



Are You Ready for Strategic Change?

By Robert Hyde

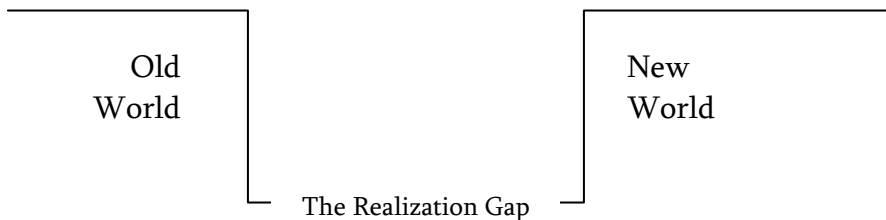
Most organizations are pretty good at understanding WHAT they need to do. They just can't realize the results. That's because they haven't prepared the organization and don't know HOW to make things happen.

Most Strategic Initiatives Fail

The reason for this failure is the inability of the organization to deal with Change. When installing a new application or implementing a new customer service initiative, most organizations view the installation or implementation as the end-point in the initiative. When things start to go awry after implementation, individuals within the organization start to believe that the decision to proceed with an initiative was wrong and start trying to return to their old ways. Although this can be true, more often than not they don't realize that by implementing they are now forced to BEGIN a process of Change.

Change Is About People; and People Hate Change

What most organizations forget is that the benefits of a new system, a new org structure and new approach to the business are not realized until people change their behavior. A change in behavior cannot be realized until AFTER the initiative has been implemented. In other words, Change begins with an Ending. Paradoxical as this might seem, every change involves giving up something and taking a leap of faith into the unknown.



The time between the change and the realization of the results of that change is what William Bridges calls the "neutral-zone"¹ and what I call the realization gap. This is the time between the implementation and the realization of the benefits of the change. Most initiatives are given up because organizations don't see the gap for what it is; the transition between the old world and the new.

¹ Managing Transitions, W. Bridges

This is a great introductory text to the challenges associated with Change. In this text he defines 'Change' as external and a 'Transition' as the internal psychological process that individuals must go through in order to adapt to a change. In his words, it's not the changes, but the transitions that do you in.

Preparing for Strategic Change

How ready is your organization for proceeding with a large organizational change? Ask yourself the following questions:

Sponsorship of the Change

To what extent are the leaders and managers in the organization in support of the change effort? Am I willing to change my own behaviour in order to make this change happen?

Resistance

Are the various stakeholders indicating a reluctance to support the change? Are powerful individuals able to prevent the change from occurring?

Culture

Is the culture of the organization threatened by the change? Do individuals in the organization understand the need to change the corporate culture?

Business Capacity

Does the organization have the required resources and tools necessary to make change happen? Specifically, do they have time in addition to their daily tasks, do they have the necessary project management skills or the know-how necessary to implement the change.

Framing Change

How should an organization approach change? One way is to look at the Change from multiple perspectives simultaneously. This is called Reframing and involves looking at a particular situation from four different angles: The structural frame, the human resource frame, the political frame and the symbolic frame.²

Structural Frame Processes, new technologies, organizational design involved in Change	Human Resource Frame “What’s In It For Me” How will the change impact the lives of individuals involved? How can you mobilize and empower for change?
Political Frame What are the sources of power and how can they be used to realize the results of the Change? Who can prevent the change from occurring? How will the change affect the balance of power?	Symbolic Frame What is the impact to the organization’s culture? What symbols can be used to facilitate the change? What cultural icons are lost as a result of the change?

² Bolman and Deal; Reframing the Organization

Most strategic initiatives fail because the individuals responsible for the change do not approach it from the four frames. By thinking of the changes as primarily structural, organizations often miss key elements. By considering all four aspects of change, the organization is more certain of realizing the true benefits of their strategic initiatives.

The Importance of Leadership

I once heard a speech from an expert on leadership. He told the audience how he had spent four years completing his PhD and finally boiled down his answer to the question “What is a leader?”. His answer was that “a leader is someone who knows what they want.”

Let’s think about this in the context of change. A leader is someone who can see the end-state, and envision the new world. Moreover, they have what Peter Brill and Richard Worth call the “Fire In the Belly”³ or a desire to move forward and be leaders.

During the realization gap, a strong leader is able to continue to focus on the end-state or the New World and not be distracted by issues that arise during the transition. By using tools from each of the four frames, a leader can build leverage to ensure that the benefits are realized. These include:

- Be self-aware. Even leaders who promote change can find they have urges to resist, as they often didn’t realize that they need to change their behavior as well.
- Set milestones and communicate progress. This lets people know where they are in the change process and what they need to give up.
- Ensure people involved in the change have the resources and tools they require and time to make things happen.
- Develop symbols and ceremonies that represent a transition from the Old World. Before accepting the new, people must give up the old.
- Manage up and down the organizational hierarchy. Consolidate the necessary power from all levels needed to make the change happen.
- Make use of informal leaders within the organization. Find the person most resistant to the change and make them responsible for getting it to happen.

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³ The Four Levers of Corporate Change; P. Brill and R.Worth; 1997