



Leadership NOTES

Designing and Leading Transformational Change

Transformational Change: A shift in the culture of an organization resulting from a change in the underlying strategy and processes that the organization has used in the past. A transformational change is designed to be organization-wide and is enacted over a period of time. (from businessdictionary.com).

Continuous improvement strategies deal with incremental change within a current paradigm. Transformational or disruptive change strategies deal with a shift in paradigms and/or a fundamental shift in the way an organization operates.

Principals for designing and leading transformational change.

- Align the top. Transformational school improvement requires effort from everyone, but it has to start at the top. Spend time examining your own commitment to the change and build coherence and consensus among the school's leadership team. (strategyand.pwc.com, 2017)
- Identify and recruit high priests. High priests are informal, but powerful, thought leaders in the school. They are looked up to and are influential in the eyes of others. Enlist them in the leadership of the school's change initiatives (Deal & Kennedy, 1982).
- Declare amnesty for the past. Look to the future. Absolve any residual angst around how things were done in the past. Cognitive and emotional energy dedicated to the past is unavailable to create the future. (Drucker, 1999) (strategyand.pwc.com, 2017)

1

- Showcase quick wins and early successes. Transformational change creates momentum for continued improvement. Early bursts of success provide the momentum to overcome inertia of the status quo. (strategyand.pwc.com, 2017)
- Set up a parallel organization. For some changes, it makes sense to continue to do things as they have been done and create change on a parallel track. In the future, as the change produces results, it can expand to all tracks. (strategyand.pwc.com, 2017)
- Expect implementation dips. Whenever an individual or an organization attempts to do something in a new way, their initial forays are less productive than the current way of doing business. This is called an implementation dip. Implementation dips are a positive sign that the organization is indeed changing. Change leaders should explain ahead of time that a dip is expected and is evidence of growth, not an early indication that we've made a mistake (Fullan, 2007) (Kubler-Ross, 1969). (For more information on implementation dips see the MLDS Developing Level Guide, Learning Experience 7, Treatment 4: Understanding change curves and implementation dips.)
- Communicate before, during, and after. Communication is always important of course. During the rapid pace of transformational change, information becomes even more essential. When information is scarce, it is a natural tendency for faculty and staff to imagine worst-case scenarios. Since thinking drives behavior, this become counterproductive quickly. Margaret Wheatley, in her excellent book, *Leadership and the New Science*, suggests that, organizationally, information should be treated like air, not like money. With air, everyone gets to breath as much of it as they need to do their work. With money, one only gets what a manager thinks they need to accomplish the work. During rapid change... treat information like air (Wheatley, 1992).
- Put everything on the table. Transformational change is systemic by nature. Therefore, everything in the system must be in the game. If new ways of teaching require

new ways of scheduling, staffing, or supervising, so be it. Even sacred cows should be on the table. Perhaps, especially sacred cows should be on the table. This sends a powerful message that the universe around us is changing, not just us. (strategyand.pwc.com, 2017)

- Shape culture through symbolic actions. Every leadership action and decision has a dual nature, part technical, part symbolic. During rapid change, it is the symbolic nature of leadership actions that take center stage. Change leaders are wise to recognize this heightened state of symbolic interpretation and use it to advance the change. (Deal & Petersen, 2009). (For more information on the technical/symbolic duality of leadership actions, see the MLDS Developing Level Guide, Learning Experience 4, Treatment 1: The technical/symbolic duality of leadership decisions.)

- Take field trips. Seeing is believing. To support transformational change, it is beneficial to arrange field experiences where faculty and staff can visit a school or a program that is implementing a similar change. Vision creates energy for change. Going to see something is compelling. Even if that something is not a perfect model, and even if the visited school/program has different demographics and conditions, it is still energizing to go see it. Generally, people don't resist their own data. They resist others' data. A visit builds personal ownership that results in less compliance and more commitment (Senge, 1990).

- Recognize and embrace resistance. Resistance to change is a natural, even healthy, response to a sudden shift in the environment. Transformational change leaders do well to recognize resistance and position it as a healthy aspect of change, not a defect in thinking or a lack of moral standing. It is most effective to recognize resistance, but overwhelm it with a compelling vision, well-designed first steps, and irresistible reasons to make the change (Dannemiller & Jacobs, 1992). (For more information on the relationship among vision, reasons, first steps, and resistance, see the MLDS Developing Level Guide, Learning Experience 7, Treatment 1: Managing organizational energy for change.)

- Keep the weight off. In a sudden, profound change event, it is quite normal for faculty and staff to quickly backslide into former, more comfortable routines and habits. Place structural and cultural obstacles in the environment so as to make backsliding harder or even impossible. If on a diet, take the cake out of the refrigerator. (strategyand.pwc.com, 2017)

Bibliography

Couto, V., Cagler, D. & Plansky, J. (2017). Fit for growth: A guide to strategic cost cutting, restructuring, and renewal. <https://www.strategyand.pwc.com/fitforgrowth/minibook>.

Dannemiller, K.D, and Jacobs, R.W. (1992). Changing the way organizations change: A revolution of common sense. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*. 28, 4, 480-498.

Deal, T.E., and Kennedy, A.A. (1982). *Corporate cultures: The rites and rituals of corporate life*. Boston, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Deal, T.E., & Peterson, K.D. (2009). *Shaping school culture: Pitfalls, paradoxes, and promises*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Drucker, P. (1999). *Management challenges for the 21st century*. New York, NY: Harper-Collins Publishers.

Fullan, M. (2007). *The new meaning of educational change*. New York, NY: Routledge

Kubler-Ross, E. (1969). *On death and dying*. New York, NY: McMillan Publishers.

Rutherford, et al (2015). *Missouri leadership development system, MLDS facilitation guide*. Jefferson City, MO: Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Senge, P. (1990). *The fifth discipline- The art and science of the learning organization*. New York, NY: Doubleday/Currency.

Wheatley, M.J. (1992). *Leadership and the new science- Learning about organization from an orderly universe*. San Francisco, CS: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.