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ICMA

LEADING TEAMS AND CHANGE IN **LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

**LEADERSHIP IN LOCAL
GOVERNMENT eBOOK SERIES
PART 3:**

Leading Teams

Leading Change

LEADING TEAMS AND CHANGE IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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ARTICLES HAVE BEEN COMPILED FROM *PM* MAGAZINE.



INTRODUCTION

To lead an extraordinary team, it takes a leader that can create a culture of leadership that is centered on shared values and focused on a common goal. To lead change, it takes a leader that can corral the forces for change and shepherd their organizations and members of those groups through a successful change process. Being able to lead both the team and change takes a special kind of leader, one that works hard to create a compelling vision and may involve others in the process of crafting that vision. This leader truly believes in the change and leads by example while pursuing the goal.

The purpose of the ICMA Leadership in Local Government eBook Series is to provide professionals of all career stages with leadership best practices and tips to help their communities achieve organizational excellence.

Each eBook is a compilation of articles from ICMA's

PM Magazine and are written by thought leaders in and out of local government. The focus is on three main areas of leadership and management: (1) managing yourself, (2) leading and managing others, and (3) leading teams and change.

In the next two sections of **Part 3: Leading Teams and Change in Local Government**, we will take you through different levels of leading teams and change, including: why teams matter more than ever, hiring options for your team, how to be a trustworthy leader, building commitment for change, and tips for managing organizational development and change. These two sections are foundational to any successful leader. They will help you elevate your skills and get you one step closer to developing organizational excellence to achieve a successful community.



LEADING **TEAMS**



WHY TEAMS MATTER MORE THAN EVER

by Bruce Piasecki

America loves a fierce individualist.

And yes, there is something inspiring about the lone leader and organizational manager blazing a path into the unknown but valuable future. And yet, while our culture will always celebrate the individual, I think the organizational world must acknowledge the truth behind the (alleged) Aristotle quote: “The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” In other words, the near future will be all about innovation for sustainable value creation, led by teams.

In a world that becomes more complex by the day, command-and-control is out and employee engagement is in. The days when a larger-than-life personality is allowed to steamroller over the rest of the company are over. This destroys morale, which destroys results. Teams, not individuals, drive performance.

And make no mistake. The best organizations, the ones with real staying power, are fueled by well-run teams.

Teams are more important than ever because the way people work and do business has changed. Within the fierce competition that is the global economy, companies that get fast results because they excel at collaboration and innovation will rise to the top and rule the day.

And the ideas that allow an organization to achieve, grow, and prosper—as opposed to merely survive—will be created only when teams leverage their combined skills and hold themselves mutually accountable. No individual, no matter how brilliant, is likely to have the skill set to take projects from start to finish in this fast-paced and complex environment.

The good news is, organizations can shatter this individualistic mindset wherever it occurs and guide employees to a better way to work while tapping into and maximizing their raw talent. But first, they must understand that managing teams with their web of

IN A WORLD THAT BECOMES MORE COMPLEX BY THE DAY, COMMAND-AND-CONTROL IS OUT AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IS IN.

hidden politics and complex interplay of human differences is extremely different from managing individuals.

1. Here are my seven insights on teams:

Great teams are led by captains. Like many popular terms, the word leader has become so overused and commonplace that it has lost meaning. Anybody can call himself or herself a leader; anybody can follow the “do’s” and “don’ts” in leadership manuals.

But it takes a special type of leader—a captain—to create not just a loose affiliation of individuals but a true team that’s centered around shared values and focused on a common goal. Captains are quick to recognize the key capabilities of their team members, including strengths and weaknesses, and to build the plan around those capabilities.

2. Fierce individualism has no place in teams.

Captains need to be sure that the “most valuable player (MVP) syndrome” is not allowed to define their teams and be on the alert for individuals who might be losing sight of the team that gave them an identity—the group with whom they worked to produce the fame for which they are now known. It is in these situations that such workplace ills as favoritism, sexism, and even criminal activity like embezzlement tend to flourish.

3. Seek to hire coachable individuals rather than individualistic high performers.

Do everything possible to promote and reward teamwork rather than individualism. Whether your efforts are centered on pay structure, group incentives, verbal recognition, or some other technique, seek always to send the signal that it’s strong teams and not strong individuals that make up a strong organization.

4. Teams hold the bar high for everyone, especially the superstars.

In all teams, there is an inherent desire to protect superstars and keep them winning. Never mind all the others whose quieter, though no less critical, contributions are downplayed. We are all aware of conditions when everyone else was willing to go along with a wrong.

We recall instances in history where the politics of fear enabled the Nazis, and where embezzlement seems the norm. Yet it is harder to see when victory shines so brightly. Captains must be mindful of this human tendency, in themselves and in others, to look the other way, to give our victors the benefit of the doubt.

We must be vigilant and ever alert to wrongdoing. We must be willing to ferret out corruption in the highest echelons, to bench the most valuable player, even to fire the superstar for the good of the team and the sake of integrity.

Teams have to be willing to lose sometimes or they will eventually self-destruct. When teams keep winning, they can become addicted to victory—feel entitled to it even—and this is what can drive a team to illicit extremes. The lesson is clear: When we don’t learn to tolerate failure, we will do anything to keep the public adulation coming.

Teams become great because they keep things in perspective. Team members understand the broader context of competition; namely, that there is always a larger league and a set of better players out there, no matter what has been achieved or what rung on a ladder you’ve just reached.

In other words, no one can always win. In fact, if a team becomes addicted to victory, it may take the Lance Armstrong route and go to illicit extremes to

keep winning. An inability to tolerate failure makes a team easy prey for “the dark side.”

5. Great teams revel in the pleasure of persistence and the sheer thrill of striving. Knowing that we will stumble and fall from time to time, yet get up and try again with some success, is at the heart of a great team.

I insist that it's critical to teach teams to be well prepared for assignments and to keep going in spite of hardship. When an organization enrolls an executive in leadership training, these lessons of teamwork should be emphasized:

- How to play through pain.
- How to resist the criminal opportunities inherent in becoming an MVP.
- How to keep your feet on the ground despite being a member of special teams with special force.
- How to outlive an uncomfortable appointment when your boss has selected you for a team where you are a bad fit, and how to behave when you are chosen for a team on which you do not want to play.
- Life can be a tough slog, and victories are sporadic at best. Maybe we can't win, but we can keep going. This striving brings with it its own unique rewards. It is up to us to learn to appreciate them.

6. Successful teams share values, integrity, and a commitment to one another. In preparing for a team event, or in becoming a member of a team, a transformation occurs where team members end their individual associations and create a team identity through sharing with others the experience of that process. Once the team is created, a strong bond is already in place from that preparation and from the obstacles everyone had to overcome to get there.

In complex situations where outcomes are unknown, the temptation is always to play it safe. But in a world of constantly changing tides, yester-

day's “safe” is likely to be today's “not enough.” That's why teams must work on instinct, often at a moment's notice, and constantly move forward.

Effective teams learn by doing and stay focused on results; they are not bound by method or processes. And that gives them the flexibility and resiliency they need to thrive in the midst of flux.

7. Effective teams take risks. Because business climates are constantly changing, teams and the captains who lead them know that yesterday's guidelines can quickly become obsolete. That's why they don't allow themselves to be overly bogged down by rule following and order taking.

Rather, they push boundaries when it's proper, in other words, when ethical and moral lines aren't being crossed, because the greatest innovations happen beyond existing laws and rules. When led by great captains, teams regularly work beyond normal and limiting boundaries to increase productivity and success.

While it's important to encourage the kind of risk that involves seizing opportunities, it's also equally and increasingly critical to take steps to eliminate the risk of negative team behavior. I'm referencing here the risk of allowing “the dark side” to encroach on ethical behavior as evidenced in the stories of Bernie Madoff, Lance Armstrong, and the latest string of scams reported in the news.

The word team is more than just a business buzzword. If done well, building and captaining a team will determine whether you merely survive or instead thrive in this strange new economy.

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ON POINT

How do you get constructive feedback from your management team members?

Tim Gobble

City Manager, East Ridge, Tennessee
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My door is always open to management team members who want to discuss any issue. There is a level of trust between us. I also go to them on a regular basis, ask questions, and get feedback on matters that come to my attention. I want to learn, be fair, and help all of us grow in our profession. The internal attitude among top-level management in our community is positive toward each other.

We also have weekly staff meetings where I address issues and discuss relevant city management related topics. These meetings are generally informal and all top-level managers are invited. During this meeting we have a time set aside to go around the room to each division head, who discusses issues of concern and

then asks questions of me and others in the room.

Each management team member is encouraged to provide input and perspective on any issue or question asked, regardless of whether the topic involves that particular manager's immediate area of responsibility.

Robbie Chartier, ICMA-CM

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As the first city administrator of Mandan, my primary task was to bring our many departments together to ensure we are all communicating and spending resident's tax dollars wisely.

We have more than enough meetings in our daily lives; however, we have at least one management team meeting per week. The week of the city commission's meeting, all department managers attend with commissioners

invited, to discuss items on the upcoming agenda.

Many times, items outside the agenda topics are discussed. Weeks where we do not have a commission meeting, we again gather department managers to discuss items that are of interest to all.

I believe we have created an environment where managers are comfortable in voicing their opinions on areas related to their expertise as well on all city operational areas. Through this environment, all departments are aware of what projects are being considered and how departments can assist each other.

Brenda Fischer, ICMA-CM

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Simply ask and listen.

To be effective managers, we must be open to constructive feedback from our team. The first step is to

have an organizational culture of open, honest dialogue. There must be trust that once feedback is given, there is no repercussion. If that culture and trust don't exist, don't bother asking.

Constructive feedback helps the organization and manager improve performance and effectiveness. Regardless of the topic, to improve, you must be comfortable asking, "What did we do right? What should we do differently? Where do we go from here?" In addition to gaining invaluable information, you will earn greater respect from your team.

In addition to gaining invaluable information, you will earn greater respect from your team.



TRUSTWORTHY LEADERS

By John Hamm

Do your employees trust you? The brutal truth is: probably not. It may not be fair, and you may not want to hear it, but chances are that previous leaders or managers have poisoned the ground on which you're trying to build a successful organization. Make no mistake: unless you and all the leaders in your organization can gain the trust of employees, performance will suffer. And considering how tough it is to survive in today's economic environment, that's bad news for an organization.

Why is trust so pivotal? Because it's a matter of human nature. When employees don't trust their leaders, they don't feel safe. And when they don't feel safe, they don't take risks. And where there is no risk taken, there is less innovation, less "going the extra mile," and, therefore, very little unexpected upside.

Feeling safe is a primal human need. When that need isn't met, our natural response is to focus energy toward a showdown with the perceived threat. Our attention on whatever scares us increases until we either fight or run in the other direction, or until the threat diminishes on its own. Without trust, people respond with distraction,

fear, and, at the extreme, paralysis. And that response is hidden inside organizational behaviors—sandbagging quotas, hedging on stretch goals, and avoiding accountability or commitment.

Trustworthiness is the most noble and powerful of all the attributes of leadership. Leaders become trustworthy by building a track record of honesty, fairness, and integrity. For me, cultivating this trust isn't just a moral issue; it's a practical one. Trust is the currency you will need when the time comes for you to make unreasonable performance demands on your teams. And when you're in that tight spot, it's quite possible that the level of willingness your employees have to meet those demands could make or break your team or organization.

Most employees have been hurt or disappointed at some point in their careers by the hand of power in an organization. That's why nine times out of 10, leaders are in negative trust territory before they make their first request of an employee to do something. Before a team can reach its full potential, leaders must act in ways that transcend employees' fears of organizational power.

The first step starts with you, as manager. As a leader, you must go first—and model trustworthiness for everyone else. Being trustworthy creates trust, yes. But beyond that, there are specific things you can do to provide unusually excellent, trust-building leadership at your organization:

First, realize that being trustworthy doesn't mean you have to be a Boy Scout or Girl Scout. You don't even have to be a warm or kind person. On the contrary, history teaches us that some of the most trustworthy people can be harsh, tough, or socially awkward—but their promises must be inviolate and their decisions fair.

As anachronistic as it may sound in the twenty-first century, men and women whose word is their honor and who can be absolutely trusted to be fair, honest, and forthright are more likely to command the respect of others than, say, the nicest guy in the room. You can be tough. You can be demanding. You can be authentically whoever you really are. But as long as you are fair, as long as you do what you say consistently, you will still be trusted.

Look for chances to reveal some vulnerability. We trust people we believe are real and also human (imperfect and flawed)—just like us. And that usually means allowing others to get a glimpse of our personal vulnerability—some authentic (not fabricated) weakness or fear or raw emotion that allows others to see us as similar to themselves and, therefore, relate to us at the human level.

No matter how tempted you are, don't mess with your employees. Tell the truth, match your actions with your words, and match those words with the truth we all see in the world: no spin, no BS, no fancy justifications or revisionist history—just tell the truth.

Telling the truth when it is not convenient or popular, or when it will make you look bad, can be tough. Yet, it's essential to your reputation. Your task as a leader is to be as forthright and transparent as is realistically possible. Strive to disclose the maximum amount of information appropriate to the situation. When you feel yourself starting to bend what you know is the truth or withhold the bare facts, find a way to stop, reformat your communication, and tell the truth.

Never, ever make the “adulterer's guarantee.” This happens when you say to an employee, in effect, “I just lied to (someone else), but you can trust me because I'd never lie to you.” When an employee sees you committing any act of dishonesty or duplicity, they'll assume that you'll do the same to them. They'll start thinking back through all of their conversations with you, wondering what was real and what was disingenuous.

Don't punish “good failures.” This is one of the stu-

pidest things an organization can do—yet it happens all the time. A good failure is a term used in Silicon Valley to describe an initiative by a new business start-up or mature company that, by most measures, is well planned, well run, and well organized—yet for reasons beyond the organization's control (an unexpected competitive product, a change in the market or economy) the initiative fails. In other words, good failures occur when you play well but still lose. When they're punished, you instill a fear of risk taking in your employees, and with that you stifle creativity and innovation. Instead, you should strive to create a digital-camera culture.

There is no expense—financial or otherwise—associated with an imperfect digital photograph. You just hit the delete button, and it disappears. No wasted film, slides, or prints. When we pick up the camera we are aware of this relationship between mistakes and the consequences—so we click away, taking many more photos digitally than we would have in a world of costly film. Because we know failure is free, we take chances, and in that effort we often get that one amazing picture that we wouldn't have if we were paying a price for all the mistakes.

Don't squelch the flow of bad news. Do you or others in your organization shoot the messenger when a person brings you bad news? If so, you can be certain that the messenger's priority is not bringing you the information you need; it's protecting his or her own hide. That's why in most organizations good news zooms to the top of the organization while bad news—data that reveal goals missed, problems lurking, or feedback that challenges or defeats your strategy—flows uphill like molasses in January.

We must install a confidence and a trust that leaders in the organization value the facts, the truth, and the speed of delivery, not the judgments or interpretations of good or bad, and that messengers are valued, not shot. Make it crystal clear to your employees that you expect the truth and nothing but the truth from them. And always, always hold up your end of that deal. Don't ever shoot the messenger and don't ever dole out some irrational consequence.

Unusually excellent leaders build a primary and insatiable demand for the unvarnished facts, the raw data, the actual measurements, the honest feedback, the real information. Few efforts will yield the payback associated with improving the speed and accuracy of the information you need most to make difficult or complex decisions.

Constantly tap into your fairness conscience. Precise agreements about what is fair are hard to negotiate because each of us has a personal sense of fairness. But at the level of general principle, there is seldom any con-

fusion about what fair looks like. Just ask yourself: Would most people see this as fair or unfair? You'll know the answer (indeed, as a leader, you're paid to know it).

If you treat employees fairly, and you do so consistently, you will set a pattern of behavior for the entire organization. This sense of fairness, critical to the creation of a safe environment, can be reinforced not only by complimenting fair practices but also by privately speaking to—or, if necessary, censuring—subordinates who behave unfairly to others in the organization.

Don't take shortcuts. Every organization wants to succeed. That's why, inevitably, there is a constant pressure to let the end justify the means. This pressure becomes especially acute when either victory or failure is in immediate sight. That's when the usual ethical and moral constraints are sometimes abandoned—always for good reasons, and always “just this once”—in the name of expediency.

Sometimes this strategy even works. But it sets the precedent for repeatedly using these tactics at critical moments—not to mention a kind of “mission creep” by which corner cutting begins to invade operations even when they aren't at a critical crossroads.

Plus, when employees see you breaking the code of organizational honor and integrity to which your organization is supposed to adhere, they lose trust in you. Betray your organization's stated values when you're feeling desperate—by lying to clients or spinning the numbers to get out of trouble—and you devalue the importance of trust and honesty in their eyes. They see

you breaking your own rules and suddenly they see you as less trustworthy.

Separate the bad apples from the apples that just need a little direction. The cost of untruths to an organization can be huge in terms of time, money, trust, and reputation. As a leader, you have to recognize that you are not going to be able to fix a thief, a pathological liar, or a professional con artist—all of them must go, immediately.

Trustworthiness is never entirely pure. Everyone fails to achieve perfection. So the goal for a leader is to make those wrong choices as rarely as possible; admit them quickly, completely, and with humility; fix them as quickly as you can; and make full recompense when you cannot. Trust is the most powerful, and most fragile, asset in an organization, and it is almost exclusively created, or hampered, by the actions of the senior leader on the team.

A working environment of trust is a place where teams stay focused, give their utmost effort, and in the end do their best work. It's a place where we can trust ourselves, trust others, trust our surroundings, or—best of all—trust all three.

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INSIDE/OUTSIDE: THE HIRING OPTIONS

By Doug Miller, Clay Pearson, and Catherine Tuck Parrish

Each time a department head, assistant, or another local government management staff member leaves his or her position, the manager has a big decision to make. The vacant position needs to be filled, and the manager has choices on how to do it: Fill the position internally or bring in someone from outside the organization. Either course of action has valid reasons.

The Society for Human Resource Management reports the average cost of replacing an employee is between half to two times the employee's annual salary.¹ This includes lost productivity as well as advertising and recruitment costs whether conducted in-house or by a recruiting organization. It also involves human resource staff time, along with the time of others involved in the selection process, orientation, and training costs for the new hire.

One important thing to remember is that applicants are customers of the recruitment process, and their experience with a community in the interview phase is

part of how a management team sells the community to prospective applicants. It is important that candidates get a full picture of the job as well as the people and the environment in which they will be working.

Get the Process Started

Like so many equations in local governments, there is more than one right answer on which candidate to hire. Will you offer the position to a qualified internal candidate or search outside the organization? In tough economic times, it's possible that a local government may lean more than usual towards hiring from within.

An internal hire provides the quickest way to fill a position, allows employees to advance within the organization, can save money through reshuffling of job responsibilities, and can open up promotional opportunities at lower levels of the organization. In some cases, this may be the only mechanism you have to reward a top employee, especially in years when few merit or

cost-of-living raises have been given.

It is tempting to use the promotion as a way to keep someone who might not be ready for the position but whom you don't want to lose to another job. These are all compelling reasons to promote from within. You should, however, do this only if you are certain that the internal candidate or candidates are ready for this move, and it is a good long-term solution for the organization.

Conversely, always consider the internal options first before automatically looking outside the organization. You may have someone who is ready for the next step and could compete well for the position.

Internal and external recruitments are not mutually exclusive. You may want to see, for example, how potential internal candidates stack up against “the best” from the outside. If there isn't an internal candidate who will be an immediate hire, opening up the position to external candidates can do these things:

- It can provide internal candidates with a great experience and the chance to show their stuff against those from other organizations.
- It can give the manager confidence and buy-in from others involved in the selection process by going through a full recruitment process.
- It puts all applicants on a level playing field, something that is extremely important for an open recruitment process and a well-run organization.

Once you've decided to open up the process to external candidates, make sure it's truly an open, fair process for everyone involved. If you have internal candidates, make sure they are clear about the process and have the support and time off they need to participate fully.

Encourage them to take the entire day off to prepare and make the mental shift between the work day and the interview. Talk to selection panel members and make sure that they make the candidate feel at ease but ask follow-up questions even if an answer is obvious.

Make sure internal candidates are prepped as much as the external ones and are offered the same things that external candidates are—tours, documents, and discussions with the outside recruiter (if a recruiter is part of the process).

Typical Inside/Outside Hiring Scenarios

These scenarios depict general hiring goals followed by the reasoning that a hypothetical local government manager might employ to decide to hire either internally or externally.

This person is a known commodity. . .

Hiring inside: This candidate was part of the organization when I got here. I had a chance to watch him

manage some important projects, make presentations to the council, and participate in interdepartmental initiatives. No guessing here, this person can do the job. I know what I am getting.

Hiring outside: This is not the first time this person has been selected to serve in this position. This woman has an established track record and has participated on other executive leadership teams. I know she is ready and wants to join this organization. I know what I am getting.

I want to change the culture. . .

Hiring inside: For the past few years I have been working with my leadership team to create a culture of accountability based on shared values. This person has seen the evolution and has demonstrated a commitment to and understanding of the type of workplace I want to create.

Hiring outside: This hire is an opportunity to bring someone in who has been part of the cultural evolution in another community. I have had a chance to see employee survey results from this person's department, and he has done there what I am trying to do here!

I want to send a message. . .

Hiring inside: My message is clear: This is an organization that plans for succession and develops talent from within. This is an organization that rewards top performers, and she is one!

Hiring outside: I am bringing in the “best of the best” and am investing in the organization by hiring top talent!

We need fresh ideas. . .

Hiring inside: I want someone who hasn't “been-there-done-that” and is creative and open to a new way of running a department, providing a service, and so forth. This person hasn't been spoiled by too many years in the same position and has ideas that she is eager to implement.

Hiring outside: We need some new blood, someone who has worked in other places and will bring a variety of experiences and new approaches to service delivery and our community's future. I need someone who can see things differently and will be able to implement creative solutions.

I need a partner to turn this area around. . .

Hiring inside: In this position, I need to have someone whom I trust. I need someone who gets me and understands the vision I have and can help me implement it. I know that this person will be able to get things moving in a different direction since she knows all the players.

CASE STUDY: SELECTING FROM INSIDE

Aberdeen, Maryland, a community experiencing massive growth from an influx of jobs associated with the federal Base Relocation and Closure Act (BRAC), recently needed to replace its police chief. While an internal candidate was serving in the acting police chief capacity, the city wanted to have a national search and was committed to an open process with no expected outcome for either an internal or external candidate.

The acting police chief was serving the community well but there was a strong desire to hire the best possible candidate. The community is experiencing rapid growth with the influx of thousands of new jobs associated with the BRAC realignment at Aberdeen Proving Grounds. Increasing urban-

ization was also changing the community and its policing needs. New ideas and approaches to policing were desired to continue to keep residents and businesses safe now and as the community grows.

Initial conversations to learn about the organizational and community values, as well as traits and experiences needed for success, included department heads and other key staff, along with the mayor. An aggressive external recruitment process began, and the job attracted a large number of police chiefs and high-level command staff from large and smaller jurisdictions within Maryland, the national capital region, and across the country.

Hiring outside: In this position, I need to have someone whom I trust. I need to have a partner in this department who will not resist the changes that need to be made. He is free of the notion of how things used to be and has no personal baggage that will be an impediment.

We need someone with a proven track record. . .

Hiring inside: I have seen this person perform in good times and under pressure. I know how to play to the person's strengths and can live with the weaknesses. He is respected in the community, and I will have council support for this hire.

Hiring outside: I need someone who has already proven themselves in this area with results. I see the fruits of this person's work, and I want her to help us get those results here. The council and organization will value her experience and be confident that she can get the job done.

We can't afford to fail in this position. . .

Hiring inside: I need someone who understands the political climate and organizational needs. This position is too important for us to have to spend more time and energy recruiting if an outside person doesn't make it. I need the safer candidate.

Hiring outside: This is not a time that I can afford to train someone to do this job. I don't have time to devote

to this and need to make sure the person we hire can do this starting on day one. I need the safer candidate.

Panel Plays Key Role

Semifinalists were interviewed and ultimately a finalist group of highly qualified police chiefs emerged. Reference and preliminary background information was gathered on the finalists prior to the interviews. Finalists provided a writing sample and also answered questions in advance of the final interviews.

An interview panel included leaders from the business, civic, and city organization, along with a well-respected police chief in the state. This panel was important in the hiring process. Its members were able to question the candidates from a different angle than initial interviewers: They were asking the tough technical questions instead of looking at chemistry and motivation.

The panel's collective and individual viewpoints were extremely important and played an important role in the decision-making process. The panel not only contributed valuable input to the city manager's final decision, it also made that decision a comfortable one.

The manager held one-on-one interviews with the candidates. The process also included a tour with the mayor and a public reception that included councilmembers, department heads, and police department command staff.

CASE STUDY: SELECTING FROM OUTSIDE

Novi is located in southeastern Michigan, 25 minutes from downtown Detroit and the University of Michigan - Ann Arbor, as well as 55 minutes from Michigan State University in East Lansing. With a reputation for innovation, quality, and financial stability, Novi had an opening for an assistant city manager. It decided that conducting a national search to find external candidates to compete with potential internal applicants was a priority.

With executive-search assistance, the department heads and key staff including the city manager had an opportunity to articulate their desires

for the position in terms of education, type of experience, traits and values, and results achieved in past positions. At the end of these conversations a profile for the position emerged that included a list of goals for the assistant manager's first year.

Some department heads initially expressed possible interest in the position but ultimately, none opted to apply for the position. Novi does not have an assistant city manager position or budget manager position, so there were no generalist or internal candidates. This position, however, did attract a great deal of talented applicants from several states.

A Tough Decision

Two top candidates emerged: the acting chief and an external candidate serving as a police chief in a neighboring state. Both candidates showed vision, leadership, and had values that aligned well with the community and the organization. Both candidates had thoroughly researched the position and were knowledgeable about the community, the organization, and the future needs for both.

The manager weighed heavily the experience of both candidates. The acting chief had shown he was able to make tough decisions and had the support of the mayor and council, community, and officers. The external candidate had also shown leadership, had dealt with complex community and policing issues, and was a recognized expert in community-based policing.

The manager's selection decision was difficult but ultimately he selected the acting police chief. He cited his past performance in the command staff, along with his on-the-job experience and ability to move the department forward, while serving in the acting role.

The fact that the city conducted a bona fide national search strengthened the acting chief's stature once he was appointed. Everyone in the organization knew that he had earned the appointment and overcame a slate of other qualified police professionals.

If the recruitment process had not been conducted honestly and thoroughly with the internal candidate being offered the job, the appointment could have been viewed less favorably in the ranks.

Tips for Setting Up a Selection Process

Regardless of whether you are looking for a candidate from inside or outside an organization, the person hired needs to be a good fit for the organization. Here are tips for setting up a process that will help ensure the right selection is made:

- Take time up-front to clearly define responsibilities of the position.
- Talk to the people who will be working with the individual on a daily basis to find out how they interact and what they think is important for the position. This includes the hiring supervisor but also direct reports and customers of the position, as appropriate.
- Articulate what the organization's values are, which must be shared by the top candidates.
- Determine what the biggest issues have been in the past year and what is coming in the next 12 months.
- Develop a process that mimics the type of work that will be expected; for example, writing exercises, analytical problem solving, presentations, and question-and-answer sessions.
- Schedule informal and formal interactions during the interview process.
- Ask the people who interacted with the candidates to provide you with feedback.

Recruitment Process Sells Community

One important thing to remember is that applicants are customers of the recruitment process, and their experi-

ence with a community in the interview phase is part of how a management team sells the community to prospective applicants. It is important that candidates get a full picture of the job as well as the people and the environment in which they will be working.

In Novi's case, a semifinalist group was interviewed and prescreened prior to the selection of a finalist group for interviews. The finalists provided writing samples in advance for review. Reference and preliminary background checks were conducted providing more context and information about each candidate's ability to perform in past positions, illuminating their leadership values and organizational management experience.

Finalists were taken on a tour of Novi and were also interviewed by two panels. Debriefing sessions were held with the city manager and the panels to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for further discussion with finalists. The manager considered all the input that was received and after deliberation and further conversation with the top candidates, selected an external candidate as assistant city manager.

While matching Novi's organizational values, especially a clear commitment to public service and high ethical standards and innovation, were critical factors in the screening process, it was also important that proof of strategic thinking, demonstrated project-management skills, and the desire and ability to think and perform quickly to deliver the highest quality services to residents were also essential.

The confidence and capability of a proven professional who brought fresh ideas and the ability to run the city in the city manager's absence with the full confidence of the council was also important. In this case, the external search-and-selection process was the right fit for Novi, the organization, and the manager.

At the conclusion of a recruitment process, fit is critical. The right candidate may come from across the country or from down the hall, but the manager needs to make sure the person who is hired is positioned to be successful in the role.

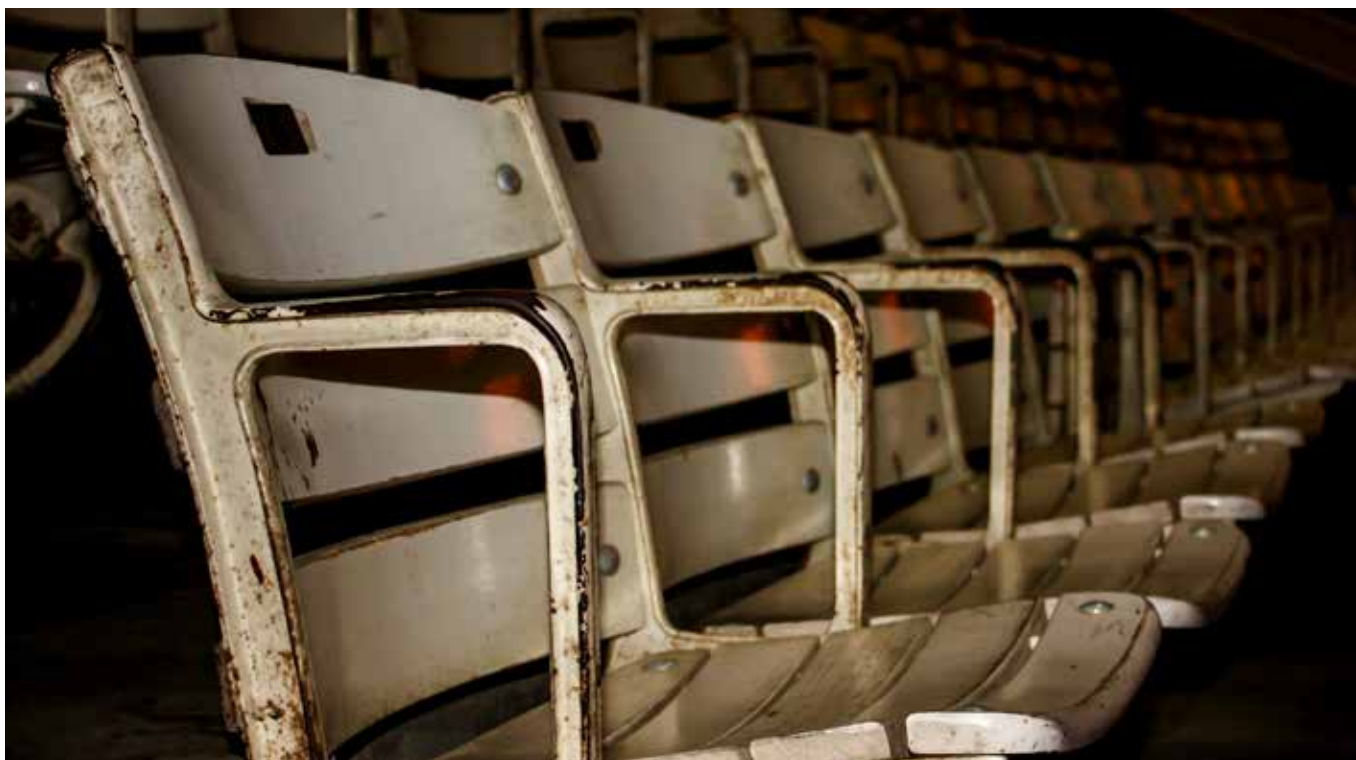
Endnote

- 1 *Retaining Talent: A Guide to Analyzing and Managing Employee Turnover* (2008), David G. Allen, Ph.D., SPHR website, membership-only section: "Research suggests that direct replacement costs can reach as high as 50 percent to 60 percent of an employee's annual salary, with total costs associated with turnover ranging from 90 percent to 200 percent of annual salary."

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LEADING **CHANGE**



LEADING CHANGE ISN'T A SPECTATOR SPORT!

By Mike Staver

"We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them."

— Albert Einstein

In today's ever-changing, unfolding world, the forces for change are rooted in the continuation of past issues gathering momentum—declining revenues, contentious political pressures, and increasing demands for service as well as other issues arriving on the scene that include shifting workforce demographics and expanding technologies.

In public sector organizations large and small, change is ubiquitous and often overwhelming, especially to those who perceive themselves as being on the receiving end. For leaders, the struggles reside in both corralling the forces for change and shepherding their organizations and members of those groups through a successful change process.

Government organizations are encouraged to institutionalize best practices, freeze them into place, concentrate on execution, increase predictability, and get processes under control. These ideas establish stability as the key to performance.

Consequently, public sector organizations are built to support enduring values, stable strategies, and bureaucratic structures—not to change. In today's chaotic unpredictable world, however, organizations should be built around practices that encourage change, not hinder it. Playing it safe is no longer playing it smart.

It has been said that not everyone is for progress. Many leaders are under the assumption that change can be accomplished with a mandate. Actually, the

merit of an idea or change initiative has little to do with its successful implementation. Every organization has its own unique “cemetery,” and that’s often where good ideas go.

Why? Because leaders either try to strong-arm people into compliance or believe that, over time, employees will simply accept the change. Rarely does either of these occur. Instead, people often wait out the change with a this-too-shall-pass mind-set or act as though they support it long enough to impress decision makers and until attention is diverted to something else and they can return to work as normal.

The best example I have found to demonstrate the struggles people and organizations encounter with change, especially with regard to implementation, is one many of us can relate to: getting in better physical shape. We are extraordinarily gifted at talking about getting in shape (the chatter about change), and even go so far as to join a local health club (we buy the solution).

The problem surfaces when it comes down to actually visiting the health club and, while there, participating in some type of workout that will generate our desired outcome. Sound familiar? Organizations and their members duplicate this same practice: employees and leaders chat about change and buy solutions, but when it comes to actual implementation it seems something always comes up and derails good intentions.

Organizational development is the practice of managing change through design and application. Its approach is to manage change through a series of planned events. For too long, however, change has been managed as a process as though people function in lockstep, waiting for the next pronouncement from on high before they move on with their beliefs and thoughts.

Quite the contrary, according to some from the organizational development field who recognize the people side of the change equation and realize that people are complicated, ambivalent, and downright messy. They also believe that employees, heavily influenced by their work environment, routinely zigzag in their expectation about the results from a change initiative.

The balance of this article will (1) Describe the most common change scenarios organizational leaders find themselves in so as to raise awareness and lessen the likelihood the situations will be replicated and (2) outline an effective approach for designing and implementing meaningful and sustainable change initiatives.

Typical Change Scenarios

The barriers that hinder, derail, and often prevent well-intentioned change initiatives from accomplishing the desired outcome are numerous and often fairly pre-

dictable. Crucial to implementing a successful change initiative is to be fully aware of the common mistakes even seasoned professionals can sometimes make. As you read these scenarios, identify those that you have experienced:

“Change is a solution looking for a problem.” An executive or manager returns from a conference all fired up, wanting staff members to read about the latest management fad that will, like taking a pill, solve their problems. The solution is a series of simple, easy-to-use steps that, upon implementation and often in isolation, will cure the current ills.

Unfortunately, this practice does not account for the organization’s own history, unique culture, and current state of affairs that together often work to resist change. It is the equivalent of a person’s initial consultation with a personal trainer—a session that can lead some to expect to become an Olympic-caliber athlete when, in fact, the original goal was to merely get in shape for an upcoming high school reunion.

“More communication is all we need to make this change successful.” The notion here is that a bigger dose of communication will persuade all involved that the change under consideration is worth their extended effort. I strongly encourage leaders who reduce everything to a communication gap and who often “fall on their swords” to prove their point to strongly reconsider their approach.

Why? Because leaders often approach communication as a one-way street and focus more on telling instead of listening. In reality, leaders and managers mistakenly believe they are the intended audience for their own message. As a result, they begin with their point of view about the change and assume that everyone will get on board and see the situation as they do.

In reality, however, most employees are not at the same level of understanding about the situation and need more opportunity to examine all the factors. Leaders often become frustrated and wonder what’s wrong with all those folks who don’t “get it,” forgetting that employees have not been engaged in all the discussions that have brought leaders to their conclusions.

“We need to brainstorm our way out of this situation.” This activity often reflects the quotation from Albert Einstein shown at the beginning of this article. Thought processes are sometimes flawed, and doing more of a flawed process only gets you more flawed, or worse faster. Moreover, managers who do little to cultivate the imagination of employees every day are mistaken when they expect that convening those same employees in a stale room with day-old doughnuts and bad coffee will result in leading-edge ideas that simply appear.

ESSENTIAL TO SUCCESSFUL CHANGE INITIATIVES IS THE DESIGNATION OF THE TYPE OF CHANGE BEING UNDERTAKEN. IN OTHER WORDS, NOT ALL CHANGE IS CREATED EQUAL.

Most employees are pretty savvy when they are invited to participate. They realize early on that there will be lots of talk—even earnest efforts afterward about instituting something generated at the brainstorm session—but little to no significant improvements made. Consequently, their participation wanes, and there is a direct correlation between this energy drain and any change initiative actually succeeding.

For too long, members in organizations have heard too much of the same thing and seen too much of the same thing, and now feel totally comfortable being spectators to the events unfolding in their own organization. Leaders become frustrated with this type of employee mind-set, but it is often the result of the organization's collective history as it relates to change initiatives. Employees have very long memories, and they often have seen change initiatives simply repackaged. Ultimately they become disillusioned. Quite frankly, there's nothing worse than a dispirited employee.

“Let’s reorganize.” Change is often designed to ease some level of pain, and reorganizations tend to be the most popular technique to remedy that pain. If organizational members are not aware of what’s supposed to happen once the situation has been remedied and the pain is gone, then that uncertainty plays a significant role in their inability to transition to the new way of doing business.

Many agencies undertake a reorganization that is intended to deliver different and better outcomes but often generate few, if any, positive dividends. The changes expected were not those delivered. Leaders often pull the “let’s reorganize” lever, which is perceived by many employees as another in a series of misguided attempts at resolving often an isolated but troubling issue.

There also is a tendency to believe that simply reor-

ganizing a function and moving boxes around on an organization chart translates to substantive differences in how work is executed.

In summary, every organization is perfectly designed to achieve the results it gets. In other words, designing a reorganization when insufficient attention was devoted to identifying significant changes in outcomes will amount to practically no positive results and may unexpectedly exacerbate other pressing issues.

The point here is that organizational change is much more than just a change in a process, procedure, or program. Organizational change is any type of transition that requires a change in human performance. The problem with ignoring the human aspect of organizational change is that you could be leaving out a whole range of initiatives that require a change management focus in order to be successful.

Change must focus on content, people, and process. Content refers to what about the organization needs to be changed: strategy, structure, systems, processes, technology, or work practices. People refer to the behaviors, emotions, minds, and spirits of the people who are being impacted by the change.

Process refers to how the content and people changes will be planned, designed, and implemented. All three aspects must be woven together into one unified change effort. Often, there is an overreliance on the content aspect of the equation and much less attention paid to the people side, with the assumption that people know intuitively what to do once the change has been announced.

Simply put, content is the what; people, the who; and process, the how. All three must be synchronized for the change initiative to succeed.

Essential to successful change initiatives is the designation of the type of change being undertaken. In

FUNDAMENTALLY, CHANGE IS ABOUT IMPROVING EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS.

other words, not all change is created equal.

How to Implement Change Initiatives Successfully

Traditional organizations like those in the public sector are built to resist change. Their numerous rules, regulations, and policies limit experimentation, program in traditional behaviors, and reward consistent performance. They have many checks and balances in place to ensure that the organization operates in the prescribed manner.

This approach is consistent with the objective of achieving success under current business conditions, but it is entirely inconsistent with achieving continuing success when change is needed. Change must become the new norm; it should be contagious among members of the organization. Organizations should always be changing, both adapting to new circumstances as well as driving strategic change in anticipation of what's on the horizon.

Essential to successful change initiatives is the designation of the type of change being undertaken. In other words, not all change is created equal. Planned change efforts can be characterized as falling along a continuum ranging from incremental changes that involve fine-tuning the organization (referred to as change with a lower case c) to quantum changes that entail fundamentally altering how the organization operates (referred to as Change with a capital C).

Vehicle maintenance is an apt metaphor. It's crucial to distinguish the type of change in an organization. Is it the equivalent of a routine oil change or a major engine overhaul? Too often, executives overdramatize the change even for slight modifications, so employees may view change with a healthy dose of skepticism.

Therefore, distinguishing where on the continuum the change initiative is that you are driving should be one of the first steps you take.

Fundamental to motivating change in an organization is having some dissatisfaction with how things are. In that pursuit, leaders and managers need to foster a work environment that enlists the involvement of employees in the performance and future of the organization; creating and sustaining a learning-oriented, feedback-seeking climate is strongly encouraged. By doing so, leaders develop their organization's capability by building up their people.

Their focus should be on creating a high-commitment culture on the part of employees as the main lever to institute change. This can happen through a variety of means, providing feedback organization-wide about the agency's performance and engaging employees in random discussions about the impact of trends on the agency, to name just two. In the spirit of the idea that "what gets talked about gets done," substantive discussions should be regularly held at all levels about the forces for change and how respective organizations intend to respond.

Penetrating the cocoon that can insulate public sector agencies should not be left to the annual budgeting process or the occasional staff meeting but, instead, needs to be part of the fabric that comprises the organization's collective mind-set. If we want employees at all levels to exercise initiative and act as leaders, then it is imperative that they are not only advocates of change but also active participants in its development and implementation.

Organizational change can be viewed as two distinct phases: determining the change needed and implementing the change.

Phase 1: Determining the Change Needed

As was described earlier under the topic of typical change scenarios, many change initiatives are misguided from the beginning. The common theme shared by those scenarios can be attributed to the desire for immediate improvement, with leaders and managers doing the proverbial “gut check” to know what needs fixing.

There is sometimes a tendency to accelerate through the assessment phase so one can arrive at the more provocative segment of the equation—the actual solution. At its core, though, change management is a problem-solving process, so if insufficient time and effort are applied to actually determining current conditions, the likelihood that a change initiative will succeed is marginal.

An alternative to the gut check is an analytical process that focuses on evaluating current practices and conditions as well as anticipating potentially impacting trends. A process that can be held up to scrutiny and is consistent with the due-diligence expression so common in organizations today is precisely what is needed. More than simply a popular notion, due diligence is designed to evaluate all the factors that are prompting the current situation.

Unfortunately, during this phase inexperience and a “we’ve always done it that way” approach can strangle the process. The challenge in this phase is to remove the psychic prisons that prevent people from seeing old problems in a new light. Analysis suffers and effectiveness deteriorates when managers and leaders cannot reframe the issue. When they don’t know what to do, they do more of what they know.

Unfortunately, rarely is government described as being proactive. Instead it is accused of the opposite: being too reactive. Reactive measures tend to create crises and changes that can occur and may be viewed as punitive.

Although most public sector agencies do not have the equivalent of a research and development (R&D) department, that should not preclude them from using an R&D process. The R&D process is well-suited for this phase of the change process.

Essentially, R&D is focused on evaluating current and future conditions, assessing their impacts on organizational performance, and developing alternatives to address those impacts. To simplify, R&D is akin to engaging in a continuous SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) process so the orga-

nization is constantly feeling the necessity for change.

An effective R&D process will be able to distinguish the magnitude of the changes needed, the incremental from the quantum, their level of interdependence, and, most important, what the change needed actually is. This is consistent with the maxim that “problems drive solutions,” not the other way around.

Important during the analysis are two aspects often overlooked:

1. Occasionally the change solution should focus on what the organizations should stop doing. Yes, that’s right, stop doing. Public sector organizations excel at performing more of the same but suffer from a straitjacket approach when deciding what to cease. In many organizations, for example, there are dedicated, earnest, hard-working employees who prepare reports no one reads.

It’s time to evaluate what each and every employee is contributing to support your agency’s mission, and those activities that are not valued-added should be stopped. Sometimes the most important thing anyone can do to institute change is to refrain from doing what seems normal (that is, the way we’ve always done it).

2. Overreliance on best practices and benchmarking. Benchmarks are about input and output measures and can assist with forecasting workload requirements, but often they have little positive correlation with positive outcomes. Government is in the business of creating positive outcomes, not merely producing more outputs.

Best practices are often self-proclaimed by agencies without any outside review assessing their validity, and they do not take into account the unique culture and circumstances of the organization into which they are transplanted. Furthermore, using best practices for every service and program an agency provides is not only unrealistic, it’s unnecessary.

Once the analysis has been completed, the situation ascertained, and a change solution identified, the second phase is the actual implementation of the change solution.

Phase 2: Implementation

Fundamentally, change is about improving employee performance and organizational effectiveness. Strong, focused, and sustained commitment is required to implement any change initiative successfully. With many change initiatives, there is an inclination to simply do that which is easiest or least controversial. While

that may be the most politically expedient course of action, it may prove to have fleeting results.

Executives must be visible advocates of the outcomes being generated by the change initiative. In that respect, employees invariably have expectations about the results of organizational change. These expectations can play an important role in generating motivation for change.

The expectations can serve as a self-fulfilling prophecy, leading members to invest energy in change programs that they expect will succeed. When members expect success, they are likely to develop greater commitment to the change process and direct more energy into the positive behaviors needed to implement it. The key to achieving these positive effects is to visibly communicate realistic, positive expectations about the organizational changes early and often.

A variety of approaches exist to implement change effectively in organizations. The crux of each is that support from top management is necessary from the beginning and throughout the entire change process. Beyond that, the following 10 steps (tactics) are recommended:

1. Define change as a compelling element of organization strategy. Unless the proposed change finds its way into a grander set of organizational priorities, it is unlikely that the change will be sustainable over time. The reality in most organizations today is that organizational priorities are driven by the annual budget cycle. It will be difficult to sustain the change effort unless there is a clear and unambiguous reason for it. Linking the change to organizational strategy creates such a purpose.

Often change is designed as though once in place it is permanent. On the contrary, many changes should be temporary—but temporary may be several years. The notion that anything put in place is permanent and needs no attention is incorrect.

2. Put an infrastructure in place, a change management coalition. Get the right people involved in the change effort and define the roles and responsibilities for these people. The coalition, to be effective, must include people in the organization who are influential and can affect employee opinion; they must be people of high integrity and credibility.

Nothing dooms a change initiative faster than for those people overseeing it to have tarnished reputations. As has been stated, the merit of the change has little to do with its success, especially when it's compromised at the start by people whose credibility is questionable.

Depending on the scope of the change initiative, the coalition should pursue bold actions that are highly visible moves and demonstrate that things are now “very different around here.” These moves are to be understood as emphatic signals that send unequivocal messages about the new direction. Bold actions should not indict the past, but rather honor it without prolonging it. They must attend to both content and people changes.

As an organizational effectiveness practitioner, my role is to serve as a change adviser, and within this arrangement there are definite limits on my ability to influence change. Consultants can play a pivotal role but cannot be seen as the face of change. Instead, a strong partnership must be established between the consultant and those overseeing the change initiative.

- 3. Work from an implementation plan.** Implement the recommendations resulting from Phase 1 and be sure they are rigorously managed.
- 4. Recognize the investment and commit to the long haul.** Ensure that the change project doesn't become some flavor-of-the-day effort. Help people understand that change takes time to implement if it is to be successful.
- 5. Think small.** Break the change effort into elements that are small enough to ensure quick wins and build momentum. The coalition should divide the change initiative into several phases, each phase with its own dividends.
- 6. Build alliances in support of the change.** Learn to play the politics of change. Find champions for the change effort. Successful implementation will be decided by customers, both internal and external, who are affected directly or indirectly by the change.
- 7. Align recognition to support implementation.** Employees will generally achieve what they are rewarded for or measured against, not just what they are expected to do. Provide positive recognition when expectations are met and negative consequences when expectations are not met.
- 8. Translate the change into job-level details.** In the end, the people whose jobs are affected by the change will be the determining factor in whether the change effort proves successful. Unless the change can be translated into specific actions or activities for these individuals, there will be too many opportunities for misunderstanding, and unnecessary time will be spent tracking down glitches in the implemented solution. Make the

change meaningful to the people who will be responsible for implementing the change.

9. Integrate the change into management systems.

Incorporate the change into such systems as the agency's strategic plan, budget, performance measurements, structure, compensation, succession planning, and employee orientation and training. Integrating the change into these systems will help prevent the change from dissipating over time and can serve as an early warning system if the change effort jumps off track.

10. Follow up relentlessly. The need for short-term results drives most organizations, and change requires time to become sustainable. People must be held accountable for their commitments. Establish regular opportunities to review progress through status reports, project review meetings, and meetings with key stakeholders.

The idea behind the 10-step approach is that executing a change initiative cannot be left to chance and must be done according to a coherent plan of steps, at least the technical aspects of the change. It is crucial to recognize that employees may not transition smoothly through the steps. This will serve as a reminder that

when an organization does not actively engage its employees in the change debate, it lessens the likelihood of continued success.

Sustaining Change

The initial excitement and activity of changing often dissipate in the face of the practical problems of trying to learn new ways of doing business. A strong tendency exists among many members in organizations to return to what they already know. Just as diets should lead to changed eating habits and working out must become part of one's lifestyle for both activities to generate the desired results, change must take hold and become part of the fabric of how an organization conducts its business.

Two maxims about change management essential to remember throughout the change journey are:

- "Changing is what organizations do, not what you do to them."
- "Organizations don't change people, people change organizations."

And, finally, remember that conversations are the oxygen of priorities. So begin the dialogue about change and enjoy the ride!



PREPARING THE SOFT STUFF ... BUILDING COMMITMENT FOR CHANGE

By Merlin Switzer

"It's the soft stuff that is the hard stuff, but it's the soft stuff that makes the difference," says Chief Operating Officer Tom Malone of the Milliken Company, Spartanburg, South Carolina, which has been a recipient of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award.

What's the soft stuff? The soft stuff is the people in our organizations. Unless people are willing to follow and willing to change, leaders face a daunting challenge in implementing change.

So, how do public sector leaders get the commitment of people . . . the soft stuff? First, leaders look inward at their leadership style. Second, leaders look outward at the vision for change. Third, leaders develop a commitment plan to build the critical mass necessary to get the change off the ground successfully. Employing these ideas will help leaders be more

effective in building commitment for change.

As you read the sections here, ask yourself this question: Is there relevance in this section for me? Personal reflection will help you determine what you may be doing right as well as identify potential areas for personal growth.

Leadership Style

Building commitment for change starts with you as a leader. Consider these questions:

- Are you willing to change?
- Do you support the change or are you willing to be an executive sponsor?
- Are you willing to empower others?
- Are you willing to communicate multiple times using various methods of communication?

The answer to these questions should be “Yes.” Here’s why:

- As Mahatma Gandhi once said, “Be the change you want to see in the world.” Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner, in the *Leadership Challenge*, found successful leaders were willing to “model the way.”
- Executive sponsorship is the top contributor to successful change, according to a survey conducted by Prosci of more than 400 organizations. People want to know change is supported at the top.
- Involving others in the change process is critical; people support what they help to create. Enabling others to act has been another trait of successful leaders, according to Kouzes and Posner.
- Communication is critical. John Kotter in his book, *Leading Change*, identifies the failure to adequately communicate as one the most common errors leaders make when implementing change. They under-communicate by a factor of 10 or more. Further, two-way communication—dialogue—is important for building leader-follower alignment. As leaders and followers engage each other in meaningful dialogue about the organization and its future, assumptions often change, and this results in greater alignment between leaders and followers. Higher levels of alignment are related to stronger commitment for change.

Whether a leader is willing to take these steps to build commitment says a lot about that person’s leadership style.

Transactional leaders, for example, expect others to do what they say: “After all, that’s what employees get paid to do.” Transactional leaders don’t think it is important to involve employees in crafting the vision or to engage them in the decision-making process; instead, this input is often limited to those in power. Transactional leaders use rewards and punishment to accomplish what they feel needs to be done.

Though still a common form of leadership, transactional leadership tends to work best when an employee’s lower-level needs have not been met or are at risk. According to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, lower-level needs include basic physiological needs, support, and belonging. Transactional leaders appeal to these needs when they cite improving one’s standard of living or being part of a winning team.

At the other end of the leadership continuum is the transformational leader. The transformational leader works hard to create a compelling vision and may involve others in the process of crafting that vision. The transformational leader truly believes in the change and leads by example while pursuing the goal.

Transformational leaders are usually out front and visible.

The transformational leader works hard to sell the vision and help followers see how the vision can benefit them. These benefits may appeal to higher-level needs on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, such as esteem and self-actualization. Examples include appeals that would contribute to raising the quality of life for the poor in other parts of the world or improve the environment through actions being taken by the organization.

Leadership style is an important consideration for building commitment for change. Depending on the followers, some styles may result in building greater levels of commitment. The use of rewards and punishment can be compelling in some instances, but where lower-level needs are already met, participation, collaboration, and a compelling altruistic vision may resonate with workers and generate greater levels of commitment.

After the leader has focused on personal change readiness, it is important for that leader to think about the vision for the change. The focus of the next section is on developing the vision so that commitment for change is enhanced.

Vision for Change

Vision is important. Vision creates a unique image of the future. Vision acts to both attract and unite people toward a common goal. One of the characteristics of high-performing teams is vision in the form of goal orientation.

Leaders can build commitment with a vision that unites people, gives them a purpose, addresses a perceived threat, creates a sense of urgency, makes organizational life better, meets client needs, and connects people to a purpose that serves a greater good. A compelling vision attracts people to it, and it builds commitment.

Another consideration is the origin of the vision. Did you—the leader—craft the vision, or did others have input? In the *Leadership Challenge*, Kouzes and Posner found that successful leaders inspire a shared vision. The vision is shared because others see themselves in it, it uses their language, and they have been involved in dialogue about the vision.

William Werther in his article, “Strategic Change and Leader-Follower Alignment,”¹ says, “The pathway to greater leader-follower alignment must be created through continuous dialogue inside the organization about the ever-changing external environment . . . with a closer alignment . . . strategic changes can be introduced with greater acceptance and speed.” Meaningful dialogue can provide a vehicle for understanding the need for change and provide clarity about

WHETHER A LEADER IS WILLING TO TAKE THESE STEPS TO BUILD COMMITMENT SAYS A LOT ABOUT THAT PERSON'S LEADERSHIP STYLE.

the best direction, resulting in higher levels of commitment to change.

People support what they help to create. Look for various ways to involve people in crafting the vision. When people see their fingerprints on a vision, they are more supportive and less resistant. Conversely, when people feel a vision is forced on them and they don't see how it will benefit them or the organization, resistance can be expected.

Although it may take longer to involve employees at the front end of a change initiative, including them can result in greater commitment and less resistance. The result can be a smoother, faster transition, saving considerable time later in the process.

The previous two sections, leadership style and vision for change, focused on the role of leaders. The next section will focus on developing a commitment plan to actively engage followers.

Developing a Commitment Plan

When people are confronted with change, they usually react in one of four ways:

- Make it happen.
- Help it happen.
- Let it happen.
- Resist it happening.

A commitment plan involves assessing whose commitment is important for obtaining the critical mass necessary to get change off the ground. Picture a family going to the park. One of the structures often seen at a park is a teeter-totter. When a child is on a teeter-totter and dad sits on the other end, what happens? Up goes the child, off the ground. The critical mass necessary for change is much the same. To get a change initiative off the ground, the right critical mass is needed.

These five steps will help you develop a commitment plan.

Step 1. Identify whose commitment is needed. Who are key people whose commitment would help bolster the chances of success? One example is a peer leader. Another might be a union shop steward. In the case of a peer leader, others will watch to see whether that person supports the change. If the peer leader is supportive, then others who value that individual's opinion are more likely to be supportive as well.

Step 2. Determine the level of commitment needed. Among those whose commitment is needed, there may be varying levels of commitment. Perhaps you need one specific person to help make the change happen. From other people, such as the union shop steward, you may just hope that they let it happen and not fuel resistance.

Step 3. Estimate the critical mass. Critical mass is that number of people or specific people necessary to get the change off the ground. Remember the teeter-totter at the park? Which side stays down? The side with the critical mass. Unfortunately, there is not a specific formula for figuring this out. The nature and scope of the change is a key factor in making this determination. A change that is relatively simple and uncontroversial will have a lower critical mass than one that is complex and far-reaching.

Step 4. Assess how to get the commitment of the critical mass. It's important to assess how to get the commitment of the critical mass and develop a plan accordingly. This requires an individual assessment. After a determination is made about whether a gap in commitment level exists, what can be done to increase commitment? Here are some things that can work:

- Send employees to see similar changes in other organizations.
- Invite stakeholders to talk to employees about how the change would benefit them.
- Invite employees in other areas of the organization to share how the change was working for them.
- Ask employees what it would take to get their support for the change.

A Southern California chief of police once told me he would ask an individual what it would take to get a 75 percent commitment. After he received a response, he would know what he would need to do in order to get that individual's support.

Step 5. Status check to monitor the level of commitment. Status refers to creating a monitoring system to identify progress toward gaining commitment. One way to do this is to ask for volunteers to sign up to participate on a trial basis. Who signs up and how many sign up can be a good gauge for determining commitment. If you are not getting the commitment necessary to leverage the change successfully, you may want to delay implementation and determine other ways of gaining the necessary commitment.

The first letter of each of these five steps makes the acrostic I-D-E-A-S. Sometimes it takes creative ideas to find ways to build commitment for change.

It's Not Impossible

One thing seems certain: change is inevitable and the rate is accelerating. Successful public sector leaders must know how to lead change, and building com-

mitment for change is an important part of the skill set. Unfortunately, many leaders have not developed these important skills.

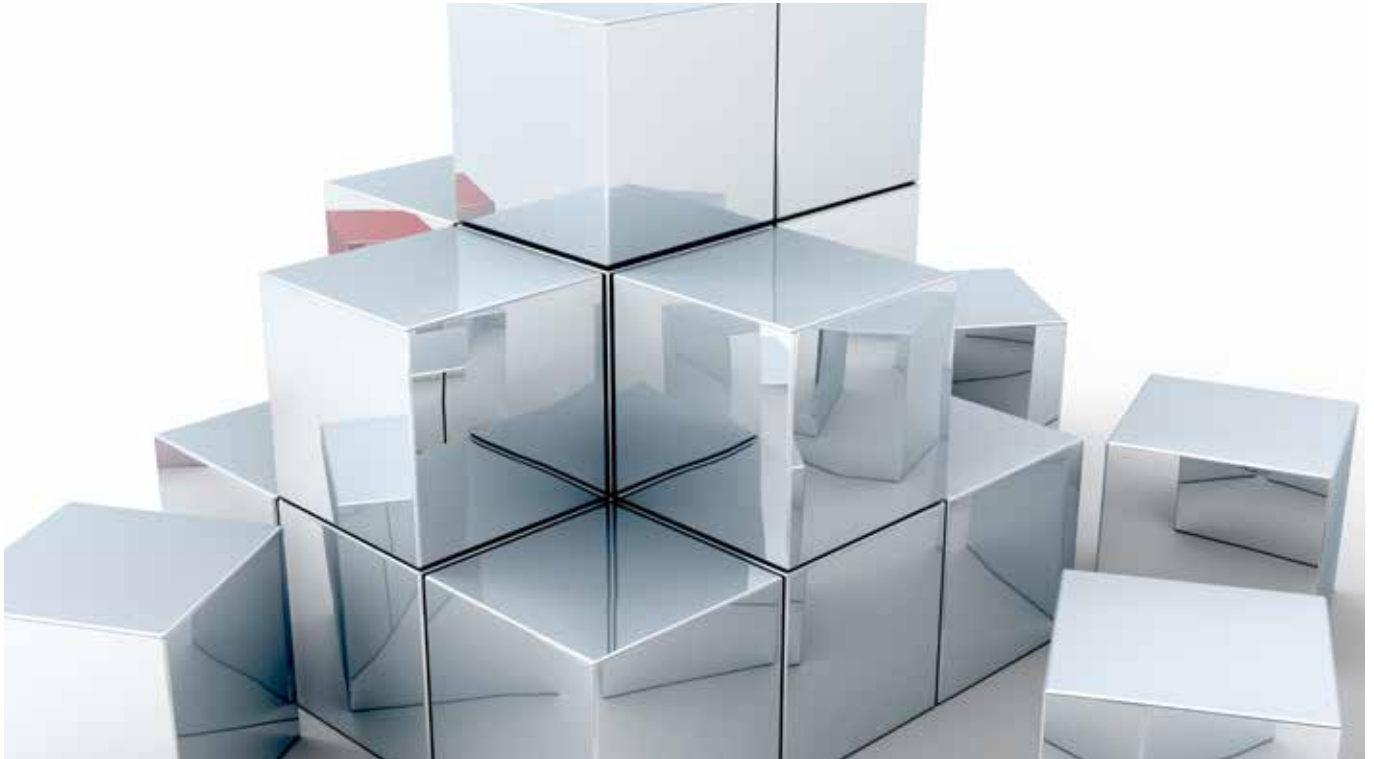
Commitment to change what prevention is to risk management. Without prevention, risk management is difficult if not impossible. Likewise, without commitment, change is difficult if not impossible.

Leadership style, a vision for change, and developing a commitment plan are important aspects of building the commitment necessary to get change off the ground. Understanding these concepts and employing them effectively can mean the difference between successful change and a botched effort that costs the organization in a variety of ways. As you reflect on your experience, decide whether it is consistent with the suggestions offered in this article. If it isn't, use this article as a guide next time you are tasked with leading change.

The information in this article is intended to be practical and doable. As a public sector leader, I have used this information to lead change inside my organization as well as in the community in which I served. Taking time to build commitment will make your job much easier and the change process much smoother. So, while "the soft stuff is the hard stuff, it's the soft stuff that makes the difference!"

Endnote

- 1 William B. Werther, Jr., "Strategic Change and Leader-Follower Alignment," *Organizational Dynamics* 32, no. 1 (February 2003): 32–45.



BELIEVE IT OR NOT! NOW IS THE TIME FOR ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

By Richard Carson

It is hard for local government managers to find a silver lining in the current economy. Dwindling public resources have resulted in a fiscal triage of cutting contracts, reducing service levels, and deciding which employees are the first to be laid off because they are nonessential. It is also hard to convince elected officials that there is any other long-term strategy for addressing the problem other than the political reality of their four-year terms.

Many elected officials subscribe to President Ronald Reagan's admonition about change: "It's hard when you're up to your armpits in alligators to remember you came here to drain the swamp." Others subscribe to President Bill Clinton's comment that "It's the economy, stupid." Either way, local government officials agree this is fiscally the worst of times.

The Nature of Change

The reality is that local governments are going through huge organizational changes that they never anticipated. Most organizational change is forced on a public agency by external forces. It is usually the political upheaval of a major election, but occasionally it is the economic upheaval of a recession. In any case, public agencies usually resist organizational change until they are faced with a political or economic crisis.

The organizational dilemma is that there is a difference between private and public sector organizations. Private sector organizations listen to their external stakeholders because their livelihoods and profits depend on customer input. In business, if you don't listen to your customers, then your rivals will.

But public sector organizations don't have any financial incentive to pay attention to their customers. This can result in a my-way-or-the-highway mentality. It also can result in government managers being blind to the political change occurring around them.

So, where is the silver lining in today's economic downturn? Managers have the opportunity to make meaningful organizational changes. Organizational change can be a good thing and a major opportunity to communicate with internal and external stakeholders about your organization's future; to make behavioral, structural, and technical improvements; and to survive and prosper from that change.

Defining Terms

Organizational change is (1) a planned, organization wide effort to increase an organization's effectiveness and viability, (2) an organizational response to the need for change, and (3) a complex process intended to change the beliefs, attitudes, values, and structure of an organization so that it can better adapt to new technologies, outreach, challenges, and rate of change.

Organizational development (OD) is a professional field just like public management. It has its roots in the field of industrial psychology and has grown into an interdisciplinary field that includes business management, behavioral psychology, political science, human resources, sociology, communications, and economics.

Resources

In print:

Improvement Driven Government: Public Service for the 21st Century, by David K. Carr, Ian D. Littman, and John K. Condon (Washington, D.C.: Coopers & Lybrand, 1995); *Organization Development in the Public Sector*, by David G. Carnevale (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2003).

Online:

"How to Manage Organizational Change," BNET.com, www.bnet.com/topics/organizational+change.

The Change Process

Most organizational change is forced on public agencies by external forces. That is unfortunate because it creates a reactive climate of fear: members of the staff resist the change process and may even work to sabotage it. There is a better model, however, where orga-

nizational change is treated as an ongoing systematic process; in this model, staff members are at the heart of the change process and actually drive it.

Change that comes from within and is staff driven is much more successful and productive than change imposed from outside. Dr. David Carnevale, in his book *Organizational Development in the Public Sector*, says, "Involving employees in structured problem solving, allowing them effective voice, and respecting their know-how are the core elements in the physics of learning."

One good example of external forces and positive organizational change is the recent trend for succession planning in organizations. As the working population has aged, there has been a need to find younger employees to replace those employees who have been retiring.

Succession planning has been embraced by all employees because the result has been that as the older employees retired, they provided on-the-job wisdom to the younger employees; the younger employees were promoted and earned more for taking on more responsibility; and the management staff maintained an effective workforce. It was win-win for everyone. I talk about this in the past tense because the concept of succession planning was put on hold as older employees' retirement funds lost value and they needed to work longer, and the younger employees often got laid off.

To successfully accomplish organizational change, it is important to understand the difference between rhetoric and action. Creating organizational change by creating a new mission, goals, and objectives is pointless unless the objective becomes an action, and the repeated action creates new behavior.

These actions are best carried out through a long-term strategic plan that fits together with a multiyear budget and is monitored through strong performance measures. Noted leadership trainer John E. Jones said, "What gets measured gets done, what gets measured and fed back gets done well, what gets rewarded gets repeated."

Unfortunately, even good strategic plans can be doomed to gather dust on a shelf. Every successful strategic plan needs a person, a team, or a committee whose job is to make sure the strategic plan is carried out at every level of the organization over time. Quite frankly, that person cannot be the local government administrator.

The administrator is too busy in the daily swamp of responsibilities to manage the strategic plan. So I suggest you find someone who is a good project manager. That person needs to report directly to the local government administrator and have the administrator's total support, because that person is going to need it.

YOU CANNOT CHANGE AN ORGANIZATION UNTIL YOU UNDERSTAND ITS UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS.

10-Step Program for Managing Organizational Development and Change

1. Establish a sense of urgency.
2. Form a guiding coalition.
3. Create a vision.
4. Communicate the vision.
5. Manage the transition.
6. Build change capacity and readiness.
7. Empower others to act.
8. Plan for and create short-term wins.
9. Consolidate improvements, sustain momentum, produce more change.
10. Institutionalize new approaches.

Source: Thomas G. Cummings and Christopher G. Worley, *Organization Development and Change*, 8th ed. (Mason, Ohio: Thomson/South-Western, 2005).

Behavior Is the Key

First and foremost, organizational change is about human behavior. It is about how elected officials, government managers, line staff, and the public stakeholders interact. A dysfunctional organization is one where the players don't share a common vision or have common expectations and do not work well together.

Having greater resources will improve an organization's ability to deliver services. Greater resources, however, will not make an organization more efficient or effective. To be more efficient means you need to use organizational change to do the best you can with what you have. And that means changing human behavior.

Carnevale says, "The premise is that the organizational members own their own problems and are responsible for finding solutions to them. OD does not

'fix' people through the use of outside consultants." Owning the problems and the solutions is important because ownership helps reduce the fear on the part of the employees that someone from outside the organization is going to fix them, in other words, blame them and fire them!

Small Town USA

Cascade Locks, Oregon, is a city of a little more than 1,000 people located in the heart of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. Earlier this year, I was hired as the interim city administrator to help them (1) complete the next year's budget, (2) evaluate and reorganize city government, and (3) hire my replacement. Since I am semi-retired, I do this kind of work because I like to integrate my academic learning with my real world public management experience.

As the administrator, I found the city to be a quirky combination of the television shows "Twin Peaks" and "Northern Exposure." In other words, it was full of colorful characters. The new city council was elected on a fiscal reform agenda and was a microcosm of the national mood for government reform that was fueled by the Tea Party activists. The councilmembers wanted to cut costs. The reality was that the beginning balance of all city funds was dwindling every year. My job was to help Cascade Locks become a fiscally sound city.

The town, however, was deeply divided. The new mayor won by five votes. The central election issue was that the new fire station was financed by numerous grants but still owed a \$450,000 loan from the city's electric utility. The loan had been based on a financial scheme, which was a house of cards, predicated on what the old fire station would sell for.

Understand that the city administration believed the old fire station would sell for a price that would pay off the debt. Then came the Great Recession, and the

financial scheme collapsed. The old fire station's theoretical value plummeted by 60 percent, and the city was making no payments on the loan.

I arrived in time for the perfect storm between a politically skeptical elected council and a city of people who loved their fire department. The city was divided into those who were mad that the former administration—former mayor, fired city administrator, and same fire chief—had used a financing scheme that didn't work and those who supported the firefighters at any cost.

The council's first public meeting on the subject of changing the fire department financially was a disaster. And I knew it would be. Angry people vented their love of the fire department and their fire chief. They also feared the council would cut funding to the fire department. After the 9/11 attack, no public official can easily question the need for a well equipped and staffed fire department.

Step one was to publicly air the financial concerns and discuss the realistic financial options. In the academic world of organizational development, this is called an intervention. Interventions are structured activities used individually or as a group to improve an organization's performance.

This intervention was accomplished through a town hall meeting. The facilitator had one interesting requirement. Councilmembers, the fire chief, and I could not participate. In other words, no political or personal agenda was allowed.

Step two was to bring in another facilitator to take the council through a goal-setting session for the coming year. The big difference, however, was that the facilitator told councilmembers they needed to undertake a multi-year strategic plan and financial plan. This strategic plan would be state-general goals, specific objectives, and detailed actions that spelled out what was going to happen, when it would happen, and who was accountable.

When I left Cascade Locks to go back to working on my doctorate, I gave the council my final recommendations on how to make the city more cost effective, efficient, and politically cohesive. First, they restructured the fire station loan from a five-year to a 10-year term and started making payments from the general fund.

The general fund loss could be offset by consolidation. In the city of Cascade Locks there is also a Port of Cascade Locks. I recommended that both entities co-locate. Although the city administrator and port general manager would maintain separate offices, they could save money by sharing the receptionist, computers/IT, phones and other utilities, and payroll. Since both organizations used heavy equipment, they could also share equipment maintenance and replacement.

The fire department also received a large general fund subsidy and could benefit by consolidating with a neighboring and slightly larger city. By combining, the two cities could save by having one shared fire chief. The largest revenue stream for a fire department is emergency services (ambulance) charges to insurance. By combining the billings process, they could save money. They could also save money in the maintenance and replacement of similar emergency vehicles and equipment.

Big County USA

Clark County is located in southwest Washington and has a population of more than 425,000 people and is part of the Portland-Vancouver metropolitan area of 2.2 million people. I was hired to reinvent an agency of 165 people with a \$17 million budget. To be honest, I didn't have a clue how to do this.

The newly elected county auditor ran on a platform of doing performance audits. One day I stopped him on the street and asked him to audit my department. So began my long journey of learning about organizational development. The truth is that I knew of a city manager who had been fired after a negative performance audit. It was a lesson learned for me.

I convinced the county auditor to hire a consultant to conduct a performance audit of my department. My theory was that calling for such an audit at the beginning of my tenure would be to my credit, but if it was forced on me later in my tenure, it would be to my discredit—as in fired.

As it turned out, I was right. The consultants did a great job and made 44 recommendations to improve the agency. I implemented those through a five-year strategic plan and never looked back. Some of the recommended best management practices were simple. Customers' two major complaints were that no one called them back and the city lost their files.

So we implemented a 24-hour call back rule that would be met 95 percent of the time. Everyone was given a call log book and was directed to document who called, what the callers wanted, and when they were called back. Each division reported this information monthly, and I shared the information with everyone by e-mail.

Over time, the department's worst offenders started to improve because they wanted to shed their bad reputations. In my annual report, I was glad to note that overall we were returning 97 percent of our calls within 24 hours.

We also tightened up the document management process by imaging many incoming documents. This

AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE



Source: "Organization Development: An Integrated Approach," Office of State Personnel, North Carolina, March 5, 2008, <http://hrpeople.monster.com/training/articles/146-organization-development-an-integrated-approach>.

meant staff could access reports via the Intranet instead of going to the records office and checking them out. It's relatively hard to lose an electronic document, so the lost document problem was greatly reduced.

A lot of time was spent mapping such major processes as conditional use permits and subdivisions on the assumption that you can't improve a process unless you know exactly how it works. Frankly, we found that not everyone agreed on the mechanics. Once we

reached agreement about how things were supposed to function, we spent time reengineering the process so it was simpler and more transparent.

We also established a number of performance measures by which to track our success over time. In the end, however, there is only one meaningful performance measure: the number of calls that elected officials don't get! And most of the complaint calls stopped. The other important measure was a personal

one: I went on to serve as the department's director for the next nine years.

That organizational change experience became a passion of mine and led me to undertake a doctorate degree at Washington State University in organizational change and development.

What to Pay Attention To

In general, here are the areas that organizational change focuses on:

- Customer service systems
- Performance measures and monitoring
- Training and professional development
- Communications
- Technology
- Staffing and turnover
- Procedures
- Cost accounting

- Regulatory improvements
- Document management
- Facilities management

This is not an exhaustive or a comprehensive list of possible areas of best management practices. Each local government organization is unique in its needs, abilities, and culture. The first step in any organizational change process is to define the organization as it is. You cannot change an organization until you understand its unique characteristics.

End Note

Organizational change requires the buy-in of line staff, top management, and elected officials in terms of embracing the need for a systematic institutional change process. It is only when the entire staff of a local government realize that they can plan for and become the masters of their own destiny that they will no longer fear change and will embrace it.

ABOUT ICMA

ICMA, the International City/County Management Association, advances professional local government worldwide. The organization's mission is to create excellence in local governance by developing and fostering professional management to build sustainable communities that improve people's lives. ICMA provides member support; publications; data and information; peer and results-oriented assistance; and training and professional development to 9,500 appointed city, town, and county leaders and other individuals and organizations throughout the world. The management decisions made by ICMA's members affect millions of individuals living in thousands of communities throughout the world, from small villages and towns to large metropolitan areas.



Leaders at the Core of Better Communities