Execution *focus*

Successful change management is significant as it impacts organizational performance, increases employee satisfaction and engagement, saves cost, improves risk management and better aligns the organization to business objectives. Leaders play a critical role in change management. They are responsible for driving change and ensuring that it is successfully implemented.

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Role of Leaders in Executing Change

Article by: Dr. Anita Ollapally
Consultant – Metis ERC (I) Pvt. Ltd.

"Google India lays off 453 employees," "Elon musk shuts two out of three twitter India offices, sends staff home". Employees all over the world woke up to this horrifying news of losing their jobs. The pandemic also brought with it challenges that forced companies to make many changes that involved technological adaptation, hybrid working arrangement etc.

'Change' that employees experience has different avatars be it restructuring, rightsizing, cultural change, mergers and acquisitions, digital transformation etc. These are different ways change is brought about by an organization in their attempt to grow, turnaround their companies and stay ahead of their competition.

Humans thrive on routine and structure and tend to be resistant to change. For the transition to be smooth and accepted by all employees, it's important to plan, implement and monitor all this change in a structured manner. This is an Achilles heel for most leaders and organizations. Organizations are struggling to keep up with the pace of change let alone be ahead of it (Kotter, 2021). Since weak implementation has been the main issue organizations are looking at improving execution (Anand & Barsoux, 2017)

Phases of change management

Kotter (2007) on doing a scan of companies who have succeeded in their change management plans indicates a pattern that can be seen.

The companies:

a) Meticulously followed the phases in sequence without skipping any of them.
b) Were cautious to avoid the mistakes one can make at each phase and
c) Did not declare victory prematurely.

Kotter (2007) states that "skipping steps creates only the illusion of speed and never produces a satisfying result." (p.5). It's important to go into it being aware that it will take time and patience, however it will be worth it.

Phases of change management

Stage	Actions Needed	Pitfalls
Establish a sense of urgency	• Examine market and competitive realities for potential crises and untapped opportunities. • Convince at least 75% of your managers that the status quo is more dangerous than the unknown.	Underestimating the difficulty of driving people from their comfort zones • Becoming paralyzed by risks

Form a powerful guiding coalition	• Assemble a group with shared commitment and enough power to lead the change effort. • Encourage them to work as a team outside the normal hierarchy.	• No prior experience in teamwork at the top • Relegating team leadership to an HR, quality, or strategic-planning executive rather than a senior line manager
Create a vision	• Create a vision to direct the change effort • Develop strategies for realizing that vision.	• Presenting a vision that's too complicated or vague
Communicate the vision.	• Use every vehicle possible to communicate the new vision and strategies for achieving it. • Teach new behaviours by the example of the guiding coalition	• Under communicating the vision • Behaving in ways antithetical to the vision
Empower others to act on the vision	• Remove or alter systems or structures undermining the vision. • Encourage risk taking and non-traditional ideas, activities, and actions.	• Failing to remove powerful individuals who resist the change effort
Plan for and create short term wins	• Define and engineer visible performance improvements .• Recognize and reward employees contributing to those improvements.	• Leaving short-term successes up to chance • Failing to score successes early enough (12-24 months into the change effort)

Consolidate improvements and produce more change	• Use increased credibility from early wins to change systems, structures, and policies undermining the vision. • Hire, promote, and develop employees who can implement the vision. • Reinvigorate the change process with new projects and change agents.	• Declaring victory too soon—with the first performance improvement • Allowing resistors to convince "troops" that the war has been won
Institutionalize new approaches.	• Articulate connections between new behaviours and corporate success. • Create leadership development and succession plans consistent with the new approach	• Not creating new social norms and shared values consistent with changes • Promoting people into leadership positions who don't personify the new approach

Source: Kotter (2007)

Barriers to Change

There are multiple factors that are obstacles to the change management effort. Organizations, leaders, and change champions need to be aware of these and overcome them to be able to make progress and make the change a sustainable one.

- The employees' experience of leaders in the past, implementing change management plans but not doing anything substantial. This causes them to not take a new leader seriously or participate in the efforts but just wait it out and do nothing.
- Employees may have "competing commitments" which are "subconscious, hidden goals that conflicts with their stated commitments." (Kegan and Lahey,2001, p.76). This prevents them from making the changes they endorse and have the skills for. Leaders need to help employees become aware of these.

- Leaders sometimes have "analysis paralysis" (Garvin & Roberto,2005, p.20). They are unable to decide as to the course they need to take. They keep listening to proposals and reports and tweak them without making a decision.
- Sometimes there is excessive focus on the process not the means and the end. The way it should be presented to get sign offs becomes paramount and eventually the plan doesn't work as that was never the focus.
- A culture of saying 'no' to everything, where people are overcritical about everything, curbing the ability to take risks, try new things and make changes.
- Multiple approvals needed for everything that results in no one knowing who the actual approver is causing complications and delays.
- Politics in the organization. Resisters may appear cordial but later resist or not cooperate.
- Leaders may sometimes try to avoid the tough existing problems and look to do other things like diversify business to bring the change. This is more of a diversion tactic and does not always yield results as it may not be the right move.
- Not having a leader to drive the change - "When these individuals are not new leaders, great leaders, or change champions, phase one can be a huge challenge" (Kotter,2007,p.5)
- Not communicating enough and consistently is a big barrier. Communication is both verbal and non-verbal, the latter being more powerful than the former. One of the biggest barriers to change is leaders not walking the talk and being "inconsistent with their words" (Kotter,2007,p.8)

Sources: *Kegan and Lahey ,2001;Meyerson, 2001; Heifetz &Linksy, 2002; Kim & Mauborgne, 2003; Hemp &Stewart ,2004; Garvin and Roberto,2005; Kotter,2007)*

Supporting and Implementing Change Efforts

At Metis we feel that once the need for change has been identified leaders need to make a well thought out plan: identify the scope, scale of effort, judge the impact, have a communication, engagement, and resistance management plan, and finally implement and monitor the proposed changes. Multiple factors need to synchronize for the implementation of change to be a success. Anand & Barsoux (2017) state that

organizations need to understand the catalyst for change, the underlying quest and leadership capabilities needed for change to know which direction to take. Incorrect diagnosis and planning can cause more problems and impact work and the commitment of the employees.

Below are some suggestions that will support the implementation of change.

1) Get commitment from people by jointly diagnosing the problem.
2) "Create and implement a persuasion campaign" (Garvin and Roberto,2005, p.15). These researchers illustrate 4 phases of this campaign to enable the change and make it stick.
    - *Announce the plan*
      This process starts a few months before the actual change is implemented. It's important that leaders convince the employees about the need for the turnaround and how they are different from their predecessors.
    - *Create a frame* – provide a context for the need for change.
    - *Manage the mood* – It's important to balance the good and bad news and know when to give each of them and be empathetic while doing it.
    - *Reinforce good habits* – unless leaders walk the talk and provide employees the support and coaching they require to continue the good behaviours, they will slip back into old dysfunctional ones.
3) Identify all the obstacles that can prevent employees from living the values and behaviours needed for change and remove them.
4) With any new change project a person's workload should not exceed more 10% or they will resist the project
5) Help employees understand the competencies required for the new context and provide the training for them to upskill and succeed.
6) *Identify "tempered radicals" in the workplace.*
   A tempered radical *is an* " informal leader who quietly challenges prevailing wisdom and provokes cultural transformation…. their seemingly innocuous changes barely inspire notice. But like steady drops of water, they gradually erode granite." .They are individuals who want to bring about changes.

They display a form of leadership that is more "localized diffuse and modest .. but not less significant." They would be able to help managers identify underlying problems and alternatives to solve them and can become leaders if given enough support and room for experimentation. (p.38 &39)

7) *Overcoming Cognitive hurdles*

People most often resist the change as they don't have first-hand experience of the problem. Leaders typically share data but making managers experience the issue at hand and deal with customers will get them to accept the need for change better.

8) *Dealing with the resource hurdle*

Instead of fighting for resources or reducing one's aspirations, leaders should try and use the existing resources in those areas that need the most change.

> *"One reason people resist change is because they focus on what they have to give up. Instead of what they have to gain"* - Rick Godwin

9) *How to tip the motivational hurdle over*

Leaders need to find and motivate the influencers in the organization who have skills of persuasion and many networks and associations . They will create a domino effect.

10) *The team a leader selects to spearhead a change project, needs to be a "high integrity and high quality team" (* Sirkin, Keenan,& Jackson,2005 p. 98). They need to have skills for problem solving, organizing, tolerating ambiguity and are result oriented.

11) *Deal with political hurdles*

Leaders will find resistors at every stage hence having a respected and influential person on your team from the beginning will help.

12) *Keep a regular check on progress*

Check on the initiatives and how they are going and ask questions about the progress. A bimonthly check on any change project is important with milestones been scheduled and monitored for impact. Understanding who is sticking to old habits and not making the change is important.

13) *Convince the uncommitted*

They are crucial so it's important to convince them about the need, walk the talk and set an example by removing those that are not able to make the change.

14) *Instil camaraderie*

The best change managers are those who encourage and teach their employees to cheer each other one and in this way there is great camaraderie and encouragement of the right kind of behaviours.

15) *Balance the change process*

Increase the temperature enough to motivate the employees but not that much that it explodes. The pace of change should be managed well.

16) *Handle resistance*

The leader should not try and handle all sources of resistance himself. Others need to be assigned accordingly.

Sources: *Beer ,Eisenstat & Spector,1990: Kegan and Lahey ,2001;Meyerson, 2001;Hemp and Stewart,2004: Heifetz &Linksy, 2002; Kim & Mauborgne,2003; Hemp &Stewart ,2004; Garvin and Roberto,2005;* Sirkin, Keenan& Jackson,2005: *Kotter,2007: Gostick, 2022)*

Leadership - Managing Oneself During Change

One critical aspect of change management is to have good leadership at the helm without which the whole change management process would not be sustainable and instead could be more detrimental to the organization. There is a need for strong and persistent leaders in the top management not just managers (Kotter,2007).

It is important to understand the emotional aspects of the change process. Change is complex, dynamic, and messy. "Change, by definition, requires creating a new system, which in turn always demands leadership "(Kotter,2007 p.5).

Organizations need leaders who can:

- Recognize the need for change. We at Metis feel that leaders not only need to recognise the need but be open to it and also embrace it. This then will be visible to their employees and encourage greater acceptance from them.
- Communicate a vision for what an organization can be
- Provide motivation and guidance to take it there
- Develop partnerships to make change possible
- Understand its painful for employees
- Build organizational wide commitment

Leaders in the process of leading change face many kinds of threats in the form of resistance, defamation, marginalization, attempts at removal from the job or actual removal. A leader could face threats from others or be a threat to oneself. Heifetz and Linksky (2002) have suggested a survival guide for a leader that suggests two ways a leader can manage oneself in this process:

- **A leader needs to manage one's desire for control and self-importance.**
  - ✓ Two dangerous hungers the researchers indicate are for control and the other for importance. It's important that the leader doesn't feel he has to control everything all the time. The great need to control and maintain order may sabotage the process of change which will require some amount of chaos.
  - ✓ Some leaders need to "feel important and affirmed by others" (p.71). this however gives them an inflated view of themselves causing them to make wrong decisions. Another way for them to feel important is by making people dependant on him. This may give the leader a god like status and will absolve employees of not taking ownership. Eventually there will also be issues when they realise that the leader is human and makes mistakes.

- **A leader needs to take care of his well-being**

  The leader needs to have a safe place that s/he can go to in order to heal from psychological damage incurred, renew the resources they need to deal with the days to come, and recalibrate their moral compass. The leader should have confidantes that s/he can discuss issues with and understand that comments made are towards the initiative that s/he is spearheading and is not personal but towards the role.

Conclusion

Change has been an "either -or – proposition", earning revenue for shareholders or developing a long-term culture of trust and openness (Beer and Nohria, 2000). However, the researchers indicate that the new age thinking is that managing both the hard and soft approach is a better one that will transform the way change happens in organizations. They refer to them as theory E (change based on economic value) and theory O (change based on organizational capability) balancing both across areas of goal setting , leadership, focus, process and reward system is crucial for success. While this may have been stated over 20 years ago, we at Metis feel this is still a relevant

approach to change. Change should not only be about numbers but it's also important to humanize it. Change is here to stay and leaders that differentiate themselves from the rest are those who manage this change well. This is turn reinforces the belief of the employees in their leader and leads to greater trust (Gostick,2022)

To keep up with the pace of change that's needed, Kotter (2021) suggests that in the current complex, uncertain, fast changing business scenario, a traditional hierarchical organization alone will not lead to speedy transformation which is the need of the hour. Organizations need to be more agile and thus more prepared. He suggests a combination of two systems, a management driven hierarchy and a strategy network (a more fluid, network like structure that continuously develops and implements strategies) that comprises of volunteers passionate about the cause, invested with their head and heart to drive the change. Two structures in one organization that communicate regularly with each other, complement each other, and allows for the accelerated change needed in todays' world.

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