

WHY CHANGE EFFORTS FAIL

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Generating and sustaining organizational change is one of the profound mysteries of our time, or any time. There is, of course, no alternative to change: it happens, like the weather. But to actually understand and lead change, in other words, to take advantage of the opportunity of change, is where the challenge lies.

These days, there are many theories (some would say fads) on how to seize the advantage that change presents. In recent times, there has been re-engineering, empowerment, and team-building, to name a few. All of these are fine in their place, but they don't address the heart of the matter, which goes beyond trendy buzz-words, and has to do with a leader seeing the organizational/business reality accurately and articulating a doable vision to people, which will inspire them. So, a combination of realism and imagination is required. But how to do this?

Peter Senge in his most recent book, The Dance of Change, addresses the obstacles of change efforts. Even when there are clear business, group and personal benefits from a stated direction, change efforts often (one could say usually) fail. Early on, there are many factors contributing to this failure, among them, as Senge speaks of them, not enough help (issues of coaching, mentoring, support, asking for help), not enough time (issues of scheduling, delegating, efficiency), and non-relevance (issues of strategic awareness, information exchange, emphasis on business results).

However, there is one key overriding factor contributing to the failure of change efforts. *It is that leaders fail to see how they themselves must change in order to accomplish what has to change organizationally.* For a leader, organizational change automatically signals personal change, and significant personal change at that. A recent example: a CEO was trying to lead a cultural change toward increased accountability among key managers. To achieve this, he insisted on increased accountability, outlined the objectives, gave the rationale, and touted what the business and productivity results would be. However, he failed to invite input into the change and was perceived as telling/dictating his ideas rather than selling/persuading. What he got was a fair amount of rebellion rather than increased accountability, in some cases the opposite of what he

wanted. He failed to realize he needed to change in a more fully collaborative direction to create the conditions of accountability among his managers.

Real organizational change requires that leaders change their attitudes, assumptions, and ways of acting. It inevitably feels uncomfortable - and should feel uncomfortable -because it reflects going into foreign and unknown ways of acting, thinking and reflecting on one's own behavior. It is tempting to try to dictate change. Much more challenging (and ultimately rewarding) is actually being an example of that change, genuinely working in new ways and with different "mental models". To state the obvious: it all must start with oneself.

Reference:

Senge, Peter, et al (1999) The Dance of Change. New York: Currency Doubleday.

"Think of yourself as a work in progress. . . Where does real power begin? On the inside, with self-awareness and self-acceptance. This is the pathway to leadership and fulfillment."

From Real Power, by James Autry and Stephen Mitchell

Expert Analysis, Artful Application

In our twenty years of experience working with corporations, non-profit and government agencies, we at Development Associates have learned that all positive organizational change depends upon two things. One is the quality of leadership at all levels, and the other is the health of the organization's culture--the subtle but pervasive day to day reality experienced by all employees.

As consultants, our task is to help introduce the principles and practices of authentic leadership into your organization at both executive and grass-roots levels. Our ultimate measure of success is that these ideas and methods take root and become self-generating, for the long-term realization of your vision and the well-being of your people.

Contact us to discover more about our consulting, coaching, assessment, teaching, and facilitation services. Visit our website at www.dev-assoc.com or call (902) 424-1131.