

Viewpoint: Leading the Way

Our [survey](#) very clearly ranked 'Leadership' as the top Critical Success Factor for successful change. So, why is it so important? How does Leadership help set up a change initiative for success?

We argue that Leadership's primary role is to 'navigate' the initiative. Drawing on the classic Change Circle, it focuses on the space in which the commitment and ownership of the entire organisation for the big picture is engaged, enabling it to 'pull' the change into day-to-day operation successfully.

Leadership must set the Purpose – the compelling need for change and the clear outcomes which will define success – and 'walk the talk' for the entire organisation to see, throughout the initiative. Communication obviously plays a vital role – but communication needs the context and content provided by Leadership.

Before we go on to explore these ideas in more detail, it's worth thinking about who and what we mean by 'Leadership'.

Who is 'Leadership'?

Leadership is the collection of people who are accountable both for the organisation's ongoing success and for the success of any change initiative. They comprise:

- The Executive Team: typically those 'C' level executives who are responsible for operating and improving the business on behalf of its stakeholders, such as shareholders and customers;
- The Sponsor of the initiative: the individual, often a member of the Executive Team, who is accountable to the Executive Team for achieving the change at hand; and
- The Director of the initiative: the individual charged by the Sponsor with directing the initiative day-to-day towards successful delivery.

So how do these people 'navigate' an initiative towards success? We've found the Change Circle to be a useful tool for thinking about this question.

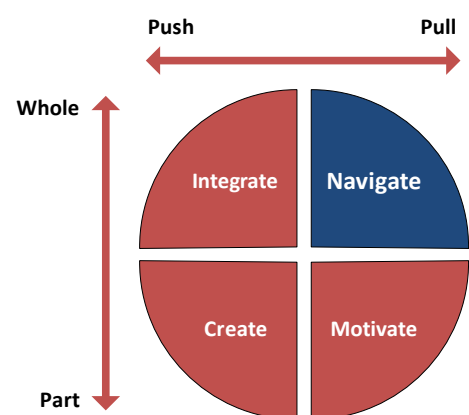
The Change Circle

The Change Circle has been around for some time, but we find relatively few leaders who have come across it, so it's worth a recap. It's a simple model and like all models, its value is as an aid to thinking – generating ideas which help in specific situations.

The Change Circle is formed of 4 quadrants relating to the intersection of two dimensions: the 'Part – Whole' dimension and the 'Push – Pull' dimension.

The 'Part – Whole' dimension is about whether a particular activity relates to the big picture – the Whole – or whether it is about some specific detail – Part – within the big picture. An analogy here is the distinction between the contributions Architects and Heating Engineers make to a building. The Architect's job is to envision the whole building and set the framework within which all other design and construction activity takes place. On the other hand, the Heating Engineer's role is to ensure that the building's heating system is effective and safe and fits into the overall framework established by the Architect. The Architect works on the 'whole'; the Heating Engineer works on the 'part'. In the context of change, Programme Managers, Business Architects and Strategists work on the 'whole' whilst Process Designers, Programmers, Trainers and Users work on the 'part'.

The 'Push – Pull' dimension is about whether a particular activity relates to building and integrating the solution – 'Push' – or whether it is about generating momentum within the business for the change – 'Pull'.



In other words, it's about *supply* versus *demand*. On change initiatives, Project Managers and Solution Developers work on the 'push' whilst Change Management Specialists, Business Executives and Line Managers work on the 'pull'.

The intersection of these two dimensions creates four quadrants of change. In the bottom-left (Push, Part) components of change are 'created'. In the top-left (Push, Whole), new or enhanced solutions are 'integrated'. In the bottom-right (Pull, Part) the people in the business are 'motivated' to adopt elements of the change and make them work in the real world. In the top-right (Pull, Whole) the holistic and demand perspectives come together to 'navigate' the change towards success.

Each of these quadrants plays an important part in delivering change successfully. But, as our survey has shown, the most important factor in any successful change initiative is Leadership. So, let's focus on the top-right quadrant – through which Leadership navigates towards success.

How can leaders do this? By looking after both factors in the top-right quadrant – by generating and sustaining 'demand' and momentum for the overall ('holistic') change.

The 'Whole' Factor

How do leaders play a role in emphasising the holistic nature of the change?

It is interesting that Leadership is consistently the highest ranked Critical Success Factor in our survey – even more important than having a Purpose which responds to a compelling need for change and defines clear outcomes. Why is this? Because it is leaders who must identify and engender the compelling need for change and it is they that must also define the clear outcomes.

Such Leadership must come from the 'business' – the core functions and capabilities of the organisation. For instance, the Purpose can only come from a deep understanding of the business and its position in the market – its role in the 'value chain'¹, if you like.

The vision of what the business will look like in the future must also be holistic. It's no good envisioning a world-beating information system if future processes, roles & responsibilities and so on are not properly aligned to this new technology. We were once asked to find out why a new insurance sales system was performing so badly that it couldn't be used; it turned out that the system had been designed to support a new way of selling, but no one had followed through to re-define the sales processes or train sales professionals in their use. It wasn't a technical issue at all, but a failure of Leadership to follow-through to deliver the whole vision.

The holistic statement of what the change is all about must be established early in any initiative and be maintained, enhanced and refined throughout. In fact, it must outlast the initiative itself. After solution delivery teams have celebrated the success of getting the solution in on time, on budget, on scope and on quality, Leadership must continue to sustain the Purpose through day-to-day operations.

The 'Pull' Factor

How do leaders play a role in driving demand for the change?

It goes without saying that change must be "pulled" – it can't be "pushed". We've seen many initiatives fail by focusing on the left-hand "push" activities at the expense of "pull" activities.

It also goes without saying that change succeeds or fails in the bottom-right quadrant. It succeeds if people in the business are motivated literally to *pull* the change on board and make it work every day in the real world. But that motivation depends on the context set by Leadership.

¹ Michael Porter, Competitive Advantage: Creating and Sustaining Superior Performance, 1985

When we work with Change Leaders, we focus on characteristics such as ‘commitment’, ‘accountability’ and ‘visibility’. It is the strength of these characteristics that distinguishes Leadership from other Stakeholders in the change. To adapt an old fable: Stakeholders are involved, but Leaders are committed! We look for evidence that leaders are ‘walking the talk’.

We also look for evidence of courage. Any change that’s worth the effort, at least any substantial change, will involve taking the organisation outside its comfort zone. It will require new and different behaviours. It must be self-evident that leaders have embraced such change – and that takes courage.

In the BBC’s insightful sitcom ‘Yes, Minister’², if Sir Humphrey Appleby ever wanted to steer Jim Hacker away from a particular course of action, he knew how to get his way: “... if you want to be really sure that the Minister doesn't accept it you must say the decision is *courageous*.”³ Politicians, and even Stakeholders, may be able to get away with delaying, evading and generally avoiding acts of bravery; change leaders cannot! Everyone in the business must see that Leadership has the courage to embody the change.

A Word About Communication

As many respondents to our survey pointed out, communication is critical the success of any change initiative. It’s no good having a compelling need for change, a vision, clear outcomes, and so on, if these are not clearly communicated to the whole organisation. It’s no good ‘walking the talk’ if people can’t see you walking – or hear you talking for that matter.

But more importantly, it’s no good having a great communications plan if there aren’t strong messages to communicate, or if they won’t be believed because your people don’t see commitment from their Leadership – if you and your team haven’t clarified your Purpose and if you’re not walking the talk.

Conclusion

In any change initiative, there are lots of people *pushing* the solution towards implementation and there are many people involved in the *details* of the change process. **Leadership is the one place where the pull for the whole change comes together.** As a leader of change, you can use the top-right quadrant in the Change Circle to help you navigate your organisation towards successful change, by frequently asking:

- What should I be doing to get the big picture – the compelling need for change, the vision, the outcomes of changing successfully – across to the organisation?
- How can I demonstrate my commitment to the change and how can I help people understand why this change is important for them, personally, as the organisation moves forward?

Meanwhile, of course, management must span the entire Change Circle – all four quadrants. It must ensure that both the supply of, and the demand for, the holistic change and all of its components are properly planned and executed to deliver change successfully. And we can help you shape, mobilise and deliver an initiative for success.

But that’s our focus. Yours is Leadership.

Only you can provide the Leadership. We can help you by providing a context and a structure within which that Leadership can navigate change towards success. We can help you achieve the right balance between “whole” and “part” and between “pull” and “push”.

For more information about Houghley Ltd: visit us at www.houghley.co.uk; contact us at enquiries@houghley.co.uk; or phone us on +44 (0) 845 604 2335.

² To find out more, try www.yes-minister.com

³ Yes, Minister – The Right to Know, Antony Jay & Jonathan Lynn, BBC 1980