The need for organizations to change is far more demanding now than a few years ago when the question “Why Change?” was dominant and the challenge was more to accommodate the change as it occurred than to proactively initiate and internalize the change as a way of doing business. Managing change is probably the single most important issue today for all organizations. The economic, social and technological changes of the past decade have placed greater demands on organizations to be “proactive, responsive and responsible”.

Why change efforts fail?

Organizational change efforts often fail. It is estimated that up to 70% of new initiatives from developing and adopting new technologies to changing culture fail. Why does change often fail to achieve the intended results? Studies clearly point out four important reasons for failure of change efforts. These are:

Too little effort is put into developing the 'case for change'. The leaders need to establish a clear direction a compelling case for change, by involving employees in the discussion.

Very often change is seen as a 'single event', effectively moving from one steady state condition to another; however, this is not true. Change is nearly always a journey and it can take several iterations to get to the right structure/alignment.

Change plans are normally developed by leaders, who believe that change is a top-down phenomenon. Leaders fail to realize that for change efforts to be successful there is a need for effective balance between 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' approach. Involvement of employees or group of employees is vital for effective implementation of change.

For effecting change, organizations and leaders have to be flexible. Flexibility is a big challenge in successful change management.

Leaders as change agents

Researchers on organizational change tend to agree that leading change is, in effect, the same thing as leading. Leadership is, therefore, very crucial in organizational change management. Leaders need to understand the reasons for the failure of change and should be able to adapt their leadership styles and orientation to foster radical change in the organizations. Leaders have to develop capacities to be successful change agents. Leadership skills and attributes, required for successful change management, are brought out as an analogy with chameleon. The following four characteristics of chameleon could probably throw light on what is required of the leader for organizational change.

The ability to change: Just as chameleon changes its body colour, a successful leader should be flexible, capable of adapting to new conditions, open to novel alternatives and be willing to accept failures in the process of pursuing change initiatives. Very often leaders address technical dimensions of change but fail to consider what it takes at each stage of change, in terms of leadership capabilities, to actually carry out that change.

The ability to see in multiple directions: The eyes of the chameleon are one of its most remarkable features which have the ability to see in any direction without having to move its head at all. Organizational leaders should also develop skills to look in multiple directions to understand what is needed to be changed for moving the organization to greater success. It is said that leaders need to have skills for four 'looks'. These are: to look back which would give them learning from their experience; to look ahead which would give them hope and provide the vision to move forward for meeting the challenges; to look around which would make them understand the situational realities and provide direction for making the needed changes; and to look within which would give them self-confidence. “To look within" is indicated as “To Be” component in the Mahavakya of Leadership, which emphasizes the personality of the leader as one of the most important determinants for being a successful leader. The Mahavakya of leadership process points out four important components for leadership, which are “To Be", “To Do", “To See"
and “To Tell”. Of these four components, “To Be”, which is related to the personality of the leader, is indicated as the most important component and this, in fact, determines the strength of the other three components. Oliver Wendell Holmes said it right in his words “What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us”? 

Ability to strike fast when required: Even though chameleon is a slow moving creature, it has a powerful and fast moving tongue which strikes the prey at a pretty long distance, even as long as two and a half times its body length. A change-oriented leader should make efforts to look for opportunities and grab it before it is too late and lost. A leader should develop skills and ability to strike fast when it is needed.

The ability to hang on when the going gets tough: The chameleon spends a great deal of time tightly grasping or holding itself close to the branches, even if the situation becomes tough. As the adage goes, ‘when the going gets tough, it is the tough who gets going’, a successful change-oriented leader should be willing to take risks and keep going forward till the organizational change is successful. Leaders need to realize that the path of change, like that of true love, never runs smooth. Several detours may be necessary to reach the desired destination. In fact, our studies point out that risk taking is invariably inadequate among the leaders. There is, therefore, a definite need for the leaders to develop capacities and capabilities to take the needed levels of risk for promoting change and innovation in the organization.

What should leaders do to make a difference for facilitating organizational change? New millennia’s proven methodology for managing organizational change was built around a Ten-Step Change Management Life Cycle, which is outlined below.

1. Develop the case for change:
   This step involves the leaders to identify the drivers for change and to articulate a shared vision.

2. Assess the environment and culture:
   The leaders need to identify and understand the strengths to be leveraged and the gaps to be addressed through assessment of the environment.

3. Plan for change:
   The leaders have to detail the change management activities and identify success factors and risks associated with the proposed change initiative.

4. Define what success looks like:
   Leaders, in this step, should involve people to evolve SMART goals and also agree on critical success factors along with success criteria.

5. Lead the change:
   In this stage the leaders should identify the change team and help develop skills in people to cope up with the changes. This is the stage where leaders need to develop strategies to enroll affected employees while managing resistance to change. Leaders should help employees to break with the past which would help to bring down the resistance to change. Leaders need to develop emotional intelligent skills for leading the change.

6. Communicate the change:
   This is the stage where leaders develop an orchestrated communication plan to inform people, to listen to people and also to involve employees. This is the stage where the art of intelligent leadership plays a crucial role. The leader needs to create a passion for change among his employees. Necessary motivation from the leaders is very important for the employees to accept and adopt the change. Communicate, communicate and communicate is the successful slogan of change management.

7. Identify key change impacts:
   This is the stage where Domino effect of change takes the front stage. Any change would, in turn, impact on process, procedure, structure, tasks, technology and people. The impact on the associated organizational elements which are affected by the change initiated has to be assessed.

8. Get ready for the changes:
   The leaders should develop and implement ‘change readiness’ plans which would address the change impacts. 

Champion the change:
   In this stage the leader would need to identify, build and support a strong network of change agents and mobilize the affected employees in the change success. The leader should also ensure to celebrate change successes. Reinforcement of every small success of change would provide great motivation.
for people to enhance their support change.

10. Monitor progress and reinforce the change process:

As Kurt Lewin pointed out, any change efforts would fail if the change approaches are not reinforced in the system through the process of refreezing. Leaders should, therefore, regularly assess the progress of change and stay through the course till the effects of change efforts get reinforced in the organizational system.

The leader's role in every step outlined above is obvious. Leaders who would understand this ten-step life cycle and make efforts to provide the needed leadership in every step would make a difference from others and would, thus, become "truly change-oriented leaders" in organizations.

Why do organizational leaders fail?

It is not uncommon in organizations for people to occupy the leadership position by virtue of years of experience. In fact, people get selected to that position more by virtue of their experience than by the realistic assessment of their capabilities in terms of leadership skills. Experience is not the key to effective leadership. Experience would count only if the individual makes it count. There are, as the saying goes, too many people in organizations with 25 years of experience who have had one year’s experience repeated 25 times. When the leadership positions are occupied by such people in organizations, they would never be able to understand the leadership skills and strengths that would help moving the organization forward towards success. As Peter Prescription goes, in a hierarchy, every employee tends to rise to his/her level of incompetence. Over time, every post tends to be occupied by an employee who is incompetent to carry out his/her duties. It is, therefore, important to ensure that the leadership positions in organizations are occupied by people who have or have been groomed with the required knowledge and skills.

What needs to be done?

As is the case with some sectors, in defense organizations for example, people who aspire to move to management positions are identified and are given one year management training with a focus on leadership and managerial skills. The leaders are selected only among these people, whereas the rest of the people who were not considered for management training could move up only in the non-managerial position hierarchy and can never get into managerial positions. Such an approach of identifying prospective leaders and grooming them with appropriate, well-designed, long-term training that would help them take up future responsibilities should become an accepted mechanism in every organization.

That leadership skills are learnable skills, is well documented. The leadership position does not preclude one from learning and picking up the tricks of the trade. There is, therefore, a need to plan appropriate Executive Development Programmes for the leaders. Periodic upgradation of leadership skills through participation in such development programmes should become mandatory for every leader in the organizations.

It is said that the leader’s style determines about 70 per cent of the emotional climate which, in turn, drives about 30 per cent of the organizational performance. The leader’s emotions infect the organization. There is, therefore, a need to develop appropriate emotional intelligence skills among the leaders. A study to understand the emotional intelligence of leaders, efficacy and stress in organizations would give a clear indication to the need for the leaders to become “primal leaders”, which refers to the emotional dimension of the leadership.

There is a need to document what goes to make leaders by developing case studies of successful leaders in various organizations. Such research studies would document the leadership strengths that could help develop effective leaders for organizations.

“Things change, times change, leadership can make a difference… So I’m trying to think differently, not stay stuck in the past”

-George W. Bush

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