



Implementing change in public sector organizations

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to review the importance of various change principles in assisting change in three public sector organizations.

Design/methodology/approach – The researchers carried out interviews and used focus groups in assessing the principles and strategies which would be more useful.

Findings – The interview and focus group results in three public sector organizations suggest that forming a guiding coalition might be one of the most important principles to observe.

Research limitations/implications – The research data used for illustration are based on case evidence and the anecdotal interpretation of change in three settings. The paper does not claim to offer a scientific conclusion.

Practical implications – The goal is to encourage a discussion on whether or not certain principles or strategies should be more important.

Originality/value – The paper reviews the literature on change and reviews these principles in real experiences. Much of the other literature is conceptual.

Keywords Change management, Organizational change, Organizational development

Paper type Case study

Implementing change in public sector organizations

Change in the public sector often involves resolving conflicting interests. In one city, a senior citizens initiative was embroiled in conflict for over 15 years. City officials worked with developers to design an assisted-living complex with 50 living units and office space on the ground floor. Everyone agreed in principle that it was a badly needed development. Several plans were submitted and rejected by council because of pressure from a very vocal and organized community association. Over the period, there were six public hearings on plans submitted by various developers. Angry citizens spoke out. “How would you like this building in your neighborhood?” Citizens agreed with the concept of the new building as long as it wasn’t next door to where they were living.

Public sector changes may not be more difficult than those in the private sector, but they are different. Private sector changes might be just as complex, geographically diverse and impact just as many people. The unique thing about the public sector is that change takes place in a fishbowl and the agents of change are neither the biggest nor most aggressive fish in the bowl. Change is not simply an exercise in convincing the various stakeholders to get on side; it is an exercise in negotiation and compromise. Doing what is “right” in government is a matter of responding to conflicts and negotiating with various interests much more than it is for a corporate executive trying to implement a strategy.



In 1970, Stan Herman introduced the idea of the Organizational Iceberg to depict the strength of the informal and hidden elements in organization life (Herman, 1970). He represented the formal organization as the buildings, equipment, and people working in a common area, a relatively small part of the iceberg above the water line. The informal, hidden organization was represented by the far larger bulk below the waterline. It included the values, norms, attitudes, and expectations of people who work within an organization. The strength of the iceberg analogy is that it illustrates the relative importance and size of the informal part of an organization. The difficulty with the iceberg analogy is it suggests the under-the-water mass is similar in all organizations. That has not been our experience.

The size and strength of the informal organization can vary dramatically in public sector organizations. Police forces, military organizations and churches are examples of agencies where the informal organization and its underlying values and norms will shape the organization and the way it carries out its mission. The difficulty of change in such organizations was illustrated when the Canadian Navy was told to change the color of their uniforms from the traditional navy blue to dark green. In the hearts of navy personnel, there was a high resistance to change. Navy personnel never gave up their desire to wear the navy blue worn by the rest of the world. When the opportunity to change back to navy blue occurred, it took place with blinding speed and enthusiasm.

In other areas of the public service, it is possible to find equally strong cultural values and norms. Prison systems, post offices and departments of motor vehicles may be dominated by long service employees with deeply entrenched behavioral culture, which may either facilitate or impede change. Changes which are aligned with the organizational culture may be embraced with enthusiasm and implemented quickly. Military organizations can quickly adapt to a wide variety of challenges from fighting forest fires to fighting wars. The change in direction is rapid and dramatic and is reinforced by the organizational culture. Indeed, it is the strength of the culture that makes this type of rapid change possible. On the other hand, changes that threaten the underlying culture are extremely difficult to implement.

Other agencies, like the central service agencies of government, may be more fluid and transient and have less powerful cultures. In a new organization or one with high turnover the underlying culture below the water line in our iceberg analogy might not be an impediment to change. At the same time, lack of cohesion or a sense of shared purpose may limit ultimate performance. This informal organization is not just dead weight; it is a powerful determinant of ultimate performance. It is the difference between a championship team that has built a level of trust and confidence through a long season and a team of all stars brought together for a single game. Understanding both the strength of the cultural norms and the degree to which they are aligned with the proposed change is essential.

While there are several principles, which provide a holistic framework for introducing change (Gilbert and Bower, 2002; Kaplan and Norton, 2006; Ulrich, 1998, Kotter, 2007), we might need a better understanding of how certain principles might be more useful in settings where the informal culture is strong. This paper summarizes a number of principles based on the change literature and offers a suggestion for why certain principles might be more important than others. Given that our specific

applications were in public sector environments, we are highlighting principles that we found more relevant to public sector cultures.

Principles for changing public sector organizations

We attempted to develop a list of change principles based on a review of the popular and research literature on organization change. The resulting nine principles are also based on the practical and academic experience of the authors and, understandably, our review is subjective. It reflects our recent experiences in using the Balanced Scorecard in implementing change in various public sector organizations. This experience relates to a variety of organizations in the health care field, local government, cross-jurisdictional programs and social service agencies.

Table I summarizes nine principles which we felt were important in implementing changes in contexts where there were strong cultural norms and where commitment of organizational participants was important to the success of the change. Some of the leading questions under each principle can be used in a group setting to assess the degree managers believe the principles are in use. These questions begin with the phrases: "To what extent is there . . ." or "Is there a process that . . ." The secondary questions can be used in applying the principles (Who? How? and What?) and probing to understand underlying values or interests in a change (Why? and Why not?). These principles and questions are based on the assumption that commitment of people is important in change. For example, in introducing a new computer system or managerial team process, the assumption is that these principles will enhance involvement and commitment to the changes. Other changes, involving downsizing and mergers might also benefit from the application of this approach (Kivimaki *et al.*, 2001). However, where decision-makers are implementing their will and are willing to tolerate resistance, this approach is less relevant.

Principle 1 – forming a guiding coalition

Many of the articles we reviewed highlighted the importance of creating a powerful guiding coalition, which is defined as a committed leadership team, in addition to steering committees, working groups, or implementation committees. The purpose of this coalition is to represent the informal organization and act as champions, researchers, and facilitators in listening to people, gathering information, researching, and making adjustments during any change process. Such groups were one of the key implementation devices used by the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations on projects introducing socio-technical systems and new work designs throughout the world and were key in Kurt Lewin's interventions in changing social norms in US factories and in social experiments in overcoming prejudice (Kotter, 2007, 1989; Ulrich, 1998; Cunningham, 1976, 1993).

Principle 2 – recognizing and responding to people who might be resistant to the change

Kurt Lewin identified a resistance to a change as a force, like inertia that is preventing the disruption of an old equilibrium. In physics, a body will remain at rest when the sum of all the forces operating upon it is zero. As changes are introduced, forces create stresses and strains to disrupt the normal equilibrium. In the same way, there is a tendency for a system to adjust in order to seek balance or to restore itself to its previous equilibrium. The forces resisting change can vary dramatically depending

1. Forming a guiding coalition	<p><i>Inputs initiating change</i></p> <p>To what extent does the change have clear leaders, managers, steering and work groups who have championed the change and have time and resources to carry it out? Who are the key people who can manage the change? Who should be involved in the steering and working groups? How often should they meet? Have we given them key people who have position, resources and time to assist the project? Why? Why not?</p>
2. Recognizing and responding to resistances	<p>To what extent have we taken steps to identify and respond to key resistances? What are the positive and negative forces affecting the change? How might we overcome some of the key resistances to change? Is the proposed change aligned to the underlying culture or is there a need for a cultural shift? Why? Why not?</p>
3. Establishing a need for change	<p>To what extent did managers identify and focus on a clear need for change? To what extent do employees and stakeholders recognize and commit to the need for change? What are the key problems or issues? In our problem statement, have we identified a set of criteria or measures so that people can judge the solution? Why? Why not?</p>
4. Articulating envisioned outcomes	<p>To what extent have we articulated our vision of where we are going? To what extent is the vision valued by participants in the change? What are the outcomes of the change? Are the outcomes expressed in behavioral terms? What are the underlying values that will illustrate what we are trying to achieve? Why? Why not?</p>
5. Establishing a process to implement planning	<p><i>Processes assisting the implementation</i></p> <p>Is there a process of implementation identified where objectives and projects are assigned and reported on and which emphasizes feedback and adaptation? Who are key people who own and are responsible for different objectives? What are the dates for the implementation of various objectives and projects? Do we have commitment and motivation of groups working on objectives? To what extent have we delegated responsibilities to different people who have the time and resources to carry out the implementation? Why? Why not?</p>
6. Focusing on continuous improvement	<p>Is there a process of problem solving and continuous improvement? Is the process of implementation formative vs summative in nature? Are problems, benchmarks and best practices discussed and acted upon? Why? Why not?</p>
7. Developing a commitment plan	<p>Is there a process that communicates the various outcomes as they emerge? Are there communication updates on ongoing meetings? Are people assigned responsibility to report on the progress of various objectives and projects? Why? Why not?</p>
8. Managing by walking around	<p><i>Outcomes illustrating success</i></p> <p>To what extent does the informal system illustrate and support the change? What is the informal system saying about the change? How can managers and champions be more involved in the informal organization to help facilitate the change? Why? Why not?</p>
9. Changing structures and HR systems	<p>To what extent have structures and systems been altered to institutionalize the change? What new structures and HR systems are required for implementation? Do HR systems (recruitment, selection, performance management, team management) reflect the change? Why? Why not?</p>

Table I.
Questions assessing whether principles are in use and applied

both on the nature of the organization and the compatibility of the change with current culture. For example, a change in a highly cohesive organization might be like moving one huge iceberg, something which is very different than moving several smaller icebergs which are scattered randomly in the ocean. While moving a huge iceberg might be very difficult to get started, once it starts moving, it creates its own momentum, just as a cohesive organization is a very strong force enhancing the implementation of a change (Lewin, 1969; Lazarus, 1991; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984).

Social scientists have taken this principle and suggested that there are similar forces that affect the process of change in organizations (Lewin, 1969). In organizations, there is a constant inertia or resistance to new changes that affect individual habits and group norms. In a state of normal equilibrium, things might be stable, and the range of positive and negative forces and events might be relatively balanced.

Principle 3 – establishing a need for change

Much of the change literature has highlighted the importance of establishing a need for change and to create a consensus around this need. Whether the starting point is a clear problem or a need for improvement, the change literature highlights the fact that people don't change unless they are compelled to do so. Since some of the more successful change efforts are a result of traumatic events or crisis, some change researchers have advocated that managers might use of radical change strategies like reengineering (Hammer and Champy, 1993). The organizational development literature has focused on creating a need and involving participants in illustrating why change is important. Such organizational development intervention usually begin with a frank discussion of some of the facts and perceptions of the issues, statements of satisfaction, inefficiencies and ideas that participants might find useful in change (Ajzen, 1991; Burke, 1982, 2002; Beckhard and Harris, 1987).

Principle 4 – articulating envisioned outcomes

According to Collins and Porras (1997), a vision statement describes the core values and purpose guiding an organization as well as an envisioned future of a change. It is a picture of the future that clearly communicates a valued direction for designing, implementing, and assessing organizational change. It should also appeal to the core values of customers, stockholders, and employees. John F. Kennedy vision of "putting a man on the moon and returning him safely to the earth" was a vision that provided a clear direction. At the time, it was just beyond engineering and technical feasibility and provided a clear and valued direction to focus an organization (Senge, 1990).

Although a vision statement can easily become a bunch of words that everyone forgets, organizations with carefully crafted visions can significantly outperform the stock market over long periods of time (Collins and Porras, 1997). When vision statements are poorly crafted, organizational members may spend a great deal of energy planning and developing initiatives that people suggest might be important. Key aspects of a good vision statement are its ability to picture a future state that stretches people and is responsive to core values. The envisioned future illustrates a paradox. It nicely describes a sense of concreteness or something that is vivid, real and tangible. It also portrays a time that is yet to be realized, someplace in the distant future (Collins and Porras, 1997, pp. 231-232; see also, Senge, 1990; Kotter, 2007).

Principle 5 – establishing a process to implement the plan

A plan is merely a hypothesis about how to proceed if all the assumptions that underlie the plan are correct. It is a virtual certainty that at least some of your assumptions will be wrong. Eisenhower illustrated this with his statement, “Plans are worthless, but planning is everything” (Eisenhower, 1957). He was highlighting the importance of a planning process to help people understand the contingencies and unexpected. While planning is often described as a formal process for focusing and scheduling how we use resources to achieve objectives, a great deal of attention illustrates the process underlying the planning (Mintzberg, 1994; Ulrich, 1998). While a plan might be an important part of a change process, regular adjustments to the plan are key if a change is to be successfully implemented. While Henry Mintzberg (1994) indicated that managers don’t plan and that many strategic plans are never implemented, he called attention to an informal managerial process. Reviewing the so-called pitfalls of planning, Mintzberg (1994) argues that the process of planning itself can destroy commitment, narrow an organization’s vision, discourage change, and breed an atmosphere of politics. The healthy process to implement a plan requires a way to adapt and deal with uncertainties. This might include the periodic updates, feedback sessions, and critiques focused on implementation.

Principle 6 – focusing on continuous improvement rather than objective rightness of measurement

Much more time is spent communicating facts and results and objective proof. A survey of 300 electronic companies revealed that 73 percent of the companies had reported having a total quality program under way, but 63 percent of these failed to reduce defects by even 10 percent (Schaffer and Thompson, 1992). A study of 500 small to medium sized organizations produced similar findings; even though implementation of formal quality systems was seen as a major priority, the implementation of formal quality systems was very low (Thomas and Webb, 2003). These and other studies highlight Deming’s 11th principle which argues for eliminating work standards (quotas), management by objectives, management by numbers and, numerical goals (Anderson *et al.*, 1994; Hodgson, 1987). While it is always useful to state goals and objectives, it is important to foster a program of continuous improvement, to focus actions, initiatives, and measures that are being taken.

Principle 7 – developing a commitment plan

“A commitment plan is a strategy describing a series of action steps devised to secure the support of those people who are vital champions of the change effort” (Beckhard and Harris, 1987, p. 54). Various questions can help develop such a plan: Who are the individuals or groups whose commitment is needed? What do they contribute? Who is committed to the idea and who can effectively get the message out? Who can provide resources and who is willing to persevere when the going gets tough? What is the critical mass of people to be involved? Who can provide useful ideas and insight? How can their commitment be assured?

Implementing this commitment plan involves the sequence of activities for getting the “top management approval,” “getting key people on board”, making sure the union is committed, and “having the membership understand it.” It also involves understanding who in the organization must be committed to the change and to

carrying it out. This is an understanding of the politics of the change. In public sector agencies, these champions may well extend beyond organizational boundaries. Successful implementations require a systematic analysis of who is committed to the idea, who is able and willing to provide resources, and who is willing to carry out and persevere with the new process. In any change process, a critical mass of people is necessary to assure implementation (Ulrich, 1998).

Principle 8 – managing by walking around

Twenty years ago, Tom Peters and Robert Waterman described “management by walking around” as a process where leaders and managers were seen and involved in face-to-face interactions with front-line staff. Walking around was not simply an exercise in getting out of the office, but involved taking time to find out what is happening, learning the names of people and what they have accomplished and were concerned about. “Management by walking around” recognizes that it is very easy for managers and the guiding coalition to become distanced and isolated. The process of “walking around” provides the driving forces for propelling an informal organization underlying any change (Peters and Waterman, 1982).

Principle 9 – changing structures and HR systems

Human resources are “people” resources in any organization and are increasingly being viewed as just as important as capital and financial resources in effective performance and competitive advantage. Evidence on the link between good people and human resource management is growing. It is because of this growing evidence that many practitioners and academics argue that human resource systems – the job descriptions, job design, pay, benefits, vacations, health, training and career development – are critically important. Ideas about organizational empowerment, team development, and re-engineering cannot be effectively implemented without changing some part of the HR system. As a result, an effective HR system is often seen as a crucial formal part of an organization for institutionalizing change and personal and organizational development. “HR is where the tire hits the road” for a formal organization, just as “management-by walking” around might illustrate change in the informal organization (Becker *et al.*, 2001; Wagar, 1999; Fitz-enz, 2000).

Method

The present study involved semi-structured interviews of ten participants in three of the approximately ten change programs we were involved with over the last three years. Although all change programs involved the use of the Balanced Scorecard for implementing change, we chose the three programs for analysis because of they illustrate applications in different public sector-like settings.

Cool Aid

The Victoria Cool Aid Society worked with homeless and marginalized people in downtown Victoria. Their goal of eliminating homelessness was noble, but totally impractical without the support of a very broad range of other agencies. Almost all the critically important issues facing this agency crossed the boundaries of other organizations and, for this reason, staff formed working groups with other community members. A core feature in developing the Cool Aid strategies were the active

engagement of a broad range of “partners” external to their organization. Staff engaged municipal and provincial governments, the local health authority, police forces and other service providers. Using the balanced scorecard approach, they identified the action required of their own staff but also the support required from others to be successful. A community homeless count was critical to winning public support for funding. Much of the success of the initiative was dependent of having a funders, health authorities and academics who jointly developed the methodology and raised the profile and credibility of the count.

Saanich

The municipality of Saanich is a bedroom and university community of about 120,000. The government is stable and levels of voter satisfaction are relatively high. There was almost a complete absence of any strategic planning and no pressing need for change before our project work began. The public had little more than technical zoning and land use plans or a very fuzzy “vision” document that had little impact of departmental plans. The web site showed pie charts of income sources and expenditures at a very high level but virtually nothing on performance.

The introduction of provincial legislation requiring greater accountability and the arrival of a new city administrator finally provided the impetus to consider a new approach. Rather than simply impose new reporting requirements through the established formal organization, Saanich used the balanced scorecard approach to get people in various departments working together within broad theme areas (Kaplan and Norton, 2006). Initial planning sessions for the first time included elected officials, senior management and key front line supervisors. The management team recognized early in the process that one of the key impediments to building strategic alignment was the inter-departmental “silos” that had developed. Instead of cascading their strategies from the overall city level to departments, they formed “Theme Teams” with cross departmental participation. Each team consisted of the following members:

- A department head who acted as the Executive Sponsor.
- Theme Team has representatives from different departments that contributed to the theme. For example, the public safety theme team included, police, fire, engineering and planning departments.
- Theme Teams developed a theme scorecard and met monthly to review progress.
- Council Advisory Committees were aligned with themes and Staff reported twice yearly.
- Twice annual strategy review of all themes by senior management team.
- Annual theme presentations to a representative staff group (about 50).

Today, theme teams have opened up a range of cooperative cross-departmental ventures. Strategic plans include clear objectives, performance measures and regular progress reports. The municipal web site has become a model of excellence for municipal planners.

The First Nations Mountain Pine Beetle Initiative (FNMPBI)

Unlike the Saanich case, the FNMPBI had a compelling need for action because of an infestation of mountain pine beetles had devastated the massive interior forests of

British Columbia. Forests with dead and dying timber represented an immediate risk of fire to communities in the region and longer-term environmental and economic risks. The problem from the perspective of First Nations communities was further complicated by unsettled land claims over the entire area and lack of certainty about who was accountable. For example, in order to develop a fire guard around a small village on the edge of reserve land, planners might require approval of more than half a dozen different federal, provincial and regional authorities in addition to internal approvals by the band Council. The First Nations Forestry Council took the initiative to bring all stakeholders to the table.

An initial central level planning session was convened to develop a high-level strategy map. From the outset there was very clear high-level support for the initiative from the provincial government. The Deputy Minister of Forests was regularly briefed and an inter-departmental committee established. Support from the federal government was more problematic. Representation was at a more junior level and there was no clearly identified senior executive sponsor. Nevertheless, all partners agreed to participate and appoint working group representatives. The planning team quickly decided to focus on the most pressing problem of community protection to meet the most pressing concern. It was hoped that this would also help to build a framework for working together. A Community Protection Working Group was established to further develop a theme strategy map. This was followed by three regional sessions where stakeholder representatives at the working level reviewed the initial material and developed regional action plans. In general, the process helped all parties work together and substantive progress was achieved.

Subsequently, a similar approach was taken for economic development and environmental plans. These later efforts have been less successful in part because of the funding challenges involved. In retrospect, the critical difference was the absence of strong executive level sponsorship in the area of economic development and environmental stewardship. Once outside the area of core concern for the Ministry of Forests, there was a substantial barrier to moving the agenda forward in the face of budgetary challenges. These same was true within First Nations leadership bodies. Early sponsorship by the First Nations Forestry Council was much less effective outside their area of influence.

Data gathering

In our participation as facilitators in these programs, we conducted semi-structured interviews with key participants in four areas: introductory information (for example, positive and not-so-positive experience); perceptions of forces affecting the change, perception of the change principles, which were most helpful in assisting the change. We reviewed the principles and then suggested that we were not seeking specific answers to each of the questions. Rather, we asked participants to review the first seven change principles we identified (concerning the input and processes illustrating the change)(see Table I). We asked what worked well and what would we do differently? Also, in each program of change, we used the force-field analysis technique to develop an understanding of the changes.

The sample was selected on the basis of the respondents' potential to assess the concepts that we introduced and is not a sampling of individuals per se, but rather, a sampling of incidents, behaviors, and self-observations. In this study, events are

presumed to denote the perceptions, understandings, and feelings about the change that people experienced. In the initial phase of grounded theory development, a homogeneous sample of individuals (in this case, participants in the change) is chosen.

The sample size for the interview study was ten individuals. The sample is described as a purposeful and non-probabilistic and the size typically relies on the concept of “saturation” or the point at which no new properties, dimensions, or conditions are seen in the data (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Using data from 60 in-depth interviews, Guest *et al.* (2006) found that saturation could occur as early as six interviews or within the first 12 interviews. In our study, we found that saturation occurred after five interviews, but carried out five more interviews to verify this.

The research and process of data analysis utilized a number of grounded theory methods for verifying the findings (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Briefly, the ten interview summaries constitute the “raw data” used in subsequent analysis.

As part of the strategic planning process, we also involved participants in identifying both positive and negative forces that may impact the implementation of change. We carried out this exercise in Cool Aid, Saanich, and in four communities that were involved in the First Nations Mountain Pine Beetle Initiative (FNMPBI). For example, we illustrate this in the FNMPBI area of community protection (fuel management and emergency management). Described as “force field analysis”, this brainstorming focus group exercise was intended to solicit forces that may encourage (positive forces) or inhibit (negative forces) changes to occur in harmonizing First Nations and Government actions in fuel management and emergency management. Within each of the communities, a series of positive and negative forces were: identified by participants; and ranked according to participants voting on their top six driving forces that may impact and influence the community protection agenda. The force field analysis produced a great deal of individual comments and group voting of the most important forces. The researchers developed categories to organize the sub themes within each change program.

General findings

Our interviews and force field analyses results provided two sets of findings relating to the importance of the guiding coalition as a key principle in implementing change.

The importance of the guiding coalition

Our interviews in all three cases illustrate, more than anything else, the importance that a guiding coalition in assisting a change process. Although the other principles might also be useful in change, change would have faltered without the guiding coalition.

In the Cool Aid Case, much of the success of the agency depended on an engaging municipal and provincial governments, the local health authority, police forces and other service providers who were aware of the homeless issue and were working together in responding. The society had been very successful in attracting a hard working, influential and committed group of directors who were able to gather support from like-minded individuals from other social service agencies. Critical to this process was an early agreement to put aside their competitive nature in the interest of winning the support needed from various levels of government. As one director put it, “We couldn’t care who builds supportive housing as long as it gets built.” The second

element of this working group was engaging the senior management team. The shelter, clinic and supportive housing departments had worked with some degree of independence. All were very busy dealing with the day-to-day pressures of their jobs and had little time to “waste” on undirected planning. With the support of the Board who were actively engaged, the management team began to understand that developing a well thought out plan was the key to securing long term funding. Being able to answer the “What’s in it for me?” question was essential.

In Saanich, the new Chief Administrative Officer (City Manager) began the change process when he was being recruited in his statement to the Mayor and Council that he was committed to undertaking a strategic planning process. The long-serving Mayor who had previously not shown any interest in planning, agreed to take a very non-partisan approach to the planning effort. Initially, council was briefed on the planning process and then agreed to actively participate with senior management and a planning team in strategy workshops. This was a radical departure for Saanich and involved a substantial risk on the part of the newly appointed CAO. The Mayor and senior executive would “drop in” and engage work teams during their deliberations. By the end of the process, when the first plan was presented to City Council, there was unanimous support.

With the Mountain Pine Beetle Initiative, there was an eagerness to get on with solving problems at regional and local level. Groups needed to be empowered rather than pushed to take action. As one participant said, “It took a beetle to get us working the way we should have been working all along.” But even here the importance of a guiding coalition quickly became evident. In two regional meetings, there was broad and effective participation by the surrounding First Nations leadership. In one area however, the groundwork had not been effectively laid. Local leadership did not feel they had been effectively consulted and participation in the initial planning sessions by First Nations was at best marginal. Before progress could be made, the leaders of the planning group and representatives of provincial leadership bodies had to make an extra effort to convince the reluctant groups that the process would meet their needs.

The forces affecting change

Figure 1 summarizes a second set of results, which also seemed to point to the importance of a guiding coalition in change. The example illustrated was from the First Nations Mountain Pine Beetle Initiative project, which attempted to coordinate the resources of various levels of government to respond to the Mountain Pine Beetle problem. The figure, which summarizes how plenary session members voted on the importance of each force, illustrates that the most important positive force, which might assist the implementation of the change was the sense of urgency (nine votes). This illustrates the importance of a need for change (principle 3). That is, change is more likely to occur because the sense of urgency is illustrating the importance of the change and the need for it.

The positive forces 2, 4, and 5 point to the guiding coalition. That is, this group of people suggested that group synergy, collaboration between various level of government and First Nations provided a guiding coalition in tackling this issue (8). The positive forces 4 and 5 indicate that people are committed (1) and willing to move forward on implementing plans (8).

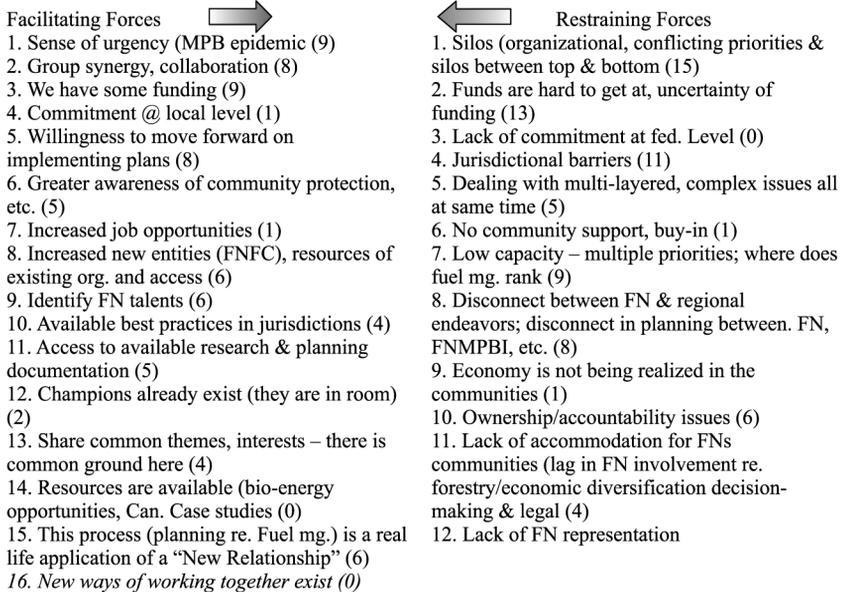


Figure 1.
Facilitating and
restraining forces involved
in implementing pine
beetle initiative
equilibrium or present
state now

A number of negative forces illustrate that the lack of a guiding coalition might be a major obstacle. The negative force 1 illustrates that there are tremendous silos (organizational, conflicting priorities, and silos between top and bottom (15). The lack of a guiding coalition is also illustrated in several other negative forces: the lack of commitment at the federal level (0), jurisdictional barriers (11), dealing with multi-layered, complex issues all at the same time (5), and the disconnect between First Nations and regional endeavors and access and the disconnect in planning between First Nation and the First Nation Mountain Pine Beetle Initiative (8).

These force field analysis results are similar in other change programs and generally suggest that the guiding coalition is one of the more important principles to assist the change.

Conclusion

This paper reviewed the importance of various change principles for assisting change in three public sector change programs. Based on our review and experience in change, we suggest that certain change principles might be more important than others. Table I suggests that such principles might be grouped as input principles or those, which were necessary for change to begin. These include: forming a guiding coalition, recognizing and responding to resistances, establishing a need, and articulating envisioned outcomes. A second set of principles might be concerned with the process or way the change is facilitated. These principles might include: establishing a process, focusing on continuous improvement, and developing a commitment plan. The final set of principles might illustrate the success of the change. These include: managing within an informal process of walking around, and changing structures and human resource (HR) systems.

Our findings, based on our experiences, suggest that building a guiding coalition might be more important than the other principles. This suggestion is consistent with the Lewin and Tavistock models of action research where a great deal of time and attention was spent on training and developing steering and action research groups to guide and steer the change process. The findings can also be linked to Revans (1981) work on action learning sets, or groups of people who are given responsibility for a change. These action learning groups or “sets” were the heart of the Action Learning process (McNamara and Weekes, 1982). Sets are comprised of from four to six managers or employees, who have the authority and responsibility for implementing change in their organizations.

The research data we used for illustration are based on case evidence and our anecdotal interpretation of change in three settings. We do not claim to offer a scientific conclusion. Ulrich (1998) and Kotter (2007)'s review of change highlights the importance of a broad range of principles and strategies for change. Our goal is to encourage a discussion on whether or not certain principles or strategies should be more important. Perhaps, focusing in and more attention to the guiding coalition might make it easier to implement other principles.

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