

THE ROLE OF THE INTERNAL CHANGE TEAM

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The following discussion assumes that no external consulting resource has been brought in to orchestrate the change initiative. If, indeed, that is the case then the competencies cited would be used in a key support role dictated by the level of involvement of the outside entity. That said, it is imperative that the internal team be included in the initiative planning from day-one as they will be supporting the organization long after the external team has departed. They are key in providing the continuing reinforcement needed to insure the sustainability of the changes made in the initiative.

The importance of the internal team's role cannot be overstated. If properly utilized, they become the accessible frontline support resource for change in the organization. Broadly speaking, their role is to always be available with the goal of becoming the trusted, go-to, support resource for counsel, expertise, coaching and training; egos, know-it-alls and better-thans on the team are sure to create cynicism and cause the team to be a barrier to successful change.

The team and the support they provide are only as good as the knowledge and skills of the individuals selected to serve on the team. Consequently, when selecting team members it is critical to insure that each team member have, or acquire prior to the change initiative, the eight personal qualities, skill sets and strategy shown below. If these attributes are absent in those selected, if they cannot effectively fulfill these responsibilities, the team not only will be less cohesive but will fail as an effective catalyst and resource for successful change.

People transition strategy: Change initiatives tend to fail because often there is no coherent people transition strategy as human-factor considerations associated with change are most often ignored or overlooked. The internal team should be the architect of, or at a minimum be the driver for, the development of a comprehensive people transition strategy. They must understand how people and organizational cultures are impacted by, cope, and move through (or not) change and put a proactive plan in place to deal with the people realities of change.

Change management expertise: The medical profession's prime directive, "First, do no harm", should be the touchstone for internal change teams. If there is not a high level of understanding of the change cycle and how organizations and people go through it, more harm than good will be inflicted making matters worse. Knowing how structures react to change, e.g., knowing when you change over 'there' it will impact or 'wiggle' over here, here and here. This knowledge will allow the team to anticipate issues and address them proactively. The importance of knowing these linkages and understanding the knock-on effects of change, interventions, and training undertaken can't be overestimated.

Focus: In the hurly-burly of day-to-day activities both management and employees can become distracted and lose focus during a change initiative. A major role of the internal change team is to help others, especially management, maintain focus on the strategy, next steps, initiative metrics and to continually reinforce how others can support employees as they move through the change cycle. The team is the keeper of the change-comes-one-person-at-a-time mindset in an environment where management is more frequently looking for silver bullet quick fixes and instantaneous adoption.

Communication: The tendency in any change initiative is to start hard and fast, with lots of hype and fanfare, only to become virtually silent as focus is lost. The internal team is responsible for the orchestration of consistent, meaningful (this is very important and the data can vary by audience) change initiative communication to all impacted parties throughout the organization. They should play a role in the crafting of the messages and who is to deliver them, the latter often more important than the former. A full communication strategy, taking into consideration audience, message goal, message,

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and deliverer is the purview of the internal team, if need be in concert with a communication department if such exists.

Measurement: This goes hand-in-glove with communication. It is essential for the internal team to have a clear understanding of the milestones and measures needed for a successful change initiative, their drivers and how to activate those drivers. The team determines how best to communicate them, which creates credibility for both the initiative and the team. Most importantly, continually reporting metrics to the entire organization allows all to see that real, objective, progress (along with any setbacks) is being made. Also, this is a must to fend off the naysayers and those who are advocates of the status quo.

Mentoring: The internal team has the pivotal role of helping, as needed, all change-impacted members within the organization cope with the psychological and emotional stress inherent in change initiatives. Understanding the impact of change on individuals, and how to apply that understanding on an individual basis in order to assist employees in adapting, evolving, and embracing the change, is a major role for the team. In this process, confidentiality is key to the internal team's credibility while still reporting trends in both adoption and resistance they see developing within the organization and crafting interventions, if needed, to cope with the resistance.

Coaching/training: Change initiatives introduce all manner of new systems, processes, behaviors and ways of thinking, all of which more often than not conflict with those currently in use in the organization. The internal team should be champions, if not masters, of these new processes. They should be able to train/coach/support others through new learning curves until those they become comfortable with the new competency or change in mindset. The team should have sufficient expertise to guide senior managers through line supervisors in the development of the new mindsets and work processes needed to understand the impact of change on the day-to-day end users. This may include developing new/better management, life, and technical skills.

Be ethical: The foundational issue, of both success and failure, is one of ethics and their associated 'do-right' behaviors (or not, as is often the case in failure); it is a character issue. Team members must understand, communicate and, through their daily personal behaviors, demonstrate their belief in the ethical principles of trust, fairness, honesty, respect, accountability and dependability.

An effective internal team is critical to the success of a change initiative. Because most internal change teams are formed ad hoc just prior to initiative launch, they seldom have the understanding or skill sets nor often, critically, the level of management support needed to be effective in their role (and let's be honest; invariably the skills sets needed and the expertise of the newly formed team tend to be, respectively, underestimated and overestimated).

If a change initiative is going to happen then, as far in advance of launch as possible, the organization's responsibility is to insure that the team is not just adequately trained but has the time and support needed to come together as a team rather than a collection of individuals with good intentions. If not, if they are left to 'wing it' with only good intentions to guide them, the organization will have set them up to fail. If the team fails it is very likely, as well, that the change initiative itself will fail and in the process contribute to the 70% change initiative failure rate that leaves behind a more cynical workforce and change resistant organizational culture.