Update September 2005- Challenges of Change II

Recently, someone reminded me, again, of some of the formative change work of John Kotter that has supported the thinking and action of those of us in the change field. Kotter's initial work can be summarized via the following eight key learnings:

1. Establishing a sense of urgency
   - Examining market and competitive realities and define the business case
   - Identifying and discussing crises, potential crises, or major opportunities

2. Forming a powerful guiding coalition
   - Assembling a group with enough power to lead the change effort
   - Encouraging the group to work together as a team

3. Creating a vision
   - Creating a vision to help direct the change effort
   - Developing strategies for achieving that vision

4. Communicating vision
   - Using every vehicle possible to communicate the new vision and strategies
   - Teaching new behaviors by the example of the guiding coalition

5. Empowering others to act on the vision
   - Getting rid of obstacles to change
   - Changing systems or structures that seriously undermine the vision
   - Encouraging risk taking and nontraditional ideas, activities, and actions

6. Planning for and creating short-term wins
   - Planning for visible performance improvements
   - Creating those improvements
   - Recognizing and rewarding employees involved in the improvements

7. Consolidating improvements and producing still more change
   - Using increased credibility to change systems, structures, and policies that don't fit the vision
   - Hiring, promoting, and developing employees who can implement the vision
   - Reinvigorating the process with new projects, themes, and change agents

8. Institutionalizing new approaches

- Articulating the connections between the new behaviors and corporate success
- Developing the means to ensure leadership development and succession

What I asked myself after re-reading Kotter's eight key change principles are two questions,

- ***"What would I change from his list of eight key factors?" and***
- ***"What has changed in the environment that would cause those leading change to think and act differently?"***

I would delete nothing from the list that Kotter developed about 15 years ago. I have found repeatedly that all eight of these factors are essential to ensure the success of IT change projects. Some of the eight factors, though, I have found to be more important than the others and we want to highlight them for those seeking successful ITIL endeavors. The two factors from the list of eight that repeatedly need more attention to ensure success are:

- #2- form a powerful guiding coalition and
- #5- empowering others to act on the vision.

In practice, no real changes occur successfully unless the leadership team or guiding coalition actively supports the change effort (*Kotter factor #2- form a powerful guiding coalition)* in a **sustainable** way. This was stated in our original article but what does it mean? It means that those with recognizable formal authority actively support the change effort from beginning to end. People still listen to those in charge. The necessary support comes in a variety of forms:

- actively communicating their support and reasoning for the change effort,
- procuring the right people resources to get the job done well and
- providing the dollars necessary to achieve the objectives.

At other times the support required is that of influence:

- Stating the case for change to other key decision makers so that they actively support the effort or at minimum do nothing to get in the way.

The other key factor is that of sustainability: Continuing to influence and support the ITIL effort until successful completion of the project. Sustained influence over time is not necessarily something that every leader or change sponsor perceives as requisite for success. Our experience is that it is a critical success factor.

The second factor of the eight that I have essential to the success of every change project is *number #5- empowering others to act on the vision*. Most of the initial change management work and literature focused on resistance to change

and finding ways to minimize the resistance or to get the impacted stakeholders to let go of their resistance. Over time, I have found that approach to be burdensome and not all that successful. It is simple: people resist changing because they do not want to change.

I found that designing change efforts based on the ideas of Dick Axelrod (Terms of Engagement) and Diana Whitney (The Power of Appreciative Inquiry) to be more fruitful and impactful. My direct experience is that it is more productive to examine and articulate the case for meaning or why the change matters than to attempt to confront or overcome the resistance to change. Rather than fighting with or against what people don't want I have found it more "resultsful" to present the case for change and to give people the chance to understand and accept it. Invariably, a critical mass will support the change if you have a well thought out case for change that includes the logical business case and the opportunity for people to express their sentiments. Once they understand and accept the case for change is the new way to go you can use past successes, attributes and strengths of the people and the organization to design more successful and easily implementable change solutions.

The other key addition to Kotter's seminal work that I find necessary to add comes from the nature of the development of ITIL itself. ITIL was born because of the increased need for increased rigor, clarity of process and cost effectiveness in IT. In the recent past, both Wal-Mart and Dell have captured great efficiencies and cost savings by initiating major process improvements to their IT functions. These changes have been predicated on three core principles:

1) run a centralized information system.
2) have common systems and common platforms
3) be merchants first and technologists second

What does their success imply for those leading other successful IT change efforts? In my experience it strongly suggests that successful change efforts integrate in their planning and implementation the impacts and influences on people (merchants first), process (centralized information system) and technology (common systems and platforms) and that they each receive the appropriate level of attention to ensure success. An exclusive focus on technology, as has happened in many places in the past, or improvements that don't focus sufficiently on process improvement, are not likely to capture the range of benefits and impacts that those designing the change hope to achieve. ITIL is based on the premise that IT processes must be improved. It is our experience that the right blend of focus on change in technology, process improvement and engagement of the people who will need to change creates the "special sauce" that cultivates successful ITIL change efforts.

Kotter in my opinion laid the groundwork for successful change efforts. Many change agents and leaders put his principles into practice and found them to be

pretty effective. What we have learned overtime, especially in the realm of IT and ITIL efforts, is that there are three core refinements that can and should be applied to informed ITIL efforts:

- Increase focus on sustained support or sponsorship. Without the decision maker(s) providing all the resources and influence required throughout you are diminishing your chances for success.
- Refocus the change paradigm from resistance to change to one of achieving a positive vision based on engagement through a thoughtfully articulated business case and case for meaning. In short, people support best what they design or when they are given the opportunity to contribute to the design

- Design a change approach that appropriately considers an integrated approach that always considers people, process and technology and how they fit best together given the specifics of your context, conditions and culture.

While most of this September addition is simply a refinement to the original article, we think it is an important refinement that can make a significant difference for you. Just adding a little salt to your steak is also just a refinement but sometimes that little bit of salt makes a big difference to the final product.