Creating Contagious Commitment

By Andrea Shapiro ISBN 0-9741028-0-6.

This book is about leading change in organisations, Change is about people. Companies make a wide variety of changes to try to improve performance, to process redesign, to introduce quality initiatives, to accelerate getting products to market, to increase efficiency etc. However unless there is true buy-in from employees these schemes are destined to fail.
Time and time again in organisational change cynical comments persist, or apathy takes a hold or even false agreements are given. Hence 50% -80% of change efforts fail. The lion's share of resources are put into the technical aspects of the change and the little of what is left goes into supporting the people.

Defining Organisational Change.

What: A planned effort to increase capacity and improve effectiveness
Why: To respond to or leverage Political, Economic, Social and Technological forces
How: Organisations change when people in them change.

We need to create the right conditions for 'positive epidemics' (i.e. epidemics of enthusiasm and commitment for an organisational change). We need to find the characteristics that motivate change, so that acceptance becomes contagious and spreads effortlessly throughout the organisation.

In change we can categorise individuals into four groups:

Resistors - People who are actively against the change
Apathetics .- People who feel disconnected to the change or unaffected by it
Incubators. - People who are thinking about how the change affects them or their work environment
Advocates - People who are full of enthusiasm for the change.

Enthusiasm towards the change spreads when 'advocates' come into contact with 'apathetics'. Some 'apathetics' will incubate the new idea. Some 'incubators' will go on to become 'advocates' themselves. Others will be unconvinced. If 'advocates' are not supported they can slip back into the apathetic pool.
Sources of resistance tend to be:

- Concern with the change or its applicability
- Exposure to hyped and unsupported changes in the past
- Fear of loss

Advocates need support or else they can easily become former advocates. The tipping point ratio is the ratio of new advocates to former advocates. If the ratio is one or above then the idea is spreading. We need to:

1. recruit advocates
2. keep advocates
3. grow advocates

The spread of an idea and how quickly it becomes contagious depends on its environment, the idea itself and the amount of contact between the idea's advocates and

the people who are apathetic towards it. There are three factors that relate to this: Content, Carriers, and Context.

Content – The strength of the change case
Context – The environment in which the change initiative is happening
Carriers – The characteristics and behaviours of those infected with enthusiasm for the change.

The case for change needs to be crystal clear – and honest. The way to gain commitment is to be sure that people understand the purpose of an action. Having a vision or an end state is good, but this does not mean that the change will run directly there!

A change spreads when people with expertise, experience and enthusiasm advocate it. However, no idea or change will spread without support. Leaders can provide two types of support:

1. People support - includes such things as explaining the change, listening to concerns and fostering contacts.
2. **Environmental support** - is creating the right atmosphere for change. For example: stating a clear business case, ensuring the necessary infrastructure exists, rewarding those who support the change.

Change will occur when you have 'critical mass'. This is when you have enough impetus to sustain a chain reaction. Innovativeness and change acceptance tends to follow a 'bell curve' shape if graphed.

Innovators	3%
Early adopters	14%
Early majority	34%
Late majority	34%
Laggards	16%

Interestingly, what attracts each of these groups to change is different to the other groups. For example, early adopters seek changes that give competitive advantage, whereas the early majority seek practicality.

There are three different change styles:

- **Originators** - who are future orientated catalysts for change
- **Pragmatists** - who encourage cooperation to find solutions based on experience.
- **Conservers -** who work well in the existing structure and value consistency and reliability.

There are three key skills that are needed to underpin the spreading of change:

A. **Skilled conversation** - The ability to balance the skills of advocacy - clearly expressing a position and inquiry. Genuinely seeking to understand another's position better.
B. **Understanding the law of the few** - Being able to work effectively with the type of people who carry the change.
C. **Sensitivity to change styles -** Leveraging change styles when making contacts.

Systems thinking

We need to understand that organisations are not linear, they operate as a collection of components that interacts together to form a whole. Each component must be part of the whole to do its essential function. The key issue which impacts on change is how these parts interact.
These interactions in systems lead to closed loops called feedback loops. A reinforcing loop is one which moves something in a direction. For example an employee who performs well tends to get more attention and support which makes them continue to perform well – i.e. a loop. Other loops are balancing, for example an employee performing well is given more work which can negatively affect his performance, which can then result in him receiving less work, sending his performance back up again. It balances itself.
Systems work exponentially. That is, if one person tells two others positively about the change, and each of these tell two others about the change and so on, soon it spreads like wildfire – not in a linear/straight line fashion.

The seven levers of change

People support

1. Contacts between advocates and apathetics
2. Mass exposure
3. Hiring advocates
4. Removing resistors

Environmental support

5. Walk the talk
6. Ensure reward and recognition supports the change
7. Make sure that the infrastructure is in place to support the change.

There is no magic action that guarantees successful change. Understanding how to put the seven levers of change into practice is the key. Each situation and organisation will require different levers in different ways.

Dynamics of Change

There are four different categories of important interactions in the systems that we need to understand in change:

1. What goes around comes around

There are some ‘`standard’ loop systems in organisations. For example, the more advocates there are in the population relative to apathetics, the more friendly the atmosphere is to accepting more advocates.

2. Combinations matter.

Levers of change are more effective when used in combination with others. In fact some (such as mass exposure) should never be used alone. ‘Contacts between advocates and apathetics’ are essential, as is ‘walking the talk’. However ‘hiring advocates’ and ‘removing resistors’ is certainly recommended.

3. Not all levers of change are equal

Some levers are essential, whilst others should only be used judiciously.

4. The Goldilock test.

This is ‘testing if the porridge is too hot or cold’. It is about finding the right lever and the right way to use it for the organisation.

A CHECKLIST FOR CHANGE.

Contacts between advocates and apathetics

- Are the advocates identified?
- Are the advocates respected for their expertise in the product or service that the company produces?
- Can they use the three key skills?
- Can we foster contacts through networks?
- Are advocates being supported in implementing the change?

Mass exposure

- Does the mass exposure match the need?
- Is the mass exposure always honest? Will it pass a no-hype test?
- Is the mass exposure matched to the support for and commitment to the change?
- What might we be doing too much or too little of?

Hire advocates

- Is there a way of leveraging the hiring of new advocates when hiring for growth?
- Are we in danger of relying too much on hiring new advocates?
- Are we monitoring the resentment that often results from hiring new advocates?

Remove Resistors

- Are we listening to the concerns of resisters and making adjustments as appropriate?
- Are pockets of resistance identified?
- Do we have a plan to deal with resisters?
- Is there resistance in key places?
- Are we confusing apathy with resistance?

Rewards and recognition

- Are reward and recognition plans in place?
- Are we looking for the behaviours that make change work and rewarding the business results from those behaviours?
- Are we leveraging recognition – including formal recognition?
- Is there a plan to reward and recognise early wins?

Infrastructure

- Does the schedule match the work to be done? Do stakeholders understand the schedule?
- Do people understand how they will do their jobs once the change is implemented?
- Is there a plan for specific training in place?
- Are the tools, technology, data, and infrastructure in place?
- Is there harmful infrastructure (e.g. policies) that must be removed?
- Are there tools in place to measure progress?

Walk the talk

- Is it clear who the sponsor is?
- Does everyone involved understand the vision and the success criteria?
- Is leadership making the business need/opportunity clear, and do stakeholders recognise it?
- Are the decision makers and the decision making process visible to those affected?
- Does every stakeholder see the link between company performance, the change initiative, and their own performance?

Interactions

- What needs to be addressed simultaneously? Sequentially?
- What areas might undermine others? Enhance others?
- What other areas provide opportunities or concerns?
- What actions in your culture can make an idea contagious?