

## Enabling Organizational Transformation

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Change is ubiquitous and ever present in our lives today. There is no way to avoid it and it is difficult to slow its pace. We all experience three kinds of change; positive, neutral and negative. I call them  $C^+$  (positive change),  $C^0$  (neutral change) and  $C^-$  (negative change).

While most people never talk about the need to manage  $C^+$  or  $C^0$ , there are volumes written on managing  $C^-$ . The problem with that is that we need to consider the impact of all three of these types of change on our lives. While  $C^0$  may be of no concern to us now, it may over time have a ripple effect causing either positive or negative consequences in our lives. The same holds true for  $C^+$ . Lottery winners for example are often surprised by the ways in which people they know treat them differently and by the expectations others have of them and their newfound wealth.

I'll talk more about the need to deal with these changes, what to look out for and what to do to manage all three types of change at a personal level in a later article.

In the business environment we find that in addition to being able to manage the three types of change, we need to manage change at three different levels; personal, team and organizational.

Managing personal change involves finding my own way to successfully adapt to changes I face. It may also involve helping friends and colleagues experiencing the same transition. Managing team change focuses on managing the team dynamic through the transition process. I will write more about that in a later article too.

That leaves managing organizational change. I often refer to it as enabling transformation. It is different from the other levels of change because it is really a system level intervention which includes elements of personal and team change but is more fundamentally focused on enabling the entire organizational system to successfully transform itself. This is the focus of this article.

The greater the significance and impact of a change introduced into an organization, the more likely that change will produce both expected and unexpected consequences. And, therefore, the greater the need for system wide change enabling activities. Because organizational change happens all the time we can be lulled into thinking that we don't need enabling activities.

In many cases that is true. Adding a line item to a performance management process is something that can be explained and communicated without much difficulty and with a very high probability of a high adoption rate. Changing an entire performance management process including moving from a paper to an electronic format might well benefit from a good deal of enabling activity.

For managing large scale transformations which must be accomplished quickly, such as mergers and acquisitions, I find it best to take a structured rather than viral approach to change. Viral change leaves much to chance and as we all know viruses have a habit of mutating and generating unpredictable outcomes. A structured approach to change is clearly goal oriented with a specific set of outcomes in mind.

When an organizational direction or strategy has been decided upon most of us know what needs to happen next.

- A governance process for execution is created
- A transition plan is created with different work streams

So far so good. What happens next varies greatly. Because of the need for speed and the focus on task accomplishment the need to engage and involve appropriate constituencies of the change is often overlooked or given very little attention.

One company I worked with attempted to create a change in strategic direction this way. They hired a prestigious consulting firm which produced a plan of execution using a minimum of input from employees. The cost of the plan was a seven figure number. As management began to execute they continued to hear comments such as, "that won't work here" and "nobody ask us about how to do this". They also heard even more deadly - silence. The workforce resisted, pushed back and the strategic direction was killed. Total cost to the organization in the 7-8 figure range.

What they didn't realize that there are several enabling work streams along with a shift in mindset which are required to rapidly and effectively enable the organizational transformation process. The change in mindset is easy to recognize but sometimes difficult to accomplish; involve impacted employees as partners in the transformation and where appropriate involve other impacted constituencies as well.

The enabling processes which should be added to the transformation plan and married to all other transformation activities are:

- Leadership Involvement
- Communication
- Employee Involvement
- Assessment

**Leadership Involvement** includes not just leadership commitment to the transformation but a careful plan for how leaders will demonstrate and visibly provide leadership and involvement.

**Communication** should provide a plan for how those impacted will be kept informed and educated using multiple modalities and multiple contacts, including how they will be able to obtain answers to their questions.

**Employee Involvement** should include a plan for how and when employees will be appropriately involved in problem solving and decision making throughout the entire process. It should also include a plan for assisting individuals and teams with their personal and group response to the changes and the change process.

**Assessment** should provide a plan for assessing the success of the execution and the results of the execution as the transition proceeds. It should provide information necessary to modify the transformation, if necessary, and to identify barriers and pathways to acceleration of change.

Some say that they don't have time for these processes. But it is most often the case that these processes improve the speed and quality of adoption leading to greater performance results and an engaged workforce.

Without a doubt, enabling organizational transformation produces a significant ROI.