Patterns of Successful Organizational Change

Hal G. Rainey
Department of Public Administration and Policy
School of Public and International Affairs
The University of Georgia

Sergio Fernandez
School of Public and International Affairs
Indiana University

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• A review of research on successful large-scale organizational change, seeking points of consensus among researchers and expert observers.

• The research consists mainly of case studies and expert observations, and produces very general generalizations.

• The generalizations have value because they are easier said than done, and because change leaders often omit them or do not succeed at fulfilling them.
### Determinants of Successful Organizational Change in the Public Sector

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposition</th>
<th>Sub-propositions</th>
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| Ensure the need. Leaders must verify and persuasively communicate the need for change. | • Convince organizational members of the need and desirability for change.  
• Craft a compelling vision of change.  
• Employ written and oral communication and forms of active participation to communicate and disseminate the need for change. |
| Provide a plan. Leaders must develop a course of action or strategy for implementing change. | • Devise a strategy for reaching the desired end state, with milestones and a plan for achieving each one of them.  
• The strategy should rest on sound causal theory for achieving the desired end state. |
| Build internal support and overcome resistance. Leaders must build internal support and reduce resistance to change through widespread participation in the change process and other means. | • Encourage participation and open discussion to reduce resistance to change.  
• Avoid criticism, threats, and coercion aimed at reducing resistance to change.  
• Commit sufficient time, effort, and resources to manage participation effectively. |
| Ensure top management support and commitment. An individual or group within the organization should champion the cause for change. | • An “idea champion” or guiding coalition should advocate for and lead the transformation process.  
• Individuals championing the change should have the skill to marshal resources and support for change, to maintain momentum, and to overcome obstacles to change.  
• Political appointees and top-level civil servants should support the change. |
| Build external support. Leaders must develop and ensure support from political overseers and key external stakeholders. | • Build support for change among political overseers.  
• Build support for change among interest groups with a stake in the organization. |
| Provide resources. Successful change requires adequate resources to support the change process. | • Provide adequate financial, human, and technological resources to implement change.  
• Avoid overtaxing organizational members.  
• Capitalize on synergies in resources. |

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**Table 1 (Continued)**

**Determinants of Successful Implementation of Organizational Change in the Public Sector**

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Institutionalize change. Managers and employees must effectively institutionalize changes.

- Employ a variety of measures to displace old patterns of behavior and institutionalize new ones.
- Monitor the implementation of change.
- Institutionalize change before shifts in political leadership cause commitment to and support for change to diminish.

Pursue comprehensive change. Leaders must develop an integrative, comprehensive approach to change that achieves subsystem congruence.

- Adopt and implement a comprehensive, consistent set of changes to the various subsystems of the organization.
- Analyze and understand the interconnections between organizational subsystems before pursing subsystem congruence.

- Widespread belief in the need for change
- Clear, sustained leadership, including support from top executives
- Broad participation in diagnosing problems and planning the change
- Flexible, incremental implementation, involving experimentation, feedback, and adaptation
- Institutionalization: building on prior success to institutionalize change
CONDITIONS FOR A SUCCESSFUL CHANGE IN A FEDERAL AGENCY

1. A durable power center, committed to successful change
   - Strong, stable leadership by career civil servants
   - An internal change agent (career agency executive) with sufficient authority and resources
   - Active, creative bureau staff

2. Appropriate timing for collective support
   - A political “window of opportunity”
   - Political overseers (congressional committee heads) who are supportive but not interventionist
   - Political sophistication of agency leaders and staff—effective management of relations with Congress and oversight agencies (OPM, GSA)
   - Strategies that blend sincere employee involvement with decisive exercise of authority

3. A comprehensive, clear, realistic alternative process
   - A long-term change strategy, using group processes to develop new structures
   - A major structural reform, focused on measurable outputs, that decentralizes operational responsibility
   - Reasonable clarity about the nature and objectives of the new structure and process

Determinants of Lasting Change in Public Organizations

- Crafting a compelling vision for change and persuasively communicating the need for change.
- Transforming the vision for change into a course of action.
- Reducing resistance to change through widespread participation and other means.
- Top management support and leadership.
- Resource munificence.
- Support from political overseers and key external stakeholders.
- Adopting and institutionalizing change.
- Developing an integrative, comprehensive approach to change—achieving sub-system congruence.
Patterns of Successful Organizational Change: Additional Sources


