
Change Process – Phases and Pitfalls

The dual nature of organizations – being at once a **results-oriented system**, adapting itself to the environment within which it operates, and a **social system** shaped by power, groups and the interacting individuals - means that they are constantly changing, sometimes suddenly, sometimes so slowly it is hardly noticeable. They are so-called socio-technical systems.

The same holds true for organizations as for human life; **change is everywhere**, human life is marked by transformation from the cradle to the grave. In other words, it is **change** rather than a static state that characterises **life and organizations**. Technology, tools, objects, operations and contracts may be geared to continuity and constancy, but not even they can withstand the ravages of time.

The **impetus** for change in social systems comes from very different **sources**, which may lie within the organization itself (internal), or outside it (external). They operate at different **speeds**; sometimes they inch their way along, slow and barely noticeable; at other times they suddenly break over an organization. They may be turbulent and confused or more or less predictable and planned.

These factors are all linked to various **experiences**, which in turn have a major impact on the course of changes. We may experience change as an unsettling experience or as an encouraging sign. An individual's experience of change shapes his/her **attitudes** and **values**, and the transformation itself is in turn shaped by these attitudes.

- People who are **involved** in a change, are also changed by this experience, even when they are only observers rather than active players: the stargazer is pleased to see changes in the firmament, and this pleasure in turn confirms for her/him that s/he is right to stargaze.
- The term **project** and the philosophy linked to the term within the scope of international cooperation, are geared to changing individuals, communities and organizations. Newer concepts, such as open consultancy, institutional pluralism, help towards self-help, sustainability, empowerment, overcoming the belief in male domination, women's and children's perception of transformation, all point to the same issue, if we take a sober look at them: how can an **external** impetus for change join up with **internal** desire for change, and, through positive experience, usher in improved living conditions and opportunities?

Every **culture** has its own way of regulating the transition from one age to another. Cultural patterns offer security through social integration and protect individuals against the uncertainties of the future. The vector of the three types of resources provided by every culture (**support, structure and motivation**) is geared to resolving the paradox between the need for security and the search for innovation.

Western culture gives us little help in our efforts to understand a reluctance to change. Two cultural observations help to explain this:

- Part of instrumental and technical reason, the successful sub-project of the western enlightenment, is the unshakeable belief that on the time axis the past lies firmly behind

us while we move inexorably forwards on an arrow tracing an upward path. It is, however, clear that history must be seen as part of the present. During civil wars in particular we see how these have their roots in age-old conflicts and injustices visited on the fathers of the present generation and on their fathers. In the same way, positive experience helps build images across the generations.

This is perhaps best summed up by an old saying of the Aymará who live in the Andes: "The future lies behind us; the past stretches before us". The Aymará perceive the past as fertile soil to get prepared for the uncertain, unknown future. They see time as being cyclical and inconstant, and they thus reject changes which are not consistent with the past as it is relived time and time again.

- The frequency, pace, strength and extent of social change is constantly accelerating in western culture. The Frenchman Paul Virilio analyses this **acceleration** as the disappearance of the past, indeed a loss of touch with reality. Our view of the present is reduced to a tiny slit in our frenzied push forwards into the future. **Expectations**, fuelled by rates of growth, prevent us from perceiving the present as it really is. "You have clocks, but we have time!" was the soft parting shot of the director of a large American-Indian woman's organization as the Western consultant took her leave after, what had after all been a three-hour meeting.

It is immediately clear that **time** is the most important factor in the success or failure of processes to change the composition of an organization, its tasks or the way it works. These changes must be carefully planned, introduced with a high level of participation and consolidated through new routines.

In order to pay due consideration to the question of efficient organizations and how they can best cooperate, international cooperation projects must be seen as **socio-technical changes**. These changes can clearly take an open and tangible form (manifest changes) or operate as an undercurrent (latent changes).

OBSERVABILITY → Levels of change ↓	M A N I F E S T	L A T E N T
<i>Technical Change</i>	New production procedures, machinery, materials, measuring methods, ...	Expectations, criticism, voice, loss of members, lack of challenge, willingness to learn ...
<i>Social Change</i>	New tasks, division of labour, roles, decision-making, communication, cooperation, ...	Uncertainty, fear, mistrust, insecurity, rivalries, disappointment, resistance ...

In the case of **technical change** (production inputs and processes, performance and coordination dependency) to which short-term international cooperation projects often limit themselves, the second dimension of changes is often neglected: where the inputs, the technology and the tasks of an organization are modified, the people within that organization will also change, as will their relations to one another. Dyed-in-the-wool technocrats consider this a minor **irritation**, and are often surprised when, (much later), they realise how powerful the human factor is. To avoid this

sort of blindness, the transformation of social systems must be understood as a **sequence** of social **and** technical changes.

Because our experience, attitudes, values, demands and wishes go into our work, as well as our knowledge and skills, (i.e. our entire **personality**), the **latent** side of change must not be put to one side and ignored as an irritant. The challenge of organizational change is precisely to understand the **dynamics** at the two poles, technology and social systems, and the interaction between these two extremes.

According to the social scientist Kurt Lewin, **socio-technical change** is basically made up of **three phases and** certain activities and experiences are typical of these three phases:

UNFREEZE	MOVE	FREEZE
Opening to new ideas, searching for different ways of performing	Taking action Start with low hanging fruit, conform task group for each change project	Celebrating, enjoying innovation, draw attention to positive experience
Developing alternatives and seeing new opportunities	Risking experiments. Be aware: Not all change projects will be successful.	Preventing backsliding, consolidating achievements to become new routine
Negotiating and defining objectives and change projects	• Risks, making mistakes, monitor carefully and learn for next change projects	Making minor corrections, integrate innovation
Accepting uncertainty and fear	Reviewing the agreed change projects and terms of cooperation	Gearing activities to the outside world, learn from similar change projects
Accepting different expressions of silent and explicit resistance, working with it (not against it)	Learning and applying new procedures, monitor progress and time for fine tuning	

The three major **pitfalls** in organizational change can be pinpointed fairly accurately with the help of this model:

- A frequent error, committed by enthusiastic proponents of change and cool project managers alike, is the attempt to start with the **phase of change (move)**. In the euphoria of having dreamed up a solution (the Eureka experience) or in the firm belief in technical rationale, all energy is focused on achieving the target immediately. This **objectives-oriented pitfall** is deeper and more dangerous the more power and influence a person has to push through the change. The result is sobering. Suddenly one finds oneself completely alone with one's pet change, or the change, which seemed so natural and rational comes up against unexpected **resistance**.

In the course of socio-technical change, the **unfreeze** and the subsequent **freeze phases** are every bit as important as the move phase itself. From this we can conclude that the process of change must be ushered in gradually with a slow, careful phase of **exploration and information**. In the quest for solutions, mutual **trust** can blossom, and form the foundation that is essential for all participation. During this unfreeze phase, **motivation** and **acceptance** are generated vis à vis the planned change.

- A second error is the wish to change everything at once, and put all your eggs in one basket (the **all-round solution pitfall**). Where organizational changes are planned down to the last detail and then implemented in one fell swoop, there is no scope for local modifications of the individual steps.

Organizations can only be changed within the scope of an **iterative process**. Far-reaching changes must be broken down into small steps or projects to allow for modifications and corrections at the end of each step. Every individual step must be consolidated with a **stabilisation phase**. The three phases are repeated within every project phase. The curve of organizational change shown in Chart 41 represents a stairway, with the individual projects making up the steps.

- The third potential error is linked to the rejections and turbulence that accompanies the **transition** from the unfreeze phase to the process of change: the temptation is to concentrate on the enthusiasm and ignore resistance, which will sooner or later put a spanner in the works (the **success pitfall**). This transition is a **pivot**, which is a tinder box for potential crises:

The strong motivation and enthusiasm can give way to concern and fear, which is infectious: "Can it really work?" - The decision to make changes automatically brings with it the awareness of the loss of the other options discussed: "If we do "x", we can't do "y". The anger at and criticism of the first changes, which are less than perfect, triggers frustration: "At least the old system worked, now nothing works".

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