

Change Within Organizations

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Change, a topic often spoken of but one rarely understood, at least from the perspective of understanding how to bring about change. Before discussing the mechanics of bringing about change, it is important to understand why change is important.

Simply put, organizations are similar to any other living organism; they either adjust to their environment or they atrophy and die. The literature is replete with examples of great organizations that could not or would not adapt to their changing environment and now, they no longer exist. One such company was Digital Equipment Corporation, (DEC), a Fortune 50 company. In the mid '80s, DEC was the world's second largest computer company with over fourteen billion in annual sales. It held fast to being a technology driven company as that was the path to its success, its hallmark and its comfort zone.

At the same time, the market place changed to a "solutions oriented" environment. What was once DEC is now a small part of Hewlett-Packard.

Why is "change" so difficult? A simple way to understand the difficulty is to look at an example from physics. Michael Faraday coined the term "Force Field" in which the forces attempting to move in one direction are opposed by equal or greater forces in the opposite direction.

Organizational psychologist Kurt Lewin adapted that concept to a study of the dynamics of change in organizations.

Basically, there are forces for change and there are forces restraining the change in an attempt to maintain the status quo.

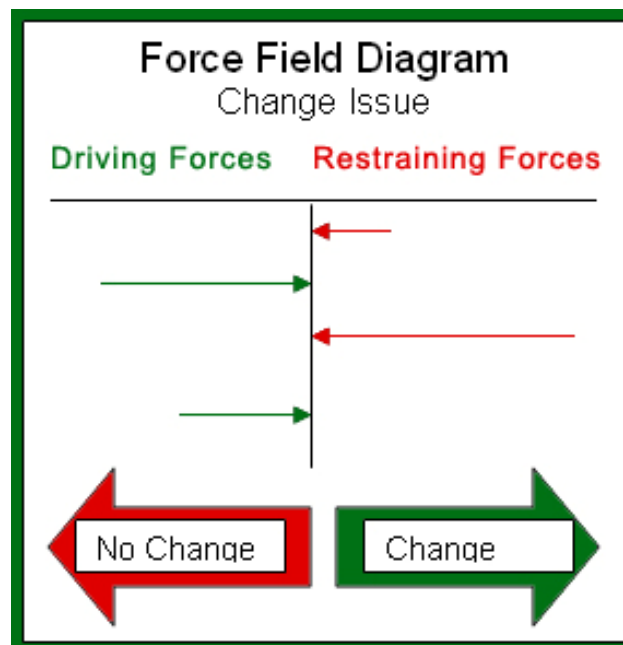
Lewin's basic theory states that when forces to change are applied; forces rise to resist that change. To effect change, it is more readily accepted if you first work to reduce the resistance.

While difficult, change within an organization is possible! Moreover, successful change and survival have identifiable characteristics.

First, and foremost, the organization recognizes the need for change. Then, it is willing to change. Forces restraining the change are identified and reduced. A commonly found restraining force is the reluctance to give up the "perceived" comfort of the present state, even when that state is clearly detrimental to the health of the organization.

Secondly, successful change depends heavily upon strong leadership. Examples of successful change efforts point to the need for leaders who recognize that change is necessary, have a vision for the future state and have the courage to see the change effort through, even when faced with internal resistance. These leaders are the key forces for change! Without these leaders, few change efforts get started, much less succeed.

One last thought; Harvard Professor Rosabeth Kantor puts it succinctly: **"If you want to truly understand something, try to change it."**



Leadership for the Future

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I'll begin by making a point that I've made many times within WBCCI both in discussions and in the Unit Leadership Workshops that I have presented; Leadership is leadership and is not significantly altered simply because we are speaking of "volunteer" organizations.

I say this for two reasons. First, look at why people join an organization. I maintain that we join any organization to meet our needs. It might be solely for a salary so that we may meet physical needs or it may be to meet sociological needs such as relationships, entertainment, achievement, etc. Some are fortunate to be part of organizations that provides both a salary and the opportunity to pursue a passion.

Second, people within organizations follow leaders they respect; leaders who take the organization in a direction that results in the organization providing value and meeting the needs of the people within the organization.

Volunteer organizations do impact the leadership dimension in one respect and consequently have different issues in staffing effective leaders. Volunteer organizations are prone to having leaders that self-select. Once they "volunteer" for a leadership position, they tend to move along through the ranks and little or no checks or gates through which they may pass only by demonstrating their effectiveness.

If you agree thus far, then it follows that "leadership" is an important factor to the survival of an organization. The issue then becomes one of determining what it is "effective" leadership.

Leadership is loosely defined as the ability to influence, motivate and enable others to contribute towards the effectiveness and success of the organization.

Many of us were taught that if we studied the great captains of industry and emulated their traits, we too would be effective leaders. However, our concept of leadership has changed significantly since the 1950's. Leadership is far too complex to have a set list of traits that will meet the requirements of all situations. This is not to say that certain competencies (traits) are not found in successful leaders. It simply implies, and justifiably, that there is a behavioral dimension to the repertoire of the effective leader and this greatly impacts the outcome of the leadership effort.

One of the earliest practitioners to advance this theory of the behavioral dimension was Fred Fiedler. According to Fiedler's Contingency Model, the leader effectiveness depended upon whether the person's natural leadership styles corresponded to the situation. While Fiedler is highly acclaimed for his works on leadership, his model has not been as highly regarded over time.

The Situational Leadership Theory was advanced by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard. Basically, they posited the theory that the effective leader was one who could adjust their style and thereby provide a leadership style needed by the organization in any given situation. Their theory categorized the styles of leadership by the amount of task-oriented behavior or people-oriented behavior exhibited by the leader. The type of behavior was dictated by the "readiness" of the followers to react effectively to accomplish prescribed goals.

A more recent theory is the Path-Goal Theory which states that some styles of leadership may be effective in some situation but not effective or even disruptive in other situations. This theory relies heavily upon the Expectancy Theory which basically states that a person's effort leading to performance is dependent upon

the expectancy that a level of performance will lead to an outcome that is of value to the individual. While this Path-goal theory has received much support, there is much to be studied. Suffice to say that theorists are in agreement that the study of leadership is complex.

Hopefully we can agree that most of the subsequent leadership theories arrive at the conclusion that an effective leadership style is one that meets the needs of the situation. Unfortunately, the issue remains that most leaders, while able to adjust, have a style at which they are most comfortable and one that fits their personality and not necessarily the needs of the organization. They, in reality, do not adjust to the situations encountered.

There are generally consistent abilities and attributes exhibited by effective leaders. A list of the more prominent traits of effective leaders is:

1. They elicit the cooperation of others.
2. They listen well.
3. They place the needs of others and the organization above their own needs.
4. They embrace responsibility.
5. They are self-regulating; they control or redirect disruptive impulses.
6. They have unwavering resolve; they will do whatever needs to be done to make the organization great. (See the often quoted *GOOD TO GREAT*.)
7. They do not confuse the authority to command with the responsibility of leadership. Command focuses on tasks whereas leadership focuses on PEOPLE.
8. They do not confuse management with leadership; managers do things right, but leaders do the right things.
9. They have a passion for the task that goes beyond aggrandizement or personal status.

You can add to this list but you cannot argue that these, as well as other traits you might add characterize the effective leaders

that you have had the good fortune to work with.

While the study of leadership is fine, there is one more element that must be present for a truly outstanding leader to emerge and that is the situation. A person with all the essential traits to be a great leader will not be that leader if there is not a situation that requires that leadership. Conversely, we have all seen situations that called for strong leadership and none emerged. So, the two must go together. If you study the life of Winston Churchill you will find that for the most part, his early life was not in any way notable. It was the situation presented by the crisis of World War II that gave Churchill the opportunity to demonstrate his great leadership.

Where does this leave us? I maintain that while we certainly do not have situation the compares with WW II, we do have a crisis facing WBCCI. It is unarguable that the Club cannot sustain the continued decline not only in the number of members, but also, in the average age of the members. It is my contention that a strong leadership is needed to bring about necessary changes to improve this situation.

Some responding to my first paper asked me to be specific as to what needs to be done. I do not believe that to be useful. It has been my goal to keep these papers free from specifics so as to not get caught up in personal feelings but rather, my goal is provoke thought and action within the current leadership of WBCCI. Therefore, I have attempted to be purposely academic. Ideally, the entire membership must face these issues but I am not able to reach that audience.

I will, in my third paper, attempt to be specific on those areas I believe needing attention or change. Since they will be solely my opinions, I will so label them and you are free to disagree with them. The solutions to these issues will remain with you.

Concerns for WBCCI

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This is the third of the papers I promised. As stated in the last paper, this will address more specifically those changes that I believe might contribute to the survival of WBCCI. Admittedly, these are my opinions and certainly open to discussion and disagreement. In fact, I welcome others thoughts as I believe that many recognize what needs to be done to assure the Club's future. The problem has been one of action, or the lack there of. At some point, we need to cease talking and get on with doing!

My comments are based upon my experience both in academia and in the practical world of organizations. To begin, I spent the first forty-four years of my life in the military, first as a dependent growing up in the military environment where my father was a senior officer, next as a young soldier for over three years, a cadet at West Point for four years and finally as an Infantry officer leading in various situations to include combat. I think I understand the military structure and structures similar to the military. I worked in a corporate environment for seven years before launching my own company. I understand the corporate environment. My company consulted on change management, so I have a grasp of the difficulties of change. Finally, my academic work is in the area of organizational behavior, management and leadership.

The 20-20 Committee

A good start is the work already in progress by the 20-20 Committee. All should read their latest report. If half of their recommendations are taken seriously, we would be on the way to returning WBCCI to the great club it once was.

Staying Focused

We should view all we do through the prism of our mission statement. In other words, what does WBCCI stand for and what is its goal. Once we have that clear, everything we do should support that goal. If it does not support that goal or worse, if it

detracts from that goal, we should cease doing it immediately. This begins with the IBT!

What is WBCCI's Goal?

WBCCI has drifted away from being a caravanning and camping club to being an organization fixated on "structure" and hierarchy. An inordinate amount of time and energy is spent on formal events that seem to benefit a few but irritate many. Just look at the emphasis on uniforms. Not only the senior managers but also their distaff side wears distinctive uniforms that further separate them from the Club members. I suspect this practice crept into our Club through the influence of former military folks. This practice has lost favor in today's military and has outlived its value to our Club if it ever was of value.

A simple review of practices that benefit and aggrandize a few but irritate many would surface issues that can be easily resolved

Leadership in WBCCI?

When we look at the leadership within WBCCI, a couple of points come to mind. One, we are content with managers and not leaders. Generally, these individuals self-select. Once having "volunteered," they are moved along to higher positions with little or no thought given to either their ability or their temperament for the positions. These folks are advanced not for their ability to lead the organization but more for their ability to manage the day-to-day activities.

We are content with managers willing and able to put on "events" and we neither expect nor demand much else from them.

Understand, this is not a criticism of these individuals, for they are providing exactly what we ask of them. The problem, if that can be said, is the Club is getting exactly what it is asking for. For the most part, this has served WBCCI well over the years. Unfortunately, that is not what WBCCI needs. Today, we should allow our leaders to focus on the needs of the organization beyond rallies.

WBCCI fosters the practice of selecting managers and not leaders. This works well when all you want, or need is the status quo. The successful manager is one who does not “rock the boat” and who ingratiates himself with the existing management structure. Successful managers maintain order and neatness in the existing organization.

Close observation of the IBT for four years leads me to recognize that there is clearly a strong norm for the behavior of the IBT members. This norm is one that rewards agreement over disagreement; one that values consensus over divergent thinking; one that maintains the status quo rather than allowing change. Moreover, the non-verbal behaviors exhibited by senior members of the IBT clearly show favor on those who “fall in line” and disdain for those who do not agree with the executive committee.

The Power structure of IBT!

The International President is certainly entitled to pick his/her treasurer and secretary. However, we should not be asked to “vote” on them so as to enable them to be voting members of the IBT. As it now stands, the executive committee holds sufficient voting power to override the Region President’s with the help of a few Region presidents who can be counted upon to follow the lead of the executive committee. This takes the power from those more closely representing the rank and file and centers it on the executive committee.

The Misuse of Rules

Certainly organizations require some structure and the constitution is a means to provide that structure and order. *Robert’s Rules of Order* is a useful tool to bring order to assemblages. However, we sometimes use both to stifle discussions and muffle viewpoints that differ from those of the senior leadership. The Constitution of WBCCI should be reviewed to insure that it contains only those points necessary to maintain our Charter; **it should be written so as to be long on spirit and short on words**. It should not be used by the IBT to block divergent opinions.

The System

There is too much emphasis on the “good ole boy” system within the Club. This follows on the comment above concerning the norms dictating how one “gets along” with the “power structure.” This practice violates all the leadership practices advocated in such recent books as *Good to Great*. This “network” begins at the Region level and gains strength as it moves upward through the system. It is very apparent at the International level. Again, I suspect that this was the “way it was done” in the structured organizations of many who volunteer for positions within WBCCI.

However, this is not the past, this is today. This nepotistic practice violates all the examples of good leadership practices. Effective leaders of today are not aloof; they work closely with their followers. There is less concern for status and perks and more concern for the accomplishment of the task and the betterment of the organization. There is less emphasis on structure and formality and more emphasis on having access to and association with the members of the organization. There is more emphasis on “what can I do to better the organization” rather than the status and perks offered by the position.

The Future

Clearly, WBCCI requires strong leadership that recognizes the issues and more importantly, is willing to address these issues. Again, many points made in the 20-20 Committee report provide a good beginning. We can only trust that the committee’s effort does not find its place with the many dust covered surveys conducted in the past.

And finally, if nothing else, I hope that these papers generate some thought and discussion. I realize that there are many more points that you may add to this paper and perhaps some you might want to delete. None-the-less, in my view these are some of the larger cultural issues that need to be addressed before we concern ourselves with tweaking the small points.

Thank you for reading them.