cummings, Bridgman, and Brown 2016) show in their researches that planned change need to be more developed as it does not proceed as planned or as anticipated. Planned change is sometimes met with lack of support and sometime with reluctance from members. From that point of view, based on Van de Ven (1986) analysis, institutional leadership could be a key factor in managing change in higher education.

II.1.2. Strategies for institutionalization of change

Various authors assess change through the results it achieves compared with the planned objectives (Judson 1991; Kanter, Stein, and Jick 1992). These objectives and results might include different types of indicators including performance and satisfaction (Beer 1984). Various authors proposed a framework to institutionalize change, which include strategies, enablers, and results of the change institutionalization (Armenakis and Bedeian 1999; Cummings and Worley 1997; 2019; Goodman and Dean 1999). Armenakis, Harris, and Feild (2000) argue that in order to

institutionalize change, we need to meet the seven categories of change institutionalization strategies as listed by Armenakis, Harris, and Feild (2000) followed by the enablers of change institutionalization (Annex1 : Change institutionalization framework (Armenakis, Harris, and Field 2000)).

II.2. Transformational leadership theory

According to Bass (1990, 20) «*transformational leadership – occurs when leaders broaden and elevate the interests of their employees, when they generate awareness and accept a rice of the purposes and mission of the group, and when they stir their employees to look beyond their own self-interest for the good of the group*». According to Chemers (1997), leadership is the process by which the leader influences others to accomplish a common goal. This study uses these two definitions of leadership that are widely used by researchers. With the need for change stemming from increased competitiveness, transformational leadership is becoming critical to leadership literature since early 1990s (Avolio, Walumbwa, and Weber 2009).

The transformational leadership theory is based on the transformation exchanges between the leader and the follower. According to this approach, transformational leaders have the ability to promote organizational objectives beyond employees' individual interest. They focus on four dimensions: individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, idealized influence, and inspirational motivation (Avolio, Walumbwa, and Weber 2009; Bass 1985; Judge and Piccolo 2004).

The inspirational motivation involves creating a vision, and the ability to realize that vision with optimism and confidence. It is the leader's capacity to give meaning to a followers' work (Harb and Sidani 2019), which arouses team spirit. This means that inspirational motivation pushes employees to go beyond themselves in order to realize the company's mission (Bass and Bass 2008).

The idealized influence, also called charisma, can be defined as the capacity of a leader to reinforce the behavioral identification of the collaborators through to act in an admirable and coherent way that is aligned with the organizational vision (Bass 1985). Those transformational leaders are recognized, admired, and respected by their team (Bass and Riggio 2006).

Intellectual stimulation consists of motivating the team to think about the needs and problems, suggest potential solutions, and take risk to execute them (Harb and Sidani 2019).

Lastly, the individualized consideration is defined as the capacity of the leader to empathize with each follower, understand his needs and concerns and reinforce the continuous communication with every individual (Bass 1985).

Transformational leadership helps to increase employee enthusiasm and satisfaction, and consequently improves their performance while enhancing creativity and shared vision (Wang et al. 2011). These characteristics and behaviors are essentials in a change process and each dimension of Transformational leadership could have a specific impact of the process of (institutionalization of) change.

II.3. Transformational leadership and institutionalization of change

“The transformational leaders inspire others to identify and work with them towards a shared vision of the future; they are bound together in a mutual and continuous pursuit of a higher purpose.” (Golm 2009, 4) Which means reinforcing the self-confidence of others in order to empower them. Transformational leaders act as role models for their team. They ensure a shared vision and develop teamwork and trust. Brandt, Laitinen, and Laitinen (2016) compared the transactional and transformation leadership as an enabler for change, and found that transformational leadership is more effective. Transformational leaders reinforce the confidence and pride of their team, and give them support through training and development in order to be ready and capable to manage change (Oreg, Vakola, and Armenakis 2011).

Considering that the capacity of an organization to change and transform is critical in order to maintain the competitive advantage of an organization (Vandangeon-Derumez 1998) and that there is a tendency in institutions to abandon a practice after some time, described as improvement evaporation effect (Buchanan et al. 2005), it is necessary to understand the mechanisms of the institutionalization of change. Based on Armenakis, Harris, and Feild (2000) studies, we will focus on the 3 main strategies used by management for institutionalization: active participation - persuasive communication - rites and ceremonies and the enablers in the context, the people, in order to analyze the relationship of these 4 strategies tools of the institutionalization of changes with each dimension of transformational leadership.

II.3.1. Intellectual stimulation

In their study Beer, Eisenstat, and Spector (1990) found that employees that are involved in the change-decision-making process tend to identify more with the change (Beer, Eisenstat, and Spector 1990). Participation also increases the view of fairness of the process because employees are given a voice. Consequently, it is important to include people from the start of the change process, while formulating the vision. Kotter (2014) advises

to include people from all levels and from every department in the process. People should also participate through identifying strategies and executing them. Change leaders have a critical role in encouraging teamwork, giving support and demonstrating commitment (Dale et al. 1999; Reisner 2002), and showing credibility and persistence (Kotter 2014; Pettigrew 1985). At this stage, the transformational leader has a stimulating intellectual influence on its colleagues by encouraging them to give suggestions and ideas, and to take risks. Employees that participate in a decision making process have an increased sense of self-efficacy and are able to relate the change goals with their personal interest (Latham, Winters, and Locke 1994). In a change process, management can consider creating moments and spaces for exchanging ideas among peers. In their research, Paper and Paper (2001) argue that successful change require people empowerment and ownership.

II.3.2. Idealized influence

As a change leader, the transformational leader performs the role of shaping the change vision, communicating and sharing the new vision with his team in order to implement and institutionalize new practices in the organization (Sayli and Tufekci 2008).

The importance of communication might take an increased importance depending on the change, for example in a study on restructure and downsizing, Nelissen and van Selm (2008) found that internal communication is the most important enabler for employees' commitment with change.

The change message should be clear and structured and should include the reason for change, the aim, the potential advantages, and the time and resources required (Judson 1991). Roberto and Levesque (2005) identified in their study that storytelling, metaphors, and other visual and symbolic tools can increment the motivation and support to change. Additionally, face-to-face meetings promote discussion and interpretation to generate a group view of change (Clark et al. 2010; Kotter 1995). Communication should be continuous in order to maintain and reinforce the believe in the change (Higgins, Weiner, and Young 2012; Kotter 2014).

II.3.3. Idealized influence

Rites, ceremonies, and symbolic public practices impact the cultural values of an organization. They improve recognize change leaders and promote innovation. This recognition motivates people and creates change

champions (Jacobs 2002). The leadership team that is promoting change should clearly recognize the positive results of change and show in a ceremony or symbolic event the progress toward the vision (Hiatt 2006; Kotter 1995). These ceremonies have three different objectives, first to motivate people, second to recognize the effort of the change leaders, and third to show external stakeholders that change is occurring (Jansen 2004; Kotter 2014).

II.3.4. Inspirational motivation

For Kezar (2009) management are the ones who identify the need for change and transfer it to the team. Authors agree that management have a role in identifying a clear vision, especially new managers that should take over their predecessors' change (Kezar 2014; Kotter 2014; Senge 2006). They should understand, adopt, recommunicate, and institutionalize change. In their study, Armenakis, Harris, and Feild (2000) focused on the change agent attributes and the organizational member attributes as the main two factors affecting institutionalization. Yet, communication is not enough for employees to adopt change. It is important to inspire people and have them participate in the vision design phase so they would commit to the change (Cooperrider et al. 1987; Judson 1991).

III. Research methodology

III.1. Context of the study

Previous studies have associated transformational leadership style with organizational change (Brandt, Laitinen, and Laitinen 2016). Yet, the role of the transformational leader in the institutionalization of change has received little attention in the literature. Thus, to understand the associations between transformational leadership and the institutionalization of change, we will adopt an exploratory approach based on a case study (Pettigrew, Woodman, and Cameron 2001; Pettigrew 1985).

Our methodology is based on the collection and analysis of qualitative data. These data were collected through a series of focused semi-structured interviews with 15 senior managers and heads of departments, working in the four disciplinary fields of the university and through 15 focus groups with 85 faculty members from the four disciplinary fields. Universities are actually under pressure to accreditation process, which constitutes a key factor in international rankings and choices criteria of students' enrollment policy. In order to cope with these multiple challenges, the university focuses on

organizational change due to accreditation process and need to institute changes. In our case, the university implemented the quality assurance process in all the faculties, our research question is: Is transformational leadership an enabler for change institutionalization? Considering that the change is the quality assurance process.

Because of the COVID-19, we did the interviews and the focus groups over zoom. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner consisting of three parts:

- (1) The perception of the faculty members of change, its results, and challenges
- (2) The strategies used by the leader to institutionalize change
- (3) The enablers of change institutionalization in their faculty

During the interviews, we asked about the strategies used by the leaders as well as the leadership style as an enabler for change

Interview Guide

The university is actually under pressure to accreditation process, which constitute a key factor in international rankings and choices criteria of students 'enrollment policy. In order to cope with these multiple challenges, the university focus on organizational change due to accreditation process and need to institute changes.

The objective of our interview is to understand and analyze your individual perception of the strategies used by the leaders as well as the leadership style as an enabler for change in the context of the accreditation process.

1. What are the challenges of the accreditation process?
2. What is your perception of change?
3. What about the results of these changes?
4. What are the strategies used by the leader to institutionalize change?
5. Who are the enablers of change institutionalization?
6. Is transformational leadership an enabler for change institutionalization?
7. What do you from/ How do you perceive the role of the transformational leader in this context of change?

Each interview took between 45 minutes and one hour. These interviews were spread over 3 months. On the 15th interview we noticed saturation in the information, which shows that the data collected is accurate and shows comprehension of the phenomenon under study. For the discourse analysis, we have adopted the content analysis approach by counting the number of times each transformational characteristic was related to institutionalization of change.

III.2. Coding matrix
Annex 2. Table of coding matrix

TL	Change	Verbatim	Literature
Intellectual stimulation: – participation in the decision and ideation – involve in change	Active participation	The dean made sure that everyone participated in the decision so that everyone takes responsibility for the implementation and the performance. We set the indicators and we became bearers of the project.	(Beer, Eisenstat, and Spector 1990)
	Active participation (missing)	All the head of departments participated in the decision-making process in our faculty. The whole council meets to make decision and insure the adhesion of all the faculty's members. Professors also participate in assessments and propose ideas since they are close to the students and they know their needs.	(Waytz and Mason 2013)
		There is a small group highly involved. Internally we need more communication and meetings to involve all the faculty members in the change.	(Paper and J. 2001)
		The dean has the intentions to involve everyone. Yet, and even though we are invited to vote for the projects, I don't feel we actually participated, there wasn't any group reflection.	(Dale et al. 1999; Reisner 2002)

TL	Change	Verbatim	Literature
<p>Individual consideration: – organize training and coaching as per the individual need – recognition of the individual effort</p>	Human resource management	<p>After several workshops for faculty members, the dean chose a project coordinator who was there to carry on with the trainings and give recommendations to the faculty members.</p>	<p>(Jansen 2004; Kotter 2014)</p>
		<p>Trainings and workshops were good but individual coaching is more important. Whenever a faculty member had a gap they knew there is someone to call for help.</p>	<p>(Jansen 2004; Kotter 2014)</p>
		<p>We had various trainings, we also found some great people in our institution that helped us. These meetings boosted us up</p>	<p>(Jacobs 2002)</p>
		<p>We do little continuous training; we prefer to exchange good practices in informal meetings. The dean involves people and give responsibility to the ones that are interested in participating.</p>	<p>(Jansen 2004; Kotter 2014)</p>
	Human resource management (Missing)	<p>The leader expects us to do a lot of work, but the pay remains as it is. There are a lot of acknowledgements that can be shown in many ways but they are not implemented</p>	<p>(Jansen 2004; Kotter 2014)</p>
		<p>We would have liked a word of encouragement for the teachers, the fact that the leader tells us that they see what we are going through is very important. There were messages sent but they were not personal. They were not really recognition.</p>	<p>(Jansen 2004; Kotter 2014)</p>

TL	Change	Verbatim	Literature
<p>Idealized influence: communicating and showing dynamism and desire for change</p>	<p>Persuasive communication</p>	<p>First thing the dean did was to bring everyone together and to explain clearly, where we are, where we want to arrive and why we want to go there. He explained the problem and made sure that the change is beneficial for everyone, the students, the faculty members, and the faculty</p> <p>The dean continuously communicated and showed dynamism and desire for change. He inspired us to continue to navigate in these uncertain moments</p>	<p>(Sayli and Tufekci 2008)</p> <p>(Sayli and Tufekci 2008)</p>
	<p>Persuasive communication (Missing)</p>	<p>The dean has sent emails about the quality assurance process, but because there are too many emails, the faculty members are no longer reading. We also think that quality is the work of management. We don't see the importance for us</p>	<p>(Judson 1991)</p>
<p>Inspirational motivation: – feedback for strategic orientation – inspirational vision</p>	<p>Rites, ceremonies, and formalization activities</p> <p>Rites, ceremonies, and formalization activities (Missing)</p>	<p>The dean put in place an international strategic committee, with whom we met systematically to discuss the strategic orientation of the faculty and the QAP action plan. Their feedback is very important, they also suggested new direction. Their motivation boosts us.</p> <p>Quality appears in its mission to harmonize and dynamize. Everything will depend on the seriousness of this process. We need to see a clear vision in order to aim for it.</p>	<p>(Kezar 2014)</p> <p>(Cooperrider et al. 1987; Judson 1991)</p>

Source: The author based on field interviews and focus group.

IV. Results

In the last decades, governments around the globe considered higher education as a key component of their national strategy. They considered reinforcing education as an enabler to prepare the future workforce and empower economic growth (Alexander 2000). Higher education institutions are facing an increased demand for accountability and they started accrediting various aspects of their programs and services (Harvey and Williams 2010). While many benefits came from accreditation for the university, faculty members felt that all the accreditation requirements hindered their work (Twidale and Nichols 2013). Consequently, universities focused on faculty engagement in order to gain and maintain their accreditation (Calegari, Sibley, and Turner 2015). Various authors agree that leadership is one of the major enablers for change (Beer, Eisenstat, and Foote 2009; Buchanan et al. 2005; Kotter 2014).

After the analysis, we noticed that the transformational leadership characteristics influenced the change institutionalization strategies through four strategies: persuasive communication, active participation, learning and growth, formalization and integration.

IV.1. Idealized influence

Management and faculty members were keen at distinguishing between various ways of communicating change. There was the idealized charismatic leader that used persuasion techniques to explain and convince team members in the accreditation, and the leader that sent informative emails. Standard communication and email did not go through. Faculty members who felt that communication was not persuasive did not commit to change. Only leaders with idealized influence were able to use persuasion and not just communication to promote and involve the team.

IV.2. Assess the opportunity or problem motivating the change

Intellectual stimulation affected how faculty members perceived their engagement in the accreditation process, explaining that they appreciated the reflection. Faculty members that did not feel intellectual stimulation, even though they were involved through voting and execution, did not commit to the accreditation. Faculty members that felt intellectually stimulated felt an increased sense of ownership of the accreditation and their role in it

IV.3. Assess the opportunity or problem motivating the change

Faculty members, that were convinced with the importance of accreditation and committed to the process, considered that this commitment

should payoff and be recognized for their contribution. Being part of an accreditation process meant extra effort sometimes outside of the scope of teaching and resource. Most of the faculty members that committed to the accreditation appreciated the training and support received, nevertheless, they considered that there was not individual consideration and recognition for the effort deployed in the process.

IV.4. Assess the opportunity or problem motivating the change

Faculty members expressed the important role of being inspired by the accreditation vision, especially the reason behind implementing the accreditation and what would the expected result be. In various cases faculty members considered that the objective of the accreditation did not align with the current strategic priority of the faculty.

Faculty members who saw that the change was related to the faculty strategic priorities were inspired to make the change a reality and to execute the vision. It is known that the vision is a key component of change, yet this vision needs to be motivational for people to maintain the work on it.

IV.5. Challenges related to institutionalization of change of accreditation process in a Lebanese private university

Considering the Lebanese unstable environment and the various crisis created a continuous shift in the universities' strategic priorities, this led to a continuous shift away from the accreditation in various cases. Only transformational leaders that were able to continuously motivate their people to the importance of accreditation despite all the crisis were able to maintain the change.

V. Conclusion

Based on Bass's theory of leadership (1985), the purpose of this study is to examine how each of the dimensions of transformational leadership could make a significant contribution to (institutionalization of) change of the university accreditation process. We adopted an exploratory approach based on a case study (Pettigrew, Woodman, and Cameron 2001; Pettigrew 1985), consisting of focused semi-structured interviews conducted with 15 senior leaders and 15 focus group with 85 faculty in a private university in Lebanon.

The findings of this study highlight the role of transformational leadership theory in implementing change through the dimension related to intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation. As for the other two components of transformational leadership, namely idealized influence and

individualized consideration (Bass 1985), we have noticed that they play a limited role in the institutionalization of change of the university accreditation process. It would be relevant, at this stage, to set up all the material and human resources in terms of intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation in order to enhance institutionalization of change. Collaborators emphasize the intellectual participation in decision making as they appreciate to take part and be involved in the process change through reflection committees.

Given that today, the accreditation of universities is a positioning factor in an increasingly demanding market in terms of knowledge, skills and training, the accreditation process to which the university is subject implies a change in managerial practices, management methods, procedures as well as the vision in a more global way. This change requires transformational leadership. Our study context highlights certain components of this transformational leadership as more accentuated, more valued and possibly better perceived than others to lead this change.

However, the university suffers from many factors that limit the role of transformational leadership in the institutionalization of change. Human resources practices in terms of trainings and workshops are considered responding to their personal needs, and collaborators will appreciate more individual recognition (Jansen 2004; Kotter 2014). Moreover, regarding the instability of Lebanese socio-political environment, leaders should show charisma and inspirational motivation in their communication to inspire change (Sayli and Tufekci 2008). This component of transformational leadership - inspiration - aims to motivate the entire team involved in the process of accreditation, and therefore of change, for the achievement of the organizational objective (Chemers 1997; Harb and Sidani 2019).

In order for all members to take ownership of the change, the transformational leader must involve them in this process by motivating them, through intellectual stimulation, enhancing creativity and shared vision (Wang et al. 2011; Harb and Sidani 2019), thus consequently improving their performance and their satisfaction.

The results of the study show that leaders and those in charge of the human resources should encourage the development of all the dimensions of transformational behaviors among the leaders of the university.

V.1. Theoretical implication

The findings confirm the role of transformational leadership in the accreditation process as an organizational change and institutionalization

change (Kezar 2009). Our research adds insights to the concept of change institutionalization of higher education going through an accreditation process and contribute to enrich literature related the relation between change institutionalization and transformational leadership. Moreover, our approach provides some thoughtful insights related to the contribution of each dimension of transformational leadership to the institutionalization of change a higher education institution.

V.2. Practical implication

The findings related to the association between transformational leadership and change institutionalization have several implications. Human resources management needs to emphasize on the leaders' characteristics as an inspirational motivation in order to inspire and motivate their collaborators in order to convince them of the need of change. Regarding human resources practices, emphasizing individual recognition to appreciate collaborators efforts would create a favorable environment to change.

Moreover, participation in decision-making is not enough. Leaders would encourage active participation (Dale et al. 1999; Reisner 2002) in order to motivate collaborators and generate change.

The study's findings contribute to the literature on transformational leadership and organizational change in two ways. First, the study provides empirical evidence that intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation are the two most important dimensions of transformational leadership for institutionalizing change in a university context. Second, the study provides insights into how transformational leaders can use their skills and abilities to overcome resistance to change and to institutionalize change in a university setting. The study adds to the understanding of how to achieve more performance in the higher education sector through institutionalization of change.

This study contributes to the literature on transformational leadership and organizational change. It provides new insights into how transformational leaders can use their skills and abilities to overcome resistance to change and to institutionalize change in a university setting.

V.3. Limitation and future research

We are aware of the limitations that a case study offers in term of result generalization and the validity of the conclusions is limited to the university and the studied organizational environment. Despite these limitations and other limitations pertaining to the external validity of the qualitative studies,

this study could be a starting point for future researches that would be conducted in other higher education institutions.

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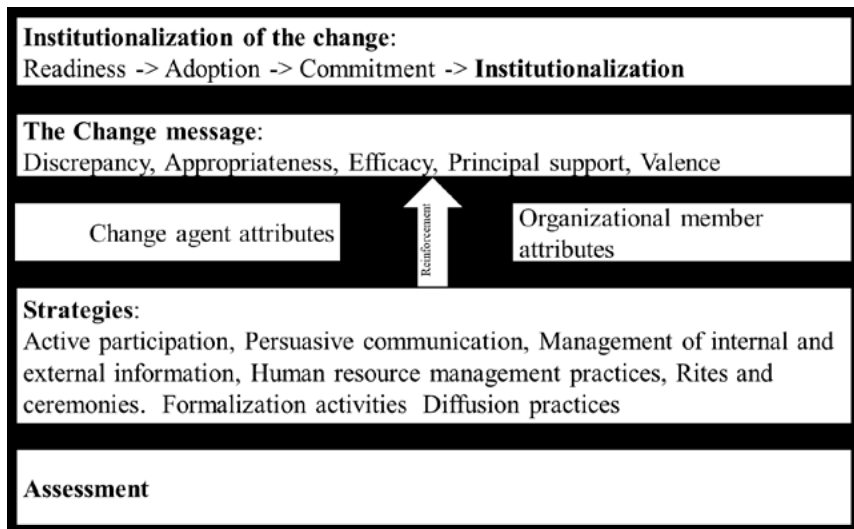
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Annex 1. Change institutionalization framework



Source: Armenakis et al. 2000, 102.