NO NONSENSE ADVICE

25

BASICS OF NAVIGATING AND LEADING CHANGE

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PROLOGUE:

Change is inevitable - how you respond to it is your choice

This year (2020) is possibly a fantastic year to understand how important it is to be able to navigate and manage change effectively. Most of the time we underestimate the importance of being able to lead change BEFORE it becomes a crisis - and pay a horrible price for it. Rather than being able to understand the nature and dynamism of the changes around us and prepare and equip organisations and people to be able to 'pivot on dime' we still assume that stability is what we need to strive for.

The very nature of how we need to look at change management has taken quite a dramatic turn in the past few months - and though organisations have been far more progressive than ever before we still haven't fully appreciated the need for continuous prepping of our teams to be 'ok' with change - and go beyond to 'embrace' change - and then, go beyond that too and 'actively change' before you are 'forced' to change.

It is indeed time to make 'change' an integral part of the organisation - and its culture - and get rid of the fallacy of 'stability.'

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Chapter 1

Understanding the types of Change

Not all change is the same - and understanding the different forms change takes is important to navigate it. So, before we look how to deal with change - lets take a look at the many forms it takes.

• Unplanned Change

Unplanned change is generally because of a shift in the operating environment that 'forces' change upon an organisation. You merely 'react' to a situation - and you 'figure it out' as things unfold. Covid is a classic example : at least the initial shock and many organisations moving to work from home type arrangements in a hap hazard manner.

It is also the little shifts and changes that takes place in organisations organically. The change in culture because of a change in leadership or ownership is a great example of this. You don't really 'plan' this change - it happens without even vey many realising change is taking place.

• Planned Change

Planned change is generally as a result of either understanding the changes that may take place in the operating environment - and therefore readying yourself for it - or because of strategic imperatives that necessitates change. It is generally 'planned' change that looks at the 'management' of change in a more focused manner.

• Incremental Changes

Incremental changes are step by step 'little' changes that you do in order to achieve an objective. Incremental changes are generally planned. Continuous improvement is a proactive approach to incremental changes.

• Radical Changes

Radical changes can be both structured or as a reaction : but are fundamental shifts in the operating model, or anything that affects the overall organisation as a whole. They are not 'small' changes - and requires significant effort and time to 'get right'

• Innovation

All innovation requires some form of change - though not all change is innovation centric. Trying to innovate without having change management at its core is a recipe for disaster - and the innovation never quite taking place.

Chapter 2
Resistance to change

Resistance to change is 'normal' - and in fact, inevitable. No matter how 'sensible' or 'logical' YOU may thing the change is, EXPECT resistance to take place. Thinking that everyone will like the change, embrace it and support it is utterly naive. So, you want to change anything - well then - buckle up for a bumpy ride!

• Why people resist change

There are a ton of reasons why people will resist change…. Some may honestly think the change will be harmful : some may resist it because of misconceptions : some others because it brings about uncertainty and 'discomfort' : some others because they are pushed out of their comfort zones : yet some others simply because others around them don't like the change - and they are merely following the 'herd' : some others because they simply don't like YOU.

Whatever the reason - being able to understand it - and empathise with it is important. To win over anyone you need to first understand where they are 'coming from'. So, don't get upset over people's reactions to change - get to understand why first…

• Why it is important to have a conversation around it

It is critically important to be able to have a wide open conversation and a dialog about the change in front of you before deciding how to go about it. Now, the reality is that some changes require immediate action - and you just don't have the time to take a 'democratic' and 'inclusive' approach to it : but that kind of change isn't the norm. IF the change requires immediate and decisive action - then, take it - but even afterwards, ensure the dialog is had - because that way the team under-stands the WHY - even posthumously.

• Importance of winning over those who resist

Remember that 'winning over' the detractors is an important part of leading change. If you take a dictatorial approach to change you may have 'passive' acceptance simply because those around you have no choice in the matter - but the chance of it being something that 'lasts' is slim. No sooner circumstances or leadership changes changes are the changes will be undone - and all the effort you put into it is lost.

So, you want change to LAST - then, ensure you win over the detractors…

Chapter 3
Managing Change

MOST change CAN BE managed - in a structured and organised manner - and in a manner that actually enables both the organisation and the individuals to grow as part of being part of it. To Manage and Lead change you need to be clear about the kind of contextual changes in the environments - and be clear about what you are trying to achieve. Trying to manage change is not an easy thing - and it isn't a neat and tidy affair. Don't approach change management the same way you approach an IT project - with timelines and rigid plans - learn to approach change in a more organic way - and build frameworks (as opposed to plans) around it. Yes - timelines and milestones are critical to navigate things - but be open to the suggestion that things will NOT go according to plans - and when circumstances change you may want to relook at the plans. So, build adaptive plans - and build frameworks.

Be clear about the objective and end state

Before anything else - be absolutely CLEAR about the objectives you want achieved. Not having this in place in absolute terms is like undertaking a trip without knowing where the destination is. It may sound obvious - but ask yourself - when was the last time you really 'definitively' put a precise, clear and absolute objective around a CHANGE initiative. Setting KPIs and setting objectives for change is different - and many misunderstand this.

For example - lets take something simple - you want to change the layout of the office - damn simple yes - but - WHAT IS THE OBJECTIVE ? Simple changing the layout of the office or refurbishing it isn't the objective - it is an outcome - WHAT is the OBJECTIVE of changing the layout ? Is it to increase productivity - is it to have more open communications - is to have a more 'corporate' feel ? Your objective sets the tone for everything else - and becomes your North Point for all action plans of your change initiative.

Understanding the emotional aspects of change

We almost always look at change purely from a logical and structure perspective - and we often forget that PEOPLE need to change before anything else. Dealing with people requires dealing with emotions - and if you forget this - almost all the beautifully laid out plans will be to nought. So, understand that you need to get people EXCITED about change : LOOK FORWARD to the change : and be EMOTIONALLY connected to the change that is envisaged. This is CRITICAL : and also one of the most important things leadership should undertake in a change initiative.

<div align="center">So, be willing to :</div>

- Explain WHY it needs to happen
- Help them overcome their fears
- Establish trust - that the change will be GOOD for everyone
- Give comfort - that you will be THERE for them whenever needed
- Give confidence that it CAN be done
- Be POSITIVE about it - and be 'buoyant' about the future
- Be willing to hear people out - and have conversations (without being judgemental or 'snapping' at things impatiently)
- Be willing to offer counselling and the opportunity to 'vent' in a 'safe space'

Remember - any change will have those who like it and those who don't

Be ok about the fact that there will be nay sayers. Understand this - and accept it. You don't have to give in - in fact you shouldn't : but understand that nay sayers are actually good - specially if they are vocal.

- Nay sayers are an excellent source of 'what can go wrong' with the initiative - enabling you to prepared better
- A great way to have a conversation - and 'prove' your point of view
- Converted nay sayers often become your biggest proponents
- Allowing the nay sayers to have their say is a fantastic way of demonstrating that you have an open culture

A word of caution - as much as you understand the nay sayers - you must understand their motives too. GENUINE concerns are great - but 'terrorists' are not. So, be watchful for those who are deliberately trying to derail things for personal gain. Being able to take decisive action against anyone who wilfully sabotages things for purely personal reasons is as important as 'winning over' those who have genuine concerns.

Creating Awareness

Always always take the time to create awareness. Most of the 'resistance' is down to misinformation and 'fears' - which can easily be addressed by proper awareness. So, before you take on major change initiatives to the execution phase - make sure you are able to offer detailed insights about the change - and create as much awareness about it as possible.

Here are some fundamentals to cover :

- WHY are we doing it ?
- HOW will w do it ?
- How will it affect us - be honest about this
- What are the benefits of doing it
- What will happen if we DON'T change
- How the team can support and be part of the change

Creating a Team to Spearhead Change

The team that leads the change is critical for the success of the initiative. Notice we have said 'team' - so, we are NOT looking at just ONE person - NOR are we looking at a 'committee.' You want change to work - better have a TEAM to really spearhead it…

Here are some aspects to factor in when developing a team to take over the change initiative :

- The team needs to be clear about the purpose - and the objectives
- The team needs to have the required skills to lead the change - both technical competencies as well as a leadership skills
- It is critical that the team gels well together and is complimentary to each other
- It is also important to ensure the team cuts across the departmental divide as well as the hierarchical divide
- The team needs to embrace collective leadership
- The team needs to have the authority to make the decisions as required - and must be supported by the 'powers that be'

Supporting the Change Champions, winning over nay sayers and silencing the 'terrorists'

Throughout a change initiative there will be a small number of change champions that emerge. It is critical to foster those first change champions and truly truly support them. Drawing them out and giving them more ownership helps them become visible - and also, encourage others to follow suit.

At the same time, work on the nay sayers - specially those who are 'mission critical' to the initiative. Some 'opinion leaders' are important to be won over to ensure the larger organisation accepts the change - and opinion leaders play a critical role in the 'conversation' process. So, as much as working to highlight change champions - make sure you work on the nay sayers and when they convert - give them responsibility and authority and make them lead initiatives too.

You will also need to 'silence' the terrorists who undermine progress. Some may well need to be removed from the organisation altogether - and painful as it is it may need to be done - so, be open to this. This is never a first resort - and ALWAYS a last resort - but being able to do it is important for the overall success of the change initiative.

Training

Training becomes a critical aspect of any change initiative. Most of the time we 'assume' the change will not require formal 'training' and that it will be 'understood' and that people will 'adapt' but it is not often the case.

So, consider the following :
- Any IT related training
- Any job change related training
- Any additional work to be undertaken - process related training
- Any help with regards to coming to grips with a new role - either through forma training or on the job training - or even coaching/ mentoring

Unlearning to Change

Sometimes (actually many times) you need to 'unlearn' before you learn new techniques, roles and tasks - and this 'unlearning' process is often missed. Much of the unlearning can also be attitudinal - where you need to 'look at things differently' in order to truly embrace the change and 'move forward'

So, when you are considering training and support - focus on training people to 'unlearn' as well - which is ALSO A SKILL.

Creating the 'DESIRE' to change

Being able to understand that people must WANT TO CHANGE is important. What methods you use to 'motivate' this change is a different conversation - but whatever method you employ, understand and appreciate the need for a person to be 'emotionally invested' in the change - which is the ONLY way you will ensure the change becomes something that 'sticks' in the longer term.

So, here are some broad approaches to 'creating desire'. Remember - ultimately, whichever way you look at it, there are only 4 broad motivators :

• **FEAR:** Threat of Punishment or 'being left out' : Negative yes - but, if you want something done fast then FEAR is a great motivator. Remember, most who do good generally do it because they want to avoid hell - not necessarily the desire to go to heaven. Ask yourself what human beings will be like if the concept of 'hell' didn't exist !
    • **EGO:** stroking the ego and giving prominence for those who 'support' change can be a great motivator too. Many of us respond extremely well to ego based inducements - and in change it is no different
• **GREED:** don't need to explain this isn't it ? If those involved in the charge could see they will make more money or have some benefit out of it then, you are stroking GREED as a motivator. What's in it for me ?' Is definitely a question that needs to be answered.

- **IDLENESS :** often the forgotten motivator. Remember - many resist change because they think it will add to their workload (and it does many a time). So being able to establish that it will actually REDUCE work may just be a superb motivator to win support - specially over those who are already working rather long hours.

Understanding the interconnectedness of change

Remember change is interconnected. Many a time change fails to really be successful because though YOUR part of the business needs it, the interconnected 'others' may not necessarily see it that way. Also, remember, change does NOT happen in a VACUUM - it is change in a LIVE setting - and it always evolves - and anything you do has multiple ripple effects. So, you want to change one thing - then, look at the multitude of others it is connected to ?

For example - if you are changing a HR policy, look at how it will affect other policies, the people it relates to, if the technology supports it, how the leaders will view it etc - its not just simply changing a policy - it is always a hell of a lot more than that…

Remember to involve all stakeholders - not just the immediate 'group'

Remember there are ALWAYS stakeholders involved. So, make sure the widest possible set of stakeholders are ACTIVELY INVOLVED in the change process. Getting feedback of possible impacts to the varying stakeholders directly and indirectly involved helps you make sure the change is much better planned - and the execution of it becomes easier and hassle free.

Making change 'stick'

Most of the time we 'forget' to make change 'stick' - and we let up a little too fast before things really settle in. Remember it isn't 'done' until it becomes a mainstream - and you need to follow up the execution fo the change with reinforcements and audits over a period of time to ensure what you have established is working as planned. The more complex the change the longer this period should be.

Never make the mistake of allowing the 'old practices' to seep in with time - making the change initiative not deliver the value envisaged.

Leadership's role in change management

Leadership's role in managing change is critical. So, make sure there is absolute support - not just lip service. Remember to make sure that the approach you take to the change initiative is supported by the leadership style - and also, that the organisation 'sees' the support leadership gives to it.

Chapter 4

Practical Tips on Managing Change Effectively

Change is a complex navigation. There really are no rule books - and each context needs to be weighed in differently. So, be 'practical' in your approach to dealing with and leading change - rather than looking at it as a 'paper based' road map. Learn to understand that there will always be 'unknowns' that can derail things - and that you really can't plan for all eventualities. Change management is a leap of faith as a much as a thought through initiative.

Be clear about what should NOT change also

As much as focusing on what SHOULD change - be clear about what should NOT also. Far too many times in our eagerness to embrace change we disrupt the GOOD and what is really making a difference in a positive sense as well. This is a HUGE mistake. So, whenever key change initiatives are taking place - be absolutely certain about what SHOULD NOT CHANGE as well.

Gather coalitions - play the politics

Learn that politics gets played the most during change. Don't be naive about it - nor be taken by surprise over it. So, ensure you are astute a politician during these times as much as you are being an inspiring leader.

NEVER allow unholy coalitions to derail an all important change initiative. Understand the power plays : understand the allegiances : understand the key movers and shakers - and ensure you are able to at least ensure they don't become 'road blocks.'

Be willing to take the tough calls

If heads need to roll - heads need to roll…

Don't have the stomach for it - well then, leading change is something you need to think twice about. Some of the toughest decisions to be made are during times to imperative change - and the entire success of the organisation at times hinges on the change being successful.

So, make sure you have the stomach for it BEFORE you decide to lead change.

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Not allowing time to react

Some times, in order to ensure change happens, the best tactic to follow is to go through change as rapidly as possible - not allowing people to think about it - nor react to it. IF the change is needed fast, forget all the theories and just go for it with absolute precision and focus - and do it in rapid succession. ONCE done you can deal with the fallout - but GET IT DONE.

Getting outside help

Often times you may need outside expertise and help to navigate the change. It is perfectly fine to seek help - from sister companies, former leaders, consultants and other sources. However, remember that this is YOUR change initiative - and they are there to HELP - you cannot and never should make it THEIR initiative.

The BIGGEST reason for many consulting assignments to fail when change is involved is because leaders make the CONSULTANTS responsible for the outcomes - rather than the leaders themselves and the organisation overall.

Also, when getting help - be very very clear about the selection criteria : getting the WRONG type of help is a sure path to disaster !

Making the naysayers the leaders

Another tactic that helps at times is to take the BIGGEST RESISTERS to the change and make them lead the initiative - and tie their increments, bonuses and all future growth to the success of the initiative. A dicy game to play - but it has been proven to be extremely successful at times…

The role of Constant 'positive' communication in 'selling' the change

Be willing to put time and energy and resources in carefully crafted 'marketing campaigns' around the change program - specially in bigger organisations where one to one communication is not often possible. Being able to 'show' that things are 'working' helps galvanise popular support. NEVER underestimate the importance of the 'narrative' being controlled - because if you don't - chances are others WILL - much to your own detriment !

Be willing to go back to the drawing board

Things not working out - please be willing to go back to the drawing board and re-strategise. NEVER be dogmatic in your plans - and be willing to change the change plans - and be open to changing course when required. The WHAT needs to be firmly placed - the HOW - let that be open to evolve.

Understand that not all change will be successful

Understand that not all change WILL be successful - and be ok about it.

However, it things fail - you DO need to have another go at it - and then again - and again until the desired change DOES happen - specially if it is important enough. Letting go of something sends all the wrong messages to the organisation - and if you allow that - the 'resisters' will have a superb weapon at their disposal - which is - to simply 'wait it out' - knowing full well that you will give upon at some point.

So, once you have decided that the change is important - ensure the entire organisation understands that it is in their best interest to get it done fast - otherwise, you will NEVER let it up - and that the only thing that will happen is merely 'prolonging the inevitable'

NEVER EVER abandon a change initiative once you start on one…. Make it happen - one way or another…

Chapter 5

The FUTURE of Change Management

The future is not Managing Change - but being disruptive in a given space. If you are looking at change management you are always playing catch up - rather than being the one 'causing' the change. So, try and move your thinking from 'managing change' to 'being the reason for the change' in the first place.

Having agile organisations is critically important to be able to be nimble enough to constantly reinvent yourself. Don't look at agile within your current monolithic organisational framework. Learn from smaller startups and disruptors - and reinvent the organisation.

Size no longer matters…

SPEED is the name of the game going forward…

Epilogue

Change is never easy…

Writing about managing change is a hell of a lot easier than actually driving and leading change. Never underestimate the complexity and challenge of enabling change inside an organisation - and often times, it CAN be quite frustrating (to say the least.) The key is to be realistic and absolutely focused - and understand it for what it is : and that you, as a leader charged with making change happen drives it from a pragmatic perspective rather than from an idealistic view point.

Learn to look at change as something that you NEED to do - rather than having a choice about. Change IS critically important for the forward trajectory of the organisation - and also, your own leadership journey. Remember though - as much as you are asking OTHERS to change - YOU need to be able to change and adapt as well - and if people see this - at least, you will have the CREDIBILITY to demand it of others.

Successfully navigating change is a hallmark of a leader - it is also the only thing that will ensure both you and the organisation are relevant in the long term.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Vidusha is currently the Destiny Architect at High5 Consultancy and Training and also the organization's founder member. His areas of expertise lies with strategy facilitation, HR strategy development and Leadership Training. He has conducted assignments in 15 countries regionally and consulted for the World Bank, the UN as well as some of the top corporates in Sri Lanka and the Region. He is also a member of the board of directors for Chrysalis, a social enterprise working to empower women and youth by fostering inclusive growth in Sri Lanka and elsewhere.

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Anton is a multi-faceted professional who has had over two decades of hands on experience in process improvement, change management and strategic management. As the former AVP at HSBC DPL Anton won accolades for his superlative work there: and won the prestigious HSBC Group Service – Global Talent Management Member two years in a row. Anton currently works as a consultant focusing on efficiency and productivity improvement and process optimization for local and regional clients.