



LEADING CHANGE SUCCESSFULLY

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Individuals occasionally go through change. Institutions often undergo change. Change is inevitable. It is in this context that we should all be prepared, as much as we could be, for change. Leaders, including those leading change, should lead with compassion but they should be firm and decisive. We can use insights from Jacqueline Carter and Rasmus Hougaard – their recent book on *compassionate leadership* demonstrates “how to do hard things in a human way.”

Change can be good for many reasons. We should not fear change. We always need to plan for it and embrace it when it happens. It is said that one of early Greek philosophers Heraclitus opined that “the only constant in life is change.” We find ourselves having to lead change in our lives, to lead change in organisations we are associated with, and to lead change in our various respective environments. It is therefore important to be able to lead yourself (viz. self-leadership) if you are to lead teams and organisations well, especially to lead change well.

Self-leadership requires, among other things, that you are fully self-aware, and you have a roadmap for your life and career. This implies that you should be clear about what you want to change in your life and or career. Sometimes that entails making a decision about what you want to do more or less of. For instance, deciding like I did a couple of years ago to exercise more and spend more time with loved ones can be the change you implement. Consequently, it has meant that I write less than I used to.

Literature on leadership educates us that to lead change in an organisation, three perspectives are critical: Strategic, Cultural, and Political. Almost always, change in organisations is influenced by political factors. There is need to be politically astute. In organisations, we deal with various individuals that have authority, power and influence. Persuasion than force often works better.

Change can spur conflict or misunderstanding. It is important to manage conflict when it happens and apply negotiation skills. In a nutshell, leading change requires that we must build coalitions, we must influence relevant people and apply power judiciously in getting things done. Most importantly, everyone has to be on board.

An often-overlooked tool in leading change is network analysis. The good understanding of network ties can make leading change relatively smooth. Leading change in organisations should be guided by good knowledge of the network landscape in the organisation. The law of propinquity (i.e. the principle that we interact more with those who are near us) should be considered and structural holes in networks should be taken into account to ensure that those who are strategic in the help and advice networks as well as the friendship network are part of the process. In many if not all organisations, there are individuals who might not occupy a position of influence in terms of rank or seniority, but such individuals can be linked to others who are more influential. Depending on the context, it can be useful to know the network density and the external ties as well as internal ties for those who would be critical in the change effort. This can be taken a step further to estimate the

E-I index (a formula associated with David Krackhardt and Robert Stern) which takes into account numbers of external links and internal links.

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Capabilities Leadership Model helps us to consider four critical areas in leadership: Sensemaking, Relating, Inventing and Visioning. In leading change, those involved should satisfy these four critical areas in leadership. For instance, envisioning the planned change is important. There is also need to invent, relate and sensemaking. Linked to this, it is advisable that there is a team instead of having only an individual that leads change in an organisation. The team ideally should comprise of those who have role based and personal power. Structural power (networks & power in organisations) should also be taken into account as well as ensuring that there is sufficient social capital and political capital in the team that is leading change. Team members should have abilities to meet the four critical areas of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Capabilities Leadership Model.

Lastly, leading change has be inclusive and those leading change should be patient. It might be important to undertaking interviews or consultations and build coalitions to support envisaged change. It is also important to recognise adopters and occasionally confronted those who might resist the planned change.

As a parting shot, ensure that the envisaged change is clear to everyone who would be affected by the change that is being (or to be) pursued. Reasons and envisioned outcome for that change should also be communicated. Always, there must be better understanding of the context.