

# Change Within Organizations

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Change, a topic often spoken of but one rarely understood, at least from the perspective of understanding how to bring about change. Before discussing the mechanics of bringing about change, it is important to understand why change is important.

Simply put, organizations are similar to any other living organism; they either adjust to their environment or they atrophy and die. The literature is replete with examples of great organizations that could not or would not adapt to their changing environment and now, they no longer exist. One such company was Digital Equipment Corporation, (DEC), a Fortune 50 company. In the mid '80s, DEC was the world's second largest computer company with over fourteen billion in annual sales. It held fast to being a technology driven company as that was the path to its success, its hallmark and its comfort zone. At the same time, the market place changed to a "solutions oriented" environment. What was once DEC is now a small part of Hewlett-Packard.

Why is "change" so difficult? A simple way to understand the difficulty is to look at an example from physics. Michael Faraday coined the term "Force Field" in which the forces attempting to move in one direction are opposed by equal or greater forces in the opposite direction.

Organizational psychologist Kurt Lewin adapted that concept to a study of the dynamics of change in organizations.

Basically, there are forces for change and there are forces restraining the change in an attempt to maintain the status quo.

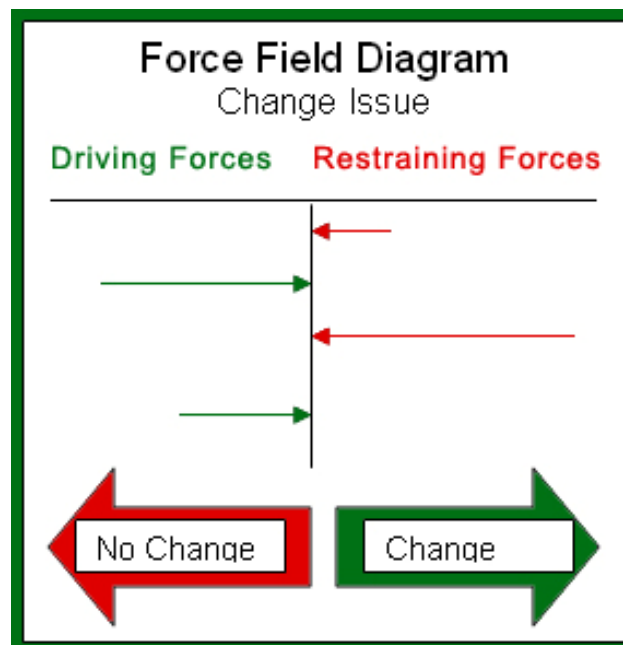
Lewin's basic theory states that when forces to change are applied; forces rise to resist that change. To effect change, it is more readily accepted if you first work to reduce the resistance.

While difficult, change within an organization is possible! Moreover, successful change and survival have identifiable characteristics.

First, and foremost, the organization recognizes the need for change. Then, it is willing to change. Forces restraining the change are identified and reduced. A commonly found restraining force is the reluctance to give up the "perceived" comfort of the present state, even when that state is clearly detrimental to the health of the organization.

Secondly, successful change depends heavily upon strong leadership. Examples of successful change efforts point to the need for leaders who recognize that change is necessary, have a vision for the future state and have the courage to see the change effort through, even when faced with internal resistance. These leaders are the key forces for change! Without these leaders, few change efforts get started, much less succeed.

One last thought; Harvard Professor Rosabeth Kantor puts it succinctly: **"If you want to truly understand something, try to change it."**



# Leadership for the Future

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I'll begin by making a point that I've made many times within WBCCI both in discussions and in the Unit Leadership Workshops that I have presented; Leadership is leadership and is not significantly altered simply because we are speaking of "volunteer" organizations.

I say this for two reasons. First, look at why people join an organization. I maintain that we join any organization to meet our needs. It might be solely for a salary so that we may meet physical needs or it may be to meet sociological needs such as relationships, entertainment, achievement, etc. Some are fortunate to be part of organizations that provides both a salary and the opportunity to pursue a passion.

Second, people within organizations follow leaders they respect; leaders who take the organization in a direction that results in the organization providing value and meeting the needs of the people within the organization.

Volunteer organizations do impact the leadership dimension in one respect and consequently have different issues in staffing effective leaders. Volunteer organizations are prone to having leaders that self-select. Once they "volunteer" for a leadership position, they tend to move along through the ranks and little or no checks or gates through which they may pass only by demonstrating their effectiveness.

If you agree thus far, then it follows that "leadership" is an important factor to the survival of an organization. The issue then becomes one of determining what it is "effective" leadership.

Leadership is loosely defined as the ability to influence, motivate and enable others to contribute towards the effectiveness and success of the organization.

Many of us were taught that if we studied the great captains of industry and emulated their traits, we too would be effective leaders. However, our concept of leadership has changed significantly since the 1950's. Leadership is far too complex to have a set list of traits that will meet the requirements of all situations. This is not to say that certain competencies (traits) are not found in successful leaders. It simply implies, and justifiably, that there is a behavioral dimension to the repertoire of the effective leader and this greatly impacts the outcome of the leadership effort.

One of the earliest practitioners to advance this theory of the behavioral dimension was Fred Fiedler. According to Fiedler's Contingency Model, the leader effectiveness depended upon whether the person's natural leadership styles corresponded to the situation. While Fiedler is highly acclaimed for his works on leadership, his model has not been as highly regarded over time.

The Situational Leadership Theory was advanced by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard. Basically, they posited the theory that the effective leader was one who could adjust their style and thereby provide a leadership style needed by the organization in any given situation. Their theory categorized the styles of leadership by the amount of task-oriented behavior or people-oriented behavior exhibited by the leader. The type of behavior was dictated by the "readiness" of the followers to react effectively to accomplish prescribed goals.

A more recent theory is the Path-Goal Theory which states that some styles of leadership may be effective in some situation but not effective or even disruptive in other situations. This theory relies heavily upon the Expectancy Theory which basically states that a person's effort leading to performance is dependent upon

the expectancy that a level of performance will lead to an outcome that is of value to the individual. While this Path-goal theory has received much support, there is much to be studied. Suffice to say that theorists are in agreement that the study of leadership is complex.

Hopefully we can agree that most of the subsequent leadership theories arrive at the conclusion that an effective leadership style is one that meets the needs of the situation. Unfortunately, the issue remains that most leaders, while able to adjust, have a style at which they are most comfortable and one that fits their personality and not necessarily the needs of the organization. They, in reality, do not adjust to the situations encountered.

There are generally consistent abilities and attributes exhibited by effective leaders. A list of the more prominent traits of effective leaders is:

1. They elicit the cooperation of others.
2. They listen well.
3. They place the needs of others and the organization above their own needs.
4. They embrace responsibility.
5. They are self-regulating; they control or redirect disruptive impulses.
6. They have unwavering resolve; they will do whatever needs to be done to make the organization great. (See the often quoted *GOOD TO GREAT*.)
7. They do not confuse the authority to command with the responsibility of leadership. Command focuses on tasks whereas leadership focuses on PEOPLE.
8. They do not confuse management with leadership; managers do things right, but leaders do the right things.
9. They have a passion for the task that goes beyond aggrandizement or personal status.

You can add to this list but you cannot argue that these, as well as other traits you might add characterize the effective leaders

that you have had the good fortune to work with.

While the study of leadership is fine, there is one more element that must be present for a truly outstanding leader to emerge and that is the situation. A person with all the essential traits to be a great leader will not be that leader if there is not a situation that requires that leadership. Conversely, we have all seen situations that called for strong leadership and none emerged. So, the two must go together. If you study the life of Winston Churchill you will find that for the most part, his early life was not in any way notable. It was the situation presented by the crisis of World War II that gave Churchill the opportunity to demonstrate his great leadership.

Where does this leave us? I maintain that while we certainly do not have situation the compares with WW II, we do have a crisis facing WBCCI. It is unarguable that the Club cannot sustain the continued decline not only in the number of members, but also, in the average age of the members. It is my contention that a strong leadership is needed to bring about necessary changes to improve this situation.

Some responding to my first paper asked me to be specific as to what needs to be done. I do not believe that to be useful. It has been my goal to keep these papers free from specifics so as to not get caught up in personal feelings but rather, my goal is provoke thought and action within the current leadership of WBCCI. Therefore, I have attempted to be purposely academic. Ideally, the entire membership must face these issues but I am not able to reach that audience.

I will, in my third paper, attempt to be specific on those areas I believe needing attention or change. Since they will be solely my opinions, I will so label them and you are free to disagree with them. The solutions to these issues will remain with you.