

Chapter Zero

To some people “Chapter Zero” may sound a little odd. We have given that title to this opening chapter for two reasons. First, the first step in your organization change work is in Chapter One, the next chapter. Chapter Zero picks you up at “ground zero,” what you need to understand about the material in this book before you address that first step. Chapter Zero gives you the overall framework around which this book is formed and the critical beliefs about people and organizations facing change that underpin all of what you will read here. Second, it is titled Chapter Zero simply so that the following chapter titles can match the numbers of the change tasks they address, Chapter One addresses Task I, Chapter Five addresses Task V, and so forth.

About Changing Organizations

Changing is what organizations do, not what you do to them. Changing is the continuous process of an organization attempting to align itself with shifts in its marketplace and with the realities of its external financial, physical, social, political, and technological environment. It is the organization’s drive to synchronize purpose, process, structures, people, information, rewards, and management systems within itself and within an integrated outside world.

Organization change can be complex because organizations are complex. Guiding successful intentional change can be puzzling and difficult because the organization is held in place by networks of established interrelationships among its environment, its processes, its structure, and its people. Whether an imperative for change comes from business needs, technological opportunities, mismatches in structural alignment, or the nature of the organization's people, for the change to be lasting, all aspects and interrelationships of the affected networks will have to change. We'll talk more about this "work system" view of organizations in the next chapter and throughout the book.

In yesterday's world, major organization change was often experienced as a cataclysmic eruption one hoped would only happen every millennium or two. In today's more complex, dynamic world, organization change is ongoing work, not just a one-time "catch up" event. Being an agile change artist is as critical for success as being a reliable producer. Successful change is required for survival. Changing more responsively and effectively than one's competitors is required to prosper.

About the People in a Change Situation

Changing organizations are complex because people are complex. People tend to objectify their work. They experience it as separate from themselves, something "out there" that they examine and "work on." They may engage their work with passion, but they still tend to see it as something apart from themselves, something they "do" rather than who they are. A change situation replaces the microscope with a mirror. The prospect of change confronts people with the reality that they are not separate from their work, that in a deeper sense they are what they do and they are defined by how they do it. The task of self-reflection is more complex than the task of objective problem solving. The work of changing organizations is not only about finding a way to apply a logical process to a non-

linear reality, but it is also about setting the conditions within which people are willing to do research on themselves.

The Work of Changing Organizations

Conventional wisdom tells us that changing our organizations is very difficult. That's because we built them in a complex way, not because change is mysterious and unfathomable. Changing an organization is hard work because organizations, and the people who inhabit them, are designed to provide stability. When we put our organizations together, we are looking for predictability. We know we may have to be nimble in a fast-moving marketplace, but at the same time we want to be sure that promises made will be promises met. Our work systems are designed to "ingest" variance without losing control of the process. We pay our people to pursue the objectives tenaciously in spite of the odds. We struggle with change, not because our organizations aren't agile, but because they are so agile in order to stay on course and avoid the rocks in the roadway. Organizations are hard to change because the organization designers before us and the managers who followed them have done their jobs so well.

Changing organization may be hard work, but it doesn't have to be mysterious. In this book, the work involved in changing organization is modeled as "The Ten Tasks of Changing Organization," illustrated by the ten activity bars in Figure 0.1.

The overlapping bars in the model signify that, although the tasks flow sequentially in concept, the work addressing any one task will continue concurrently with the work associated with previous and subsequent tasks as the process unfolds. Picture the overall Ten Tasks as a cascade of activity, like a step-down waterfall, where each level feeds the next and each builds on the flow from before. As a change unfolds, you must cycle over and over through the essence of all of the tasks as you drill down into the details at different levels of the work system or open up change in different parts of the

Figure 0.1. The Ten Tasks of Changing Organization.

- I Appreciating the Situation
- II Developing Strategic Alignment
- III Evoking Change Leadership
- IV Expanding Understanding and Commitment
- V Analyzing Processes
- VI Designing Processes, Work, and Boundaries
- VII Planning Implementation
- VIII Establishing Metrics
- IX Managing Transitions
- X Continuous Learning and Improvement

organization. This is what we mean by saying the process of change may be approached logically, but it is not linear.

The Ten Tasks is not a “methodology” and not a step-by-step process for managing change activities. It is more useful when seen as an overarching checklist of what to pay attention to as you apply your own logical thinking to accomplish the change. An analogy is the early computer game called *Dungeons and Dragons*. I never got the hang of it, but my son was pretty intense about it. As I understand, you are given a general idea about a journey and a bundle of weapons and tools that you can apply as you run into the unexpected beasts of the passageway, the bottomless pit, the unseeable door, the unclimbable wall, and so forth. If what you try doesn't work, you adjust your tactics and try again. As you learn and succeed, you progress and are given more tools and weapons and more insight about how to apply them to the next unexpected challenge, and the challenges just keep coming and coming. Stewardship in changing organization is a little like playing *Dungeons and Dragons*. The Ten Tasks gives you an overview of the path and some good ideas (your weapons and tools) to work with. The bad news is that only you can figure out how to apply them, using your own and your colleagues' best judgments, as the adventure unfolds and the specific challenges come up.

The chapters in this book address each of the ten tasks in order. Chapter Eleven provides a checklist of the work to be undertaken during each task. It can serve as a memory jogger, helping you as you work your way through your change effort. Or you can hand it to another person as a quick outline to guide discussion about where you have been, what has and has not been accomplished so far, and where to go next.

Application of the Ten Tasks Model

How much rigor and attention you must pay to each item listed under each of the ten tasks will depend on its relevance for the situation and the magnitude of the changes you face. For example, in

a technology change, the more business process boundaries crossed, the greater the change of skills and knowledge demanded, the larger the impact on collateral systems, and the deeper the impact on culture and careers of the workforce, the more formal attention you must pay to the ten tasks. We'll talk more about the impact of change in Chapter Two.

How collaboratively you approach your change process will also influence how to best work with the Ten Tasks. If you approach the change with high employee involvement, you can often "feed a number of birds with one hand," and many activities can address objectives catalogued under a number of different tasks. For example, in a four-day working conference, a 180-person "deep diagonal slice" (people from multiple levels in the organization's hierarchy and across the span of its horizontal business units) worked together to digest data about present operations, identify trends in the environment, define priorities, agree on the critical elements of a vision for a better future, set "next-step" follow-up actions, and establish plans for their personal involvement in communicating the outcomes of the conference to the rest of the organization. In this single event, they were able to address objectives under Tasks I, II, III, and IV of the Ten Tasks simultaneously.

During the last decade, pioneering efforts in the design of large-group processes for organization development work, such as those of Marv Weisbord and Sandra Janoff, Kathleen Dannemiller and Robert Jacobs, Dick and Emily Axelrod, Bill Pasmore, Harrison Owen, and the earlier work of Fred Emery and Erick Trist, have made high involvement and collaboration in organization analysis, design, and development much more practical. Our successful experience in building on the work of these pioneers has allowed us to, figuratively speaking, "get the whole system in the room at the same time," as in the example above, and to accelerate the time it takes to accomplish, diffuse, and establish critical decisions about the state of things and the directions to pursue in a change effort. Two good overviews of these pioneering large-group processes are

the books *Large Group Interventions* (Bunker & Alban, 1997) and *The Change Handbook* (Holman & Devane, 1999).

Core Beliefs That Shape Our Practice

There are a few simple beliefs about change that have guided us in our most successful change work. Whenever we violate the principles represented in them, because of time pressure or opposition, the effectiveness of the process has suffered. As my grandmother used to say, “Pay me now or pay me later!”

People Change Because They Choose to Change

For organizations and the people who inhabit them, changing is choice, changing is work, and changing is learning. Guiding change in organizations, therefore, is not just the business of designing new technologies, structures, and behaviors and training people to use them. Guiding change has more to do with establishing the context within which people can really engage the needed changes, and the primary rule of thumb for that engagement was succinctly stated a long time ago by our colleague Frank Delaney in his paraphrase of an old axiom about communication:

Tell me—I may hear; I may remember.

Show me—I may understand better.

Involve me—I will take ownership; I will add value and be committed.”

The Overarching Goal of Any Change in an Organization Is Constant

No matter what your specific change objectives are, the overarching goal is *always* to move toward a higher and higher performing work system. Or else why bother? In any change effort, it is easy to become locked into immediate objectives and to become focused on the immediate struggles to accomplish them. However, it is

worth coming up for air every once in a while and reaffirming what you are ultimately trying to do.

An Organization Is a Work System

Re-emphasizing what we said earlier, an organization is a work system. Its relationship with its environment and the behavior of its people and processes are held in place by a network of structures, interrelationships, demands, and consequences that make up that system. The major imperative for change may come from business needs, technological opportunities, mismatches in structural alignment, or the nature of the organization's people. However, for the intended change to take hold, all the related aspects of the network will have to be addressed.

Implementation of Change Begins with the First Encounter

Implementation starts when you first encounter a stakeholder about the possibility of change. Implementation is not just a project step that follows design, not a problem you address when you are ready to "roll out" your changes. It is much more than "selling" changes to the stakeholders and looking for buy-in. It is an integral part of how you approach everything you do in each task. You have to keep this clearly in mind as you plan your work and work your plan. The world is a stage, and the audience begins reacting to the play with the first crack of the curtain. There are no dress rehearsals in real life.

Successful Change Is an Informed, Open Process

Communicate! Communicate! Communicate! In a change situation, secrecy is an illusion. If people don't know the specific details, they will invent them, and we human beings tend to splash our blank canvasses with our worst nightmares. If people don't know what's going on, they cannot help make it come out right. So when you are sick and tired of saying something, say it again. When you are sure you have all the information you need, ask the question at

least once more. When you are sure you have reached a mutual understanding, discuss it again. When you think you have planned enough interactions into a process, double the plan. Most importantly, remember that simple distribution of information is the business of a newspaper and that change leadership is not just journalism. Communication is a two-way street, not just telling and selling, not just a series of well-engineered messages that you want people to believe in. It includes listening and a dialogue about meaning.

Change Leadership Is Guiding Collaborative Action Learning

Although we may not believe we are very good at leading organization change, we know how to lead people in becoming clear about objectives, planning and taking action, collecting data about what happened, making sense of the results, learning from our successes and failures, and re-planning as conditions dictate. This is the rhythm of *action learning*, and action learning is the fundamental rhythm of successful change (Lewin, 1947). As change leaders, we must start with the mind-set of guiding a collaborative action learning process, rather than trying to plan activities that will change people's behavior. The rhythm of action learning is discussed more deeply in Chapter Ten. If the thought of leading change from a learning perspective intrigues you, but you don't have much experience with this approach, you may want to read Chapter Ten next instead of Chapter One, because the notion of *organization change as organizational learning* underpins this book.

For Change to Last, It Has to Optimize Business, Process, and Human Requirements Jointly

There was a time when you could "make it" in Hollywood if you were very good looking, could really act, or could sing and dance like gangbusters. Today, it seems you need to have all three attributes just to get into the casting interviews. That's a metaphor for business in today's environment. You used to be able to focus your

attention on strict supervision of processes and *inspect* your way to consistency of product at the expense of human and material costs. Or you used to be able to push your processes to maximum volume at the cost of quality and human frustration. Or you used to be able to provide exceptional quality through increasing individual rewards, inflating prices, and diminishing quantity. *Not any more!* Today, every system improvement and work design decision has to embody a joint optimization of reliably delivering products at competitive costs, controlling the processes to control consistency, *and* providing the quality of work life required to attract the energy and commitment of the work force required to do it.

Summary

The work of change begins with an individual believing that something should be different. Moving from the individual to an organization requires stewardship of the change process. The work of changing organizations can be complex because organizations are complex. However, the work of changing organization can be modeled as ten major tasks and approached systematically. What you believe about change and about people set the conditions for how you conduct yourself in the change steward's role. Your behavior heavily influences the conditions of the change situation. So one of the opportunities you have in reading this book and applying its content is to examine your own beliefs about yourself, about people, and about changing organization. Here are a few key beliefs that have served the authors well in our change work:

- People change because they choose to change
- The overarching goal of any organization change is constant—high performance
- An organization is a *work system*; for change to take hold it has to address all the elements

- Implementation of change begins with the first encounter
- Successful change is an informed, open process
- Change leadership is guiding collaborative action learning
- For change to last, it has to optimize business, process, and human requirements jointly

