COMMUNICATION IN THE MANAGEMENT OF CHANGE: APPLICATIONS TO THE PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SECTOR

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ABSTRACT

Change is now widely accepted as an inevitable consequence of modern management. As such, practitioners from various disciplines are required to take responsibility for the management of change and its resultant transitions. In most organisational contexts, the nature and dynamics of instituting change and leading transitions are very similar. This article discusses the causes of change in a volatile global and local environment, explains the difference between change, transition, and transformation, and explores facts about change and people's reactions to it. The eight common mistakes in change management are deliberated upon and their solutions are given. After various challenges for initiating change have been formulated, some guidelines for the role of communication in the management of change are provided.

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INTRODUCTION

Certainly one of the most stated truisms in the private and public sector of the past decade in South Africa is the contention that change is the only constant. Yet, despite the seemingly uncontested acceptance of this integral part of organisational management and leadership, many business institutions and governmental departments still seem to falter and flounder in instituting business and political change and leading their employees/voters through the resultant transition and transformation.

In contemplating the nature and implications of global organisational change (whether in profit or non-profit organisations) the change guru, Peter Senge, and his associates pose this question: Looking ahead twenty or thirty years, does anyone expect the next few decades to be less tumultuous than the last twenty years (*Senge et al.* 1999). Simply considering the world-wide changes that may be possible in the economy, in socio-politics, in governments, in technology, and in all of the other fields of human endeavour and investigation, who can say what might happen?

It is fairly obvious, however, that continuing and accelerating change will tax social, governmental and organisational management and leadership resources to the ultimate. It was the very nature of universal change that prompted the fusion of the established paradigm of systems theory with the seemingly unrelated field of quantum physics and molecular biology to give us chaos theory as an attempt to understand and manage unbridled change. Paradoxically, the tenets of chaos theory give the assurance that there is a sensible measure of method in what seems to be the madness of wide-ranging change.

In this article the point of view is taken that two of the major reasons for both private and public sector's inability to effectively manage change is that (1) the importance of communication is either totally ignored or (2) communication is only viewed as a tool to bring about change (that is, communication on technical level). As a tool in change management, communication is either used to inform employees about change interventions and then to control the change intervention; or it is used to change the organisational culture in order to adapt to a changing environment. Although changing the culture of an organisation is the first step in the change process, organisations fail to perceive the management of communication as an important resource in the management of change. Attempts at managing change

in the organisation often fail, because organisations do not see communication as a strategic function or resource.

This article discusses the causes of change in a volatile global and local environment, explains the difference between change, transition, and transformation, and explores facts about change and people's reactions to it. The eight common mistakes in change management are deliberated upon and their solutions are given. After various challenges for initiating change have been formulated, some guidelines for the role of communication in the management of change are provided.

CAUSES OF CHANGE

Global (international) and local (national) changes result in subsequent changes on both the external and internal environments of organisations in the private and public sector. Numerous causes and sources of change exist: changes on political, economical, and technological level will be singled out. Lastly, globalisation will be discussed, as globalisation is in essence a connected word that is built through technology. The cause of change with its resultant effect is indicated in each instance. See further Grobler in Verwey & Du Plooy Cilliers (in press, due for publication early in 2003).

Political changes: "Deep structural uprooting"

Unprecedented change in countries, governments, and political views caused astonishing changes with deep political structural uprooting. This resulted in total changes in traditional political structures on a global basis (Haines 2000:3). The following can be cited as examples that occurred since 1990:

- the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany;
- the formation of the European Common Market and the introduction of the Euro;
- the toppling of communism throughout Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union;
- the "Asian Tiger" countries and China's Communist mandarins appear to be mounting a campaign toward free markets;
- Latin American dictatorships' veering toward the free market mind-set;
- Foreign investments in the Third World countries;

- Formation of an African Union; and
- Social and political changes in Zimbabwe cause displacement and food shortages.

Add to this list the release of Nelson Mandela after 27 years of imprisonment and an ANC Government that came to power in South Africa in 1994, and it becomes very clear that the global and local political playing fields have undergone deep structural changes. The world may be changing rapidly, but the pace in South Africa is even more extreme because political and social transformation adds extra pressure to the global "change in progress".

Economical changes: "The 24x7x52 customer"
The global emergence of e-business changed the values of customers/consumers significantly. The wired economy of today is affecting the entire configuration of business and today's customer must be catered for 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 52 weeks a year: the "24x7x52" customer.

Social changes: "The boom in better governance and social responsibility"
The collective social conscience of the word is shifting towards placing greater importance on ethical, social, environmental, and developmental issues. Businesses and governments are under pressure from many sides and from an increasing range of stakeholders (such as other governments, regulators, animal lovers, environmentalists, activists, angry shareholders, disenchanted workers and from alert – and often hostile – media) to improve their governance (Manning 2002:5).

A global example is the collapse of the American energy, commodity, and services company Enron and the alleged role that the international auditing firm Andersen played in it. This incident shattered the confidence in American "apple-pie" business virtues (Swift 2002:13) world-wide and locally rumours, allegations and sometimes proof of corruption in government and private enterprise and unethical practices abound.

Organisations furthermore have an ethical duty to mankind to improve their resource management in order to reverse the damage to ecosystems and safeguard the earth for its future inhabitants. Improvements in organisation's productivity and resource efficiency must continue, but within the constraint of environmental protection.

Lastly, community development initiatives, such as corporate social investment, are sometimes thought of as a peculiarly South African solution to eradicate the historical imbalances that arose from apartheid spending patterns. Ploughing back into the land from which one reaps is, however, a universal concept: it just has a greater urgency in the South African context.

Technological changes: "The death of distance"

The microchip and the Internet have changed the business landscape forever. In fact, the effects of technology cannot be underestimated. This statement has given rise to the necessity to distinguish between two types of technologies (Christensen 1997:xv).

Sustaining technologies

Implementing sustaining technologies refers to situations where technology and organisational structure work together to establish incremental (small scale) change in the procedures of the company. An example would be the regular upgrading of computer systems to keep pace with new technology.

Disruptive technologies

Disruptive technologies, on the other hand, do not (at first) enhance an organisation's present way of conducting its core activities, but requires a total new structure and strategy. An example is when a changed external environment forces a hierarchical "Brick and Mortar" 20th Century organisation to become a mean and lean "Click and Order" network type 21st Century organisation using the Internet as a primary platform for exchanging information - whether it is for business or for political purposes. This change in technology causes changes in organisational processes, practices, communication strategy, management, or leadership skills, IT staffing requirements, in both private and public practice.

Whether sustaining or disruptive in nature, the fact is that new communication technologies have caused the "death of distance" and the "24x7x52" customer or voter sits on the doorstep of global and local businesses and governments.

The above-mentioned causes of change are therefore all indicative of the new dynamic revolutionary external business and political environment. It results in local workplace and political reform on the internal environment of the organisation. External and internal triggers of change are interdependent. The following serves as some

examples of internal triggers: the shift and redistribution of decision-making power across the organisation; reduced regulation and increased competition; and increased diversity of the workforce. The latter is obviously of special importance in South Africa.

Quantum leap changes on global and local level impact on the internal and external environment of all organisations: private or public, profit or non-profit, governmental or non-governmental. The important role that globalisation plays needs further discussion.

GLOBALISATION: WORLD CONNECTIVITY THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

As stated before, globalisation is in essence a connected world that is built through technology. Within the fulfilling of Marshall McLuhan's global village prophesy and within the notion of bifurcations and the butterfly effect of the chaos theory, a single incident in a local region can have close to dramatic effects on the whole globe. The first incident, albeit a tragic incident, that jumps to mind is the terror attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York on September 11, 2001. It is still too early to know what the real consequences might be, but suffice to say that the effects will reverberate through the world economy, the political landscape and global social values for many years to come.

What is of importance here is how this new world connectivity through globalisation impacts on the way business and politics are conducted on a global as well as a local level, i.e. the changes that globalisation forces on organisations and, ultimately, on organisational communication.

For example, globalisation means that organisations now have to address issues of cultural diversity, intercultural communication, and cultural training barriers as they manage a more diverse workforce and service the needs of more diverse customers and publics. Since the 1990s globalisation of the economy and the adoption of free market systems in Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America have prompted business and government leaders to re-examine the goals, responsibilities, ethical principles and value systems of organisations that were entering their economies from different cultural environments (Paine 1997:378). Albach & Bloch (2000: 138 ff.) contend that globalisation and the intensification of international competition are two trends that have exerted a major impact on (change) management theory.

CHANGE, TRANSITION AND TRANSFORMATION

Change

In an endeavour to arrive at a lexicon of the nature and dynamics of change, a wide array of terms and concepts that are often used interchangeably is found.

The original meaning of the old French word *changer* was "bend" or "turn," like tree or vine searching for the sun (*Senge et al.* 1999). Today, in business and politics the word "change" can often mean several seemingly contradictory aspects. It sometimes refers to external changes in technology, competitors, market structures, or the social or political environment. This meaning of change connotes an awareness and acceptance that "our world will change, and we have to adapt along with it." Change also refers to internal changes: how the organisation internally adapts to those changes in the environment. The constant concern in most organisations is whether these internal changes – in practices, views, and strategies – will keep pace with and respond appropriately to external changes.

Transition

There is a clear differentiation between change and transition (Bridges 1991). Change is situational: the new office, the new boss or political party leader, the new name of the government department or political party, new team roles, or the new business or political party policy. Transition is the psychological processes people go through to come to terms with the new situation. Change is external; transition is internal. Change is not a problem for the manager/leader - transition is. Unless transition takes place, change will not be successful. Several of the important differences between change and transition are overlooked when people think of transition as simply a gradual or unfinished change. Transition is different: the starting-point for transition is not the outcome but the ending that each person will have to make to leave the old situation behind. Situational change revolves around the new thing, but psychological transition depends on letting go of the old reality and the old identity that a person had before the change took place. Nothing undermines organisational change as much as the failure to think through who will have to let go of what when change occurs.

Transformation

In some circles, people use the term "transformation" to describe comprehensive or profound organisational change initiatives. (The original Latin word for "transformation" simply means "to change shape.") In many instances, it is found that "transformation" is used to indicate "really large changes." (It is therefore no coincidence that the political changes in South Africa are referred to as transformational changes.)

One of the inherent dangers of the term "transformation" is however that it often conjures up the connotation of a singular episode of change that has a clear beginning and an end. This may lead the people to adopt an attitude of "just wanting to get it over so that we can go on with our life." *Senge et al.* (1999) use the term "profound change" to describe organisational change that combines intra-personal shifts in employees'/voters' values, aspirations, and behaviours with extra-personal shifts in processes, strategies, practices, and systems. The word "profound" is derived from the Latin *fundus,* which means a base or foundation. In profound change, there is learning. The business/government doesn't just do something new; it builds its capacity for doing things in new ways – indeed, it builds capacity for on-going change. The emphasis on the differentiation between the intra-personal and extra-personal dimensions of change gets to the heart of the difficulties that large organisations (private and public) wrestle with today. It is not enough to change strategies, structures, and systems, unless the thinking that produced those strategies, structures, and systems also changes.

A DOZEN FACTS ABOUT CHANGE

Although the origins, reasons, desired outcomes and specific substance of different change contexts may vary widely, recent literature on change management (Haines 2000:293, Moran & Avergun 1997:146, Puth 2002:111), reveals the following facts about change irrespective of the specific situation.

Organisations do not change, people do

Organisations in private and public sector consist of people. External global and local changes force the organisation to change internally in order to survive financially or politically. But employees/voters must bring about this change within the organisation and must themselves adapt to these changes. The only way to do this is through constant

communication. Managing people successfully requires successful communication. The quality of communication between the people who make up an organisation is "a crucial variable determining organisational success" (Hargie & Tourish 1993).

Change is difficult

Many managers/leaders still adopt attitudes such as "don't tell employees/departmental officers or political party officials anything unless they need the information to do their specific jobs. It's none of their business why management or leaders made major changes to the business, the government, or the political party". Change is difficult for most people. In fact, resistance to change is one of the strongest laws of human nature – "old habits die hard". The greater the magnitude of change, the more severe the discomfort and reluctance of people to support the change.

People fear change

At every level and in all forms of organisation, people tend to resist change. The existing means of operating, the *status quo,* is safe and non-threatening, whereas change creates inconvenience, uncertainty, and anxiety. In the process of change, managers and leaders often fear increased employee/voters participation, because it involves sharing information and power. First-level supervisors/leaders, in particular, are concerned about further erosion or even elimination of their positions as more emphasis is placed on broader participation and teamwork, on more efficient organisational structures, and on increased information sharing.

People are inconsistent

Change that results from their own initiate is viewed as good, necessary and valuable, however change that is forced on them is met by some form of resistance, no matter what the nature of the change. For change efforts to be effective, organisation-wide participation must be elicited.

Change has an important personal dimension

The more profound the change, the more important it is to create opportunities for people to re-examine and adjust their own values and beliefs. Unless people can integrate new change beliefs on a personal level (that is, unless internal transition, and ultimately transformation, takes place), they cannot sustain it organisationally on business, governmental, or political level.

Losses must be grieved

People will think first about what they will have to give up – their losses in times of change. Sometimes the "loss" is obvious, for example a job in a process of downsizing in the workplace. However, on many occasions the "loss" can be very personal, perhaps involving a loss of a form of security (e.g. promotion, a salary increase or even political standing), loss of competence in the job (e.g. after the installation of new IT systems), or just sadness for the loss of the old and the accepted way of doing things in a new political dispensation. Employees/voters must be afforded the opportunities to grieve their losses: let them cry and mourn.

People feel alone during change

Even though other employees/voters are going through changes – even the same changes – people will still feel alone. Processes for interactions and involvement must be structured. Communication must be encouraged, communication coaching must be done, and sensitivity training groups must be established.

Change is non-linear: it often has no clear beginning or end

During times of comprehensive change it is usually not clear where one change intervention ends and the next one begins. Without clear beginnings and/or endings, change can seem confusing and endless.

Change also threatens people at the top

To say that the radical changes taking place in many organisations are traumatic, is an understatement. It should not be forgotten that the reorientation of business and political structures, and the thinking and cultures accompanying these changes, are also traumatic for top executives/officials who are diligently - and sometimes frantically - searching for answers to propel their organisation into a new phase or era. These are the agonies of top-level managers and leaders, whose task is monumental in times of massive change.

Executives should never forget that the transition will be much easier if they can persuade all employees/voters that the eventual benefits stemming from the changes - with job security being a major factor - make them worth the risks and pain involved. Good communication can help to do that.

Communication can ease the pain of change

The human hardships of change cannot be totally eliminated, but the suffering of not making the required organisational changes to adapt

to new business or political environments is likely to be much greater. "Good communication" can help to ease the pain of change and it is a way of avoiding the uncertainty that change can promote. Good communication can facilitate the "gain" and the "pain" of corporate/political transformation and change. The bottom line for this worker-management or voter-leader partnership is communication. The relationship must be built on a solid, factual understanding of the company's/ government's/party's position.

Effective change interweaves multiple improvement efforts
Organisational improvement through change includes increasing the focus on the customer/voter, improving and managing work processes, and strengthening employee/public involvement. Success with one type of improvement triggers the need for other types. Stalled change efforts do not necessarily indicate failure, but rather the need to jump-start a change effort in another area. Today, there is no one right answer. Rather, multiple efforts are required to achieve the change organisations need to keep them competitive in the future.

Measurement is key to successful and sustainable change
The more an organisation's/government's/party's goals can be quantified and progress towards these goals linked to individual or group performance, the more successful and long-lasting change is likely to be. Without adequate communication of these goals, uncertainty will increase resistance to change.

THE PROBLEM OF DIFFERING POINTS OF VIEW

Views of managers/leaders and employees/voters
It seems to be part of organisational life that managers/leaders and employees/voters view change differently (Kerfoot 1996). Top-level managers/leaders see change as an opportunity to strengthen the business/government/party while employees/voters often see change as disruptive, intrusive, and upsetting to the familiar and *status quo* (Strebel, 1996). Weidenbaum (1995) refers to confirming evidence contained in a survey of management views by Arthur D. Little Inc., where only 12 percent of companies said that they embarked on downsizing and other changes to improve profitability or to increase shareholder value. Rather, a major purpose of corporate overhaul in a clear majority of cases (60 percent) was "to improve employee satisfaction". To this, Weidenbaum reacts by saying that it seems inevitably that employees are going to mistrust any management that

attempts to peddle this patently unbelievable line. In order to bridge this gap between management and employees/voters, and to transform a culture, the people affected by the change must be involved in creating the change. This simple, fundamental insight has been proved a hundred times over in academic journals and in real life settings.

Vested interests

However, the mere existence of differing points of view with regard to organisational change is not the full extent of the problem. The way in which such differences are used to advance vested interests can have serious implications in an organisation. Organisational change and re-engineering processes give politically motivated actors (in private and public sector) considerable influence with respect to defining terms of reference of ways in which will shape potential outcomes in their favour. Unlike other organisation development interventions, business and political process re-engineering or profound changes on business, governmental or political party level is not a "context sensitive" approach. In such circumstances, the role of the project manager/political leader becomes critical in establishing a balance between individual, functional, and organisational goals in such a way that it is perceived to be legitimate in the context. Effective change and re-engineering management thus requires a combination of political and process analysis skills (Buchanan 1997).

PEOPLE AND CHANGE: SABOTEURS, CASUALTIES OR CHANGE AGENTS

As organisations are compelled to continuously evolve and adapt, their members must live up to the changes in their environment by acquiring new skills and competencies, and most importantly, by building up judgement of the rapidly changing context.

Research on how people react to change revealed that a pattern seems to emerge. Haines (2000:259) calls this the Rollercoaster of Change. It consists of four primary stages:

- Shock and denial
- Depression and anger
- Hope and readjustment
- Rebuilding

How people manage these natural reactions to change could influence their career paths: some would sabotage change interventions, some will be unable to cope and will inevitably become casualties of change and, unless properly managed and assisted, only a very few will become agents of organisational change.

Attempting to drive through change with little regard for employees'/voters' emotional responses is futile. Team workshops and individual coaching, led by skilled facilitators, have a valuable role to play in overcoming barriers to change and to improve performance during times of change. The key to this process lies in the recognition that, if properly harnessed, people's feelings can accelerate the embracing of change just as it can block acceptance of it (Piasecka 2001:70).

Each change initiative moves trough a predictable cycle (Moran & Avergun 1997:148 and Moran & Brightman 2001:114):

- Denying the need for change

- Admitting the need for change

- Agreeing about the type of change required and

- Searching for solutions to accomplish the agreed type of change.

It is the task of the communication coach to lead employees through the continuous process of successive change interventions. The aim of coaching communication interventions is to end up with a well-connected group of champions of change instead of saboteurs of the change process or even a couple of change casualties who have fallen by the wayside.

The communication manager/officer can play a pivotal role in acting as communication coach to help people to successfully achieve their performance and professional/career goals while coming to terms with first and second order organisational change. Brightman and Moran (2001:250) list the following basic principles of effective communication in what is essentially a two-way process of coaching communication:

- Warmth: express caring, interest and positive regard

- Genuineness: being honest, open and trustworthy

- Concreteness: making clear, specific and understandable statements

- Self-disclosure: revealing one's own thoughts and feelings appropriately

- Respect: communicate regard for human dignity in word and deed

- Empathy: communicate accurate understanding of others' experience

- Assertiveness: avoid passive and aggressive communication styles and

- Negotiation: balance competing interests for win-win solutions.

As the pace of change increase, the demand for communication increases: "The profound economic and business changes now under way in industrialised countries world-wide are radically altering the world of work. The market demand for communication skills is soaring" (Timm & Stead 2000:11). This is equally true in the public services sector.

COMMON MISTAKES AND THEIR SOLUTIONS IN CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Most organisations in the private and public sector have no choice on having to institute change initiatives. Yet, many have failed in their most sincere endeavours. Based on investigations into change efforts in many organisations, Kotter (1998) distinguishes eight main reasons why organisational change fails. These efforts have gone under many different banners: total quality management, re-engineering, restructuring, affirmative action, employment equity, rightsizing, culture change, political transformation and many others. Whatever the reason, substance, or approach followed, most of the failures showed at least one or any combination of the mistakes below. However, for each of the mistakes, a solution is offered.

Mistake 1: Not enough urgency

Many change efforts are launched when somebody in the organisation, an individual or a group of people, starts looking hard at the company's competitive situation, market position, financial performance, technological situation, or some similar key drivers of political performance on governmental and/or party political level. They then find ways to communicate this information broadly and dramatically, particularly with respect to its crisis or potential crisis implications. Alternatively, the potential opportunities are dramatically highlighted.

This emphatic first step is essential because just getting a transformation programme started requires the aggressive co-operation of many individuals. Without motivation and urgency, people won't participate and the effort goes nowhere. Compared with the other requirements for successful change, this first mistake can sound unimportant. However, experience indicates that well over 50 percent of change initiatives fail in this first phase. Many top executives underestimate what it takes to shake people out of their comfort zones. In other instances, leaders are afraid of the almost universal tendency to kill the messenger of bad news, especially if the head of the organisation is not a particularly strong change agent. Executives who see the necessity for change often rely on outsiders to bring unwanted information.

However, whether the crisis or opportunity is real or manufactured, internally initiated or identified by outsiders, the need for urgency is almost indispensable for successful change to take place. When is the urgency rate high enough? Experience indicates that when at least 75 percent of an organisation's management/leadership is honestly convinced that "business-as-usual" is a threat to the future of the organisation, change initiatives may be successful. Anything less can produce very serious problems later in the process.

Solution 1: Establish a sense of urgency

Establishing a sense of urgency is crucial to gaining needed co-operation. With complacency high, transformations usually go nowhere as only a few people are interested in working on the change problem. With urgency low, it is difficult to put together a group with enough power and credibility to guide the effort or to convince key individuals to spend the time necessary to create and communicate the vision. People will find a thousand reasons to withhold co-operation from a process that they sincerely think is unnecessary or wrong. Creating a sense of urgency usually demands bold or even risky actions normally associated with dynamic leadership. If the dominant coalition consists only of cautious leaders, no one will push the urgency rate sufficiently high and a major transformation will never succeed.

Mistake 2: A weak guiding coalition

It is not uncommon for major change efforts to start with only one or two people initially. However, for the change impetus to grow and eventually lead to success, the leadership coalition committed to the

change has to grow as it moves forward. The problem is often that an inadequate critical mass is achieved in the guiding coalition early in the process. One of the generally accepted principles of change processes is that the top dog should be committed to the change. To have a committed and dynamic guiding coalition goes far beyond the CEO. In successful transformations, a substantial number of credible leaders on all levels of the organisation are needed for success.

In many instances, the guiding coalition may not necessarily include all of the organisational leaders, because some people will simply not buy in from the beginning. But in the most successful scenarios the guiding coalition is always relatively strong in the early phases of the change process. Although a high sense of urgency within the managerial ranks usually helps a lot to get the change effort going, more is often needed. Someone needs to get these employers/voters together, help them to develop a shared view of the problems and opportunities, and create an adequate level of trust and commitment in the group.

Organisations that fail in this phase of the change process usually underestimate the difficulties in producing change and the role of a powerful coalition in the transformation. In cases where there is no strong tradition of coherent teamwork at the top, it becomes even more difficult to mobilise the rest of the organisation. Efforts that do not build on a powerful enough coalition can seem to make some progress for a while, but as soon as the opposition gathers, it invariably succeeds in stopping the change.

Solution 2: Create a strong guiding coalition

Major transformations are often associated with one highly visible leader. Looking at corporate figures such as Jack Welsch, Lee Iacocca and other giants of industry, or political figures such as Nelson Mandela or even Adolf Hitler, one might easily conclude that the kind of leadership that is so critical to any change can only come from a single, larger-than-life person. This is a very dangerous belief. Because change is so difficult to accomplish, a powerful force is required to sustain the process. No one individual, even an extraordinary CEO, is ever able to develop the right vision, communicate it to large numbers of people, eliminate all the key obstacles, generate short-term wins, lead and manage dozens of change projects, and anchor new approaches deep in the organisation's culture. A strong guiding coalition is always needed –

one with the right composition, level of trust, and shared objectives. Building such a team is always an essential part of the early stages of any effort to restructure, re-engineer; or retool or transform a set of strategies.

Mistake 3: No clear vision

Virtually every successful organisational change process is characterised by a guiding coalition that is able to develop a clear and compelling vision and to share it in an enticing and persuasive way to all relevant stakeholders. A compelling vision entails much more than the bottom line projections or other forms of quantitative argumentation often found in three or five year plans. A vision should, in essence, paint an attractive picture of something that is not visible yet. It also indicates the direction in which the organisation should be moving and draws the line to which the people of the organisation can align their behaviour.

Without a sensible and compelling vision, a transformation exercise can easily disintegrate into a series of confusing and seemingly unrelated steps and projects with no indication of taking the organisation into any particular direction. A useful standard for a compelling vision is this: If you can't communicate the vision in five minutes or less and get a reaction that signifies both understanding and interest, this phase of the transformation process runs the danger of becoming its point of failure.

Solution 3: Develop a vision and strategy

It is sometimes amazing to see how many organisations and their leaders try to institute change through either authoritarian decree or micro-management. When the goal is deep behavioural change, unless the top leader is extremely powerful, authoritarian decree works poorly in most instances and will almost inevitably be met with resistance. Micro-management tries to get around this problem by specifying in detail what followers should do and then monitoring compliance. However, there is really only one approach that has the potential to break through all the forces that support the status quo and to encourage the kind of dramatic shifts found in successful transformations. This approach is found in a compelling vision and a clear, directive strategy – a central component of all great leadership.

Mistake 4: Inadequately communicating the vision

Having a vision is one thing – effectively and pervasively communicating it throughout the organisation (business, government or political party) takes additional effort and commitment. This mistake usually take one of three forms: In the first, the guiding coalition actually succeeds in developing a relatively good vision and then short-sightedly proceeds to communicate it by calling a single company-wide or public sector-wide meeting or sending out a single written communiqué. After using only about a fraction of a percent of the annual internal communication effort, the group is often startled by the low turnout or the lack of excitement and effort elicited by their effort. In the second fruitless effort, a couple of the coalition members get to be selected to make speeches to groups of employees/voters, with no discernible effect. In the last misguided communication exercise, much more is devoted to time and effort in internal communication, but some of the most visible executives are seen to be behaving contrary to the message and spirit of the change vision.

For any major change endeavour to succeed, communication has to be up to the task in terms of clarity, persuasion, sincerity, and inspiration. Executives who communicate well incorporate the vision in their day-to-day interactions in all contexts and are clearly seen to be walking the talk. Nothing undermines change more than behaviour by important individuals that is inconsistent with their words.

Solution 4: Communicate the change vision

A great vision can serve a useful purpose even if it is understood by just a few key people. However, the real power of a vision is unleashed only when most of those involved in an organisation have a common understanding of its goals and direction. That shared sense of a desirable future can help motivate and co-ordinate the kinds of actions that create successful transformations. Gaining understanding and commitment to a new direction is never an easy task, especially in large organisations in the business sector or in governments. Smart people make mistakes here all the time, and outright failure is not uncommon. Leaders under-communicate, often by a large amount, or they inadvertently send inconsistent messages. In either case, the net result is the same: a stalled transformation. Conversely, good communication of the vision is the key to most successful transformations.

Mistake 5: Ignoring obstacles

In most change and transformation processes, there is the underlying principle that as many people as possible should be involved, either actively or at least supportively. Often people are expected to do new things, try out new ideas, and come up with appropriate suggestions. The only constraint is really that this should be in line with the strategic intent and direction of the change effort.

However, at this stage of the process the enthusiasm and commitment of employees are often dampened by residual structural, procedural, or attitudinal barriers and obstacles. It can easily happen that the vision of things to come require people to behave in a certain way, but the reward and recognition system still pay out the bonuses to the old way of doing things. Worst of all are bosses/political leaders who still cling to the old ways and threaten to subtly coerce their direct reports to sabotage the new intent.

It is extremely important for the success of change that the driving coalition members identify and anticipate possible obstacles and remove them before they can have a destructive or even terminating influence on the transformation.

Solution 5: Empower followers for broad-based action

Major transformation rarely happens unless many people assist. Yet, followers generally won't help or cannot help if they feel relatively powerless. Effectively completing Solutions 1 to 4 of the transformation process already does a great deal to empower people. But even when urgency is high, a guiding coalition has created an appropriate vision, and the vision has been well communicated, numerous obstacles can still stop employees from creating needed change. The purpose of Solution 5 is to empower a broad base of people to take action by removing as many barriers to the implementation of the change vision as possible at this point in the process.

Mistake 6: Not planning for short-term wins

In most new endeavours, it is natural for people to gain in enthusiasm if they can quickly see the success of their efforts. Many organisational change initiatives fail at this stage because nobody has systematically planned for attaining and celebrating short-term successes. Real transformation takes time, and a renewal effort risks losing momentum if there are no short-term wins. Without these

moments of elation and celebration, even if they need to be manufactured to a certain degree, too many people give up or join the ranks of those who said that it wouldn't work anyway.

Creating short-term wins is different from merely hoping for short-term wins. The latter is passive, the former active. In successful transformation efforts, the leaders actively look for opportunities to obtain measurable success through short-term goals and phased implementation plans. When it becomes clear to people that the change process can take a long time, urgency and commitment levels can easily drop. Commitments to produce short-term wins help to keep the urgency level up and force detailed analytical thinking that can clarify or revisit the vision.

Solution 6: Generate short-term wins

Major change takes time, sometimes a surprisingly long time. Zealous followers will often stay on course no matter what happens. However, most people expect to see convincing evidence that all the effort is paying off. Non-believers have even higher expectations of proof. They want to see clear data indicating that the changes are working and that the change process isn't absorbing so many resources in the short term as to endanger the organisation. Running a transformation initiative without serious attention to short-term wins is extremely risky.

Mistake 7: Declaring victory too soon

Although it may sound contrary to the previous point, celebrating short-term wins is essential, but declaring victory too soon can be the death knell of the transformation process. Until the changes become totally internalised into the culture and very fibre of the organisation, there is the imminent danger that people will simply go back to the old way of doing things. While the time span for completion of a major change process will obviously vary from one organisation to another, they invariably take years to complete rather than months. This often means that the current change effort gets to be overtaken with another subsequent or supportive initiative that requires an equal investment in time, effort, and commitment.

Ironically, it is often this concurrent and overlapping of change processes that cause leaders to want to get done with the preceding process. This creates a great temptation to declare victory and to start a major but premature celebration. This relaxation at an inopportune time can very well lead to the failure of the latest initiative as well.

Leaders need to make absolutely certain that the process has indeed been concluded to its final implications before popping the corks.

Solution 7: Consolidate gains and produce more change

As pointed out in the previous point, major change often takes a long time, especially in large organisations. Many forces can stall the change process far short of the finish line: turnover of key change agents, sheer exhaustion on the part of leaders, and even bad luck. Under these circumstances, short-term wins are essential to keep momentum going. However, premature celebration of those wins can be lethal if the urgency is lost. With complacency up, the forces of tradition can sweep back in with remarkable force and speed. Here again strong leadership is invaluable. Outstanding leaders are willing to think long term. Driven by compelling visions that they find personally relevant, they are willing to stay the course to accomplish objectives that are often psychologically important to them.

Mistake 8: Not anchoring the changes in the corporate or political culture

The final measure of success of any instituted change process is the question whether, and to what extent, the changes have become part and parcel of the inherent values and behavioural norms of the organisation, the government or the political party. In fact, it could very well happen that insufficient cultural contextualisation of changes can create a corporate or political culture where change is seen as incidental and passing, rather than as a natural part of the organisation's life cycles. This is what distinguishes organisations with adaptive cultures from those with non-adaptive cultures.

In essence, change should never become incidental or peripheral in the cultural architecture and design of an organisation. Where there is no clear cultural understanding that organisations that want to learn and grow to become or remain the best will always be undergoing change, fixation becomes the cultural norm. Past success can so easily become tradition, and tradition very quickly becomes fixation. This last mistake, if it occurs, will certainly complete the full circle in either confirming or invalidating the adage that, in our organisation, change is the only constant.

Solution 8: Anchor new approaches in the culture

When the new practices made in a transformation effort are not compatible with the prevailing culture, they will always be subject to

regression. Changes in a work group, a division, or an entire organisation can come undone, even after years of effort, because the new approaches haven't been anchored firmly in group norms and values. Because corporate culture exerts this kind of influence, the new practices created in any context of change or transformation must somehow be anchored in it; if not, they can be very fragile and subject to change.

TEN CHALLENGES FOR INITIATING CHANGE

The challenges for initiating change develop as soon as any individual or group in the organisation begins to conduct work in unfamiliar ways, or expect other people to change their ways of doing things (Senge *et al.* 1999) Typically, all of the following challenges or any combination thereof may occur:

The challenge of time

"We don't have time for this stuff!" – The challenge of control over people's time is typically first to emerge. Changes are often seen as something additional that will take up unavailable time. People involved in change initiatives need enough flexibility to devote time to reflection and practice.

The challenge of support

"We have no help!" – The challenge of inadequate coaching, guidance, and support for innovating groups, and of ultimately developing internal resources for building capacity for change.

The challenge of relevance

"This stuff isn't relevant!" – The challenge of relevance: making a case for change, articulating an appropriate business/political focus, and showing why new efforts, such as developing learning capabilities, are relevant to business/government/political party goals.

The challenge of credibility

"They're not walking the talk!" – The challenge of management/leadership clarity and consistency requires guarding against a mismatch between behaviour and espoused values, especially for those championing the change.

The challenge of anxiety

"This stuff is strange!" – The challenge of fear and anxiety is based in concerns about exposure, vulnerability, and inadequacy in relation to the unknown. This is often accompanied by the conflict between

increasing levels of candour and openness and low levels of trust in the change agents.

The challenge of negative assessment

"This stuff isn't working!" – The challenge of negative assessment of progress often lies in a disassociation between the organisation's traditional ways of measuring success (both in metrics and time scales) and the perceived achievements of the change process.

The challenge of arrogance and isolation

"We have the right of way!"/"They don't understand us!" – The challenge of arrogance or isolation appears when the "true believers" within the change management group confront the "non-believers" outside the group. Often, the rest of the organisational goes into a phase of consistently misinterpreting each other.

The challenge of governance

"Who's in charge of this stuff?" – The challenge of the prevailing governance structure, and the conflicts between change agents seeking greater autonomy, and managers concerned about autonomy leading to what they perceive as possible chaos and internal fragmentation.

The challenge of communicating change

"We keep reinventing the wheel!" – The challenge of diffusion, the inability to transfer knowledge across organisational boundaries, making it difficult for people around the system to build upon each other's successes.

The challenge of purpose

"What are we here for?"/"Where are we going?" – The challenge of organisational strategy and purpose: revitalising and rethinking the organisation's intended business focus, its reason for being, its contribution to its stakeholder community, and its identity.

COMMUNICATING TO HELP PEOPLE CHANGE

One of the most obvious, yet least considered elements of change is that, to those who are expected to accept and adapt to change, it really requires a journey into the unknown. Change always constitutes a future unknown in relation to the past and current known. In many respects, it represents a leap of faith. Marilyn Ferguson, the American futurist, says that it's not so much that people are afraid of change or so in love with the old ways, but it's that place in between that they

fear ... It's like being between trapezes. It's Linus when his blanket is in the dryer. There's nothing to hold on to.

One of the greatest challenges in communicating to help people to change is to remove the anxiety caused by apprehension of the unknown. According to Puth (2002), there are four essential states-of-being that need to be brought to life in the hearts and minds of people that will allow them to change. These four conditions can also be viewed as four essential steps to make change happen. The fifth and final step (according to Puth 2002) occurs when people willingly make the change.

Step 1: Lift the veil – create a clear picture of the future

Change always require people to go to a new place that is currently still removed in time and space: it is not now and it is not here. The unknown future lies out there somewhere, in an area where they have not been before. When thinking of the new thing – new ways of doing things, a new strategy, a new corporate, government or political identity, a new cultural architecture, a new political view, new structures or processes – most employees/voters will subjectively feel as if they have a veil over their eyes. They are literally sightless, being blindfolded to the unknown future. Yet, many organisational change efforts expect people to leap blindly into that unknown future.

Experiential exercises where participants are blindfolded and then led through an unseen terrain by a seeing person clearly demonstrate what happens in real life organisational change in private and public sectors. Most people are highly disoriented, many experience high levels of apprehension. They seem to flounder through not being able to see where they are in relation to their environment and the others who are on the journey with them. Some literally seem to lose their relational and functional identity.

In those initial stages of organisational change, people desperately need a clear picture of the future. Communication needs to be directed at lifting the veil, taking off the blindfold to the future.

Step 2: Let the light come in – explain the purpose behind the desired outcome

Most people are naturally inclined to seek out light and to avoid darkness. Watch people when there is a power failure: most would find creative ways to shed light on the situation, even if it may be temporarily. Step 2 entails communication that would shed clear light

on the unknown and unseen future implied by change. It is essential to explain the purpose behind the desired outcome. Employees/voters have to understand the logic of the purpose before they will apply themselves to it. Successful new beginnings are based on a clear and appropriate purpose. Without one, there may be lots of starts but no real beginning. Without a beginning, the transition is incomplete, and without transition, there is not transformation and the change changes nothing (Puth 2002).

Purposes are critical to beginnings, but they can be rather abstract. They are ideas, and most employees/voters are not ready to commit themselves to a difficult and risky undertaking simply based on an idea. They need something they can see, at least in their mind's eye. They need a picture of what the outcome will be like, and they have to be able to imagine how it will feel to be a participant in it. A floor plan of the new office layout or a video of a self-managed political committee planning the month's priorities are aids that could help employees/voters to imagine the way it will be. Employees could also visit another organisation/government department or political party where the new way is already in use. As they talk with people like themselves working successfully under the new conditions, they can begin to visualise and feel at home with the new way.

Step 3: Leverage the deeper understanding – paint an enticing picture of the future

Steps 1 and 2, lifting the veil and letting in the light, leads to the third state-of-being: a deeper understanding of the purpose and benefits of the desired outcomes of the change process. In this third step, communication needs to revolve around continuously verbalising the deeper understanding and making it collective property of all the people in the organisation. In many respects, it requires the creation of a common language, a lexicon of the new thing. One of the basic tenets of communication is that it is an earnest endeavour to share meaning.

If there is no effort in trying to create and reinforced a shared meaning and understanding of the change and its outcomes, as well as its required behaviours, the probability of dissipation of commitment and energy becomes a real danger. Creating a deeper understanding is essential; keeping the momentum of such as shared understanding alive is probably far more important. Letting up after a couple of logical and clear explanations is simply not good enough. The deeper

understanding needs to be enunciated in different ways in order to leverage maximum commitment to the change. This is really the stage where the passing opportunity exists to paint and elaborate an enticing and compelling picture of the future.

Step 4: Implement the turn – give clear marching orders

It was mentioned earlier that the root meaning of the word "change" means to bend or turn, like a plant or branch purposefully following the best direction to reach the sunlight. When the veil has been lifted, people have seen the light and developed a picture of what the future will look like, and acquired a shared meaning and deeper understanding of the change process, they are ready to make the change. This is the time for step 4: Implementing the turn of direction that would constitute and substantiate the required change.

At this time, people need to know exactly what is required in terms of concrete behaviour. Confusion is one of the biggest obstacles created by change. As things change, employees/voters will obviously not do some of the things they used to do. But which things will they stop doing? Not specifying what is over and what is not may lead to problems.

Employees/voters will not dare to stop anything, but try to do all their old tasks and the new ones. After a while, they could burn out with the overload. Employees/voters could make their own decisions about what to discard and what to retain, which could result in chaos. They will toss out everything that was done in the past, and the baby will disappear with the bath water. Change agents have to think through each aspect of the change that is to be implemented, and have to be specific about what goes and what stays.

What employees/voters need at this stage are clear marching orders. However, it is critical to realise that these directives and guidelines need to be contextualised down to local work area and even individual employee level. Simply providing macro-level, company-wide/government-wide/political party-wide guidelines is not sufficient. Communication processes need to be instituted to allow a multi-layered participative and interactive discourse where everybody concerned can work out what the change means to them in the form of concrete changes in their day-to-day behaviour.

SUMMARY

Instituting change and leading the transition is one of the most daunting challenges in any organisation. The fact is that change is difficult for most people, including those who institute it. The difficulty of change is often exacerbated by different pictures of the outcomes of change and/or vested interests in the business, government or political organisation. These trends have caused employees/voters to question the traditional and long view approach of dealing with change from a perspective of organisational culture processes. New approaches deal with change as a process of business or political re-engineering.

Much can be learned from the most common mistakes made in change management. An overview of such mistakes and their solutions provide guidelines to change agents in both the private and public sector. Finally, communication has a key role to play in helping workers/voters to cope with change and to assist in achieving successful change in organisations.

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