

# Development of human resources

## Part 5: Managing change with large-scale, real-time interventions

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*This is the fifth in a series of articles to introduce methods addressing the development of individuals and organizations through the field of human resource development.*

Many of us have been involved in activities designed to bring change and strategic planning into our organizations. We've been to training courses, to numerous meetings, and sometimes taken time off for strategic planning retreats. We talked a lot, made some plans, went back to work. But we know that little was really accomplished, that these activities had no follow-up. We felt that it was a waste of our time. It probably was.

### Large-scale, real-time strategic change

It can be different. Meaningful change can happen in organizations. Organization development—the management of change in organizations—was introduced in a previous article in this series<sup>1</sup> and is being applied in a new way to make these changes actually happen. Here are the major features of methods of large-scale, real-time change:

- Large-scale—The change involves the entire organization, meeting and working together in one place, at the same time.
- Real-time—What was formerly a slow “waterfall” process (*i.e.*, originating at the top, flowing down through the organization) is now a fast, quick response which results in immediate action taking place.
- Learning is no longer just for the individual or unit, but for the entire organization.
- Responsibility and accountability move from senior management to a mixture of senior management and the whole system.
- The change process moves from incremental change to fundamental, organization-wide change.
- Dissatisfaction is allowed and encouraged to emerge, to develop a common sharing of ideas.

- Vision—A common vision of the future is created with the buy-in and ownership by everyone in the organization.
- Action planning—Steps are taken to be sure that there is follow-up, commitment, and accountability—that change really will happen.
- Participation—Everyone throughout the organization actively participates in designing the change and in the event itself.
- Strategic—This process makes permanent changes in the organization and addresses the real problems. It is NOT a quick fix.
- Paradigm shift—It may be necessary to change the culture of the organization. This is true for major changes such as employee empowerment, changing to team management, and for organizational redesign.
- Systems approach—Meaningful change must involve the entire organization and its environment.
- Open-systems approach—All stakeholders (all individuals and groups having an interest in the changes) must be included in the planning and implementation. This includes the suppliers (inputs) and customers (outputs) of our production processes.
- Open information—Knowledge is power, so empowered employees need information. The organization's database, which was formerly limited, is now shared throughout the organization.
- Highly adaptive process—The change event is tailored by the organization to fit their culture, employees, organizational norms, management style, vision, markets, customers and other stakeholders.

The large-scale change process is unique for every organization. It has worked successfully for many Fortune 500 companies (including Ford, Boeing, and Marriott) and for smaller groups.

<sup>1</sup>Rouda, R.H. and Kusy, M.E. Jr., *Tappi J.* 78(8):253(1995).

## Case history

Here's a typical case history for a paper mill or similarly sized organization.

Senior management realized that, for long-term survival and prosperity of the company, it would be necessary to have empowered workers who were capable of, and responsible for, making their own decisions. They also felt that some type of team environment would be desirable. Knowing that effective change requires leadership with knowledge and experience in change management, they brought in external consultants with experience in designing and managing large-scale change events for organizations outside the paper industry. A planning team was created, which included management representatives and internal and external consultants.

This planning team, in turn, created a design team where representatives of the entire organization would be involved in designing the organization development intervention meeting. This design team met several times before the event. It had representation vertically among all levels of the management and workers, and also had horizontal representation across the organization. They produced a plan for a meeting that was highly adaptive and tailored to fit their needs, wants, and situation. They did not use any one specific model or consultant's approach. The team created a list of specific outcomes that they wanted from the process and circulated it for comment throughout the organization.

They created a highly structured design for a future off-site meeting of the entire organization. This was centered on the use of current adult learning techniques with an emphasis on involvement and interaction—not on information and visions presented from the top. The design team created detailed written instructions and worksheets, and appointed a logistics team to work out the details for the change event.

It took almost a year from the beginning of the process until the actual change event occurred. But when it did, it was held off-site over a consecutive three-day period. To allow everyone to participate, production was shut down for three days!

### The change conference

All of the 800 people (just about everyone) were assigned to specific tables, with eight people at each of 100 total tables in one large room! The seating arrangement ensured a maximum mixing (max-mix) of people both vertically and horizontally throughout the company. Nobody sat with anyone in their own functional group or at their own level of management. Vice presidents were mixed right in with production, engineering, secretarial, and sales and marketing personnel.

### First day — dialogue

The first day was spent developing a common database of the current reality. Views were presented by customers, management, representative workers throughout the corporation, and outside companies that had successfully completed this process

in their own industries. A process of structured listening was imposed. Working at their tables, participants proceeded to learn about each other—about their environments, constraints, daily work routines, pressures, problems, successes, values, and outside activities.

Participants were required to discuss what they heard, how they felt about it, and what meaning it had for their own situation. It was important for everyone to see the information generated by themselves and by everyone else in the organization. The company heard from its leaders, customers, and organizations outside industry that have had successes with this large-scale change process, and from its employees.

### Second day — vision

The second day was devoted to moving toward a preferred future for the organization by finding common ground among the diverse participants. The design team presented a working draft of a vision statement as a starting point for discussion. This was then subjected to open criticism and revision. Reality was brought in by having the participants work to analyze their strengths and weaknesses as well as opportunities and threats. They then proceeded to a process of organizational diagnosis—of identifying the problems that are impeding change and progress.

A discussion and clarification of the mission identified what business the company was in, and what business they should be in, considering their stakeholders' needs, resources, and competitive environment. This reinforced some existing operational practices and suggested new ones to be added and others to be eliminated. The "max-mix" seating arrangement was then reconfigured to group people together by functional groups (*e.g.*, engineering, management, technical, production, marketing). These groups prepared and sent messages to the other groups, covering what they appreciate about each other and what they need from the others to help them do their jobs more productively.

### Third day — action planning

If this was to be more than an informative exercise, the words had to be converted into actions. The last day was devoted to setting strategy, gathering and processing feedback on this strategy, and especially on action planning to secure commitments to make the proposed strategy develop into reality. Written commitments were made for the entire organization, for the functional groups, and by the individuals. A combination of individual, table-group, and plenary work was used to ensure that the commitments were heard, relevant, and agreed on. These objectives were specific, measurable, realistic, and achievable.

### Outcomes and results

- Understanding—People left with a better understanding of the roles, responsibilities, and realities of others throughout the organization.

- Cooperation—With this new understanding, the organization became a unified team. Much of the internal competition and complaining was reduced or eliminated.
- Simultaneous change—Everything moved forward at once, because of the coordination and implementation of changes throughout the organization. Groups no longer postponed changes while waiting for others to move first.
- Empowerment—People now had knowledge of the complete organization which would allow them to make decisions on their own, reflecting an understanding of the big picture.
- Implementation team—A “max-mix” team, again representative of the entire organization, was created to continue the change process and motivate everyone to follow up on their commitments.
- Actions—Changes actually took place because of the specific commitments which were prepared to include assignments of who, what, and when.
- Buy-in and ownership—Everyone in the organization supported the change efforts because they had been actively involved in the action planning and goal-setting and because their viewpoints and ideas had been heard. This may not have happened so quickly and effectively with change managed exclusively from the top.
- Creativity—Individuals and teams now were able to apply original, creative ideas, with less interference from organiza-

tional politics and managerial restraints and with less fear of reprisals for failure.

- Spirit—People now enjoyed their working environment, feeling that they were important, that their ideas counted, and that they would be heard.
- Paradigm shift—The organization was never the same again. A new spirit of cooperation and individual responsibility permeated the organization.

### It can work for your company

The above scenario is only one possible implementation of large-scale, real-time change management. An actual process would be designed by the organization to fit its staff, stakeholders, and situation. These large-group, real-time strategic change processes have worked, and worked very well, in other industries. There is no reason they can't work in the paper industry. Who will be the first to try it? **[ ]**

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### For further reading

1. Bunker, B. and Alban, B., J. *Applied Behavioral Sci.* 28(4):1992, p. 579.
2. Jacobs, R.W., *Real Time Strategic Change*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco, 1994.
3. Senge, P., *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, Currency-Doubleday, New York, 1994.
4. Weisbord, M. and Janoff, S., *Future Search—An Action Guide to Finding Common Ground in Organizations and Communities*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco, 1995.