



The Eight Stages of Change

I am often asked, 'What are the keys to creating major change?' In my mind there are essentially eight stages in the process. Each one has to be effectively completed in sequence, and it is folly to try to skip one or to assume that you have actually completed one before moving on to the next.

Firstly you have to establish a sense of urgency. Undoubtedly there will be market or competitive realities which must be faced. You have to identify potential crises, or actual crises which you can turn into opportunities. Change for the sake of change does not work.

Secondly you have to create a change team at the top who will take ownership for change. This is not something which can be delegated and the entire top team have to buy into the change in its entirety. They have to be able to work together as a team and have the power to effect changes.

Thirdly you have to develop a vision for the future and the strategies for change. If you cannot describe your vision clearly within a couple of minutes to someone who does not know your business then try again. The clearer the vision the easier it is to develop the strategies.

Fourthly comes the enormous task of communicating the vision. You have to use every means in your power to communicate the vision and the top team have to role model the desired behaviours expected of other employees. Until the top team are seen to be making the necessary changes themselves then nothing will happen.

Next comes the challenge of knocking down the obstacles which are standing in the way of change. You may have to change the structures that undermine the change vision. The word 'empowerment' is often used in this context. Be certain that in your case it does not stand for 'lending power to someone else'. You will have to encourage risk taking and

non traditional ideas and actions. Failure will occur and your behaviour in the face of failure will be interpreted by all. If you punish failure you can wave goodbye to further change initiatives for ever.

Measure short term wins. These are visible improvements which everyone can see. Reward and recognise the people responsible for achieving these wins.

At this point you will need a period of consolidation. Much will have happened by this stage. You should use the increased credibility to change all the systems, policies and structures that no longer fit together. You will have to reinvigorate the change process with new projects and recruit more agents for change. This is the period that can be most dangerous. People will be running out of steam and before you know it they will have returned to their old ways. Senior managers underestimate how hard it is to drive people out of their comfort zones.

Finally you will have to anchor these new approaches in the culture. Improved leadership and effective management will be required to create better performance through customer oriented behaviour. You will have to continue to communicate the important connections between these behaviours and organisational success. Do not underestimate the communication challenge - it never ceases. Make sure that further means have been agreed to ensure leadership development and succession. Culture changes only after you have successfully altered people's actions, after the group has produced some improvements and benefits for a period of time.

At the end of it all to effect major change requires high calibre leadership, drive and determination and time. Longer than you think.

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