

# LEADERSHIP PREREQUISITES, ACTIONS, AND STANDARDS OF BEHAVIOR IN CHANGE MANAGEMENT

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*The need for organizations to become agile in terms of their structure, people competences, processes and technology employed has been ascertained since the 2000 Agile Manifesto. The most recent developments around the world in the recent years, namely a global pandemic dramatically impacting all walks of life and old ways of work, and a war repositioning power vectors and geo-strategic interests have made the requirements for focusing more on people and their interactions, finding working solutions to stringent problems, establishing collaborative relationships with major stakeholders and working with change rather than following a set plan even more prominent. Consequently, identifying and working adequately with key areas within an organization calls for a renewed interest in the role played by organizational leadership in managing change. All of the above considered, this article overviews leadership prerequisites as informed by a select number of traditional change models, revisits the actions required on behalf of leaders as informed by Kotter's change model and briefly identifies a number of change management principles which can be used as standards for measuring leadership behavior.*

**Key words:** change, transformation, structure, resources, people, technology, leadership, resistance, agile.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Change management is not just a fad phrase but an ongoing need of organizations and people altogether. In times of great distress for societies and states, organizations

take the brunt and need to either find new ways of accomplishing their primary mission and strategic goals while assuring isles of stability, or to re-engineer their entire approach to how they do business. Regardless of the choices made by individual

organizations, the assumption underlying this article is that leadership remains a much coveted desideratum and also a solution for circumstances requiring various types of change, be them transitional, transactional or transformational. That informs the objectives of this article to infer some leadership prerequisites based on organizational behavior anchored types of change and the models of change proposed by Leavitt (1965) and Knoster, T., Villa, R., & Thousand, J. (2000), to identify an action based framework for leaders derived from Kotter's eight step change management

model, as well as to outline a number of change management principles that could be used as standards of behavior for leadership in times of change.

## 2. LEADERSHIP PREREQUISITES AS INFORMED BY TYPES OF CHANGE AND CHANGE MODELS

Identifying leadership prerequisites for managing change requires, in our opinion, an organizational behavior informed perspective which, by its layered approach focused on the individual,



**Surface change**

**Shallow change**

**Penetrating change**

**Deep change**

**Transformational change (strategic)**

**Fig. 1.** Types of change

Source: Adapted from Andrzej A. Huczynski, David A. Buchanan (2013)  
Organizational Behavior, Pearson Education Limited, p.624

the structures the latter are part of and the organization itself, provides a comprehensive outlook on what change management entails. In this respect, we believe that the approach most fit for that is proposed by Andrzej A. Huczynski and David A. Buchanan (2013:624), according to which change initiatives can be viewed as an in depth depiction of effort and results which we can metaphorically present in the shape of iceberg, as presented in the figure below.

The authors identify five types of change, as follows: surface change, shallow change, penetrating change, deep change and transformational change.

**Surface change** focuses on achieving efficiency and on restructuring in the form of centralizing or decentralizing. Efficiency is focused on identifying the means by which resources are employed with minimum waste. While that is one of the goals of any organization, efficiency has to run in parallel with a focus on effectiveness, namely on the extent to which the same organization meets its strategic goals. Therefore, in the case of leaders, securing the right balance between the two both

in times of stability, as well as in times of change is quintessential. In this respect, as a McKinsey article published in 2019 highlights, surface change in the form of structuring/restructuring an organization calls for a mission focused approach if efficiency and effectiveness are to strike equilibrium.

**Shallow change** is concerned with resource reallocation. That is mostly done by resizing organizational departments or the organization itself, such as growing or cutting the number of departments. Another approach to that also consists in improving the planning processes. As to that, an agile approach requires that resource related decisions be made under the principle of cross-functional collaboration (McKinsey, 2019) and planning be tested, allowed to change if needed and allowed to give room for further learning.

**Penetrating change** is tightly connected to changes in leadership and changes to an organization's definition of success, which resides in the establishment of new goals and objectives. In the case of changing leadership, we believe that the change does not necessarily involve simply replacing/promoting people, but more importantly allowing

people to grow professionally and personally so that they become better able to work with others and streamline organizational processes, structures. The McKinsey report on the type of capabilities required of 21<sup>st</sup> century leaders to develop (McKinsey, 2018) highlights that leaders first and foremost need to develop an innovative, collaborative, value focused mindset, while also taking a disciplined approach towards their own work. Second, leaders, need to have a disciplined approach towards asking more questions, allowing for more time to reflect and find the gaps, welcoming diversity of opinion and approaches and taking an opportunity and need based approach to working with challenges and identifying solutions. Leadership change also means that leaders change the way their teams work by empowering people to do their job and encouraging them to find win-win solutions. Last but not the least, penetrating change in terms of identifying new goals and objectives requires leaders to have an outcome based, value adding approach based on which the right direction is identified.

**Deep change**, as the name itself suggests, is related

to transformations made in organizational mission, vision, values, philosophy. Unless change as a requirements and its outcomes are distinctly acknowledged within the very backbone of an organization (i.e. its mission and values), the latter cannot possibly take the right path to trod. In this respect, it is our firm belief that any organization aiming for deep change needs to revisit and emphasize the values that drive and inform people behavior and resource allocation.

**Transformational change**, also called a paradigm shift, aims at changing mental models, the way of thinking, the manner of solving problems, the manner of conducting activities in an organization, as well as the definition of boundaries. Transformational change is only possible through long-term education, and development of critical thinking skills.

In our opinion, successful change requires that all levels of the iceberg be touched upon. It is true that education is the primary pillar that leads to long-term changes throughout a society and inherently across an organization. But paradigm change is only possible if that works in parallel with changes or

adjustments to the mission and values of an organization that can be promoted and sustained by the right people in leadership position, as well as through the reconfiguration of structures and work models that heavily impact management practices.

A synthetic view of the above types of changes in terms of organizational behavior is provided by the change model proposed by Leavitt (1965) which emphasizes the need to take an integrated outlook on change. According to this model, the **structure of an organization, its tasks, people and technology** are intrinsically linked. As such, any change in one of those generates ripple effects, be them more or less positive, in the others. In this respect, we argue that one prerequisite on behalf of leadership lies with the ability to acquire a comprehensive view of the critical links among the four elements, along with the skill to foresee the changes in the visible and invisible network of relations underpinning the components.

In relation to the types of changes identified in this sub-chapter, Knoster, T., Villa, R., & Thousand, J. (2000) view **change as the sum of a number of elements,**

as follows: **vision, skills, incentives, resources and action plans.**

According to the same authors, the absence of any of the above, leads to emotional reactions such as confusion in the absence of vision, anxiety if skills lack, resistance to change if incentives miss, frustration if resources are not available or even false starts in the absence of clear-cut action plans. What we believe needs to be emphasized in the case of this definition of change is that all elements are not only prerequisites for leaders to own, but also for people working on change initiative. At the risk of stating the obvious, clear, transparent communication top to bottom and bottom to top is necessary for vision to be enacted as behavior on a day to day basis. Furthermore, the identification of the right critical skills for change initiatives is mandatory, along with the consolidation or assurance of those. Incentives and their use in terms of frequency, amount, personal predispositions, and equity principles play a major role. Last but not the least, specific, realistic, measurable, time-lined action plans must be informed by the vision for change, as well as by the need to break down the necessary skills and resources by

level of effort required and amount of resources already available or that could be incrementally acquired.

### 3. REVISITING KOTTER'S EIGHT STEP MODEL AND ITS RELEVANCE FOR LEADERSHIP ACTIONS

According to John P. Kotter (1999) significant results of change initiatives and efforts are only generated through time-consuming complex processes and not via simplistic, shallow approaches. What he suggests is an orderly and logical eight step process which can yield the expected results. He underlines that skipping some of the steps or following them in the wrong order is unlikely to aid.

The steps suggested by Kotter to follow when approaching change are as follows:

1. *Establish a sense of urgency;*
2. *Form a powerful guiding coalition;*
3. *Create a vision;*
4. *Communicate the new vision broadly;*
5. *Empower others to act on the vision;*
6. *Plan for and create short term wins;*
7. *Consolidate improvements and produce even more change;*

8. *Institutionalize the new behavior and make it part of organizational culture.*

Worth noting is that Kotter endorses the vital role played by leadership and its main attributes in change management, namely vision creation, implementation of change via a complex network of aligned relations, execution of change through inspiration of others. Change, in the absence of leadership and its manifestation, regardless of how well-crafted plans are, is doomed to fail. According to the aforementioned author, for step two to step four to be properly approached, top executive commitment must be 100%, whereas the majority of employees and 75% of the managers must have a “can do” attitude.

**Establishing a sense of urgency** can be done based on current realities or future scenarios. The aim is to increase what Kotter calls the “felt-need” for change and overcome complacency. Taking the first step is always more difficult in organizations characterized by self-satisfaction. Similarly, for creating the vision and communicating it (steps 3 and 4), it could take a few weeks, or sometimes up 12 to 24 months.

The reasons for complacency are various but they flow from the overabundance or absence of the main elements identified by Knoster, T., Villa, R., & Thousand, J., as well as by Leavitt as follows: no need to revisit the vision of the organization as a result of no sense of any looming threats or crisis that goes hand in hand with indulgence into the satisfaction of past results; the abundance of resources; organizational structures that focus the attention of employees on tactical and operational aspects only and places a lot of workload on those; self-sufficiency of the organization and its divorce from external drivers; a self-centered approach that influences the selection of performance measures and indicators and mis-directs any initiative or action for improvement. Obviously, creating the sense of urgency requires leadership to change the approach to resource availability, structural information flow, focus of employees on relevant performance management standards and indicators, as well as revisiting and heeding external requirements of major stakeholders. In our opinion, one of the most prevalent reasons for which the sense of emergency is not felt as such is the huge gap

between certain organizations and their primary stakeholders that make requirements for their services or products.

An important aspect highlighted by Kotter in step 2 is that change is by no means a lone ranger's endeavor given the multifarious decisions that need to be made. In this respect, the role of forming and working as part of a **coalition** is to collect information, process it, find alternatives and make decisions. As such, a working coalition must gather the **right** members whose main attributes are defined by: power, expertise, credibility, leadership, trust and long enduring common goal. Thus, as with any coalition formation, the latter should be made of a sufficient number of top, middle and line managers and leaders so that those left out cannot block change. Additionally, the group includes a sufficient number of leaders who have already shown evidence of their skills in the field to undergo change and consequently are able to drive the change process. Furthermore, the various departments in the organization must be represented, and the work experience along with other intangible aspects like nationality or gender, if case may be, must be

relevant for the type of change to be undertaken so that informed and good decisions are made. One major value to be emphasized within the coalition needs to be loyalty to the organization as an overall and that should override parochial attitudes and behaviors resulting from misplaced rivalry among departments that are supposed to work together and not compete. It is worth mentioning that team membership should harmonize both leadership skills (in order to drive the change) and management skills (so as to keep the whole change process under control). Last but not the least, the larger the size of the organization, the larger the number of coalition members (starting from two to three at the beginning, moving on to about six in small to medium enterprise and reaching twenty to fifty in very large organizations).

The creation of a vision for change and its communication across the entire organization are two quintessential steps. The goals of a vision are three fold: to clarify realistically and attainably the future direction and thus empower the decision-making process to eliminate clutter/overlapping projects and activities; to motivate people to take the right direction, even though on

short term that means stepping out of the comfort zone; to swiftly and efficiently coordinate the actions of different and numerous people (i.e. by giving them a degree of autonomy in their actions) by being neither too specific nor too general in the statements it makes. The goal of communicating the vision is for an organization's employees to fully embrace it. Otherwise, the next step in the change process, namely empowerment, cannot be undertaken.

**Empowerment** of people resides first and foremost in smoothening the manner in which employees conduct their activities in order to truly grant them the power and/authority to act in accordance with change specific requirements. The areas where most of the stumbling blocks can be found and prevent true empowerment are organizational structure, training, information systems and managers' attitudes and behaviors.

Usually the success of change initiatives lies in the creation of cross-functional teams. Nonetheless, the very concept comes in contradiction with the functional structure of some organizations. Thus, too many hierarchical levels that work in a functional manner with no real

integration and whose resources and responsibilities are divided in piecemeal fashion, excessive centralization of decision-making power and the tendency to micro-manage at certain decision-making levels run drain the impetus for change.

The design of training in terms of scope, duration, target audience, time-frame is of utmost importance in building the skills required before, during and after change initiatives. It concerns not just skill development, but, equally important, attitude. In this respect, employee's buy-in and understanding of the role played by training sessions for their current or future activities is necessary and needs to be supported by human resource functions like selection, promotion, compensation, performance management, as well as by information systems.

Manager's attitudes and behaviors take the shape of command-and-control structures. Managers may drag their feet steps one through four, but their refusal to empower people make change efforts cease in the end. One last important aspect worth underlining in relation with empowerment is that it is usually the middle level

managers that act as stumble blocks for people's empowerment.

**Planning for and creating short term results** renders credibility to any change initiative. It can undermine the distrust of the cynics who might complain about the costs, time-frame or ambiguity of results and possibly gains more supporters. Short-term milestones also act as motivation for those in charge of executing the change and validate the vision and hence the direction of efforts.

According to Kotter, there is one basic rule that should not be broken when it comes to **consolidating improvements:** *"Whenever you let up before the job is done, critical momentum can be lost and regression may follow"*. In other words, the sense of urgency should be maintained even when celebrating the results achieved. Unless the change becomes part of the organization's cultural norms, the efforts are not over. Therefore, the following checklist should become the beacon of behavior for change efforts reaching this point:

- Efforts are being made to focus on generating even more changes,
- recruitment and selection, promotion and development

- become the main tools to consolidate change,
- senior leaders support a clear vision for the overall change effort and maintain the level of urgency,
  - Lower ranks assume management and leadership responsibilities for specific projects,
  - Interdependencies that hinder the change process are reduced.

According to Kotter, culture change is the last step in a transformation process and not the last. Changes in cultural norms and values are generated by: The connection between improvements in performance and new practices that are put in place must be overtly discussed by managers and leaders; The history of the old culture is still remembered and at the same time the reasons for which that culture no longer serves current and future goals are explained.

All of the above considered, when analyzing change initiatives and role of leadership in securing their success, we propose a set of guiding questions that could be followed:

- Where is the need for change, what tangible objective data sustain it and do all

- people in critical positions in the organization sense the urgency of change?
- What is the long-term goal that can be shared by almost all stakeholders with interest and power to influence the change?
  - What is my role in the change management initiative (i.e. legitimacy, authority) and who are my coalition members (i.e. critical positions) whom I need to work with all throughout the change process?
  - What is it exactly that the change generates in terms of tangible and intangible deliverables?
  - What are the desirable behaviors do I need to set as expectations and observe to tell-tale whether people work towards achieving the tangibles?
  - How much freedom of choice and decision-making can/will my people accept and what exactly to I need to do to empower them?
  - How do people know that we are on the right track and how do we celebrate that?
  - What do the tangibles/intangibles generated so far require to assure their sustainability organization wise?

#### 4. SOME CHANGE MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES AS STANDARDS FOR LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOR

One of the basic prerequisites in change management is to gain understanding of an organization's internal and external environment, as well as of its culture from a two-fold perspective: the AS IS/current description of variables and the TO BE/Envisioned state of the organization to achieve via change initiatives.

According to the Price Waterhouse Change Integration Team (1995) there are several paradoxes that need to be managed when focusing on change, even though an analysis of these rather indicates them as basic principles to heed. They are as follows:

- To reap benefits of change, **stability** is required.
- **People as individual personalities** are at the core of any endeavor.
- **Culture** must be the nexus of change initiatives.
- **People empowerment requires powerful leadership.**
- Any change is the result of **two complementary forces: tearing down the old and building the new.**

**Stability** concerns a clear analysis and diagnosis of what needs to change and what needs to remain in an AS IS status until preliminary steps are taken and benefits are obtained. Disbanding the whole structure of an organization and replacing it with a completely new one is possible as long as a long term vision is in place and complementary establishments conduct the mission of the organization that needs to undergo the change. More often than not, though, long-term outcomes are better secured if change is incremental. Hence, under such circumstances, diagnosing the core areas of an organization where stability needs to be secured at the beginning of the change initiative, throughout the process and at the end of the endeavor is of utmost importance. In this respect, clarity about organizational values, their enactment on a day to day basis by the people in charge of translating strategic goals into action, the identification of the jobs that are critical throughout the change process based on the core competences within the organization or its mission and filling them with the right people at the right time and for the right reasons, clarity of need for change

and maintenance of requirements on behalf of the major stakeholders are some of the elements contributing to stability throughout any change initiative.

**Commitment and rewards** are an important facet of managing people as individuals and not just as numbers on a roll call. They must take prevalence while also managing some key aspects contributing to those, such as:

- hiring the right people with the right skills and attitudes for the current and future state of the organization with a view to finding the right type of motivation that drives the change initiative and assures its success,
- making performance evaluation an actionable framework not just a must have guideline,
- managing individuals as a whole, namely identifying individual performance drivers and reinforcing those,
- establishing unequivocal objectives and accountability lines related to these,
- making initiative and decisiveness specific performance objectives of the organization,
- measuring team performance and building/promoting people's social skills, while rewarding individuals, as well as team effort,

- finding and promoting people who understand the need for change and are able to disseminate it and relay it to their peers,
- employing technology as a means to reduce workload, stove pipes and to secure better communication among people and departments.
- Working with high expectations and matching the results obtained upon meeting those with adequate reinforcement tools that fall under compensation, benefits and retention/attrition domains.

However well projects in change management are started based on the identification of the need for change and of the right expertise to begin and continue with the process itself, the planning, implementation and closure of the initiative by involving all relevant stakeholders and integrating all relevant aspects, change cannot be achieved unless the core values of an organization and the way they inform and influence day to day practices are understood and addressed. For a **new culture** to emerge, the right definition of competitive advantage and the actions underlying it need to be put in place. In this respect, the various

types of resources an organization has or acquires need to be approached as valuable, rare, imperfectly imitable and non-substitutable. That needs to start from the top, with the formulation of strategies, policies which emphasize exactly the values to be enacted and communicated to people through clear performance measures, hierarchical structures that work. Nonetheless, it also needs to be supported bottom up by drilling the practices that enforce and support people's efforts towards change.

People empowerment requires that leaders and managers know what their sources of power are and use those wisely. Empowerment is strongly related to creating an environment conducive to making decisions and acting in a responsive manner, establishing a high performing and passionate team and clarifying who makes decisions and what type of decisions need to be made. The roles and responsibilities of those in charge of ensuring the success of the change initiative, as well as of those who need to take over the results of change and implement them/manage them must be clarified and included in job descriptions and subsequent performance measures and evaluations, as well as reward

systems. Along that, education and training must complement the efforts if change is to endure.

In conclusion, it is leadership's role to assure stability when managing change. Additionally, leadership must be clear about the values promoted and should correlate people's empowerment with change end-state delineating the level of people's involvement and commitment. Moreover, leaders must be able to make value-adding trade-offs among legacy systems and new structures, skills, tasks, processes and technology.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

If structure, people's needs and competences, the role of technology in smoothening the decision/making process, communication and task performance are properly managed, involvement and commitment to change initiatives become possible. Nonetheless, resistance to change is still one of the major hindrances that leadership encounters regardless of how well the process was started, conducted or concluded since change success depends on people and their perceptions and self-concept. A Harvard Business Review article of 2022 by of Timothy Clark underlines

people's need of psychological safety when an organization implements agile methods, tools and techniques as part of its change management drive. In its absence behaviors like routine seeking, negative emotional reaction to imposed change, a short term focus, fear of competence loss, risk aversion visible in the tendency to overvalue "sunk costs" over "opportunity costs", cognitive rigidity become tell-tale signs individual behavior most commonly associated with resistance to change (Shaul, 2003).

Resistance to change can be triggered by various factors. An analysis of these and the identification of the measures that are adequate can help overcome it.

Some of the most important factors that make people raise boundaries when change is on the way are:

- lack of awareness and understanding of the purpose of change, its drivers or its envisaged, tangible outcomes, or poor description of individual roles and responsibilities related to the change process,
- feeling of losing control, related to the amount of input

people contribute to the change initiative, or, self-beliefs at a high level while outcomes are not sensed as desirable because of individual lack of involvement in their generation,

- lack of support on behalf of key figures in the organization,
- threat to existing status quo as far as people's power, career, knowledge, skills, work patterns, working relations are concerned leading to alienation, distrust and hence their sub-optimal performance of current or future tasks,
- lack of time to assimilate the change which makes the change initiative an error free environment running counter to the very fact that to change is to learn and to learn is to make errors and learn from them. If people are not granted the freedom to make mistakes when required to make changes, nor allowed to learn from them, then the change initiative is prone to failure of false positives,
- lack of incentives and rewards in accordance with what each and every individual

values and not in a non-discriminatory manner leads to disengagement in the long run.

Resistance to change takes various forms and their correct identification and adequate approach are required.

On one hand, there may be people who are not necessarily against the change, but they feel the need to question the need for change, challenge or openly disagree with the solution identified as optimal for implementing the change, or propose alternative courses of action. In such cases, listening and discussing are necessary. Involving these people, if appropriate, in the first stages of the initiative could be a good approach. Also, challenging their attitude and opinions is worthwhile if the concerns they express are related to the reasons for which the change initiative is adopted. On the other hand, there may be managers or employees who show covert or overt resistance by ignoring the activities/meetings, claiming to be too busy to attend meetings or training events, withdrawing/withholding/stalling the allotment of resources allocated for the change initiative. Mitigating the concerns of these people is

one possible strategy. However, if that takes too much time from the activities to be undertaken to secure the success of the change initiative, then appealing to the person in power to address the issue, as a last resort, is the best.

In conclusion, leadership is required to provide vision, to self-develop and develop people's skills, to secure resources, to incentivize and to use action plans in order to manage change. They also need to be aware that change is very similar to an iceberg and, inherently, regardless of the type of change they are in charge that has ramifications all across the iceberg. Additionally, for change to work, a value focused approach is essential. That impacts people's empowerment strategies, leadership's role as an isle of stability while sailing through the waves of change, and leadership's capacity to identify and keep valuable legacy systems while discarding outdated systems and practices.

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