An Exploration of the Role of Ethics in Leadership Decision-Making in Change Initiatives in Queensland Government Owned Corporations

by

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Abstract

The context for this thesis is a perceived convergence of two themes: high failure rates of change initiatives and growing concern about ethics in leadership decision-making (LDM). Change initiatives have become pervasive in business and government and are increasing in volume, speed and size (Burnes 1996; Keller & Aiken 2008). Change processes however have a high failure rate with significant financial, social and political consequences. One of the consistently identified factors contributing to these failure rates is the 'Lack of Leadership/Executive Support' (*Chaos, The Standish Group Report* 1995; *A guide to ERP Success* 2001; *Challenge of Change: Australia* 2010; Cooke et al. 2001; Eser et al. 2007; Keller & Aiken 2008; KPMG 1997; OASIG 1995), although there is limited research of what this comprises. Decision-making is however a core leadership competency (Woiceshyn 2011) increasing concern and research has focused attention on the ethical context in which leaders make decisions (Coldwell 2010; Dassah 2010; Fykse Tveit 2010; Schwab et al. 2010) particularly in the light of recent business scandals. Compounding this situation is the rate of change in business (Coldwell 2010) coupled with the perceived and actual role of leadership decision making (LDM). Consequently, there is increasing pressure on organisations to improve the quality of LDM processes in change initiatives. To date, the interrelationships and behaviours of leaders and the ethics they employ often appear as separate fields of ontological inquiry; in terms of LDM however, these interrelationships form the essence of improving LDM within organisational contexts and their impact on society.

This thesis is a qualitative analysis of two case studies of change initiatives in Queensland Government owned corporations focussing on the processes, consequences and outcomes of LDM. The research findings indicate that the quality of LDM may be improved by addressing the two issues of equivocality and uncertainty through the inclusion of ethics and logic in a prescriptive and iterative LDM process. The proposed Q.L.D. model for improving the quality of LDM in change initiatives combines the elements of ethics, logic, organisational learning and change leadership to decrease levels of equivocality and uncertainty. The Q.L.D. model presents a disciplined and focused process for leadership decision making in change initiatives by decreasing the impact of the factors affecting failure rates.

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Certification of Thesis

I certify that the ideas, experimental work, results, analyses, software and conclusions reported in this thesis are entirely my own effort, except where otherwise acknowledged. I also certify that the work is original and has not been previously submitted for any other award, except where otherwise acknowledged.

Signature of Candidate Date

Signature of Supervisor/s Date

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