Planned & Emergent Change: Adversaries Or Allies?

Part III – Leadership During Emergent Change Whitepaper

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Introduction

"…Progress occurs when courageous, skillful leaders seize the opportunity to change things for the better."

Harry S. Truman

In Part I of this three-part white paper series, we explored the Planned Change approach, and applied one of the most widely-accepted models of how change affects organizations, Lewin's Three-stage Model, to a fictional ACME Corp.

In Part II, we learned about the Emergent Change approach, the second dominant model of change management and examined Bridges' Stages of Transition using the ACME Corp. example, outlining how change affects the individuals who are involved in change initiatives.

Lewin's Three-Stage Model looks at the impact of change on the organization itself:
- Unfreeze: inertia is overcome and existing habits and mindsets are broken down
- Change: a period of confusion as the old ways are challenged, but the future is not yet clear
- Refreeze: new mindsets and habits are formed and established

Bridges' Stages of Transition explores the psychological impact of change on people:
- Endings: letting go of the old ways and the old identity
- Neutral Zone: the 'in-between time' in which individuals commonly find the transition difficult, stressful and disorienting
- New Beginnings: the point where the implementation of the change initiative is complete

In this third white paper, we will examine providing effective leadership during emergent change.

Effective Leadership During Emergent Change

According to Bernard Burnes in *Managing Change: A Strategic Approach to Organizational Dynamics, 5th Edition*, "The literature on management and leadership gives support for the notion that different situations require different approaches to change. They also show that managers are, sometimes at least, able to change their style of management or leadership, and even exhibit different styles to different parts of their organizations at the same time…managers can and do adopt both the Planned and Emergent approaches to change management either alternatively or simultaneously as the situation requires."

In fact, pundits have acknowledged that the **Planned Change** approach has provided the basic structure for the enhanced **Emergent Change** approach, making the two change management approaches allies, not adversaries.

Burnes goes on to state that change management leadership must consider both the short-term and long-term interests of all the stakeholders – whether these are shareholders, employees, the managers themselves or the community at large. "The worst managers may not be those who make poor choices; they may be those who fail to recognize that there are choices to be made."

Now more than ever, leadership is crucial for organizations to not just keep up, but to innovate in order to survive and move forward. Without strong leaders, there may not be anything left for managers to manage.

In her book, *The Art and Science of Leadership,* Afsaneh Nahavandi contends that the process of management is essentially concerned with achieving stability. On the other hand, she sees leadership as mainly being concerned with bringing about change.

Nahavandi defines managers as those who:
- Focus on the present
- Maintain the status quo and stability
- Implement policies and procedures
- Remain aloof to maintain objectivity
- Use the power of their position

On the other hand, she defines leaders as those who:
- Focus on the future
- Create change
- Create a culture based on shared values
- Establish an emotional link with followers
- Use personal power

In today's business climate, organizations may have separate leaders and managers – or one person may serve both functions. In either case, it is crucial that an organization's leadership as a whole (managers and/or leaders) utilizes the best practices available today. These practices have evolved in alignment with the organizational development field over the past half-century.

Some such guidelines that our friends in ACME Corp.'s leadership community could follow are:

- **Keep an open mind**. Sure, there's the set goal of doubling the revenue in three years and the initial strategy to get there, but ACME Corp.'s leadership should be aware that there are factors that can't be controlled, e.g. an economic downturn or brand new digital platforms. They should also be open to new ideas (including ones from their own teams!) and incorporate them into an altered strategy, if suitable. Accordingly, learn to **pick your battles** – while it is imperative to hold firmly to non-negotiable outcomes (the main goal), leaders should also be flexible with other scenarios (e.g. adjusting short term motivational targets).
- **Stay engaged** – If you could just put a plan in place and it worked, then most leaders would be out of a job! Leadership needs to be present and alert – are the new methods working? Are the short-term goals realistic and motivational? They should also have their eyes and ears open to encourage positive feedback loops and get to the source of and mitigate any grumblings quickly.
- Think in "**systems terms**" – as new ways of doing things are introduced, watch for any changes and balance systems to make sure the dynamics are moving towards the desired direction. For example, if staff is still taking too long to complete their tasks using new technology, perhaps some time needs to be spent on retraining.
- As mentioned throughout this white paper series, **communication is key**! Make sure the entire leadership team knows the goals inside-out, and the same message (e.g. a new motto referring to the company goal as "Twice In Three!") is communicated to all teams consistently and repeatedly.

In this era of rapidly evolving business innovation and change that is punctuated by business digitization, it more important than ever for leaders to understand and apply the principles of both the Planned and the Emergent Change approach. A 2014 study from the John M. Olin School of Business at Washington University estimates that 40 percent of today's Fortune 500 companies will no longer exist in 10 years! Leaders and managers who best adjust to continuous change will be better positioned to avoid this fate.

For more change management guidance and education, please visit www.pinkelephant.com to discover additional resources, expert guidance and recommended certification courses that will help you lead and manage change in your organization.

About Pink Elephant

We Lead The Way!
A premier global training, consulting and conference service provider, Pink Elephant has an undisputed reputation for leading the way. We're proud of our pioneering and innovative spirit, which has enabled us to introduce and spearhead many revolutionary concepts and programs since our inception forty years ago.

About The Author

With over 25 years of experience, Robin has demonstrated expertise in the areas of Organizational Change Management, Leadership, Agile Project Management, Service Management and DevOps. Her experience across multiple industry sectors, along with her expert-level knowledge of individual and organizational impact of change have helped her enable successful customer outcomes. Robin has a Master of Arts in Organizational Management and her passion for the field is apparent as she trains and consults with organizations – she is captivating and is extremely effective at not only teaching the subject matter, but delivering quality materials that make attendees care about how they will apply learned concepts to their own organizations.

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