

IMPROVING ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE THROUGH PEOPLE

Leading Change

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American journalist Sydney J Harris once said *“our dilemma is that we hate change and love it at the same time, what we really want is for things to remain the same but get better”*. This human desire to change and yet not change has yielded an overwhelming amount of insight and advice on how to lead change, the tools and techniques to manage it and how to communicate it. In fact a recent google search on the term “change management” provided 133 million results in just 41 seconds. So why given the volume of research available do most change efforts fail to reach the desired future state?

Since 1995 research has repeatedly shown that 50 - 70% of change initiatives fail, an astounding number given the turbulent nature of the global economy in recent years. However you frame it, leading a business transformation, transitioning an organization or managing a change, business leaders are struggling to affect real change that sticks.

Advances in research have shown that change and organisational development is doomed for failure without people being at the core, both as subjects and objects in the change. We know more than ever why individuals and organizations change. Or don't.

In a recent study of the obstacles leaders face in making real change happen, the No 1 cited barrier to success was the lack of **active and visible Leadership**. Many leaders although energized and focused during the initial planning phases failed to remain visible and engaged during the first 18 months of the change period, often choosing to switch focus to the next burning platform.

According to the research the biggest mistakes leaders make are:

- Failing to remain visible and engaged
- Failing to demonstrate support for the change in words and actions
- Failing to communicate effectively about the need for change
- Ignoring the people side of the change
- Delegating or abdicating the role of the Leader

“Change brings opportunity”, but it’s messy and complex, the fear of the unknown during transition can be paralyzing even in the best of circumstances. Each initiative is unique, with no one-size-fits-all approach that will work every time.

Yet, we often make it harder than it has to be over engineering our approach to tackle the top three obstacles to successful change; **employee resistance, insufficient change management resources, and middle management resistance**. When we break down the components of successful change and the actions that the leaders should take, none of them are difficult.

Whilst the scarcest resource of all within an organization is the leader’s time and attention, it is the most essential part of the equation to making real change happen.

“In times of change, employees look to and listen to leaders for direction, commitment and guidance”

TIPS FOR CHANGE LEADERS

1. Change is a dynamic process, **regularly check your progress** and be willing to course correct quickly when the data alerts you to a wrong turn.
2. **Communicate, communicate, communicate!** Develop a formal plan to create a call to action detailing the how and when. Remember that good communication starts and ends with listening. Acknowledge emotions along with what’s important to the individual and why might they be opposed to the changes. Make it a dialogue not a monologue.
3. **All change is personal**, and the people you lead ultimately get to decide for themselves whether they’re going to follow you. That decision will be heavily influenced by your middle managers, who are the linchpins of change.
4. Employees depend on their managers to interpret and make the messages you’re sending out relevant. **Support your managers to act as change agents** on the front end of a change initiative.
5. **Create a culture of trust** by giving managers information in advance, they will be more likely to trust you and the direction of the change.
6. **Train and equip managers** with the core capability to be confident leaders of change, and increase your organization’s change capacity.

In today’s organizations business leaders are struggling to affect real change that sticks but with a commitment to be actively and visibly engaged in your essential role, with the right team, the right mindset and a burning ambition to be better, you’ll always end up closer to that desired future state.