

4 STEPS TO ENSURE YOUR SENIOR TEAM IS READY FOR CHANGE

Christine Baker

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You have agreed your new corporate vision and strategy. Now it is time for strategy execution. But is your senior executive team fully-equipped to deal with the scope of the changes which lie ahead?

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Introduction: Why Is This Important?

When organizations embark on major change initiatives (the kind that lead to large-scale transformation) the temptation exists to focus on the intricacies of project management at the expense of big-picture thinking and planning. Often the urgency of the change program diverts resources and attention from this planning phase, as executives are pressurised into implementation. In addition, assumptions are made about the critical success factors of change programs and the role that project managers play in securing success.

The role that the senior executive team, headed by the CEO, plays in creating the context and climate for successful transformational change can be overlooked. The strategic aspect of change management needs to be the solid foundation upon which to create the operational framework. This applies not only to the initial planning phase but also to ensuring the long-term sustainability of the change program.

If you are planning to embark on such large-scale change, here are four critical steps of preparation which apply to you and your senior team:

1. Ensure Your Team Has the Right Mind-Set for Change

Change programs can be de-railed at any organizational level for any reason. However, if the senior team is not united in its appreciation and acceptance of the need for change then their lack of support for the initiative will inevitably trickle down the organization. Individual members of the senior team need to question their own commitment to the change process.

For the change to have long-term sustainability and to become embedded in the organizational culture, the senior team needs to be clear at the outset about future implications. What aspects of their culture or infrastructure will help or hinder the strategic intent of the change program? What role will their personal feelings and perspectives play? How will they need to change at a personal level in the way they view the world, in their habits and behaviours?

2. Create Program Sponsorship in the Senior Team

Program Sponsorship is different from project management. The Program Sponsor leads the change initiative at a strategic level, creating context for the project manager. This involves:

- The role as **Initiator**: Setting the long-term vision, values and context for the proposed transformational change.

The Sponsor creates the infrastructure (stakeholder engagement, resource allocation of people, budgets, equipment) which forms the basis of the Project Manager's mandate to lead the operational phase of the change program.

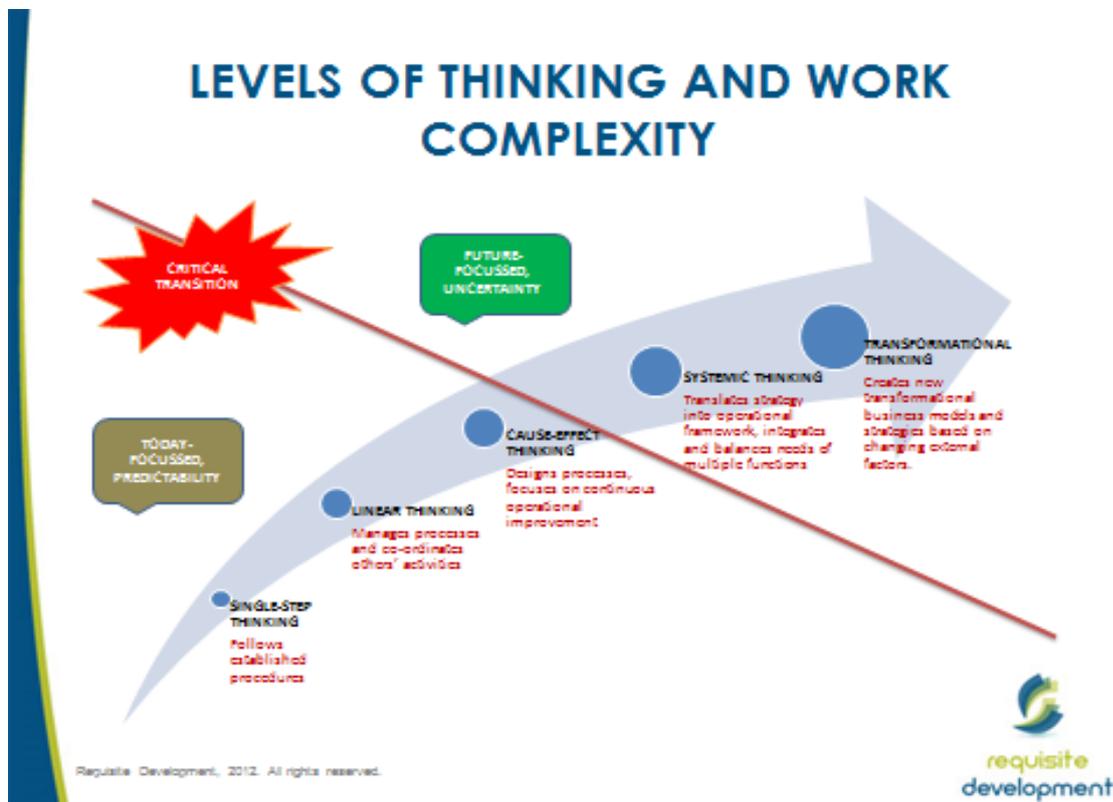
- The role as **Sustainer**: Supporting the project manager with adjustments in resources and using their Change Sponsor position to ensure continuous political backing from key stakeholders.

Who would be the Change Program Sponsor in your organization? In a small-to-medium size company this would most likely be the CEO. However, in larger organizations where there could be multiple change programs then one senior executive from the C-suite would be selected (on the assumption that the CEO remains as the overall political supporter of the program).

3. Ensure That the Program Sponsor Has the Right Level of Cognitive Capability to Cope With the Complexity of the Program

Program Sponsors (indeed, project managers and team members) are often selected primarily on their technical skilled knowledge and experience. However, this is only part of the overall capability requirements for any role.

Program Sponsors need to look beyond daily operational issues into the future, with its uncertainties and ambiguities. They need to take a systemic view of the change program, and understand how different paths of action must be integrated into a coherent whole. They are constantly required to consider compromises – trading off short-term operational needs against strategic goals. The more complex the program – for example, in a global outreach in a multi-national organization – the higher the level of cognitive capability required. Higher-level complex programs may need transformational thinking capability:



For more information about these Levels of Cognitive Capability and their implications, visit:

<http://www.requisite-development.com/free-articles>

4. Help Your Senior Team Build Emotional Resilience

No change program comes without emotional fallout. It would be impossible to avoid negative side-effects, even if they only add up to changing certain aspects of work processes or asking people to modify their habits. Most transformational change initiatives incur some job losses or redeployments, jobs which shrink or expand in scope and teams which may need to be split and dispersed in some way. Redundancies are painful, as much for the 'survivors' who stay as for those who have to seek a new position. Very few people genuinely welcome change with all its consequences – our brains are wired, to some extent, to avoid pain, fear and uncertainty.

With emotions running high and affected employees looking around for someone to blame it can be tempting for senior executives to stay in the relative safety of their offices to avoid dealing with the fallout. But a feature of successful change programs requires those executives to show their human side and to be courageous in facing up to the challenges presented to them. They may need coaching in how to give bad news and how to handle personal criticism. They will need to manage

their own emotions and reactions before being able to confront those of other employees. Acquiring a thick skin does not mean they will stop caring; rather, they will benefit from being able to create a certain degree of emotional distance in order to be able to help others in turmoil.

Summary

Change is now a constant factor in organizational life. The capability of the senior executive team to handle the complexity of transformational change is recognised as a serious critical success factor and a high priority for action by CEOs who have identified that their team is not necessarily well-prepared for such large-scale change programs.

In response to this challenge we have created a Transformational Thinking Program for senior executives who are planning to execute new change strategies and who are facing the following challenges:

- they are constantly challenged by competing and changing strategies and priorities
- they need to balance short-term and long-term goals
- they are under pressure to find innovative solutions for recurring organizational problems
- their role demands synergy and collaboration between the different departments they manage
- they are responsible for leading implementation of complex change programs
- they feel ill-equipped to deal with the human side of change

If you think your senior team has some way to go before they are ready to execute strategic change, contact us now for a free 30-minute Discovery Session to explore how the program could adapted for your specific needs.

To your success,

Christine Baker

Christine Baker
Managing Director
Requisite Development Ltd.