



Cultural Change Management The Underpinning of Successful and Sustainable Transformations

By: David Ringel
Vice President, Operations

What we have learned over the course of 25 years of implementing change and improvement systems is the critical factor to success is not only understanding what needs to be done, but also how to get the organization as a whole motivated to doing it. It is from this perspective that we created and continually refine our approach to change management.

Use Existing Power Structures

An effective change cycle in an organization begins when the need for change is widely accepted by the power brokers in the organization. For change to start from the top it takes fewer power brokers in concurrence. For change to start from the bottom it takes many more. In either case, it takes a majority among peers to begin effectively. Regardless of where the change starts, it has to gain acceptance among peers at all levels. For change to sustain it must be recognized as successfully accomplishing its intent by the vast majority at all levels.

Articulate the Brutal Facts

If the need for change is immediate, everyone in the organization must come to understand the reason for the urgency. The threats to the organization and performance deficits of the organization need to be clearly stated in terms that resonate with the members in each of their respective

organizations and roles. What are the compelling reasons for change? What are the brutal facts of the current state and what are the consequences and or inevitabilities of the future if we do not act? This cannot simply be a logical set of reasons based only on information and data; it must be built and presented in a way that will strike an emotional cord of the culture as well. It must touch individual and collective securities in order to cause members to begin to care individually and collectively about supporting the required change. Setting goals without establishing the need for the goals in the first place will be fruitless.

Generate a Vision of Success

While the case for change levies concern on the members of the organization, it is necessary to offset that concern with hope, confidence, and inspiration for the future. The vision must provide all three. Like the brutal facts, the vision must strike at who we are and what we do, and reach the membership individually and collectively both logically and emotionally. Nevertheless the vision of success cannot be a vision of general goodness, platitudes, or clichés. It must associate to the current state of affairs and provide a basis for developing a means to engineer that success. The leaders of the change must rally the organization into action by forming and casting a compelling vision of what success looks like and set expectations of timing and goals

“The rate of change is not going to slow down anytime soon. If anything, competition in most industries will probably speed up even more in the next few decades,”
John Kotter, author of *Leading Change*

for the organization to achieve success.

Expose the Implications to the Membership & Set Ground Rules

It is critical to remove the fear of “the change agenda” and keep the fear appropriately focused on the case for change. Regardless of how necessary, compelling, and hopeful it may sound by now, qualitative support for the change will not be realized until the contributors understand and accept the general implications to themselves as participants. This is very much like the vision but must address the individual securities the process of change itself threatens and the individual interests that develop. This will determine whether the members will be able to contribute constructively having been provided the necessary understanding, resources, and decision-making capacity. A believable commitment by those who are leading the change is necessary in order to look out for the best interests of the members and provide them with the support and resources they need to be successful.



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Communication is Critical

Given the personal dimension of change and dynamic relationship between these principles, it is necessary to engage in the dialogue about change on a personal level. This premise establishes the necessary format for how all of the above are introduced, translated, made relevant, and accepted by each power structure within the organization. In this era of technology based communications, face-to-face is still the most effective method of communicating, having conversations about what this means, where we are going, and how we are going to get there. Face-to-face does not necessarily mean one-on-one. We have found it most effective to utilize a minimum of two basic formats of communication. Both should leverage the existing power structures and involve three tiers of the organization at a time. The first is a meeting style format designed for getting a message out, listening to input and feedback, making the message relevant for each context, and working for consensus and acceptance. The other is done in the workplace and focuses on the actual work, observing and

discussing the daily challenges and needs. Regardless of the forums you choose, you must get leadership into a relevant dialogue with the workforce where they not only share information but listen intently and conscientiously to the membership.

Close the Gap With a Change Agenda

Closing the gap is a matter of successfully mitigating the threats, eliminating the causes of performance deficits, and further improving the organization until the vision is reached. The Change Agenda lays out a prioritized course of action over time, spells out how the agenda items are to be measured, and establishes the degree of progress (goals) required to reach the vision, identifies resources and training needed, and identifies who will do what. However, the work will not just happen; it has to be supported with the necessary leadership and oversight. A final and critical element of the Change Agenda is establishing a plan of who, what, where, and when the appropriate decision makers (power brokers) will participate in the change process to hold the organization accountable of the plan and execute their role to make decisions in support of change and remove roadblocks to progress.

Creating a Problem Solving Culture

A culture of Problem Solving is one which understands its customers, products or services, processes, supplies, and suppliers and monitors

“An organization’s ability to learn, and translate that learning into action rapidly, is the ultimate competitive advantage,”

Jack Welch, former CEO and Chairman of General Electric

external implications. Failures and problems are treated as opportunities to improve the system rather than hiding the issues and working around them. Individuals are recognized and lauded for exposing problems because only then can root causes be identified and eliminated. The predominant attitude is to meet and overcome ongoing challenges with respect to man, materials, machines, and methods. This philosophy allows the organization to continue to be successful with the delivery of the highest quality products and services as fast as possible with the lowest use of critical resources. An operating mind set which exposes weaknesses and feeds those weaknesses back into the change agenda is one that has the possibility of maintaining its competitive edge by remaining open and able to change.

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“Change is the law of life and those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future,”

John F. Kennedy, 35th President of the United States