

Managing Effective Change

Vision	Skills	Incentives	Resources	Action Plan	=
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Table 1

Whenever systemic change needs to occur in any organization, an ultimate goal is to limit the amount of anxiety and frustration that may occur throughout the effort. The following offers examples of what to avoid in helping to limit concern on behalf of those involved in the change effort. There are five components required to effective change. If one or more are missing, you will likely be disappointed in the results.

Examining the table above, you will notice five vertical columns from left to right addressing; vision, skills, incentives, resources, and action plan. A sixth vertical column is identified as the equal sign “=” which will be explained later.

Vision

As with any systemic change effort a vision will need to be created so that “all stakeholders know where the ship is heading.” Although the preceding sentence flowed rather easily when written, the task of creating a system wide shared vision is not always an easy task. The visioning effort subsumes the following:

- Assessing the readiness of the organization for change
- Assessing the capacity of the organization for change
- Selecting participants for a core team
- Creating a core team dynamic
- Training the core team in system design
- Identifying competing change efforts
- Designing a process for “buy-in” by all stakeholders
- Managing stakeholders not “onboard”

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- Establishing benchmarks and milestones
- Celebrating milestones met
- Building in a continuous improvement step to readdress milestones not met
- Etc.

As noted in the literature, visioning typically culminates in a global statement(s) that speaks in broad terms of a purpose, destination, or desired outcomes. Having said that, a visioning effort can hardly not address the realities of the bulleted statements noted above as well as many others not stated. Consequently, a visioning effort also becomes the embryo by which action plans are born.

Skills

Change efforts in any organization will require certain people or teams to have the necessary skills to accomplish various change effort tasks. An example would be bullet # six above – identifying competing change efforts. To accomplish this step in the process would require the personnel assigned to have the insight, political moxie, and otherwise knowledge of how to navigate to establish what competing efforts currently exist or may surface as potentially derailing the change effort. Training or outsourcing may be in order to be sure the personnel assigned can carry out the task.

Incentives

A typical and normal dynamic that occurs with most change efforts is the unwritten and unspoken question by all stakeholders. That question is, “What’s in it for me?” One would like to believe the answer to that question would be rooted in the knowledge of overall benefit that would be gained by the organization or the customers the organization serves. Sadly, that altruistic answer is not sufficient for many stakeholders. A more personal connection to the question is sought. Questions such as; How will I gain? How will this effort benefit me? How will this effort make my life

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better? are typical unwritten and unspoken questions raised in the minds of many stakeholders. Until a sufficient answer is determined by each stakeholder to questions such as these, significant “buy-in” by various stakeholders will be spotty at best.

Significant time and energy should be placed in this crucial step to determine how each stakeholder can benefit from the change effort. Additionally, celebrations for large and small milestones reached should become the norm when buy-in occurs.

Resources

All system change efforts will require resources to accomplish the desired change. Those resources may come in the form of human, capital, financial, etc., but some will be required. Adequate planning is crucial to make sure that sufficient resources are available in the right quantity and at the right time for change effort steps to be accomplished.

Action Plan

As noted in the vision section, it is almost by default that by accomplishing the visioning process an action plan will simultaneously start to be created. Spending adequate time to flesh out the necessary details of the action plan would be critical to the success of the desired change.

Far Right Column – “=” Column

As noted on page 1, a sixth vertical column is identified as the equal sign “=” which will be explained later. To address the unwritten sixth column, we will need to focus our attention on Table 1 with a horizontal viewing. Additionally, I would like us to start at the bottom of Table 1 and work our way to the top.

The first, or lowest, horizontal row reads as follows:

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Vision	Skills	Incentives	Resources		=
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You will notice the fifth box reading left to right is empty. This scenario is meant to depict the challenge that would occur if a systemic change effort attempted to take place that had a great vision, all the skills necessary to accomplish tasks, all the proper incentives in place for stakeholder buy-in, had adequate resources to accomplish all activities, but lacked an action plan. Such a plan would equal “=” great frustration in the form of stakeholders spinning their wheels. That is, a lot of time, effort, energy and finances would be expended toward a goal without a map of how to get there.

This end result is also known as the “treadmill” phenomenon. The treadmill is meant to be a metaphor for running in place (expending effort), but getting nowhere (ending up in the same place you started due to a lack of an action plan).

The second row up from the bottom would read as follows:

Vision	Skills	Incentives		Action Plan	=
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You will notice the fourth box reading left to right is empty. This scenario is meant to depict the challenge that would occur if a systemic change effort attempted to take place that had a great vision, all the skills necessary to accomplish tasks, all the proper incentives in place for stakeholder buy-in, along with a detailed action plan, but lacked resources. Such a plan would equal “=” great frustration for the stakeholders. That is, the best laid plans accompanied by skilled professionals with proper motivation, will become frustrated when they realize they cannot carry out their assignments due to lack of resources. Many systemic change plans have been derailed due to this critical feature. Stakeholder frustration will quickly turn to loss of interest in the change effort if

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resources are inadequate to carry out reform efforts.

The third row up from the bottom would read as follows:

Vision	Skills		Resources	Action Plan	=
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You will notice the third box reading left to right is empty. This scenario is meant to depict the challenge that would occur if a systemic change effort attempted to take place that had a great vision, all the skills necessary to accomplish tasks, all the proper resources, along with a detailed action plan, but lacked incentives. Such a plan would equal “=” great resistance by stakeholders. That is, the best laid plans accompanied by skilled professionals with proper resources, and a great action plan will be met with resistance if proper incentives are not in place for all stakeholders. As noted earlier, incentives may be larger altruistic ideals that benefit the organization and its customers, but some stakeholders also need to have incentives a bit more personalized to get “on board” with the change effort. Lack of proper incentives can also derail a change effort even to the point of outright sabotage by some stakeholders.

The fourth row up from the bottom would read as follows:

Vision		Incentives	Resources	Action Plan	=
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You will notice the second box reading left to right is empty. This scenario is meant to depict the challenge that would occur if a systemic change effort attempted to take place that had a great vision, all the appropriate incentives, all the proper resources, along with a detailed action plan, but lacked the skills necessary to accomplish tasks. Such a plan would equal “=” anxiety by stakeholders. That is, the best laid plans with proper incentives, proper resources, and a great action plan will create anxiety as no one will

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know what to do to move the effort forward if skills are lacking. Lack of skills can also derail a change effort or at the least, slow the effort to a crawl until proper skills are either developed or secured.

The fifth row up from the bottom would read as follows:

	Skills	Incentives	Resources	Action Plan	=
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You will notice the first box reading left to right is empty. This scenario is meant to depict the challenge that would occur if a systemic change effort attempted to take place that had stakeholders with great skills, all the appropriate incentives, all the proper resources, along with a detailed action plan, but lacked a vision. Such a plan would equal “=” confusion by stakeholders. That is, the best laid plans with proper incentives, proper resources, and a great action plan will be confusing to most stakeholders if no one has a vision of where to take the skills, resources, and action plan. One might argue that the action plan will bring the effort along, however, remember the action plan is born out of the visioning effort. If a lack of vision is present, all the actions in the world won't reach the desired end point as there is no end point without a vision.