Navigating Change: A Leader's Role

By: David Dinwoodie, William Pasmore, Laura Quinn, and Ron Rabin

Center for Creative Leadership

CHANGE

Contents

CHANGE

INTRODUCTION

THE EFFECTS OF CHANGE ARE FELT UP, DOWN, AND AROUND OUR ORGANIZATIONS. Change can be seen as positive or negative, exciting or demoralizing, vital or unnecessary, easy or difficult—often all of the above.

The role of mid- and senior-level leaders in making change happen is critical. Managers of teams, projects, departments, and functions are in a unique and powerful position. These are the leaders who must translate the vision of change from the C-Suite to the ground troops, help direct reports navigate the emotions of change and transition, and influence change agents to generate alignment and commitment for the change effort to be successful.

How can managers become better equipped to steer their organizations and their people through change?

Rapid organizational change is the No. 2 leadership development challenge in the next two to five years—and, logically, change is the second most important topic for leadership development.

—CCL LEADING INSIGHTS STUDY, 2013

CHANGE MANAGEMENT Is Understood; CHANGE LEADERSHIP Is Overlooked

Change is a given and a top priority across all types of organizations, but studies consistently show between 50 and 70% of planned change efforts fail. It doesn't bode well for organizational ambitions if critical change is (at best) just as likely to fail as it is to succeed.

How can organizations improve the odds of success? We have found that many organizations have mastered the operational or structural side of change, but give little effort to the people side of change. To gain the desired results from a new direction, system, or initiative, organizations need the benefit of *change leadership* along with *change management*.

Change leadership is about the phases of change—and the emotions associated with those phases—that people must navigate when change is constant. Change leadership requires leaders, and the organization as a whole, to address beliefs and mindsets and to develop the practices and behaviors that help people adapt to change. In contrast to change management—which is an outside-in process with a focus on structures, systems and processes—change leadership is the inside-out element of meeting the change challenge. It's about enlisting people in change and keeping them committed throughout, in the face of uncertainties, fears, and distractions.

CHANGE LEADERSHIP
Operates at Three Levels

Mid- and senior-level managers both create change and respond to change directives coming from above. To effectively lead these efforts, managers need to navigate change at three levels—Self, Others, and Organization. Here are questions to ask at each level:

SELF
How do I deal with change? What is my current change challenge? What is my role as a change leader and what do I need to do differently? What is my default leadership style when faced with driving significant change? How do my change style preferences impact those around me? How do I ensure we have leadership capability for change throughout the organization?

OTHERS
How do I help my people through change, especially when they have no control or choice? How do I understand—and respond to—the different perspectives, feelings, and responses people have to change while achieving alignment with organizational aims? How do I build relationships and persuade supporters, detractors, and fence-sitters to get onboard with the changes I am tasked with?

ORGANIZATION
How do I lead change in the context of the larger organizational culture and political realities? How do I forge a network of change agents throughout the organization? How do I influence up, down, and across the organization? How do I ensure that change is right for my team as well as right for the organization? How do I ensure we have leadership capability for change throughout the organization?

In Action:
Learning to Lead CHANGE

How can managers approach their real-world change challenges? CCL takes the view that managers need to have the mindsets, skillsets, and toolsets for leading change. Here are five key ideas an effective change leader needs to know:

1. PEOPLE NAVIGATE CHANGE FROM A CONTINUUM OF CHANGE STYLE PREFERENCES.

Different people have different built-in reactions to change. Managers who pay attention to *change preference* can better understand why people react the way they do when faced with change. These managers are more prepared to address concerns, leverage different contributions, avoid pitfalls—and adapt their own change approach as needed. The Change Style Indicator™ from Discovery Learning, Inc., describes the two extremes as well as the midpoint on the continuum of change preference:

- **CONSERVERS** accept the current structure, systems, and processes. They are champions of incremental change and strong advocates of continuous improvement within the established business model.

- **ORIGINATORS** like to challenge current structures, systems, and processes. They are champions of expansive business model change and tend to focus on new possibilities, vision, and direction.

- **PRAGMATISTS** tend to focus on getting the job done. They are champions of change that is functional and often see merit in the perspectives of both conservers and originators—as long as a clear business case exists for one approach or the other.

Change Style Indicator™ is a trademark owned by Discovery Learning, Inc.

2. LEADERS NEED TO NAVIGATE CHANGE THROUGH FOUR PHASES.

When managers understand the process of change, they have a better picture of what they need to do and when. They can anticipate and mitigate many predictable problems. They know not only what actions to take but also what must be done today to prepare the way for tomorrow. CCL breaks the process into four parts that occur in parallel:

DISCOVER. Change begins with understanding. What is the need for change? Will it be evolutionary or revolutionary in nature? What is the scope? What is the urgency? What communities, stakeholder groups and change agents need to be taken into consideration? Who are the people leading the change and are they aligned and committed? What is the level of commitment?
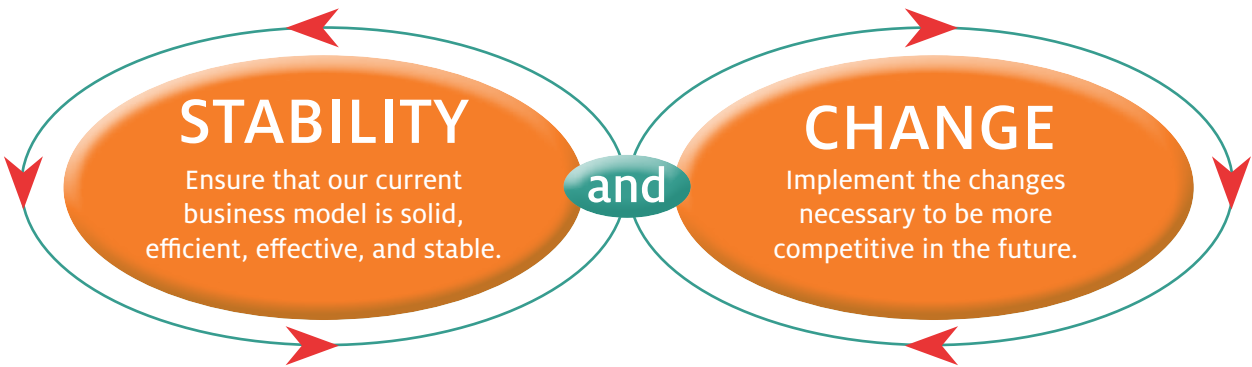
DECIDE. The vision is formed, the change terrain is mapped, and plans are created. The core team and early adopters begin to engage employees in decisions about the change. At this stage, deciding about how to frame the change initiative, build relationships, motivate others, and create alignment and commitment are key leadership functions.

DO. Communicating and taking steps to enact the change begins. The rollout may be slow, or fast-paced, but leaders should recognize that no matter how quickly they choose to move, people still need time to adapt to change. Change leaders must show commitment to the change initiative—and, above all, to the people who are affected by the change. Cracking the code of change is an emotional undertaking, which requires relationship-building across an interrelated web of change agents.

DISCERN. Change may continue and solidify . . . or it may fall off or fail to take hold. Change leaders must discern what is working and what isn't in order to maintain focus, energy, resources, and support to ensure change sustains over time. Learning—what has and has not been effective in the change process—and adapting future plans to ensure progress are critical to success.

3. STABILITY AND CHANGE IS A POWERFUL POLARITY.

As the organization evolves over time, stability and change must coexist. It is one of many organizational priorities or demands that may appear to be diametrically opposed. When leading change, managers must understand that stability vs. change is not a problem to solve but a polarity to manage. To achieve the full performance potential of the organization, energy must be given to both poles simultaneously. We hold constant the organizational elements that are critical for reaping the benefits of today's business model while driving the innovations that propel us toward our desired future.

STABILITY
Ensure that our current business model is solid, efficient, effective, and stable.

and

CHANGE
Implement the changes necessary to be more competitive in the future.

By understanding the polarities of change and seeking the sweet spot of "both/and," change leaders can present a change effort in a way that others can embrace.

4. PERSUASION SKILLS ARE ESSENTIAL.

Change and influence are inextricably linked. Influence is about gaining not only compliance but also the commitment necessary to successfully drive change. It is also about mapping out the critical change agents that must be brought onboard, and defining what "buy-in" looks like from each stakeholder that will lead to a successful outcome.

5. RESILIENCE IS REQUIRED.

Resiliency helps people handle the pressure, uncertainty, and setbacks that are part of going through change. Managers need to build their own reserves and resiliency, in support of their mental and physical health. They also can guide others to face change in healthy and sustainable ways. This is increasingly important as people experience the cumulative effects of ongoing and often turbulent change.

The Bottom Line

Navigating change is an organizational, team, and individual process. Executives, top leaders, and HR professionals can gain better results from strategic and operational change when they

- recognize the imperative to both *lead change* and *manage change*.

- communicate to mid- and senior-level managers that part of their job is to guide other people through the emotional upheaval that comes with change.

- invest in key managers to develop the mindsets, skillsets, and toolsets to be effective leaders of change.

- reframe the change message and pitch it in a way that engages team members, direct reports, senior leaders, and system-wide change agents.

- listen to the concerns of those close to the front lines as their insights and experience are critical to execution success.

With effective change leadership, organizations will overcome the pitfalls of failed change efforts and drive towards a stronger, more effective, and more prosperous future.

Want More on Leading **CHANGE**?

CCL offers a two-day course, *Navigating Change*, to help managers guide their teams through a current change. Participants work with peers and CCL experts, are immersed in a change simulation activity, learn their personal preference for change, and plan how to apply—and sustain— what they learn.

CCL works with organizations to help them navigate through small and large organization change efforts. Contact us for details.

You may also be interested in the CCL white paper *Transformational Change: An Ecosystem Approach Lessons from Nature for Those Leading Change in Organizations*

Also, for more about the complexities of change, a book by CCL's Bill Pasmore, *Leading Continuous Change: Navigating Churn in the Real World*, is available for purchase at ccl.org.

About the Authors

Dr. David L. Dinwoodie is the Center for Creative Leadership's (CCL®) Global Director, Individual and Team Leadership Solutions, a role in which he is responsible for CCL's global portfolio of programs, products and services in the Open-Enrollment, Custom, Coaching and Assessment Services lines of business. He is a coauthor of *Becoming a Strategic Leader: Your Role in Your Organization's Enduring Success*, and a research associate on the Leadership Across Differences project. He holds a master of International Management from the Thunderbird School of Global Management and earned an MBA from ESADE Business School in Barcelona. His doctoral degree is from Aston University (UK) in the area of organizational and workgroup psychology. Before joining CCL, he held management positions with pan-European and global responsibilities at Ernst & Young, BICC General Cable, Planeta de Agostini, Bristol-Myers Squibb, and EADA Business School. He also taught courses in strategic management, change management and leadership development at institutions such as ESADE Business School (Spain), EADA Business School (Spain), Centrum Business School (Peru), and Universidad de Rosario (Colombia).

William Pasmore, PhD, joined the Center for Creative Leadership in January 2008 as Senior Vice President and Organizational Practice Leader. An international authority in organizational leadership, he leads CCL's efforts to help clients develop the larger organizational leadership systems that increase their overall performance and enable their individual leaders to thrive. Pasmore previously served as partner in the Corporate Learning & Organizational Development Practice of consulting firm Oliver Wyman Delta, where he headed the global research practice and worked personally with top executives of Fortune 500 companies on organizational architecture, succession planning, talent management, and strategic planning. He holds a BS in aeronautical engineering/industrial management and a PhD in administrative sciences, both from Purdue University.

Laura Quinn, PhD, is the Global Director of Organizational Leadership Solutions, managing CCL's work in strategy development and execution, talent sustainability, organizational and leadership culture, organizational change, transformation, and executive team leadership. A certified feedback coach, Laura also trains in several CCL programs. She has made numerous conference presentations on her work and has published in CCL's *Leadership in Action, Business Communication Quarterly*, and the *Journal of Management Communication*. Prior to joining CCL, Laura was a professor in the University of Colorado's communication department, and worked for seven years in the high-tech industry, holding management positions in finance and materials. She has a BA in business and an MA in communication from the University of Colorado. Her PhD is in organizational communication from the University of Texas at Austin.

Ron Rabin is a Senior Learning Technologist at the Center for Creative Leadership. He combines his passion for innovative technology with his background in learning pedagogy to make learning more effective and impactful. Prior to joining the Center, Ron worked as an Educational Technologist and IT Consultant for IBM. As a member of IBM's Center for Advanced Learning (CAL), he designed training programs and e-learning solutions using approaches like video stories, podcasts, simulations, social networking, and personalization. He was writer and producer of video scripts streamed to 30,000 IBM managers globally, design lead for simulations and collaborative learning, and product manager for a blog-like tool used by IBMers for reflection and collaboration. He also served as co-lead of IBM's research partnership with Stanford University. Before joining CAL, Ron served as a software developer and solution architect with IBM's Vancouver Innovation Centre, where he worked primarily on K-12 and higher-education solutions. Ron received his BA from Stanford University, his MA from Yale University and his PhD from Cornell University in musicology. He studied in Vienna on a Fulbright scholarship prior to teaching at Cornell University and the University of Michigan. He returned to school and received his Dipl. Sc. in computer science from the University of British Columbia.

Additional contributors: Diane Reinhold and Harold Scharlatt

To learn more about this topic or the Center for Creative Leadership's programs and products, please contact our Client Services team.

+1 800 780 1031   +1 336 545 2810   info@ccl.org

The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL®) is a top-ranked, global provider of leadership development. By leveraging the power of leadership to drive results that matter most to clients, CCL transforms individual leaders, teams, organizations and society. Our array of cutting-edge solutions is steeped in extensive research and experience gained from working with hundreds of thousands of leaders at all levels. Ranked among the world's Top 5 providers of executive education by the *Financial Times* and in the Top 10 by *Bloomberg Businessweek*, CCL has offices in Greensboro, NC; Colorado Springs, CO; San Diego, CA; Brussels, Belgium; Moscow, Russia; Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; Johannesburg, South Africa; Singapore; Gurgaon, India; and Shanghai, China.