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Rhapsody in Change

By Dennis T. Jaffe, Ph.D. & Cynthia D. Scott, Ph.D.

Peter Drucker and Max Depree used music metaphors to refer to the complex interdependence and subtle shadings of the interaction between leadership and action. Leadership meets its deepest challenge when it must face up to the need for a deep, major, and rapid shift in the whole fabric of the organization that doesn't seem to welcome it. The two of us were called in by one of the largest consulting firms to help them manage the dynamics of their major change projects—change projects, they admitted (as have many others), that were failing at a rate of about three out of four.

After studying their most successful and their most problematic companies, we came up with a score for change. First of all, a major change has three movements: *mobilizing*, *designing*, and *transforming*. Not exactly hot news, but the fact remains that the activities of the first and last movement—creating a climate for change to happen and taking on the tasks of embedding it in the capability and structure of the organization—are often pushed aside, as the focus is on the “deliverables” of complex and untested “plans.” If you take the time at the start to introduce the themes, bring all the elements into harmony, and preview some of the dramas to come, you will have created the framework for the intense and dramatic creativity of the second design movement.

Just as there are many different classes of instruments to bring together, the score integrates independent activities of four dimensions of the organization:

1. **At each stage of change, the leadership has to be engaged:** defining parameters, providing resources, and keeping the goal and the inspiration alive. In our initial research, we found that leaders often felt too busy and wanted to delegate change. Some even wanted to outsource it to consultants.
2. **At the next level is the change team:** the key group of people who navigate, bring pieces together, focus energy, cast a net, and convene many design and learning teams. The team often contains external and internal change navigators who look after the environment in which the change takes place, as well as operational leaders, outside design experts, and up-and-coming talents from many sites and functions. The change team cannot become isolated in an ivory tower. They must be in continual exchange and communication with the multiple layers of employee involvement, continually reminding them, informing them, and engaging them in the processes of change. Many large group events keep the flow of the process alive and real throughout the organization, even as the design is evolving.

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3. **And finally, organizational structures**—reward and performance-management systems, recruiting and training, and links between groups—*have to be brought in line with the new imperatives.*

The final score of a change rhapsody is complex and multi-featured. It must be extensively choreographed, hence the score, which entails many complex activities over time. But by putting them in a graphic score, rather than a flow chart, we also highlight the community involvement, the interchange, and the public nature of real change. Change is an exchange that evolves as it is designed; it is not controlled by a few or from the top. The graphic markers in the score indicate various community events, times where small or large groups come together and produce a piece of work—a solo if you like. These markers may include communication roll-out plans and redesigns of systems, but the plans are by-products rather than the actual outcome. If there is a plan or a new design, but people aren't clear, ready, and prepared for it, then the change will remain a wish rather than a reality.

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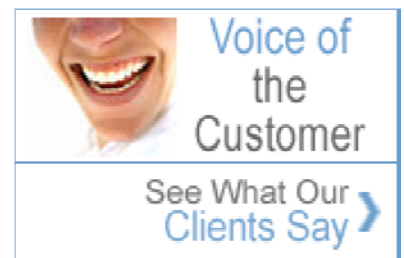
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