

Re-structuring Somalia's Ailing Institutions: Notes on Conceptual Framework

 Abdiqani Yusuf Farah

Abstract

This article explores two related questions: (1) can Somalia's public institutions be reengineered using the world's most renowned organizational change theories? (2) where should change begin in a system protracted by corruption and constitutional unrest? Considering these two questions, the paper is divided into four parts. The first part gives a historical overview of Somalia's immediate past and how, applying the organizational development (OD) concepts, successful interventions can be carried out in the public service sector in Somalia. The second part presents areas of potential interventions. The third part offers, in brief, a mechanism for change evaluation. The fourth, and final, part summarizes ways OD practitioners could institutionalize change for sustainable results.

Keywords: Somalia, Somali public institutions, organization development, change management in Somalia.

1. Introduction

Right at independence in 1960, Somalia was confronted with serious developmental challenges. Some of these challenges had to do with the fact that the country was less prepared for the road ahead after independence. Both the British and the Italian forces left behind a political culture that was not only foreign to most Somalis but also inconceivably inconsistent with, and fluid for, the pastoral social settings of the time (Lewis, 1972). Nevertheless, the nation went ahead with the first election on March 30, 1964, leading to a victory for the Somalia Youth League (SYL), and the last election in 2017 gave the country the sitting president, Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed.

Over the course of 62 years, Somalia has seen nine official presidents and 18 prime ministers, with Mohamed Siad Barre's 22-year military reign in-between. Cabinet ministers came and went like a rainfall, with virtually no impact behind other than stagnant governments, unable to see beyond the windows of the colonialist-bestowed buildings. Blaming previous administrations for the lack of developmental policies and governmental infrastructures became a cliché in the corridors of power.

Corruption, complacency in the public sector, lack of national direction, and human rights malpractices were, and still are, the order of the day. Transparency International's Corruption Index placed the country at the bottom (number 180th), according to 2018 report (Transparency International, 2018). Consequently, donor nations have been asking successive governments to reverse the situation and put new interventions in place, so the country can get the monetary help it needs to recover from remnants of the civil war (UNDP, 2010). Reversing the status quo requires confronting the real challenges of uncertainty and the pain of changing the national perception toward good governance and rule of law.

1.1 Exploratory Questions

With that picture in mind, this article investigates the organizational change and development literature in the hope of retrieving theories that could help Somalia get in the right course. It explores two related questions: (1) can Somalia's public institutions be reengineered using the world's most renowned organizational change theories? (2) where should change begin in a system protracted by corruption and constitutional unrest? An assumption this article has made, right at the outset, is that OD literature has positive implications for Somalia's public institutions, as well as private ones. The basis of this assumption is that while non-state actors such as the primary and the higher education institutions in Somalia have managed to pursue growth-oriented goals and shown resilience in the face of difficulties, public institutions are lagging behind in the race toward effectiveness and efficiency.

If Somalia is determined to make a good progress in good governance and effective public institutions, applying the OD concepts discussed in this article are crucial, and time is of the essence. These concepts offer practical propositions applicable to all public institutions wanting to change and keep up with the changing times and to serve their constituencies better. The time-tested approaches to change management not only give public service practitioners the recipe for designing successful organizational change proposals but also provide practitioners with the ability to carry out measurable interventions.

2. Change Model for Somalia's Public Institutions

Every change rests on a model, and what is discussed here have been proven by research and years of field practice across industries and cross-sectional departments. The assumption is that all organizations, regardless of the geographical boundaries, have certain characteristics such as

people, culture, structure, and power dynamics. To that end, scholar-practitioners in different fields, public and private, have developed a model that, if followed, may put Somalia's public institutions on a prosperous course. This model starts with what is today known as entering and contracting phase.

2.1 Entering and Contracting

Being the first phase to be taken during OD interventions, the entering and the contracting phase represents the gateway to the organization. It is where all organizational development practitioners have to start. According to Cummings and Worley (2015) and Lippitt and Schmidt (1967), the entering and contracting phase serves at least two purposes. First, it sets the tone for the professional relationship between the OD consultant, organizational members, and the process of improving the organizational effectiveness. Second, it helps the OD change team to size up the magnitude of the problem by putting the entire organization in a diagnostic magnifier, leading to a robust scientific identification of the problem.

Before a change step is taken, the consultant should think of the contracting phase as a venue for securing the commitment and the involvement of the key people in the organization. Here is where the organizational forces, either opposing or favoring the change, should be identified. In other words, the stakeholders (both primary and secondary) of the organization are scanned, and their concerns are taken into account (Harrison & Shirom, 1999). To that end, the contracting phase "typically establishes the expectations of the parties, the time and resources that will be expected, and the ground rules under which the parties will operate" (Cummings & Worley, 2015, p. 79).

It is at this stage that all forces, local or international, are considered. Considering forces—both pro and against—is important. “Once stakeholders are identified, the analysis focuses on those who are directly concerned with the proposed intervention or likely to be affected by it” (Harrison & Shirom, 1999, p. 118). This has particular importance for Somalia where the power dynamic is subject to tribal and group interpretations. That is, constituency expectations should be taken into account.

The idea is that it is hard to “work on problems together without first establishing mutual trust and understanding with the client” (White, 1990, p. 82). The consultant should, therefore, “obtain an organizational consensus about values regarding political interests as unitary” (Grieves, 2003, p. 54). In fact, those who want to pursue a sustainable change and development in Somalia’s inertia-driven public service sector must think well into the future and carry out the tasks diligently.

Successful interventions must not involve in haphazard undertakings but carefully designed steps. In these steps, the OD consultant ensures that organizational problems are clarified, and key stakeholders of the organization determined and put onboard. Having the relevant people onboard ensures a collaborative relationship that will prove indispensable as the change intervention moves forward toward diagnosing the real issues confronting organizations (Bellman, 1990; Cummings & Worley, 2015; Davis, 1982).

2.2 Diagnosis

The next most important step toward a successful intervention in Somalia is to diagnose the real problems that stagnated the public service sector since the founding of the nation. The diagnosis phase can set the stage for a proper diagnosis of the problem and, in the end, a successful implementation (Lawrie, 1982). Because the problems that necessitated the change in the first place must be clearly defined, carefully diagnosed,

and sharply refined, organization development literature gives an unwavering important to the diagnosis stage (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005; Cummings & Worley, 2015; French & Bell, 1971; Kilmann & Mitroff, 1979). Particularly, Cummings and Worley (2015) have particularly given the best description of how the diagnosis phase looks like when carried out diligently; they said the diagnosis is the process of understanding a system's current functioning whereby every nuance that might impede progress must be studied and dealt with in earnest.

Why is problem diagnosis so important? Because the stakes are high, and employing a scientific approach to diagnosing organization's problems helps the diagnostic team in identifying and addressing the issues. Kilmann and Mitroff (1979) asked one of the most needed but also most afraid questions in the organization development practice. They wrote: "How should the groups be composed to define, debate, and synthesize the problem definition?" (p. 31). Stated differently, the diagnostic process is meaningless unless the data are properly collected, analyzed, and contextualized for action. That is to say that through a sound methodology, "OD consultants and clients jointly define problems and seek solutions" (White, 1990, p. 81).

Identifying major problems in organizations requires the use of scientific principles that could lead to pinpointing the organization's gaps and misfits that, if unnoticed, could set the daily process of management and leadership into internal chaos. That is, "the deliberate creation of new mechanisms is essential for the identification and closing of gaps" (Weisbord, 1976, p. 443).

There are specific activities that OD practitioners should focus on during the diagnostic process. Chief among these is to seek consultative governance in which the outcome of the diagnosis process is discussed and agreed-upon. Moreover, an organization must own its means and the

outcome of the diagnosis. Realistically, institutions can enlist the help of others, but ownership of whatever happens, or fail to happen, is a fundamental step to developing an indigenous institution. Ultimately, any ambitious problem-identification steps should also include data collection and analysis as well as feedback.

Generally, OD practitioners are never satisfied with the final outcome; they are always striving for the better, always researching and diagnosing potential issues. In fact, the surest antidote to complacency and potential failure is continuous diagnosis of not only what went wrong in the immediate past but what might go awry in the distant future. The essence of diagnosis stage is to continually understand organizational issues from inside out. The way to do this is to set the entire organization in a direction in which practical problem-finding is part of the mission.

This, in essence, is the job of action research. But for action research to work, the input of all stakeholders is needed. In this collaborative undertaking, a careful attention must be paid to how the change is to be seen by all stakeholders (Gagliardi, 1986). This is particularly important because effective interventions are “intended to change the beliefs, attitudes, values, and structure of organizations so that they can better adapt to new technologies, markets, and challenges” (Bennis, 1969, p. 2). The idea here is simple: No change is possible until people who should be instituting the change buy into the initiative.

2.2.1 Data Collection and Analysis

Successful diagnosis lies in successful data collection. When the data collection process is of high quality, the success of the intervention stands a great chance. Because “effective change depends on a careful diagnosis of how the organization is functioning” (Cummings & Worley, 2015, p. 41), only properly collected data can lead to the identification of the real

gaps. That is why pinpointing what is wrong with Somalia's public institutions lies in proper diagnosis of the situation. Put differently, no great change is possible until an unwavering emphasis is put on diagnosing the problem thoroughly.

2.2.2 Feedback

Another equally important step in the diagnosis process is feeding the findings back into stakeholders. As a tool, "feedback can be very powerful. Those who look for and accept it position themselves to be more competent and capable" (Folkman, 2006, p. xv). Once the data are collected and analyzed, the result is communicated with the relevant constituencies. In fact, results communicated and agreed-upon can be the basis for designing a progressive intervention. Needless to say, in environments protracted and divided by tribalism and group-interests, seeking consensus on the most important findings could be crucial to quantum-leap change. Once organizational members decide on the problem to be fixed, designing a strategic plan becomes the next logical step.

2.3 Strategic Change Interventions

All strategic interventions have one thing in common: they are long-term focused and are intended to respond to an identified problem. That is why problem diagnosis precedes any strategic interventions. Strategic change interventions are intended to respond to the problem through the proposal of specific activities to be taken as remedies. In practice, strategic interventions bridge what is and what should be. In fact, change interventions "link the internal functioning of the organization to the larger environment and transform the organization to keep pace with changing conditions. These change programs are the newest additions to OD" (Cummings & Worley, 2015, p 161). In the case of Somalia, leaders and citizens must embrace change and be willing to head for the unknown

and risk failure. Change is mandatory if the nation is to continue to exist and to carve out a distinctive place in the world of nations.

2.3.1 Areas of Change for Public Institutions in Somalia

While Somalia has unique needs, and hence unique solutions, the theory of organization change can be the basis of developing and restructuring Somalia's ailing public institutions. The needed change could be in the form of enhancing performance, or some other type. According to Deaner and Miller (1999), "development of organization means improving performance and productivity of individuals, work relationships, work groups, and entire organizations" (p. 139). Even so, the core essence of any change must be substantiated by research. This is so because "a good plan contains the current problem, desired goal and a strategy to reach the goal" (Stanley, 2018, p. 3).

Organizations, throughout history, worked toward change in one of three levels: (1) organization-level, (2) group-level, and (3) individual-level. In the same manner, Somalia's public institutions should consider instituting change in all these areas. For example, in interventions targeting the organizational level, the goals and objectives are continually refined, and departments restructured (Cummings & Worley, 2015; Grievess, 2003). At the group-level, people who make up any particular organization are studied as a whole. Of particular interest to organizational behaviorists seeking group-level changes are group culture, group effectiveness, group integration and collaborate culture (Cummings & Worley, 2015; Randall, 1971). At the individual level, change could seek person-job alignment and personnel development schemes (Grievess, 2003).

OD literature can set the stage for change-oriented public institutions that choose to live on constant changes. In addition, while an intervention in Somalia's public institutions must be informed by research, practical

lessons might suggest group-and individual-level as a starting point for potential interventions.

2.3.1.1 Group-level

Public institutions in Somalia seem to suffer from trust and collaboration issues. Just as the country is fragmented by decades of mistrust and civil hostility, the minds of the very civil servants are divided along political and sectarian lines. If this is the case, a group-level intervention is necessary. Moreover, because public institutions grow out of the collective goodwill, and the input of people, teamwork and healthy collegial dependability are critical. Needlessly, as Grieves (2003) observed, “teamwork has become one of the fundamental approaches of contemporary management” (p. 57). Project managers will work together toward the end goals of the organization.

Teams in the systemwide must be organized toward common objectives and goals. And while at it, practitioners must pay a particular attention to building interpersonal as well as intergroup relations. This is because a highly banded team by trust is expected to outperform others fragmented by lack of trust. That is why “trust in interpersonal and intergroup relationships is essential if full and open communication is to occur” (Randall, 1971, p. 47).

2.3.1.2 Individual-level

The concept behind individual-level interventions is that organizations consist of individuals who make up the organization population. These individuals “come into groups and organizations with varying needs for achievement, inclusion, influence, and belonging” (Cummings & Worley, 2015, p. 285). Once individual-level issues are addressed, group attitudes will be in a better shape (Connor, 1977). In short, any plan that does not

take into account the input of individual organizational members, including the line workers, is increasing the likelihood of failure (Grievess, 2003).

The bottomline of this strategic change is to put public institutions on a continuous learning curve. Individual departments must be put on a molding curve, an efficient-oriented culture. A molding curve can create an environment of solution-orientation, where the team spirit is the lifeblood of the organizational well-being.

Basically, OD practitioners must entertain the notion of continuous betterment. They must continually ask: “How can we make the organization better?” That question can trigger a huge success venue for developing organizations. It necessitates the effort behind organizational diagnosis, seeking gaps that might exist in the organization. This is because “organizational fit/misfit has mainly been viewed as matching or aligning (1) organizational resources to environmental threats and opportunities, or (2) internal mechanisms to the strategy of the organization” (Pérez-Nordtvedt, Payne, Short, & Kedia, 2008, p. 790).

2.4 Evaluating

All interventions are followed by an evaluation of some kind because there is a need to know impact of the intervention. But before an evaluation is attempted, organizations must put in place measurement criteria for what a successful intervention looks like, when carried it out (Argyris, 1970). Organizations set right criteria for what to be evaluated by using a reliable methodology. Whatever the criteria, good measures of effectiveness can “provide hard proof of the effects of training interventions and the methodology” (Easterby-Smith, 1988, p. 86).

In the evaluation phase, organizations want to see whether the intervention succeeded as planned and take measurable efforts to judge

the outcome of the intervention (Cameron, 1986; Cummings & Worley, 2015; Kimberly & Nelson, 1975; Porras and Silvers, 1991). Somalia's public institutions must embrace the world of change, a rapid change substantiable in the impact of interventions through evaluation. All interventions must be followed with an evaluation, regardless of the level. Nothing short will do, or show, any good.

The entire intervention must be methodical from conceptualizing organizational problems to researching and diagnosing these problems. In this methodology, right problems to be addressed are documented, strategic implementations carried out, and a concrete evaluation plan, including the right criteria for evaluation and those who would be carrying out the evaluation, are followed up with (Cameron, 1980; Cummings & Worley, 2015; Posavac, 2011). In short, organizational change practitioners must bear in mind that only right criteria can lead to the right outcome.

2.5 Institutionalizing Change

OD interventions are useless unless the organization is capable of sustaining and institutionalizing the outcomes of the intervention. Once change is formulated, executed, and measured its success, the next major step is to institutionalize the change, so that the new culture takes root, and previous status quo divorced. Institutionalizing change is to deepen the roots of change and to set the organization for success. Cummings and Worley (2015) presented specific elements that a successfully institutionalized change must have, including “(1) motivating change, (2) creating a vision, (3) developing political support, (4) managing the transition, and (5) sustaining movement” (p. 180).

Successful institutionalization happens when organizations work within the realm of social culture that makes up its environment, both internal

and external, for the benefits of all stakeholders (Gagliardi, 1986; Jaeger, 1986). That is, the purpose of the resultant culture is to unite the hearts and minds of organizational stakeholders around their expectations and experiences drawn from the change.

3. Conclusion

Change interventions are ambitious plans and should be seen as such. They must never be attempted half-baked, for organizational change interventions are measures targeted to achieve some desired results. As Howes and Quinn (1978) put it, organizational changes go through “flexible planning sequences, initial piloting of the change, systematic evaluation of the change effort, a decentralized unit structure, and relaxation of formalized rules and procedures have been found to facilitate the institutionalization of changes” (p. 77). For Somalia, organizational change means going beyond the conventional ways of building relationships. Any effort to instituting change must reflect the technological and social dynamics in place.

OD practitioners must remember that people almost always oppose change. For a variety of reasons, people hate change and are expected to oppose it no matter who is preaching it. Some fear of losing status, others sniff possible downsizing (or rightsizing for that matter), and yet other have already bought into their comfort zones and are not willing to get out of their safety net. Either way, they will resist even the change that would professionally take them to the next level. As a result, “a highly committed individual might more readily identify with and accept organizational change efforts that are perceived as beneficial. By the same token, a highly committed individual might be expected to strongly resist changes judged harmful to the organization” (Lau & Woodman, 1995, p. 540).

In the science of OD change, this is known as resistance to change. The best way to deal with organizational change resistance is to be aware of it and to manage it successfully. One approach to managing resistance is to create readiness in the minds of those who might resist the change. In “creating readiness for change and overcoming resistance to change” (Cummings & Worley, 2015, p. 180), enlisting the support of organizational members is key.

Research suggests that the most of important readiness is emotional. “Emotional readiness alone is of course not sufficient; the organization must also have the requisite capability to manage change” (Buller, 1988, p. 43). This is probably because “when an organization is undergoing changes, its members have some interpretations of and expectations about these changes” (Lau & Woodman, 1995, p. 538).

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