

Reading: Leadership Strategies

Integrate Changes Into an Overall Vision for Change

When changes come one on top of the other without any rhyme or reason or without what appears to be a coherent plan for what the changes are supposed to accomplish, people get frustrated and begin to resist the changes.

When the organization is undergoing major strategic change, there must be an overall vision for change that integrates all of the smaller changes. This helps you and your staff make sense out of a series of changes. It also helps you use your resources wisely and avoid unnecessary or out-of-sequence changes.

Whenever you have to manage multiple changes, make sure you and your employees put them in the context of the “big picture” and how these changes are working toward your overall vision. You do this by focusing on the commonality of the change goals.

If the changes are not working toward your overall vision, you may need to revisit your vision to make sure it is encompassing enough. Remember, continuous change requires that all planning be dynamic. Visions may need to change also.

The challenge for leaders is to put the organizational changes into a context and reconcile any that may seem at cross-purposes with the vision.

Prioritize Changes

As a leader, you are often faced with competing and conflicting demands for change. You must be willing to make tough choices about what needs to be done and in what order so you can buffer your people from too much or unnecessary change.

Resist the temptation of thinking that because you’re changing many things, you might as well change everything, or that you shouldn’t change anything until you change everything. While, as Peter Senge has pointed out, there needs to be some tension between the current and vision of the future state in order for change and growth to occur, if the gap is too large the system breaks down. Instead of success, you will encounter failure. Making strategic choices will allow you to focus your resources in the most important areas.

Reconcile Overlapping Changes

At times, the visions from different change efforts may seem to be at cross-purposes. These situations challenge us to find new and different ways of thinking about and achieving the goals.

Think about the past. What are some examples of experiences you have had when changes were not coordinated or concurrent changes seemed at cross purposes? Examples may include:

- Relocating an office, knowing that a reorganization was coming soon that would cause it to move again
- Accountability is emphasized while agencies are asked to regulate less and partner more
- Budget cuts are handed down at the same time new work is added – “do more with less”

How can you reconcile these apparent conflicts?

Improve Intelligence Gathering

Another effective strategy is to sharpen your ability to take a reality check on where people are and to continuously scan your environment for unexpected problems or issues.

To improve your intelligence gathering:

- Walk around and see for yourself what is going on within your organization.
- Make it your business to find out what is happening higher up in the organization. Encourage everyone in the organization to do the same, and set up opportunities for people to share what they learn.
- Communicate regularly with your customers. Encourage feedback sessions with stakeholders to get their input.
- Stay current with world events in order to gauge their impact on your organization.

Plan for Contingencies

Contingency planning is another technique for dealing with continuous change. Planning for the unexpected during the implementation of multiple nonstop change helps you plan alternate routes and set up procedures that will minimize the chaos should the worst happen.

However, while it is important to spend some time planning for the unexpected, it can be hard to forecast the future; don't spend too much time planning for contingencies that may never happen.

Build in Timeouts

When you are going through a period of concentrated and continuous change, it is important to build timeouts into your plan. Provide opportunities for you and your employees to take breaks from the routine and the stress.

People need time away from the chaos, and may take their own form of timeout, for example, "calling in sick," if they are not given other opportunities.

Timeouts can be:

- Retreats
- Office get-togethers
- Lunch away from your desk
- Short walks
- Smaller projects

Additionally, if it is possible, you should encourage, not stifle, vacations and sabbaticals.

Concentrate on Building and Maintaining Trust

Building and maintaining the trust of your employees is the cornerstone of helping them through change.

When people trust their leader, they are more willing to undertake a change even if the change scares them. When people are willing to undertake change, they begin to accept “change as the norm” and see change as an opportunity to build their organization into a vital and enduring entity.

Some ways leaders build and maintain trust:

- Share information openly with employees.
- Ask advice of employees and use it.
- Allow employees to work out solutions to their own problems.
- Take time to find out and to share with employees “what’s been going on” outside of work.

Try to extend your trust of others a little further as well. Showing others that you trust them helps build trust toward you.