Interviewing An Organizational Change Leader

Introduction

The interviewee, Ms. Priya Sharma, is a seasoned HR professional with over 10 years of managerial experience in the corporate sector, specializing in the marketing industry. Currently serving as the HR Vice President at a leading marketing firm, she has played a pivotal role in driving organizational change, particularly in the realm of cultural and strategic transformations.

Under her leadership, the company has implemented significant diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, revamped performance management systems, and introduced flexible work policies to enhance employee well-being. The organizational change she led aligns most closely with cultural change, as her efforts focused on fostering an inclusive workplace, redefining company values, and embedding DEI practices into everyday operations. Additionally, her initiatives also reflect strategic change, such as adopting hybrid work models and restructuring employee benefits to align with evolving workforce expectations.

The purpose of this report is to analyze Ms. Sharma's experience in managing these changes, including the driving forces behind them, the strategies employed, challenges faced, and the outcomes achieved. By examining her approach, we can derive key insights into effective change management in dynamic corporate environments.

Discussion of findings based on chosen theme

Forces Driving Change

Ms. Sharma's cultural and strategic changes were influenced by both external and internal factors, as explained by Robbins et al.'s Forces of Change framework.

Externally, shifting workforce demographics and social expectations played a big role. Society's growing focus on diversity and inclusion pushed the company to adopt DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) initiatives. For example, Ms. Sharma introduced hiring goals for the LGBTQ+ community and added prayer rooms for Muslim employees to accommodate religious practices. Competitive pressures also drove change to attract and retain top talent, the company implemented flexible work policies like hybrid work arrangements and birthday leaves, along with competitive salary benchmarks based on industry trends. While technology wasn't the main focus, the company did adopt AI tools to analyze employee attrition, showing responsiveness to advancements in HR practices.

Internally, employee feedback and engagement surveys revealed problems like a toxic work culture and unresponsive managers. These findings led to changes such as mental health programs and anonymous complaint systems. Leadership vision was another key factor Ms. Sharma stated that DEI efforts were "driven from the top," meaning company leaders

prioritized inclusivity. Additionally, performance gaps, such as first-time managers struggling to give feedback, led to structured training programs to improve skills.

Most of these changes were proactive, meaning the company anticipated future needs like flexible work hours and followed industry standards for DEI. However, some actions, like mental health counseling, were reactive, addressing urgent issues raised in surveys or exit interviews.

Robbins' framework helps show how external pressures (like social trends and competition) and internal factors (like employee feedback and leadership goals) worked together to drive change. Ms. Sharma's approach aligns with Kurt Lewin's "unfreezing" stage, where these forces create the need for transformation before changes can happen.

Change Implementation and Leadership strategies

Ms. Sharma showed a deep understanding of her role as a leader driving change, balancing big-picture strategy with a focus on employee needs. She explained that DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) efforts were led by the leadership team, ensuring they matched the company's values. For example, programs to raise awareness and spaces like prayer rooms were introduced only after leaders approved them, showing a real commitment to inclusivity. To tackle mental health, she trained employees to become certified counselors, creating a peer support system. This approach combined servant leadership empowering employees with transformational leadership inspiring cultural change. During tough changes, like rolling back hybrid work policies, she prioritized clear communication, explaining the reasons, details, and timeline to reduce resistance.

Her strategies fit well-known change models. For instance, she followed Lewin's 3-Step Model: first, surveys and exit interviews revealed cultural issues like toxic behavior and manager bias, which helped create urgency for change (unfreezing). Next, she introduced solutions like DEI hiring quotas, flexible work policies, and training (changing). Finally, she reinforced new values through awards like "Mr./Miss Perseverance" and by having leaders set an example (refreezing). She also applied Kotter's 8-Step Process by building urgency, forming a leadership coalition, and creating a vision for DEI initiatives. Quick wins, such as adding prayer rooms and birthday leave policies, kept morale high. The ADKAR Model was also visible—employees became aware of issues through surveys and open discussions, and changes were reinforced through refresher training and recognition programs.

Ms. Sharma used a mix of leadership styles. As a transformational leader, she inspired change through a clear vision, like making DEI a core value, and built trust with tools like anonymous feedback systems. She also practiced democratic leadership by involving employees in decisions for example, updating policies based on their feedback and holding informal "coffee sessions" with leaders. Additionally, her focus on well-being, like providing mental health support and flexible hours, reflected servant leadership. Her approach aligns with Bass's Transformational Leadership theory, combining vision and empathy to drive change, while her use of models like Kotter and Lewin shows she followed a structured, step-by-step process.

Resistance to Change and Overcoming Challenges

Ms. Sharma faced resistance to her changes at different levels within the organization. At the individual level, employees were hesitant to adopt new diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies, such as LGBTQ+ hiring quotas, due to discomfort. Managers also resisted flexible work policies, often demanding proof for leave requests, which showed a lack of trust. At the group level, teams used to traditional hierarchies struggled with flat structures, fearing unclear roles. Hiring managers pushed back against psychometric testing, preferring old hiring methods due to ingrained biases. At the organizational level, leaders with traditional mindsets slowed DEI progress, worrying about tokenism, while departments like HR and Finance resisted collaboration due to silo mentalities.

To manage this resistance, Ms. Sharma used a mix of communication, involvement, training, and incentives. She clearly explained the reasons behind changes, using data and open discussions in town halls and informal meetings. She involved employees in DEI task forces and feedback systems, making them part of the process. Training programs, like bias workshops and mental health support, helped employees understand and adapt to new policies. She also introduced rewards, such as performance-linked DEI metrics and small perks like birthday leaves, to encourage acceptance.

Her approach aligned with change management theories. Like Lewin's model, she reduced resistance by addressing fears and building support. Following Kotter's method, she empowered employees to take ownership of changes, avoiding a top-down push. She also reinforced new behaviors through recognition programs, similar to the ADKAR model. The key takeaway was that resistance often came from fear or misunderstanding, so her strategy combined empathy, clear reasoning, and practical support to overcome these barriers.

Outcomes, Reflections and Lessons Learned

Ms. Sharma's change initiatives were successful, bringing clear improvements in several areas. Efforts to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) led to better representation of underrepresented groups, such as achieving a 5% hiring target for LGBTQ+ employees. Employee satisfaction scores related to workplace inclusivity also rose by 22% in surveys. Flexible work policies and well-being programs helped reduce attrition by 15%, and 89% of employees reported better work-life balance, along with higher productivity. Leadership changes, like first-time manager training, reduced feedback-related conflicts by 30%, and the introduction of 360-degree appraisals made performance reviews more transparent. However, there were some challenges some long-term employees resisted DEI efforts, requiring ongoing training, and a few traditional managers pushed back against flexible work policies, needing further alignment.

Ms. Sharma shared important lessons from her experience. She found that change doesn't happen in a straight line even with good planning, unexpected resistance can arise, like biases in psychometric tests, so continuous feedback is essential. She also realized that culture

matters more than policies initiatives like prayer rooms or mental health support only work if leaders genuinely practice those values. Data played a key role in gaining support, as using attrition numbers and survey results helped convince skeptics, especially when adjusting hybrid work policies. Small, quick wins, like introducing birthday leaves, built trust and paved the way for bigger changes, such as restructuring DEI efforts.

Ms. Sharma's leadership style combining empathy (listening to employees) with structure (clear vision and discipline) showed that successful change needs both heart and strategy. Moving forward, she believes resistance should be anticipated early, using tools like force field analysis during planning. To sustain change, symbolic actions like awards (e.g., "Mr./Miss Perseverance") help reinforce new behaviors a tactic she would use in future projects. She also learned that no single change model works for every situation; a flexible mix of participative and top-down approaches was key in this case.

This experience proves that successful change isn't about having a perfect plan but about adaptive leadership using data, empathy, and resilience to guide the process. Ms. Sharma's journey provides a practical guide for turning cultural and strategic changes into real, measurable results.

Conclusion

Ms. Priya Sharma's interview provides important lessons on leading cultural and strategic change in today's fast-changing work environment. She shows that for any transformation to succeed, leaders need a clear vision, data to guide decisions, and genuine care for their employees.

Change is not just about policies or structures it's also about people. Ms. Sharma balanced both by introducing diversity and inclusion programs while also offering flexible work options. This approach ensured that the organization's systems and employees' emotional needs were addressed together.

Her leadership style played a big role in making change happen. She inspired her team with a strong vision (transformational leadership) while also focusing on their needs and growth (servant leadership). This adaptability helped employees trust and support the changes.

Resistance is normal during change, but it can be managed. Ms. Sharma tackled this by communicating openly, involving employees in decisions, and recognizing their efforts like giving awards to those who embraced new values. These steps helped turn doubters into supporters, following proven change management principles.

Small, quick wins kept the momentum going. Simple but meaningful changes, like mental health support and birthday leaves, showed employees that progress was happening. This built trust and made bigger cultural shifts easier over time.

Overall, Ms. Sharma's experience proves that change is not a one-time task but a continuous effort. Leaders must keep listening, learning, and adjusting their strategies. By combining smart planning with empathy, they can turn challenges into growth opportunities. Her

approach offers a clear path: lead with purpose, connect with employees' needs, and use feedback to improve. Thus, change works best when people feel respected, heard, and motivated to grow with the organization.

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