

Organizational Change: The Dirty Little Secret

By **Michael** Ridley

Organizational change is good. It is also difficult, and getting it right is important.

What is the biggest threat to successful organizational change? What typically stands in the way?

The answer is easy: it's me. Me. The Chief Librarian, CEO, Senior Administrator, person in charge.

I have witnessed (and participated in) many organizational change initiatives that have floundered largely because the senior leader in the library (let's use CEO to describe this role) doesn't really understand what they are doing. Organizational change must have very tangible outcomes; staff must be repositioned, departments or units created or removed, new services started, old services retired, budgets realigned. But I think we all know that the process of organizational change is what is most valuable. And that's the problem with people like me. Typically we don't get it; CEOs think implementing the right model is the ultimate or important goal. We focus on the outcome not the process.

Of course, you have to give us CEOs a break. We are control freaks, know-it-alls, Type As. Not that there's anything wrong with that. However, it can make us focus on ego and hence power. And that's where the blinders come on and the whole thing falls off the rails. Don't get me wrong. The motivation the CEOs have is real; they have enormous pressure to justify to their board (or boss) that the library's resources (human, financial, capital) are used wisely and effectively. They have a bottom-line responsibility that is clear and unequivocal. Get mired in the touchy-feely world of group dynamics and staff self-actualization, and they will find themselves "available for

taking a different view of libraries in transition new leadership opportunities" (i.e., looking for work). I typify the very leaders I'm describing. I'm in therapy; this column is part of the 12-step program.

So how do you tell your CEO about this? Here are some thoughts to pass on to them.

First things first.

All that stuff about values and vision and mandate. It turns out it isn't fluff after all. It matters; it really matters. You can't deliver values to an organization: they need to be uncovered. The values are the foundation upon which you know yourselves and will later build a renewed organization. Short circuit this stage, blow it away, spend 10 minutes on it, use the last set of values your predecessor had (or the ones on your website that no one has accessed for five years) and there you have the first step in a disastrous organizational change process. Stick a fork in it – you're done already. Values, vision, and mandate are the internal guidance systems of a library. Sure they all start to look the same after awhile but the process and the discussion that brings them to the surface are essential. It is where you demonstrate trust, deal with conflict (difference), and build commitment.

Next is time and engagement.

Organizational change is a process. It must be planned out with timelines, deadlines, and deliverables. The timeframe is not a single-day retreat, or over the weekend, or even a solid month of effort. While the size of the organization will impact this, change takes months, even years. Remember, it's not about rearranging the deck chairs; that's the easy part. It's about engaging the hearts and minds of staff. If you want to inculcate personal leadership, effective communication, teamwork, and performance management (all critical elements of organizational change), then allocating appropriate time is key. It's not just that there is lots to do. A critical piece is sufficient time for reflection and personal growth. We have to learn to be different; we need to practice the skills and test the new perspectives. Participation is the prerequisite to engagement; and engagement is your objective. Trust the team. They will raise the issues that concern you; they will identify the directions that you want to explore. If they have a voice they will accept your voice (especially if you subsequently want to challenge some of their ideas or

issues). If you want superficial change, by all means announce the new organization on Monday morning and get on with it. Your successor can clean up the mess.

Finally, we have the consultant.

Everyone knows that CEOs hire consultants to deliver the message they don't want to deliver themselves. Consultants are the hand puppets of the CEO. Perhaps. Sometimes. Not in this case. First, engage a good consultant in organizational development. Second, listen to them. If you selected a good one they will tell you what you should hear and not what you want to hear. They will test you in the early stages of the relationship; if you are found wanting, they will decline the work. Remember, their measure of success is your successfully changed organization. They don't want a control-freak CEO jeopardizing their reputation. In any good consultant relationship there is a commitment moment. The consultant says to the CEO: "Are you fully prepared to do this? Are you going to follow through and deliver on your promises? If so, full speed ahead. If not, we're finished." If your organizational development consultant doesn't have this conversation with you, get another one.

As CEOs we steward a library through a particular phase of its history. Part of that responsibility is effective organizational change and development. It's hard work and we stumble sometimes. There, the secret is out of the bag; I feel better already.

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