Looking to manage change successfully? It is dependent on alignment at every level

R. Kendall Lyman and Tony C. Daloisio

To become a great agent of change, you need to diagnose impediments and create remedies. And to achieve alignment, you must focus on individual behavior, the functions of teams, and the organization as a whole. In this article, we detail how both inside-out and outside-in approaches (Table I) are necessary to create alignment. As leaders or OD professionals, you must understand the interrelationship between each of these levels – systems thinking – and its crucial importance in leading successful change initiatives.

Individual level

You must start with individual alignment because organizations don’t change until people do. And your job is not to actually change people, but to align their passion and energies within the direction of the change initiative. You do this through inspiration and engagement, bringing out the talents that lie within.

There are multiple factors that contribute to individual performance. The working environment is a big one, where misaligned systems, work processes, decision-making processes, or lack of feedback could be holding a person back. Lack of resources needed to implement change can also be a hindrance, like proper development opportunities, workspaces, or tools. Or perhaps it is a lack of skill or will. All of these are contributing factors in the complex world of individual change. As a change leader, it is your job to find the combination to enable employees to move forward. In their annual report on employee engagement, BlessingWhite (2008) found there are several characteristics of highly engaged organizations:

- Senior leaders create a high performing work environment.
- Training and resources are available to help people do their jobs effectively.
- There are opportunities for professional growth.
- Feedback from managers is regular.
- Surveys are conducted to implement organizational change.

Team level

If individual alignment is the beginning of change, team alignment gives it speed and direction. Organizations that effectively align teams outperform others at an accelerated rate. Pentland (2012) found that great teams communicate frequently both formally and informally, operate with equal measures of talking and listening, and explore for ideas and information outside of the group. He noted that how “[...] teams communicate turns out to be the most important predictor of team success, and as important as all other factors...”
combined, including intelligence, personality, skill, and content of discussion”. Keep this in mind when examining team functionality.

Cross-functional checks between teams and departments will affect the success of change. Teams have their own initiatives that use time and resources, and it is imperative to understand how your change will affect them. Misalignment among teams can become a big barrier to implementation.

Collaboration between teams is necessary to accelerate change. Independent teams might create elegant, autonomous solutions, but when executed within a vacuum, they are doomed to fail. For sustainable results, organizations must balance interests, resources, accountability, schedules, and outcomes.

**Organizational level**

The complexity of total organizational alignment can make for a daunting task. But for change to happen, business processes, systems, structures, and culture must all be aligned. To reach that goal, you should start with a diagnosis of the state of the organization by measuring the satisfaction levels of customers, funders, users, and employees. Figure out the gaps between the current results and the desired results.

Next, determine what cultural factors contribute to both positive results and poor performance. Follow suit with processes, structure, and systems, analyzing each for the positive and negative. Then evaluate the missions and visions of the organization – whether they still hold true and whether the strategy ties back to them.

To determine how all the elements in your organization are aligned to enable performance, one useful framework, the organizational effectiveness cycle, is outlined in Figure 1. This type of model will help you view your organization as an ecosystem rather than just a collection of pieces and illustrate the interdependent relationships between key elements. It will also clarify cause-and-effect factors that affect results, along with any leverage points (Lyman and Daloisio, 2017).

All these analyses will indicate where you need to make adjustments and understand organizational dynamics. Ultimately, you will want to know two things – the requirements of each organizational factor that will enable the change you want and what needs to be designed, aligned, or fit together to execute the change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table I</th>
<th>Inside and outside approaches to change</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inside-out approach to change</strong></td>
<td><strong>Outside-in approach to change</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Emphasis: Focus on enabling individuals to change first</td>
<td>Emphasis: Focus on enabling the organization to change first</td>
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<td>Philosophers of this school of change emphasize: “Teach a man to fish, and he will fish for a lifetime”</td>
<td>Philosophers of this school of change emphasize: “Form follows function, and function follows strategy”</td>
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<td>Representative quote: “Discover a few vital behaviors, change those, and problems – no matter their size – topple like a house of cards”. Kerry Patterson, <em>Influencer</em></td>
<td>Representative quote: “The problem is, how do you develop an environment in which individuals can be creative? I believe that you have to put a good deal of thought to your organizational structure in order to provide this environment”. Dave Packard, “Industry’s New Challenge: The Manager of Creativity”</td>
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<td>The process of change: Starts with changing individual behaviors; translating those to team goals, measures, and behaviors; and then aligning the organizational processes, structure, and support systems to enable the behaviors and results</td>
<td>The process of change: Starts with getting clear about the strategy, vision, and purpose of the organization; then aligning the organizational processes, structure, and support systems to deliver on the new strategic priorities; then translating the strategy to team goals and measures; and ultimately creating individual scorecards and behaviors to clarify what individuals do to implement the strategy</td>
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*Note: Lyman and Daloisio (2017)*
Despite leadership rhetoric about employees having “line of sight” to organizational goals and the power of organizational scorecards, many employees remain in the dark about how their daily priorities fit in with their employer’s objectives. Alignment is the missing link for employees who want to do work that matters, belong to something of consequence, and achieve greatness with their talents. If leaders try to shortcut the process of creating alignment among each of the systems in the organization, the change is going to be unpleasant at best and a complete failure at worst. Both efficiency and effectiveness of the organization will be compromised. Accelerating change in an organization requires leaders to instinctively define and align those activities that set the organization part and give it competitive advantage at the individual, team, and organizational levels.

**Note**

1. @Copyright Franklin Covey Co. All rights reserved. Used herein with permission. The organizational effectiveness cycle is a model and methodology used by our colleagues at Franklin Covey. The version here has been modified and refined over the years based on our work with clients.
References


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