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MAJOR ORGANIZATIONAL CHANAGE: DO NOT ATTEMPT SOLO

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

All organizations are created for a purpose. The purpose may not change, but what an organization does, how it is set-up and how it changes does. Organizations fail, survive, or thrive based often on how they deal with change. Organizational change is sometimes met with emotions of fear, hesitation, risk aversion, turf protection and an undercurrent of resistance. However, the reality is that organizations are always in a state of change. They fluctuate from periods of sustained evolutionary change where small incremental changes are made by individuals and teams to major or revolutionary change where an entire organization may have been heading in one direction and has now noticeably switched course and is following a completely different direction. It is the role of leadership to understand what level of change or changes need to occur for an organization to continue to prosper. An organizational change consultant can be the trusted advisor to both leadership and the rest of the team in helping to navigate, facilitate, and implement the change process. When it comes to major change, a well-matched consultant can help reduce the risk of rallying around the wrong changes and increase the chances of implementing the organizational changes that will enable success for the organization. They can assist with communication and buy-in strategies along with offering their own experiences they have gained by helping out other organizations. The organizational change process takes work, trust, and commitment to be successful. Major organizational change. Do not attempt solo.

INTRODUCTION

Organizational change occurs all of the time, "but fundamental organizational change that works is rare" [1]. Achieving success with major organizational change is even harder. Communication and building the case for major change amongst the organization is often poorly executed [1]. Knowledge of what to do and how to change is often lacking, incomplete, or outright wrong [1]. Thus, organizations often find the organizational change process risky and overwhelming. It is a wise organization that seeks well-matched, experienced, and trustworthy consultants to help guide them through the major organizational change process. The following provides a basis for the purpose of organizational change, its process, how to embrace it, and the critical role a

consultant plays in ensuring success. Also, next steps are identified for leaders to follow when they decide to undergo and embrace an organizational change process.

PURPOSE OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Organizations are not static entities that remain constant throughout their duration. They are a living, breathing, adapting, initiating, reacting and changing entity of individuals and groups of imperfect people. Organizations are initially created to serve a purpose. The purpose may not change, but the organization itself often does. This is often due to a condition that it creates or in response to a marketplace situation that it now finds itself in. To be true to its purpose, it often has no choice, but to change. Other times change is elective and welcomed. Regardless, organizations are always changing as they fluctuate from periods of evolutionary to revolutionary change [2].

Survival is a fundamental rationale for organizations to seek to change. Some of the largest and most powerful corporations in the world that are tracked in the Dow Jones Industrial Average are often severely jolted by events beyond their control such as terrorist attacks, weather events, presidential elections, wars, and changes in regulations [3]. Often, organizations work very hard to try and insulate themselves where they can from making unwanted changes, but cannot pivot fast enough to respond to these sudden outside factors. These defensive changes are often reactionary and damaging when they occur. However, these changes are usually embraced as organizations rally everyone around the survival theme. A "we either make the change or we go out of business" approach usually rallies even the most resistant.

To grow in abilities or capacity are other key reasons an organization seeks to change. Organizational change often begins with individuals or small teams and percolates to the rest of the organization [4]. Major organizational change initiatives are often generated from the top, but sometimes are created from those at the bottom of an organization.

"Fierce competition" from either established or start-ups organizations often drives organizational changes. When organizations change, they learn how to thrive and stay ahead of

those wishing to take its clients and marketplace position [4]. This marketplace reality to always strive to get better keeps an organization focused on change.

Evolutionary organizational change is often a recognition that major change is not what an organization needs to continue to prosper while revolutionary change is an admission that something major needs to change. Regardless, of the need for organizational change, the purpose of organizational change is to prosper an organization.

THE PROCESS OF CHANGE

It is important to recognize that an organization is always in a state of change. Organizations looking back at their past often identify milestones and course changes that occurred that define who they are today. They often track the major or revolutionary changes in their history and strive to get ahead of one's that they believe they have yet to encounter. Organizations looking to the future may predict certain changes that they believe they will need to make and strive to plan for those changes. However, not all changes can be planned or identified ahead of time. These unplanned changes are often more impactful than the planned changes that an organization is prepared to embrace. Therefore, when organizations think of change and the process they implement for the change, they often think of the major or revolutionary changes [1].

The Key Drivers of Organizational Development and Change

Studies show that five key drivers impact an organization's development process and how it changes: how old the organization is, its size, how it performs in periods of sustained growth, how it performs in periods of disruption, and the greater industry that organization is a part of [2]. The older the organization is the less willing it is to embrace change or even be able to change [2]. The larger the organization is the more time that needs to be spent on internal communication and coordination to ensure even a basic ability for an organization to learn about and understand how it is to develop or change [2]. During periods of sustained and consistent growth, organizations develop under more evolutionary changes which are step by step and in a planned, deliberate manner [2]. During this time, organizations are more interested in keeping

the good times rolling and less interested in making a change that could help them grow faster, but with increased risk of failure [2]. When the organization faces unknown, risky, or disruptive events, it enters a period where revolutionary change drives the organizational development and change agenda [2]. Finally, the industry an organization resides in often determines the pace of change for the organization with some organizations belonging to either a highly dynamic, rapidly changing industry while others may occupy space in a more mature and slower changing one [2].

Change that Creates Organizational Pivots

Most successful organizations change by going through a process that pivots between periods of sustained growth and dynamic growth [2]. The dominant management style typically defines the sustained growth period [2]. While the disruption or challenges the organization is trying to overcome controls the dynamic or revolutionary periods [2]. Failing organizations go through these periods as well, but struggle, shrink, or fail altogether as a result of a change or failure to change.

Organizations change slower during the sustained growth period, but this does not mean that they do not change at all. During this period, change occurs incrementally to the point that it is almost logical and predictable where it is going. Computer software upgrades often follow an evolutionary or sustained growth model. For the mature software organizations that produce the same software over many years, this is a great leveler and driver to sustain evolutionary change year over year. Change has occurred between model years, but the change is easily learned and incorporated by its users. Organizations that are in this period of change look very similar year to year. Long-standing and successful universities, churches, government agencies, large corporations all go through periods of sustained growth and evolutionary change for long periods of time. They enjoy this period and often seek to maximize their time in it especially the older they are since evolutionary change is a lot less disruptive for those in power than revolutionary change.

Today, universities are either thriving or failing with incorporating online higher education. Online learning has disrupted entire universities and has forced many to enter a period of revolutionary change for the hopes of both survival and achieving dynamic growth. Many did not welcome this change and are suffering the consequences. Those that embraced it early are seeing that the changes have impacted the way their entire organization operates. The growth in new students and revenue that this revolutionary change brings has allowed them to not just stay relevant, but actually grow in ways they never thought they could.

The Success of Change Depends on the Process and the Leaders

The effectiveness of the change process determines how impactful and hopefully beneficial the changes would be to the organization. Successful change processes start and end with leadership's commitment to making the change [1]. The details of change processes are highly varied, but to be successful, leaders must embrace the process early and show commitment along the way for followers to stay committed themselves to the process. An engaged leader will layout goals, the overall direction the organization should go and define limits or boundaries that change will create [1]. Leadership will determine who gets involved and how decisions related to the changes will be made. Revolutionary changes are most effective with leaders who practice a transformative leadership style and stay committed along the way. They are charismatic enough to cast a vision and open enough to let the change process work in both planned and surprisingly different ways. Occasionally, an authoritative leadership style may work for smaller evolutionary changes, but rarely works for major revolutionary organizational changes [5].

HOW TO EMBRACE MAJOR ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

"Organizational readiness for change is not only a multi-level construct, but a multi-faceted one" [6]. Organizational readiness comprises both commitment and the ability to deliver and "implement organizational change" [6]. Individuals must be committed and capable to implement change and each group collectively must be able to as well within an organization. Success amongst certain individuals, but failure at either the group level or overall organization level

spells disaster. Successful change is the result of both individual and collective collaborative successes. The greater individuals and teams within an organization are ready to embrace change the more likely success will be achieved.

A leader's job is to remove barriers for an organization to be successful. This includes individual attitudes. "For change to be successful, it is important for negative attitudes towards change are overcome to avoid any resistance to change" [7]. The individual preparation is critical. Naysayers and those looking to protect their own "silos" need to be dealt with through attitude adjustments or outright removal from the change process.

Individuals or groups within an organization may try to make power plays to resist change within an organization [8]. Those that are comfortable or feel like they may be giving up too much of their current power and control often resist organizational change [8]. A leader needs to similarly deal with them in the same way as those with attitude issues – adjust them or remove them.

An individual or group may also resist major organizational change through "blind resistance" [1]. Facing the unknown is viewed as too risky and people will default to saying "no" regardless of how right the change may be for both them and the organization. Therefore, it is important for a leader to communicate as much accurate information as possible so that the individuals and groups can learn more and hopefully address their concerns as they engage with the change process.

Regardless of the source of resistance to engaging in a major change process, leaders need to deal with the issues of their individuals and teams through effective communication [9]. It should be targeted to all that would be impacted by the organizational change [10]. Effective communication and even over communication throughout a process will help dispel rumors that only add negativity, skepticism and increased resistance to embracing change [11]. It should seek to "build trust", "motivate employees", "generate community spirit", "tackle" questions and concerns, seek "employee participation and commitment", "reduce uncertainty", and provide "security" [9]. Successful major organizational change starts with the leader's ability to effectively communicate and engage with both individuals and groups within their organization.

THE ROLE OF THE CONSULTANT

Organizational change is unique for every organization. The periods of change itself may follow a repetitive pattern switching between sustained growth and dynamic growth, or worse, one failed change after another. Leaders may have done everything to position their organizations to embrace change and strive to be successful, but still fall short. Many leaders find that evolutionary change is quite manageable, but dealing with major revolutionary change requires some outside help. Bringing in an outside consultant to help facilitate, develop, implement and communicate major organizational change has helped many organizations successfully navigate the complexities that often surround these efforts.

The consultant does not take the place of the leader, nor should they be seen as being equal to the leader. Rather, they should be seen as being a trusted "third party" that comes with no agenda, silos to protect, or aspirations to satisfy other than assisting an organization through a major change successfully. The very presence of an external consultant is often viewed by an organization that leadership is serious, and it is time for change. In this way, the consultant is no longer just a consultant, but a "change agent" [12]. "Consultants are traditionally regarded as having the highest level of specialized knowledge and expertise" [12]. This provides them the ability to immediately separate themselves from the current struggles of the organization and be seen as a resource rather than a threat to those within the organization. The best are seen as coming in with no baggage or preconceived position that favors a particular outcome over another. They truly just want to do the best for the organization.

For the consultant to be effective and accepted as a change agent, they must be trusted [13]. Therefore, consultants should focus first not on the organization, but on convincing the individuals and groups within the organization that they can be trusted. Once trust is gained, then the consultant will be able to offer advice that will be taken under serious consideration. Trust can easily be lost if the consultant is seen as picking sides or playing favorites too early in the process [14]. This runs the risk of alienating individuals or groups within the organization.

"External consultants have both a wider and deeper perspective of the environmental complexity, due to their exposure to numerous organizations" [13]. A well-matched organizational change consultant would have both familiarity with the industry the organization primarily operates in along with knowledge and experience with other industries. This provides an opportunity for the consultant to introduce the organization to both proven industry concepts and outside industry best practices that may offer significant value to the changes contemplated by the organization.

The consultant often plays the role of the facilitator to help a team go deep to identify the key issues, ideas, and concepts that need to be addressed [15]. For major organizational change, the facilitator may even play the role of negotiator between different groups and individuals to resolve disputes, merge ideas, or help define common ground [15]. An internal leader doing this runs the risk of the appearance of driving a certain agenda that favors themselves in the end. The consultant as facilitator stays clear of this potential appearance of a conflict of interest.

Effective communication is required by the consultant to assist leadership in getting messages out to the team related to the change process. The range of communication varies from setting up meetings with agendas, developing schedules, recording decisions, and sending out reminders.

Consultants keep the team focused and mission driven to both embrace and ultimately complete the organizational change process. They help create schedule milestones and assist leadership in driving the team to complete steps along the way to achieve these milestones. Goals that are generated by the team serve as key factors, limits, and boundaries that the consultant will use to keep the team focused and moving forward within the change process. Simply put, an effective consultant is an indispensable member of the change process for the organization.

NEXT STEPS FOR THE LEADER

1. As a leader, determine whether your organization requires evolutionary or revolutionary change. If the latter, then seriously consider utilizing an outside consultant and proceed to step 2. If the former, then skip to step 4.
2. **Interview and select a well-matched consultant** – one that knows your industry and can also draw from outside experiences.
3. **Communicate** to your organization and its stakeholders that you plan on undergoing a major organizational change and you have brought in a consultant to help with the change process.
4. Meet with your team (and the consultant if you have one) and start the change process. Give the consultant time to **build trust** amongst the team members.
5. Remember to always communicate, implement, and communicate more throughout. **Be committed. Be open. Think long-term**.
6. **Engage** as much of the team as possible. Failure to do so may leave groups that will resist change later or leave amazing ideas out of the conversation.
7. **Do not fear** implementing change. Fear becoming stagnant and resistant to change. Do not remind the team too much of past failures related to change.
8. **Seek feedback** along the way. This requires humility in the leaders.
9. Implement organizational change in a **deliberate** manner.
10. Understand that the change process may reach points of closure, but it never really ends. It may slow down at times, but it is always present.
11. **Embrace change** as an organizational lifestyle and that pivoting between periods of both evolutionary change and revolutionary change are normal for long-term successful organizations.

SUMMARY

Organizations are created to serve a purpose. How an organization successfully works towards successfully fulfilling its purpose is often determined by its openness to change and embracing the change process. Organizational change faces every organization on a daily basis. Whether

change is planned, unplanned, evolutionary, or revolutionary (major), it creates both opportunity and risk to the organization. Survival may drive the current change agenda or dynamic growth may be the driver for organizational change. Regardless, a well-matched organizational change consultant will help navigate, facilitate and communicate an organizational change process successfully. Going it alone adds risk. Leaders do not attempt to undergo major organizational change solo.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeffrey W. Ganthner, AIA is an accomplished architect and leader of teams and organizations in the architecture, engineering, construction, and technology industries with over 25 years of experience. He delivers a creative and comprehensive perspective on the issues and challenges impacting organizations today. A noted teacher and consultant in leadership, he knows how to liberate greatness in those around him to achieve success in their organizations.

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