



ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE MANAGEMENT

BY

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A colleague of mine says that people don't mind change and they don't necessarily fear it – but that they do fear what is required to *make* a change. So, in effect, when organizational change is proposed and employees begin to have “fear conversations” (“I wonder what job moves are going to come about as a result of this. . .?” “Where is all this heading. . .?” “What kind of shake-ups will there be at the top?”) what they're actually expressing is a fear of *how the change is to be instituted*. Organizational psychologists are highly attuned to change constructs, to the organizational purposes that they serve, and the opportunities and advantages that they provide for organizations. For all the positive aspects that change provides, we nevertheless find dichotomized thinking about the change process, when we work with the employees of a corporation undergoing change. From one perspective, we find that the organization's members endorse the end result of change and the advantages that this can bring. They can see, for example, that changes can offer greater efficiencies and improved and easier ways of doing things; increased corporate profits and a chance at higher salaries; a heightened competitive edge and greater market status advantage for the company. While acknowledging these benefits, what they talk to us about, however, are the actions and details that will occur between the time change is initiated and when the change has been effected – that is, the *path* that is to be traveled to make the change is of the greatest concern.

Because change is so all-pervasive in modern organizations, two of the most critical elements of leadership are initiation and management of change. Most managers have had limited training in the specifics of leading organizational change and have little idea of the ways that their employees perceive and experience change. And, yet, much of the day-to-day work of the manager involves addressing marketplace opportunities – most of which require change to the organizational structure and its employee functioning. The greatest determinant of the future success of an organization is the CEO and leadership team's ability to address change by formulating and articulating a clear vision and carefully-crafted strategic reactions.



Change in complex organizations requires management of the interplay of emotions and cognitive processes. Managers, on the whole, lack the knowledge and background to deal with imminent and forced organizational changes. The modern, dynamic business environment requires large numbers of changes to be made during any given year, from an ever-widening range of change choices. Without training in this area, managers often resist change or avoid organizational transformation effort. When faced with the need to change, resistive actions on the part of the organization's leaders can precipitate a process that results in rapid deterioration of the organization. Sound knowledge of organizational change processes, on the other hand, allows leaders to view change as an opportunity that can be guided and managed for greater gains.

From these two different approaches to organizational change – change resistance or change management – two differing belief systems emerge. The belief of the “change resistant” manager is that change will bring instability, upheaval, unpredictability, threat and disorientation; the “change embracer,” on the other hand, sees change as an opportunity -- a chance for rejuvenation and innovation as well as progress and growth. In effect, the difference in the two approaches is a that of viewing change from a perspective of fear and anxiety, or from one of excitement and confidence.

From our experiences in organizations, there is no doubt that confident managers deal with change management most effectively. To arrive at a point where they are poised and assured of handling organizational changes, managers will have devoted themselves to constant and continuous learning. Dedicated learners gain the ability to gather large amounts of current knowledge that allows flexibility to react with dexterity and skill to crisis situations. Learning managers also come to know the culture of their organizations, and, consequently, are adept at persuading and reassuring employees to follow their lead in instituting change propositions.

From our many experiences of working as consultants in organizations, the professionals in my company have gleaned the following precepts of managing change:

1-- STRUCTURE AND POSIT THE CHANGE PROPOSITION WELL

Managers need to be able to clearly and completely describe and justify the changes that they propose. In order to prepare their employees for change, they need to have researched the topic well in order to be able to clearly delineate: 1) the reason for the change; 2) the proposed actions to be taken; and 3) the expected results. Good data to



support the need for change are critical. The data need to be provided, along with sources for employees to find background and technical information for the proposed changes on their own. Providing information sources for employees encourages an informed workforce and also promotes the growth of an organizational population of learners.

2 -- ANTICIPATE RESISTANCE AND REACTION

The manager should know the employees and the organizational culture well enough to be able to anticipate those who will be resistant to change. Preparations for emotional reactions to change can be accomplished by developing strategies for use in specific situations. Change scenarios can offer sound operational approaches for most circumstances. If there are departments or other “pockets” of personnel who are likely to resist the changes, the manager and his staff will want to work with these members either in groups, or one-on-one, as appropriate.

3 -- TALK OPENLY ABOUT THE CHANGE REACTIONS

The manager, or an expert hired to assist with the intricacies of individual behavior in change situations, will need to confront employee fears and reactions to the change. There is a need to talk openly about plans for change and the actions relating to the change as well as to work with individual employees to assist them in addressing their concerns. As a part of this process, employees will need to determine “what’s in it for me” -- this might simply be that the company, and they along with it, will prosper under the new directions. Once there have been discussions to promote greater understanding, employees can begin to think seriously about their roles in the change process.

4 -- INSPIRE TRUST AND TEAMWORK

The focus of the work with employees during the planning and initiation stages of change will be on engendering employee trust and inspiring teamwork. When goals are explained well and management credibility and integrity exists, it will be possible to transform employee reactions of anxiety to an endorsement of changes. Trust and team building is a topic requiring lengthy discussion, as there are prescriptive processes that will need to be followed. To accomplish this phase of change, leaders will need to research the topic well; or, alternatively, employ experts who can guide the organization’s members through formal teambuilding and organizational development processes. (For more information on this topic, see: Blair, 2006, Organizational Development and Teambuilding @ www.leadinglearninginc.com.)

5 -- ALLOW OWNERSHIP OF THE CHANGE PROCESS

The desired outcome for teambuilding is to have employees feel that they own the change process as well as the path that is to be traveled to secure the change. Great value is derived from the employee dedication and rejuvenation that comes from feeling



ownership of the change process. When an employee is feeling in charge of the process and of his own fate, there is certainty that the desired change will be accomplished. This level of confidence also fosters inspiration, new ideas, and innovative ways of doing things that result in a high rate of overall achievement.

6 -- LEADERS MUST LEAD

Throughout the change process, from the planning . . . to the introduction of change . . . to the implementation, the leader must *lead*. That is, employees must be convinced, in both words and actions, that the leader is fully behind the change processes. Members of the organization must be able both to know and to sense that the direction of change is well understood and highly endorsed by the leader, and that the leader harbors no doubts about the proposed course of action leading to greater organizational benefit and commercial gain for the organization. Good information about the organization's position and the need for change, a clear plan for action, and absolute faith in the success of the actions to be undertaken will be interpreted positively by employees. A leader that proposes change must be certain of the commitment and skill in leading the change efforts. It is for these challenging change efforts that confident leaders are most needed.

In summary: A leader must be willing to embrace change processes with clarity and enthusiasm; must have identified the need for change through avid learning processes; must be able to transmit a commitment to the change as well as to one's employees throughout the process; must be willing to work with individuals, groups and teams to establish the right path to accomplish the change; must be willing to share the ownership of the change processes and to compromise and deviate, where needed, from the original plans in order to ensure that others assume important roles in the process. And, above all, the leader must exhibit the courage and conviction that engenders respect and confidence from others in the organization; that allays most doubts; and that inspires employees to greater levels of performance and accomplishment.

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