

Chapter 11

Organizational Change and Values Systems Alignment

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines how the success of change initiatives can be increased by designing the change communication process to create alignment between the values underpinning the type of change, the values of the people implementing the change, and the values of the people affected by the change. The authors use Graves' ECLET values systems methodology to show how change agents can understand and identify the dominant values systems within the people and organizations they are working with, which will enable them to express change communication in a way that creates values systems alignment. The chapter begins by examining why change fails. It then moves on to describe Graves' work and then to provide examples of how it can be used to improve the success of change projects. The chapter concludes by suggesting key questions change agents need to ask when undertaking change initiatives.

INTRODUCTION

The argument presented here is that the success of change initiatives can be increased by designing the change communication process to create alignment between the values underpinning the type of change, the values of the people implementing the change, and the values of the people affected by the change. If the communication process is based on an understanding of the values involved, it will allow change agents to determine the extent to which staff will want to know why the change is taking place, what it is designed to achieve and how to involve those concerned (Jackson, 2016). Of the many factors that are considered in the implementation of organisational change projects, the alignment of values systems is not something that is frequently discussed. As Burnes and Jackson (2011) argue, this is a major oversight and a significant reason for the failure of many change interventions.

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Much has been written over the years regarding the need to align organizational and individual values, usually from the culture perspective (Schein, 1985; Brown, 1998). The main argument is that effective organisations are ones where goals and values are congruent and shared by the leadership and staff of the organisation (Brown, 1998; Denison & Spreitzer, 1991; Detert, Schroeder & Mauriel, 2000; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2004; Ouchi, 1981). Indeed, there has been a long history of writers drawing attention to the positive relationship between value alignment, employee commitment and goal achievement (Cohen & Keren, 2008; Dubin, Champoux & Porter, 1975; Elizur, 1996; Guy, 1984; Herzberg, Mauser & Snyderman, 1956; Werkmeister, 1967).

In terms of organisational change, perhaps the first person to draw attention to the relationship between value alignment and successful change was Kurt Lewin in the 1940s (Benne, 1976). Since then, a wide range of studies have cited organisation, group and individual values as important factors in the success of change interventions (Allaire & Firsirotu, 1984; Bouckennooghe & Devos, 2007; Chonko, Jones, Roberts & Dubrinsky, 2002;; Diefenbach, 2007; Mrotek, 2001; Schwartz & Davis, 1981; Walinga, 2008). Neves and Caetano (2009) maintain that employees who see that a proposed change intervention is congruent with their own values are more likely to show commitment and enthusiasm. They go on to state that “Employees’ commitment to change can therefore be looked at as a function of the change’s fit to employees’ values . . .” (Neves & Caetano, 2009, pp. 626).

To summarise, there is support for the view that successful change is associated with the value alignment of three factors: those involved in the change intervention, the objective of the intervention and the approach to change (i.e. the values underpinning the content of the change and the process by which it is managed) (Burnes & Jackson, 2011).

In this Chapter, we draw on Graves’ ECLET values systems methodology to help change agents to understand and identify the dominant values systems in the people and organisations they are working with and show how to express change communication in a way that creates values systems alignment. The Chapter begins by examining why change fails. It then moves on to describe Graves’ work and then to provide examples of how it can be used to improve the success of change projects. The chapter concludes by suggesting key questions change agents need to ask when undertaking change initiatives.

WHY CHANGE PROJECTS FAIL?

There is considerable evidence that a large number of change project fail (Burnes, 2011). However, why this should be so has attracted only limited attention (Buchanan, Fitzgerald, Ketley, Gollop, Jones, Saint Lamont, Neath & Whitby, 2005). Some writers point to shortcomings in either the planning or execution of the change process (Burnes & Weekes, 1989; Dent & Goldberg, 1999; Hoag, Ritschard & Cooper, 2002; Huczynski & Buchanan, 2001). Others identify a lack of competence or commitment by those commissioning or managing the change process (Boddy & Buchanan, 1992; Caldwell, 2003, 2006; Kirkman & Shapiro, 1997; Kotter, 1996). However, the evidence for any of these explanations is limited.

On the other hand, there is substantial evidence that participative change is the most effective approach to promoting change, as well as giving change recipients a greater “sense of competence, improved interpersonal trust and increased attachment to the organization” (Oreg, Vakola & Armenakis, 2011, pp. 491). These findings are consistent with values systems alignment, which operates on the principle that people will cooperatively engage in a change process if they understand how it relates to their beliefs

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