

Implementation

Implementing the plan is a time of transition into a new way, a new state of being for the organization. Managing that transition is the task.

Stay Focused on the Vision-Goals-Direction

The primary aspects of the plan need to be kept in front of the organization – post it, frame and hang it, expect people to know it, have leaders present it again and again.

Leadership

The leadership task includes:

- Keeping the new direction in front of the organization
- Showing commitment oneself (including dealing with one's own internal resistance to the change or one's role in facilitating the change)
- Asking others to commit themselves.
- Managing the political process involving various interests affected by the change.

Monitor the Process of Change

1. The organization needs a way to monitor the change process. This might include
 - Providing time at the board or management team meetings to review progress.
 - Having a team gather information and propose adjustments.
 - Using a consultant to work with key leaders in reflecting on the implementation process.
2. Monitoring during implementation is an early form of the evaluation stage. You want to review all of the same issues you will deal with during the evaluation.
3. Many difficulties in the implementation phase can be traced to unresolved issues in earlier stages of the process, e.g., not involving relevant people in the entry or diagnosis steps.

Communicate – Communicate – Communicate

The implementation phase is a time to over-communicate. Keep repeating the vision, why we are making these changes, what is being changed, and what is not being changed. (People cope better if they know some things will remain stable, for now.) Provide regular updates on progress and difficulties.

Include People

Include people in implementing the plan. This can help reduce resistance, increase commitment, and provide needed creativity and energy. Leaders need to seek ways for people to play a role in the new direction.

Care needs to be taken in regard to the few people who are unable or unwilling to collaborate. Leaders need to beware of the danger of getting drawn into an emotional drama in which they try to convince or even force the strongest resisters to join in the effort. The whole organization can be held hostage to the sabotage of a few people. While leaders work overtime trying to bring them along, the organization remains stuck.

Help People to Define Success

Defining success during the implementation stage is critical to helping people stay motivated. For that to happen it's important to take initiative in defining the signs of success at this stage.

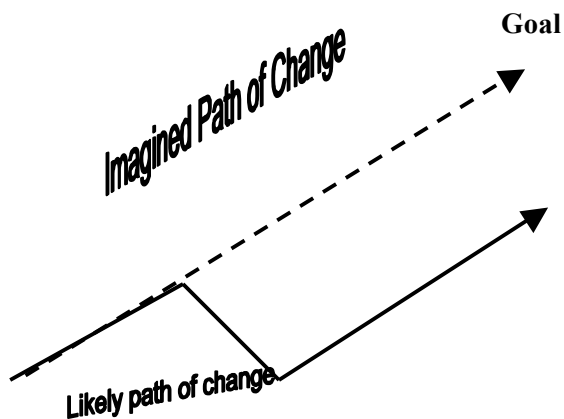
- Acknowledge publicly each movement toward the vision, each event that advances the new direction.
- Be clear that success does not mean fewer issues, problems or opportunities to deal with, but new and different ones. Remind people of this process. As old issues fade and new ones emerge, hold it up as progress.
- Success will mean an increase in our standards, expectations and hopes. This is likely to show itself as an increased dissatisfaction with the organization or the progress being made. Also there is a phenomenon noted by Maslow of complaining shifting from “grumbles” about small things to “meta grumbles” about broader, long term issues.

It Will Not Go the Way You Imagined

Implementation will not go the way you imagined it would. Even if leaders have told themselves this “truth”; it will still come as a shock to experience the confusion, resistance, anxiety, slowness, twists and turns and unanticipated consequences of the change process.

One way of understanding what is happening is the “nose-dive syndrome”; another is in terms of resistance to change.

Nose-dive Syndrome



Karl Albrecht suggests that there is a “nose-dive syndrome that frequently happens when implementing major change. It goes this way – the leadership assumes that all will go well in the change effort. In fact things get worse. People resist, grumble, fight and generally play the victim or cynic in regard to the proposed change. Resources that were to be available are slow in coming. Key people get caught up in other demands and give less attention to the effort. Productivity and employee or member satisfaction declines instead of improves.

The nose-dive doesn't always occur, but when it does, the organization's leaders face the choice:

- “this was a mistake; we misjudged what was possible” or
- “our reading of the situation and the possibilities is mostly correct; there will need to be some adjustments; but if we stay with it we will reach the hoped-for results.”

Resistance to Change

Resistance is likely as changes begin to take shape and impact people's lives or that impact is anticipated. What may have been a vague uneasiness earlier becomes a fear of loss. Some who were initially in favor of change may become restive. The sources of resistance are likely to be multiple – social networks are disrupted, influence patterns change, reward systems are rearranged, there may be a sense of uncertainty about the future. The organizational culture – “the way we are and how we do things here” – may be seen as threatened.

Resistance will be reduced if the issues identified earlier are effectively addressed, e.g., clear vision/direction, leadership, a monitoring/management process, communication and including people. It is also important to listen to the resistance. There may be information in the resistance that can improve the change project.

Reinforcing and Stabilizing Change

Systems have a tendency to function like rubber bands. They are stretched under pressure, once the pressure is released they snap back to the original shape. Organizations tend to revert to old behavior patterns unless efforts are made to institutionalize the changes. For example:

- Have a team continue monitoring and reinforcing the change.
- Key leaders need to “check in” occasionally on how well the new ways have become part of the organization's life.
- Train people in the skills and knowledge needed to competently function in the new way.
- Provide adequate resources.
- Change related policies and practices.
- Reward teams and individuals for making the new way work.
- If necessary, remove extreme resisters from positions of influence.