Get Real: Plan for the True Magnitude of Change

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How often have you seen leaders announce a major change effort without having thought through what was really required to get it done? People struggle with such a change because without knowing its true scope, they cannot effectively fit it into their already burdened workloads. Employees can end up feeling jerked around because the leaders back-peddle and try to stop or modify the change once they grasp its true requirements. Changes kicked off like this seldom succeed, and more often than not, damage morale.

It doesn't have to be this way.

Executives can take a few disciplined steps at the onset of change to ensure that they understand and commit to the full magnitude of what they are asking of the organization. They can identify up front what will be touched by the change, who will be impacted, and what resources (human and capital) will be required to get it done quickly and efficiently. This requires leaders "to *get real* about their change efforts." By doing this up-front work, leaders set up both the change and the organization for success. Here are the Five Steps to Getting Real about Change.

1. **Confirm the desired outcomes and vision for your change.**

Create a compelling, yet realistic picture of what results you intend the change to produce for your organization. Include how the organization will operate when it has successfully achieved your outcomes. Be as specific as possible, realizing that initially your outcomes may be very general.

2. **Identify what specific change initiatives are necessary to achieve your desired results.**

Identify the various areas where change will be required, such as changes to structure, services, products, business processes, IT, management systems, customer contact, mindset, behavior, or culture. Overtly name the initiatives that will drive these changes, and map how they interact with each other.

3. **Perform an Initial Impact Analysis on these initiatives.**

This is the heart of the Get Real Strategy. An Initial Impact Analysis is a quick and simple "check the box" exercise. It identifies the organizational/technical and human/cultural areas of your current operations that will be altered or affected by your change effort. This reveals the real magnitude of work required to achieve your desired outcomes.

Impact areas might include those listed above, as well as things like governance, union relations, job design, skills, teamwork, norms, resources, and dozens more.

Identifying impact areas opens leaders' eyes about the true scope of change they are initiating. Why? Because each item will require time, people, planning, action, resources, and oversight.

Is this exercise too operational for executives? Hardly! Identifying the true impacts is strategic work, and often reveals show-stoppers and levels of complexity that cause the leaders to rethink the change's outcomes, or more likely, its resource base and pacing. Adjusting outcomes, scope, pacing or resources early will save you from tremendous headaches later.

4. **Assess your organization's readiness and capacity to take on this magnitude of work.**

Readiness is a factor of recent change history, current morale, and trust in leadership, among other things. It sets the emotional stage for whether people will positively engage in change. Capacity is a product of workload, skills, resources, and time.

Now, having a more accurate assessment of the magnitude of your impacts, you can identify what level of readiness and capacity you will need for the change to succeed. Be sure to consider the emotional residue of your organization's recent history with change and its current workload, priorities, and climate.

Remember, each of the impact areas will need specific people to oversee them. Additional people will certainly be involved —in cross-functional meetings, studies, design sessions, decision-making, and the like. This is all time required *away* from these people's normal operational responsibilities and will influence capacity. Make sure that the people involved have legitimate and adequate time to do the work required for the change.

Once you have mapped how you are going to engage your stakeholders in each of your impact areas, you can more easily assess whether you have the capacity to succeed, given operational priorities and goals.

5. **Re-scope your change outcomes with renewed—and informed—commitment.**

Depending on the level of readiness and capacity to succeed, your leaders may need to re-scope your change outcomes. At least now they can make intelligent decisions about whether the change as currently scoped is set up to succeed. This is much smarter than simply naming a change and blindly assuming that the organization can actually handle it.

Whether it proceeds as scoped or gets stopped or modified, you can rest assured that your leaders will be far more committed to the change having done this due diligence to identify its real impacts. Plus, your people will understand the change better, and your current operations will be less negatively impacted because your leaders will make far

more intelligent decisions regarding pacing and resource allocation. Help your leaders get real about the magnitude of your change. You owe it to your people and organization.