

Large Scale Change Technology: Change Methodology for the 21st Century

Spending 200M dollars on expanding your operations? What have you told your staff and how have you involved them? Employing this methodology to gain buy-in could be the critical difference between success and a failed project.

By Lynnea Brinkerhoff

How do organizations deal with rapid change?

In today's increasingly complex organizational structures, the concept of planned organizational change is a hope rather than a reality of the business world. Recent brain research shows that, while the human being must have ample change in order to be properly challenged (see Indian Gaming, November 2007, page 52), too much can overwhelm our systems. New, more collaborative strategies are imperative. As our colleague, Roland Sullivan states, "Old ways of organizing and doing business have been made irrelevant by fast, even quantum change".

Organizations typically deal with change in one of three ways:

- *Reactively*: Wait until things get so bad and do something fast, no matter what it is
- *Adaptively*: Figure out what changes are occurring, whether they are in control or not, and bring in the experts to help them respond to the new environment
- *Anticipatively*: Analyze what is happening around them, engage a 360° view of the current and future reality, and plan collaboratively with key stakeholders for future scenarios

Strategy planning for the 21st Century

Whether you are kicking off a new initiative, expanding operations, dealing with changes in the competitive environment, improving performance, or planning for a better future, organizational theory postulates that senior managers should involve as many people as possible. That includes all levels of employees, clients, and even vendors. Unfortunately, most strategic planning and implementation are done in the name of employees and customers who are *not* in the key meetings.

Theory and observation of successful implementation show that: *If an organization wants or needs to undertake change and respond to it with any semblance of effectiveness, critical mass (20%) within the organization must have an opportunity to generate ideas together, hear experts, respond and be part of the implementation. The planning process itself should be 'modeling' the future the organization wants to create.*

Being efficient or effective...you choose

Many executive groups make the mistake of trying to be *efficient* and think that a managerial style of command and control will get them the results they seek and that their soldiers will fall in behind them, ask no questions, and be enthusiastic about the change. While this strategy may be efficient in the short term, the trade-off with this strategy is in long-term effectiveness. 'Pay now or pay later,' as the old adage goes. When employees and other stakeholders have not been brought into the process early, don't have a chance to make comments and don't have their thoughts and ideas included in the challenges and options facing the organization, employees then reserve the right to resist later as the implementation is underway.

The typical approach by management to organizational change

It is always baffling and frustrating to senior managers that employees are not as enthusiastic about making changes or following through on plans but instead are seen as spreading "gossip" by the water cooler or outright sabotaging the planning. The typical response by management is to write an article in the company newsletter extolling the virtues of the new change or new facility. Of course, this only adds to employee resistance because it is a one-way communication process. Time after time, senior management will then augment this communication process by having managers schedule meetings with employees to explain the change, yet there are no mechanisms within the meetings to record and act upon all of the suggestions. And worse yet, what the employee really wants to be scheduled for the last time slot when senior managers themselves are bored and burned out, and many times the managers will skip out because they have "more important" engagements to attend. What message does that send to the staff?

A vastly improved approach: Large Group Change Technology (LST)

Large-Scale Technology (LST) is based on the work of Richard Beckard in the 1960's and refined by Ron Lippitt's work in the 1970's and 1980's and then taken up by many experts since that time. "Prior to this, change was implemented with separate organization units and top down drive. LST broke this paradigm by thinking about the entire system. At the heart of it was getting 'the whole system into the room' and 'all the arrows pointed in the same direction.'" (www.coachingandmentoring.com) Organizations can alleviate the need to go department by department, meeting to meeting for the next several months or years, trying to update everyone on what was planned and the effect on operations, schedules, etc. and then repeating the meeting process to help staff through the inevitable change cycle. Herein lie not only true efficiency but ultimate effectiveness as well. By including key stakeholders in the planning and implementation process early on, senior managers ensure that implementation has as many 'believers' on board who are scattered throughout all levels of

employees and even key vendors. This is not a one time "meeting" but a carefully planned, designed, researched, and coordinated event that can have from 40 to 2000 in the room at one time for up to 3 days with extensive follow-up and implementation procedures. The results are routinely astounding and tend to release a massive amount of positive energy in the organization.

Elements of success and key principles

Organizational consultants, Gil Steil Jr. and Nancy Aronson, PhD, discovered the underlying principles of the most successful change efforts:

Clarity of purpose – the narrower the purpose, the quicker a group can mature.

Active engagement – ask people to get involved quickly. Remember, this is not a workshop or training but rather requires collaboration and creativity on everyone's part. And concerns real work and real decisions.

Whole organizational "system" is invited – tap the knowledge and experience of those on the front lines, and the key vendors and customers. Something magical happens when people see the whole system and experience themselves as an integral part of it.

Development of shared understanding of the context – generating broad-based understanding of the initiative by creating shared meaning of the changes considered.

Self-management of working groups – when outsiders facilitate working processes too much, ownership and responsibility are slowed down. Conversely, action emerges quickly when groups take responsibility for their own process.

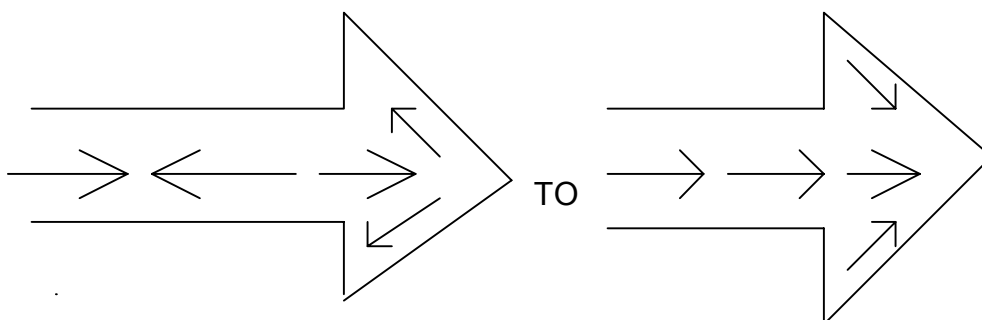
Discovery of common ground – disagreement can slow down the change process. The purpose of this meeting is to allow disagreement while focusing on what is mutually positive.

Focus on the future – let a shared dream of a desirable future draw energy and action to it.

Equal Standing – everyone has equal opportunity to speak and be heard, not just management.

Galvanizing the employees to pull in the same direction

By employing this methodology the organization moves from resistance and dispersion of energy to a shared understanding of where the organization is going and the roles everyone has in its success.



Results

One organization spent hundreds of thousands of dollars using outside research firms to conduct pre- and post-test measurements around culture change and customer satisfaction. The findings were that significant positive improvement occurred when this methodology was employed. In a successful large-scale event, **change occurs in how participants interact**. These special skills and learnings – from new ways of interacting with co-workers to conducting better meetings – become part of the organization’s new culture.

Why wait?

As you are spending huge amounts of money for bricks and mortar, plants and decorations for your new casino expansion, do not overlook the need to develop new approaches to organizational change and communication. While the new facility may be dazzling, the long-term commitment by the staff is equally as important. Participation and high involvement have been the bedrock of both the Native American culture and our system of government. This way of sharing information and creating collective wisdom for future action has worked for generations. In just the same way, Large Scale Change has been employed by countless organizations, and has been proven to help facilitate positive change within organizations. Why wait to bring the future into your planning process today?



Lynnea Brinkerhoff is Vice President of Flath & Associates Consulting, Inc. and is Co-Director of the Center for Human Resource Development and Leadership Studies at the University of New Haven in Connecticut. Once outdoor leadership guide then cross-cultural specialist, Lynnea has 20 years experience in resolving unique organizational challenges. She can be reached at 203-913-7398 or at lynneabrink@gmail.com. Web address: www.flathassociates.com.

