**The Role of Leadership in Change Management**

Leaders aren’t immune to the pressure of people’s expectations. After all, employees look to their leaders for a lot—clarity, connection, and accountability—particularly in the midst of change.

A September 2013 *Forbes* article revealed some surprising insights about change management and leadership. For example, although 55% of leaders felt the changes met initial goals, change management initiatives over the long term were successful only 25% of the time. More than 87% of leaders said they trained their managers to oversee the process of change management, but the changes, once implemented, didn’t last. In fact, training was effective among just 22% of those surveyed. A third of those understood the reasons for organizational change, but that important message never fully trickled down to middle managers or front line supervisors.

So what does this tell us about the role of leadership in change management?

Having and practicing a change management mentality are two different things.  Lots of leaders want change, but only a select few actually help make it happen.

**Adopting the Change Management Mentality**

The reasons for not adopting the right [mindset](https://alignorg.com/cultivating-successful-transformation-mindset/) vary, and most are understandable. Some leaders allocate time and resources from the perspective of revenue—versus change initiatives. Others have difficulty gaining support in a consensus-driven culture. A few might even be unwilling to share their “intellectual capital” (the resources that contribute to the enterprise’s value and ability to compete) for the good of the change initiative.  Some might even want to avoid the career risk a failure might incur.

Many leaders learn through trial and error how to lead effectively during change. Unfortunately, their learning curve can be at the expense of the organization.

**Manage the Change or It Will Manage You**

Anytime leaders fall short on fulfilling expectations, their teams become disillusioned, confused and unmotivated. The business suffers. Leaders must manage the change or it will manage them. When leaders fulfill the [change management role](https://alignorg.com/redefining-change-management/), changes are made efficiently and sustainably, and the expectations of their staff, partners, stakeholders and clients are met.

To highlight a few of the principles that leaders should embrace when leading through change, consider the following:

* **Clarify the vision and communicate it effectively.** The role of leadership in change management requires that you help people buy into your vision for the organization. This type of communication needs to occur consistently, no matter if it’s the mundane, day-to-day issues or more serious change programs. Your message needs to be clear and consistent. Leverage your audience’s preferred communication methods to ensure receptiveness. That means making the most of social media. According to a November 2015 *Harvard Business Review* article, we spend an average of 3 hours each day on various social media platforms, with over 50% of employers using such platforms for internal communications. The same article noted that just 17% of employees rated their leader highly when it came to recent change-related communications.
* **Stay connected with your employees.** Without this awareness, you’ll have a difficult time explaining your vision and enlisting support. Your employees look to you to be direct and transparent. They also want you to be approachable. The *Harvard Business Review* piece cited another study in which nearly three-quarters of employees said their CEO’s preferred social media platform allowed them to communicate more directly with the CEO. Similar numbers of CEOs believed such interactions helped them get a quick idea of what employees were thinking/feeling, which is important when aligning your change management initiatives with the capabilities of your people.
* **Be accountable and transparent.** During times of change, leaders must be accountable for what is working and what isn’t working. Being accountable fosters a desire and commitment to fix problems to yield the best results. To be truly accountable means you are willing to let others see behind the curtain to candidly assess how things are going. As you do this, your team will embrace a similar, no-blame openness to performance. Accountable leaders look at all aspects of the organization—culture, processes, management, and employees—to ensure all are functioning optimally. If they are not, a good change management leader must be willing to admit the gaps or [misalignments](https://alignorg.com/the-two-faces-of-achieving-organization-alignment/) and take actions to address shortcomings.

Remember, perceptions of leaders are often shaped during times of transition and change.  The principles outlined above help leaders conquer the change management challenge. Don’t let people question your leadership and the mission of the organization. Such questions, undermine employee commitment to the change initiatives and their allegiance to you and possibly the company. Additionally, these leadership questions may ripple out to your customers, partners and stakeholders.

**Be the Change You Want to See**

Don’t abdicate change management to others, such as HR, or leave it to chance because you think people will “get it” the first time. You have to take full responsibility, understand the mindset of your team, enlist their support and hold them accountable.

The role of leadership in change management requires care, communication and commitment. As the leader, you are the bridge between your organization and the envisioned change. If you understand your role and the expectations around it, clarify your vision, communicate effectively, and hold yourself and others accountable throughout the change process, you can successfully navigate even the most disruptive change.

## **Relationship between leadership and change**

Change has been a challenging area and has affected many organizations. Organizations have to endure such significant change in order to survive in the dynamic and competitive business environment. The change must be aligned according to organizational culture, values, people and behaviors to encourage the desired results. Therefore human leadership plays a key role in making change a success.

Such transformation is difficult and will definitely result in resistance and resentment by employees. The social and psychological fear of change and the lack of technical expertise will affect the change process. Therefore Leaders should be equipped with skills that would enable effective strategic change.

David (2004) also emphasized how leadership could help overcome resistance to change. He indicates that “In order for World Class Organizations to survive, management must understand that change is inevitable and that they themselves are responsible for overcoming employee resistance through sound management and change-oriented leadership” (David, 2004).

Globalization, technological changes, knowledge management and cross boundary collaboration are the four major forces affecting organizational change. Change could occur either in the external environment or macro environment. Organizations are in need of innovative and creative visionaries who understand how to make decisions in such changes Tappin (2009).

An effective change leader should have a sense of purpose and a vision, ability to manage people through tough situations, ability to take accountability and responsibility and motivate people to achieve respective goals. Once people believe in leaders, the excitement will drive them to achieve targets.

Therefore it is evident that there is a strong relationship between leadership and change. Leadership plays a major role in minimizing resistance to change as well as ensuring smooth execution of change.

## **Importance of leadership in change**

The most challenging aspect of a business is leading and managing change. With the business environment being subject to fast paced economic and social change modern businesses need to adapt and be flexible to survive. The main challenge in leading change is to manage human resources.

As mentioned by Kotter (1999, p.19) “More change demands more leadership…” Kotter emphasized the need of a leader to manage change. Nilakant & Ramanarayan (2006) also mentioned the importance of leadership during each phase of change, mainly the execution stage.

Kotter (1999, p.7) identified one of the most common errors of organizational failures during change as its inability to create a powerful guiding coalition. He stressed on the importance of strong line leadership during change.

Kotter identified a 8 stage change process which consist of

Establishing a sense of urgency.

Creating a guiding coalition.

Developing a vision and strategy.

Communicating the change vision.

Empowering broad based action.

Generating short term wins.

Consolidating gains and produce more change.

Anchoring new approaches in the culture.

In order to follow the above steps, an initiative needs to be taken which demands leadership. Through the above approach leaders would be able to act as a change agent minimizing resistance to change.

Tappin (2009) mentioned that a leader needs to develop the following characteristics in order to manage change.

A vision, and be able to communicate it to their organizations

An orientation to serving

An entrepreneurial mind-set

A commitment to continuous innovation

A global mindset

Ease and confidence with technology

Know-how in systems thinking (a broad view of the inter-relationship of an organization’s parts, rather than a narrow view that is focused on one part or event.)

A sense of ethics and appreciation of spirituality in the workplace

A commitment to continuous learning, personal and professional development

Tappin stated characteristics that he believes should be present in a change leader. An in-depth analysis need to be taken in order to identify the most effective approach a leader could follow when managing change.

As the characteristics of a change leader have been laid down above. It is appropriate to carry out a thorough analysis on leadership styles and approaches and thus identify which style or approach is greatly suited.