

Maintaining Motivation and Momentum

Success in Change Leadership

by DR. LAURENZ AWATER and DR. GERALD RENGER

For competitive, agile and future-oriented organizations change management has become the center of modern leadership. However, it is not sufficient to simply have basic change management skills and tools in place. To make change management a core organizational capability and embrace change as a corporate value organizational members live by, leadership development and change management must mesh.

Ask five executives, which are the most crucial success factors in leading change and you will most probably receive five different answers. The reason being individual experiences, perspectives and priorities are no less different than the sheer complexity of change programs involving numerous players and organizational levels. While we believe John P. Kotter's seminal work 'Leading Change' and his 8-Step-Model to transforming organizations to still be valid today, we also think that there is still a lot to learn in order to create best practices in change leadership.

We want to explore change leadership from the angle of keeping or restoring a high degree of employee engagement since one key success factor of any change initiative is the motivation of people driving the change process or being affected by it. Without higher levels of motivation being maintained the specter of lasting behavioral change darkens and with it the perspective of a successful outcome of the change initiative.

How can change leaders positively influence employee motivation and which practices create or undermine employee motivation during change? Our answers to this question builds upon the self-determination theory, which holds that needs for relatedness, competence and autonomy are core motivation drivers and that people strive for greater self-determination in work and life.

When, as is more often the case than not, change programs are imposed top-down on staffers, they threaten the sense of autonomy and personal choice of organizational members who wish to be the source of their own actions. As transformations demand employees to acquire new skills and fundamentally change behavioral routines, concerns about one's individual competence more or less arise naturally. Heightened levels of uncertainty and anxiety can also translate into the dimension of relatedness, a person's need to have good relations with superiors and peers, such as position, image and

respect from others can be strongly influenced by reorganizations. On top of that, management asks for more input in terms of work hours or productivity but frequently has little to offer in terms of incentives. In the following we want to share best practices with readers, a compilation, which by nature is incomplete but serves as a leadership guide.

Demonstrating the Value Created by the Change

Why all this effort is necessary eventually makes sense – the essential question of the rationale for change must first be answered convincingly before change leaders can move on. Linking the big picture and long-term vision with exemplary contributions from staffers will give them a sense of significance, the feeling that their work is of value to others. Since change can easily be perceived as a threat to personal or social identity, it is even more important in times of change for individuals to see how their work contributes to the organization's goals. The short-term wins created by a successful start into a change program provide a formidable opportunity for recognition – a major motivation driver.

Building Confidence

The more confident, the less defensive and fearful people are. Building confidence ('Yes, you can!') is essential to sustainable behavioral change, which will be achieved only if people believe in themselves and their capabilities. Building confidence helps creating positive emotions around the change. This is essential since emotions often have a stronger impact on change readiness than reasoning and persuasion can ever have.

Appreciative Inquiry

Traditional approaches to organizational change follow a sequence of identification of problems, cause analysis, developing possible solutions and action planning. Such a problem-solving approach tends to put a spotlight on negatives. Appreciative inquiry supports a more motivational work environment as it focuses strongly on valuing the successes and envisioning what could be. By appreciating what has worked well in the past, appreciative inquiry values the contribution of those who made the organization strong and successful in the past and who now, in the face of a major change, need to let go of

practices, which no longer seem to be a formula for success. This way appreciative inquiry brings advocates of the status quo on board and helps to engage everybody in dialogues about what should be and what kind of innovations would make sense.

Open Dialogue

One of the most critical factors in successful change is a work climate of trust, which allows for open dialogue. Change leaders who model trustful behavior do not deny but openly address the tensions, paradoxes and conflicts change initiatives bring about. If a work climate of trust prevails, people are more likely to express their fears, emotions and concerns, which provides change leaders and sponsors with the opportunity to address issues appropriately. Through the facilitation of open dialogue, it is possible to identify, examine and test underlying assumptions ('What served us well in the past, will also work for us in the future'), which may hold people back or drive them into other directions than the intended one.

Clarity

Times of change are often also times of increased uncertainty, ambiguity and confusion, which easily have negative consequences for motivation and performance. The success factor in change leadership is clear, consistent and frequent communication of vision, goals, expectations and performance standards, of who is accountable for what and how performance will be monitored and measured. Organizational members should be well aware of what is at stake, for them as individuals, for their teams and for the whole organization.

Attention

Change programs inevitably ask for extraordinary efforts from employees who must put in many hours of their work time into making things happen. Discretionary efforts are more likely to be taken if the organization offers support and attention to the needs of individuals and teams through coaching and mentoring. Change conversations on an individual or group level are an essential tool for facilitating change and best suited to entail the emotional and motivational aspects of change. Coaching conversations help people to step out of the current situation and thinking and look at the situation from a higher vantage point or a third-person perspective. They lead to new thinking based upon a shift of perspective and a new way of perceiving things and thus become instrumental in getting to sustainable behavioral change.

Involvement

Change imposed on staffers can have a disempowering effect and undermine years of efforts to build a culture of empowerment that is fundamental for high performance and full problem ownership. Many change initiatives result from strategic decisions taken by top management as only start-ups can involve the whole organization in vision building and strategy development. The art of successful change leadership is to integrate top-down with bottom-up processes in a results-oriented fashion: Something which requires thoughtful planning and facilitation. Involvement starts with meaningful communication and for this staff members need to have a commonly shared reference framework for change that represents the whole process and its major elements. This can be achieved by utilizing a simulation tool. If they share the big picture view of the change process and a common understanding of the

most critical aspects in their specific change initiative people can be involved in implementation planning and establishment of an open, collaborative process for co-creating the change program. Giving space to experimentation is another pathway to real involvement that eventually leads to more buy-in and a greater sense of ownership on the side of the people affected by the change. If the change initiative is designed as a continuous learning journey building upon experiences, feedback, creativity and input the involvement of organizational members becomes an integral part of the change. Last but not least, top leaders must model the way by being highly visible and personally engaged in the change process, by constantly and actively involving themselves.

Continuous Learning

Change is easier to initiate and implement in a work environment characterized by a high-impact learning culture, a culture, which emphasizes agility and continuous learning, experimentation and co-creation, collaboration and knowledge sharing, risk-taking, speed and flexibility, empowerment and self-correction, combined with a focus on the external world, i.e. customers, markets and technological developments. In such a high-impact learning culture change is the rule of the day and organizational members are accustomed to iterative approaches to continuous adaptation and improvement.

Sense of Urgency

As John P. Kotter has repeatedly pointed out, no change initiative can ever be successful without leaders having first created a sense of urgency among their followers. If people lack a sense of urgency, they do not feel the need to change their behavior and the change initiative is doomed to fail. Sense of urgency is both a mindset and an emotion but more importantly it is your gut feeling that tells you to ACT NOW. Making the need for change a visual and emotional learning experience is at 'The Heart of Change'.

Dr. Laurenz Awater and **Dr. Gerald Renger** are partners at the Shanghai-based consulting, training and coaching firm INNOVA Management Institute – itself a partner of the Integrated Consulting Group, ICG, a leading European training and consulting company in change management – and welcome comments and experience sharing from readers. The authors can be reached at laurenz.awater@innova-institute.com.cn or gerald.renger@innova-institute.com.cn. INNOVA Management Institute is a German Chamber Benefit partner and GCC members can receive discounts on training. To find out more visit www.china.ahk.de/chamber/benefit-partner/shanghai/