

Best Practices for Leading Change

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The rate of change is rampant for today's organizational leader. Customers decide they no longer need an order that has already been manufactured. Employees may or may not show up for work. Materials that are needed to craft today's products are suddenly not available. The boss communicates that the priorities that were determined earlier in the week are no longer applicable. These examples of widespread change are not necessarily different from those in the past, they simply are occurring at a more rapid pace due to advances in technology, competition in the market, and knowledge. Change is here to stay.

The ongoing transformation of events is imperative to advancing initiatives, aspirations, and achievements. Change is necessary for growth, prosperity, and accomplishment in all aspects of life. If this is the case, then what aspect of change causes it to be one of the greatest challenges for present-day leaders? (Kouzes & Posner, 2003). If change is essential, what are the attitudes, behaviors, and qualities of a champion of change? The purpose of this paper is answer these questions as well as provide insight and a rich discussion as to what theories for leading change have been proposed by thought leaders and synthesize these theories into an effective model for contemporary, entrepreneurial, change agents.

LEADERSHIP AND CHANGE

Warrick (2009) suggests that managing change is not a skill that is practiced by leaders in top management. The thought leader posits that approximately 70% of changes in an organization fail to achieve the desired purpose or intent of the change because leaders do not know how to handle change. This outcome causes organizations to flounder as needed changes do not occur. Members within the organization become consumed with frustration due to lack of direction, wasted resources, and loss of confidence in their leadership team. In essence, the lack of leadership is directly correlated to the mismanagement of change.

Leadership is so important when changes occur as the actions of a leader determine if the change becomes an improvement or a detriment to the organization (Bennis, 2007). The skills and characteristics a leader exudes when change takes place determines if the organization positively responds or despondently reacts. This theory proposes that when change occurs an authentic leader becomes a candidate for effectively handling change.

Leadership Challenges

Leaders in organizations are often promoted by their technical expertise. They are the best at what they do so they are offered a management position because they are a technical expert. As a result of the promotion, the new manager is responsible to oversee the operational side as well as manage a team of people

that report to him or her. This new dynamic generates additional challenges and often the new manager is not skilled at engaging others to embrace change let alone their own preference to rely on the status quo. This situation is an example of two of the barriers to becoming a change leader: the lack of engaging others to embrace change and the reliance on the status quo (Dess & Picken, 2000).

Organizational politics is a potential challenge to becoming a change leader. If information is not accessible or shared, then the change agent has difficulty getting the facts as to why a change would be effective. The leader's boss may override a recommendation creating a barrier for the leader to solve a problem. Conflicts and turfs that exist within an organization may come into play when a change agent pursues what they know needs to be done. These real life situations are challenges a leader must be skilled in knowing how to overcome.

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Time is another potential barrier for not handling change. Leaders may be consumed with the running of the business as they may have to do the work themselves due to organizational financial hardship. When time is limited and people are working too many hours the need for change is left to the bottom of the list. A frantic leader resorts to those daily priorities that must be done in contrast to envisioning a needed change and working on priorities for the future.

The examples above bring forth one of the greatest barriers to leaders managing change: self-defeating behaviors. For example, if a leader is indecisive, or lacks confidence they will not have the foundation for making a case for change. If change creates worry or a hesitancy to boldly make an unpopular decision, the leader will succumb to putting off the actions needed for change. Personal behaviors that limit effectiveness are significant obstacles to leading change.

In sum, there are many obstructions that leaders encounter when becoming a change agent. The challenges vary from external to internal situations that may or may not be within a leader's belief system or "locus of control" (Rotter, 1954). Knowledge and insights of potential leadership challenges are important to identify and recognize as they are the first step to developing the skills and abilities to mastering the management of change.

Managing Change

How important is managing change to leadership success? Managing change is a critical skill for leaders to embrace. If a leader is not able to manage change they will not have the ability to stay in a leadership position with an organization that is financially sound. Managing change provides a competitive advantage in which an organization grows and a leader becomes marketable. If a leader does not have the fortitude to generate change there will be another leader

that does. If an organization does not figure out how to meet the needs of its target market there will be another organization that will. Those leaders that acquire the skills necessary to be an agent of change has invested in a leadership foundation that is not present in managers that become easily frustrated when things do not go according to plan. Kotter (2001) confirms this theory by clarifying that a leader will manage change in contrast to a manager dealing with complexity. The balance of technical skills to [leadership skills](#) provides a change agent the competitive edge to compete in the twenty-first century.

CHANGE-AGENT LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Many thought leaders have studied the abilities of leaders to create change. The findings have concluded that those leaders that are successful at managing change have specific qualities and characteristics that attribute to being a change agent. From these studies, research has indicated that certain leadership behaviors have contributed to successful change management and predict that each of these behaviors are associated with long-term leadership success.

The top contributors to effectively handling the challenge of change include being honest (Bruhn, 2004; Kouzes & Posner, 2001), flexible (Wieand, 2002), confident (Quinn, 1996), visionary (Khan, 2006; Woodward & Hendry, 2004), innovative, engaging others (Bass, 1990); Gosling & Mintzberg, 2003; Kotter, 1996; Schein, 2002), being decisive (Drucker, 2004; Spreitzer, McCall, & Mahoney, 1999), and above all self-awareness (Mahan, 1999; Quinn, 1996). The following discussion will provide a synthesis as to why these behaviors are so important to managing change and propose that knowing thyself is the foundation for being a change leader.

Self-Awareness

To engage in self-awareness is an essential first step to being able to fulfill the additional leadership attributes that are correlated with effectively managing change. Self-awareness aids the change agent with the challenges of adversity, overcoming resisting beliefs, becoming the initiator and spokesperson for change, and providing consistency between words and deeds. By looking within prior to leading change, the change agent establishes a foundation of core values for building trust and respect that others need and expect (Axelrod, 2003). This level of authentic leadership and self insight is not an easy task and as a result requires a dedication to self renewal and ongoing practice.

Schein (2002) refers to the initial responsibility of a change agent as becoming an initiator. A manager becomes an initiator when they operate with a sense of curiosity and sensitivity to the concerns and hesitations of others. Members flee and hide below the surface with fear, skepticism and discomfort. Therefore, the change agent has to balance fear with sensitivity and emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2004).

Not only does the change manager have to acquire the intelligence quotient (IQ) of the situation, the emotional quotient (EQ) is critical to successfully initi-

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ate and communicate the need for a change process (Mahan, 1999). This blend of IQ and EQ will only occur if a leader has explored his or her emotions, internal needs, and what drives him or her to have the courage to lead in areas that are unknown.

In sum, building a solid foundation of personal core values in which to operate prevents the change agent from wavering from his or her convictions. No matter the circumstance, a leader with a foundation of inner truth will not only survive a change, but thrive in its essence.

Values – Driven

Studies from Kouzes & Posner (2001) indicate that 83% of followers selected honesty more often than any other leadership characteristic as to what they expect from their leader. To be truthful, honest, ethical, and authentic are leadership qualities that demonstrate integrity and credibility. Models of an effective change agent subscribe that if ethics and integrity are lacking a transformation will not occur. (Bruhn, 2004; Graetz, 2000). These thought leaders are just a handful of experts that represent how important ethics, values, and integrity correlate with holding a long-term leadership position.

This information is not unknown. Conducting oneself in an ethical manner is essential to initiating any form of recommendation or proposal. If the receiver does not believe in the messenger they will not believe in the message. It is a simple concept but not easily replicated as indicated by the frequency of poor judgments and actions of senior leaders in today's organizational environment.

Confidence

To effectively lead change the situation requires a leader to be willing to remove the barriers and obstacles to the change process. The leader has to have the confidence to act upon tough situations that are holding back progress and the courage to keep the situation from returning to the status quo. To be excellent, a leader has to be willing to "travel naked into the land of uncertainty" (Quinn, 1996) and become a risk taker willing to stay true to his or her convictions for making the change.

Confidence is a blend of belief, courage, and risk-taking. This combination of tenacious leadership skills generates a level of expectation in the leader that goes beyond a level of hope that a change will result in improvement. The change agent has a degree of confidence that creates inspiration in others to want to do what needs to be done. In sum, followers want to be a part of change as they gravitate to a leader that believes in self and also believes in them.

Vision

When the vision is understood and the leader is credible, followers are able to understand the purpose of the change, how they fit in, and will believe in what the outcome of the change will provide for them as well as for the organization. This form of transformational and authentic leadership drives others to want to

follow the plan of the change agent and make the change a success (Khan, 2006). Not only does this style of leadership align with leading change, the entrepreneurial aspect of purpose and vision is an expectation from followers to aid them in coping with the proposed change (Woodward & Hendry, 2004).

The change leader foresees a positive outcome. They envision how the change will work in contrast to being fearful in a lapse of judgment. This attribute of vision is not easily achieved as there

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are barriers and naysayers that chip away at the expectations brought forth by the change agent. It is though the power of vision and foresight that the leader excels in reaching out to the possibilities that will occur from the change and illustrates through his or her belief that the process will produce a positive result. This thought process demonstrates the skills of leadership in contrast to a task-oriented manager.

Engagement

An effective change agent will involve all members impacted by the change early in the process (Schein, 2002). Kotter & Cohen (2002) posits that a change agent tells a compelling story that catches the attention of members involved in the change and guides them to see it, feel it, and envision the change. These thoughts leaders and others have come to the conclusion that an effective change agent utilizes attention getting mechanisms to excite and inspire others to become emotionally involved in the idea of change. Once the members connect the purpose of the change to the recommended actions they are ready to be unfrozen and move to change initiatives.

Next, leaders that espouse people as their most valuable asset ask for ideas and input from team members within the organization as to how to implement an upcoming change. They believe they have knowledgeable experts that will provide solid ideas and suggestions that the leader may not have thought of. Leaders have faith in others and as a result capitalize on the potential of others by expecting the best from those they lead (Gill, 2003; Wieand, 2002).

Takes Action

Change agents understand that by being knowledgeable, connecting with others, and thinking positive they have created a call to action in which members have received a clear direction and purpose of the intended objectives. By the leader taking responsibility for leading the situation and developing action plans and commitments, the transition from a leader's plan to a leader-follower plan creates engagement within the team that is essential to leadership success. Gosling & Mintzberg (2003) refer to this phenomenon as collaborating actions and mindsets. This facilitation of action and thinking assists the change agent to manage the

combination of leading people and implementing change effectively.

Flexibility

Bennis (2003) proposes that being flexible, or adaptable, is an enduring characteristic of [effective leadership](#). Conger (2004) confirms this thinking when the thought leader proposes leaders must not only be versatile but also aware of when to adjust their leadership style. For example, there are leaders that are constrained by rigid thinking. Patterns of reactive tendencies have been formed which in turn affects relationships. When this occurs, rather than being open and receptive to handling people challenges, such as people not doing what they say they will do, an unproductive response of defensiveness toward the individual may be displayed. Aggression is a reactive response which shuts down the flow of productivity and in turn will hamper the ability of the leader to effectively manage the change. The failure to become flexible and versatile when changes arise affects credibility and trust which impacts a leader's authenticity.

Flexibility is two-fold: (1) emotional flexibility as described in the preceding example; and (2) procedural flexibility. Procedural flexibility is the ability to complete a task from a variety of perspectives. The contrast of this ability is referred to as perfectionism. Being a perfectionist does not align with being an effective change agent. When leading change things will go wrong, members will take different approaches, and things will transform. Being flexible with the manner in which tasks are completed is essential to creating a team effort and engaging the talents and expertise of those that are essential to the commitment of change.

LEADING CHANGE THEORIES

Seminal change theorists introduced the theory that the change process is a transition that occurs in three parts: (1) departure or current state; (2) decision making or transition state; and (3) action or maintaining state (Beckhard & Harris, 1977; Kanter, 1983). The original thought leader of the transitional phase theory was Lewin (1951) who termed the phases as “unfreezing, moving, and refreezing”. This review of the seminal works provides an understanding of how change management has evolved.

The priority from earlier theories was focused on the leader's understanding of the context in which change occurs. Later, Kotter (1996) added to the concept of phases by proposing eight specific steps for senior leaders to take to transform the change from a vision of change to implementation to learning new approaches. The thought leader added the importance of empowering others to engage in the vision of the change by providing specific, top-down guidance for senior leaders to implement. Kotter's theory of leading change is a linear model in which the theory's premise is that senior leadership drives the change from beginning to end in contrast to the following contemporary models that emphasize that effective change is managed from a multitude of organizational members.

Contemporary Theories & Models

Thought leaders from the current decade propose that change management is an integrated process with senior leadership as opposed to a separate entity or “guiding coalition” (Kotter, 1996). The following discussion will propose three contemporary models that provide examples of how a senior leadership team may interact on a level-playing field to obtain a higher level of commitment and sustainability from those that are directly responsible for change implementation.

Fear is a sign of moving forward in contrast to stepping backward.

Axelrod's Engagement Model

Axelrod (2003) proposes a change model where the change leader visualizes him or herself as part of the change. The foundation of the model proposes understanding oneself first and expecting that a successful change will occur. An effective change leader is one that sees the end result and knows that when he or she encounters criticism and fear from others this is a natural part of the change process. This mental model defines fear as a common reaction that people have as they work toward becoming a part of the change. Fear is a sign of moving forward in contrast to stepping backward.

The thought leader recommends four steps to effectively engage people and transition them through the stages of change. First, a change agent must broaden her inner circle of confidants. This means that the planning and discussion phase of the change must involve the members that will be impacted by the change in contrast to planning with members based on their hierarchical role in the organization. Second, an effective manager of change facilitates a connection between people. Enhancing the flow of communication and cooperation among members involved in the change will generate change experts as opposed to change resisters. Third, the members become a community for action. Instead of senior leaders asking employees to change, communities have formed which create momentum and inspires others to embrace new processes. Fourth, the members within the change community become self-governed. They are responsible for incorporating the actions that have been developed and hold each other accountable for completion.

Axelrod's (2003) model in theory and principle are in alignment with organizations that are associated with having cultures that are not just good but great. For example, W. L. Gore, Southwest Airlines, and Whole Foods are just a few of the organizations that have made the top list of companies to work for that operate within the guidelines of change that Axelrod describes. The model also incorporates the leadership principle of engagement which research studies have determined is an essential leadership quality to effectively managing change as described in the discussion of leadership characteristics. In sum, the engagement model is critical to not only leading change but ensuring that change efforts are sustained.

Leading and Coping Framework

Woodward & Hendry (2004) propose a change model that incorporates

learning and social networking. The philosophy and theory of the thought leaders is that previous change models have incorporated steps for change management which do not promote or emphasize that change is a complex, emerging social process. Key insights from the model suggest that a social process means that change occurs within communities and long lasting change is sustained through learning opportunities and coping strategies.

The coping framework for leading change has the following principles in contrast to formal steps: (a) leaders that are responsible for change need to be aware of how important leading change is in contrast to managing change; (b) employees at all levels within the organization are competent to explore the possibilities of an upcoming change; (c) leading change is a public activity; (d) learning communities are essential to effectively leading and coping with change; and (e) coaching and support mechanisms provide continuous learning to enhance a change leader's ability to grow and develop in optimizing change.

The leading and coping framework emphasizes employee communication and parallel relationships with members involved in the change. The model proposes a connection through learning experiences in contrast to the traditional task or process orientation that senior leaders give emphasis to in change management projects. The framework proposes that senior leaders assign too much importance on rolling out a change in contrast to helping members cope with the change. The research study conducted by Woodward & Hendry (2004) correlates with the proposed framework by concluding a disparity between leadership actions and stakeholder needs. What organizational members require to effectively implement a change are often the opposite behaviors of what senior leaders provide. In sum, the model recommends the actions of engagement, involvement, and helping members handle the psychological aspect of change as three leadership priorities for leading change.

Quinn's Deep Change Model

Quinn (2004) proposes from his ten years of experience that the emphasis for leading change comes from the leadership theory that in order to influence others to change the change agent must reach a "fundamental state of leadership". Through personal development and a foundation of reflection and transformation the ability to manage change only comes through personal leadership.

The change model has been developed over the years from Quinn's (2004) insights and experiences in how leaders have become agents of change. The model proposes that in order to become an effective change agent a leader transitions from the ordinary state of leadership and moves toward an extraordinary state of leadership qualities. The four leadership qualities to generate a deep change are to be: (1) clearly focused with a purpose and meaning; (2) motivated internally; (3) empathic and outwardly focused; and (4) thrives on unknown territory and learning. The change model emphasizes the mental model of the change agent which follows the theory that in order to lead change the leader must have a direction, be authentic, engage others, take risks, and believe that learning is an ongoing

process.

Quinn's (2004) deep change model is in alignment with research studies that indicates a leader has a high level of influence through his or her behaviors and example of self leadership (Bass, 1990; Manz & Sims, 1987). Through focusing on the personal transformation in contrast to changing others the change model adds to the success of managing change by first leading self. In sum, the model proposes that self-leadership and self-insight are the essentials to becoming an effective leader of change.

THE CHANGE MODEL FOR AN ENTREPRENEURIAL LEADER

The leadership qualities and attributes of an effective change leader from all three models propose authenticity, engagement, and learning. In all three models the change leader has reached a state of leadership which enables him or her to appreciate the challenges of change. The leader has the skills to handle controversy, the discipline of staying power, and the personal convictions in which to resource. These attributes require the role of the change leader to above all take time to reflect and engage in self awareness. Even though the change models previously analyzed have different approaches, names, and philosophies, they have a common thread - [engaging the hearts and minds](#) of the people affected by the change. This is the foundation and first component for the proposed change model of an entrepreneurial leader.

An effective change leader is a leader that takes risks, has a high level of self confidence, values the contributions of others, and believes he or she will make a difference toward a different tomorrow. This definition sets the bar and explains why more, effective change leaders may not exist. Leaders simply are not rewarded for change leader attributes. The qualities of a change leader are so immense that ordinary leaders retreat with feelings of fear and anxiety. This ability to conquer fear and pursue adversity is associated with an entrepreneurial spirit.

Entrepreneurial Spirit

The entrepreneurial spirit is the next component of how change is successfully led. There is a resemblance between what an entrepreneur does to launch a business as to how a change is successfully implemented. For the purpose of this dialogue the researcher will reflect on two similarities and three differences in order to compare and contrast leadership change with entrepreneurial spirit.

To initiate the discussion an entrepreneur is a leader. Although there are a variety of perspectives of what defines leadership, a leader as defined by Bennis (2003) is one that has flexibility, the aptitude to connect with others, a say or position, and a powerful purpose. Entrepreneurs, like change leaders, inspire others to believe in their cause in order to ignite a spirit and a belief in others to engage in their purpose. Graetz (2000) proposes that this leadership energy equates to the entrepreneur's charismatic style in order to create in others a capacity for change. When the vision is understood and clear, followers are able to understand the purpose of the change, how they fit in, and what outcome the change will provide to

them as well as for the organization. This form of transformational leadership inspires other to go beyond the status quo.

In contrast to leading change, the entrepreneur spirit has three primary challenges. First, change is more likely to be implemented if the change is introduced in incremental steps. Incremental is not what the entrepreneurial spirit typically represents. Change leaders are rewarded for their radical changes and quick turn around; for what is thought of today is to be implemented today. Second, an

entrepreneurial leader has a keen sense of solving problems but is not as talented in helping others cope with change. The lack of patience in others to go through the stages of change is not a skill that an entrepreneurial leader naturally engages in. Third, the entrepreneurial spirit is so spontaneous that it is not uncommon for the entrepreneur to fail to plan and sequence the roll-out of the change. The change leader may fail to in-

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volve the necessary stakeholders in decisions which create uncertainty leading to a lack of understanding which results in lack of engagement (Bruhn, 2004; Woodward & Hendry; 2004). These three omissions on the part of the entrepreneurial spirit may create a failure in not only leading change but also sustaining change. By understanding why changes fail to materialize a leader may now move forward to developing skills for self-awareness and learning.

Self-Awareness and Learning

The failures discussed in the previous examples show a relationship as to the importance self reflection and renewal contributes to the foundation for leading change. Through self analysis a leader becomes aware of potential conflicts between his or her functional role and the role as a leader of change. Realization of conflicting roles provides a resource for leaders to add clarity to internal conflicts that may arise.

Learning about associations, habits, and reactive tendencies that exist within is the third component to the model for becoming a change leader. With this self knowledge the leader has a strong basis in which to build authenticity and the engagement skills that will be needed to guide others through the change transformation. The change leader understands that his or her influence generates a passion and culture for others to grow and develop. It is this understanding of the role of leadership that provides the importance for building a connection.

Connection and Engagement

The leader that has participated in self awareness has the skill set to build

a connection with others. Through the attentiveness of understanding the importance of change from within the leader is now equipped to help others follow the same path of transition. For example, an effective change leader introduces a change topic and encourages those members hearing the change for the first time to openly express their frustration with the proposed change. The change leader knows that the community of stakeholders must go through the psychological shock of the change and reflect from within as to how they will contribute.

A change leader provides a safe environment in which others may react without fear of repercussion. The connecting approach is in contrast to a change manager that becomes frustrated when members within the organization build resistance to the change and ask challenging questions. The task-oriented leader promptly tells and directs people that the change will occur in contrast to the change leader facilitating the members to actively contribute to the change process. This manner of connecting is a parallel approach and fourth component of the model that proposes that all members are equal contributors to the success of the change.

Change leadership is about building a culture of commitment through people. By building relationships and focusing on the human element of leadership, successful change has the potential to be everlasting.

Builder of Community

At the peak of the model is a change leader that values and appreciates working with people. He or she not only states that people are the greatest asset of the business they practice this belief through leadership behaviors and actions. Utilizing the theories of coaching and mentoring the entrepreneurial leader deems that by knowing oneself and continually learning he or she will be able to duplicate the skills of change leadership through others. This practice of engagement will lead to building communities within the organization and strengthen change optimization. This perspective provides the change leader with the freedom to move on to the next challenge by establishing a culture in which an organization may flourish.

In sum, the proposed model recommends that a leader does not become the change agent; the people that surround them generate change. It is through the love of people, the spirit of authentic, entrepreneurial leadership, self-awareness, continuous learning, engagement, and community that the contemporary leader will excel in mastering the challenge of change.

CONCLUSION

The change leader of today has recognized that change management as an individual is not possible. A change leader understands that with the teamwork of members throughout the organization change is possible. It is not about leading from the top, the process, the steps, the phases, or managing the project. Change leadership is about building a culture of commitment through people. In sum, by building relationships and focusing on the human element of leadership, successful change has the potential to be everlasting.

Superior leadership is the key to effectively managing change. Without the guidance of authentic leaders managing the upcoming challenges of today's world

the results will be disastrous. The question is, will the body of knowledge that has been provided transition managers to change leaders? Will processes-oriented managers gravitate toward prioritizing the importance of building relationships? Future research will help answer these questions by providing the evidence of how leadership applies to change management success and by identifying the leadership qualities and behaviors of those that have accomplished it.

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