

Change management is all about alignment – Jean-Charles Neau - December 2007

Change management is very often defined in a very restrictive way. Without explaining today how it can be done, let's attempt to describe first what it is all about.

On the one hand, you may have the best strategy (we will need to come back to that in another article, as "best" is not easy to define), it will mean nothing without implementation and resources.

On the other hand, you may have the best resources and the best people, you will go nowhere without a vision, a purpose that makes sense, a compelling story to tell your people, your clients, your partners, your investors; to create a sense of belonging and to foster team work. Reason why you need strategy.

Going from strategy to implementation requires **alignment of resources**: putting all elements together so that going from today's to tomorrow's situation is understood, feasible, easy, measurable. By resources, I mean **people** but also what I would put under the umbrella of **structure**: organization, processes, performance metrics and other management tools, supplies, information systems...



Aligning strategy, structure and people is Change management. If one resource is misaligned, implementation just fails.

Another key reason for Change management is **sustainability**. Why investing so much time in implementation, taking so many risks, if it is just to get short-term results? Obviously, we all want sustainability.

The problem is that you and I know that all change projects create resistance, **resistance from the people and/or the structure** ("only wet babies like change").

Resistance is like an **elastic spiral**: either it will prevent you from going where you want to go, within the timeframe and budget you had in mind, or it will take you back very quickly to your starting point and sometimes even behind. Therefore, addressing resistance to change from people and structure is key for implementation as well as for sustainability.

For **structures**, it is quite *simple* as structures are just *objects*. You actually have one single resistance: this *thing* can do what you want or simply cannot (just check *user manual*). You can adapt this structure. After all, it is *just* a question of time and investment; in other words, it is manageable. Nevertheless, let's bear in mind that we will need people for that...

For **people**, it is more complex, not surprisingly. People resist either because a) they do not know that they need to change or what to change, or b) they cannot change or do not know how or c) they simply do not want to. Guess which one is the most complex obstacle to overcome?

Although *don't want* is not easy, managing resistance to change cannot be restricted to this challenge. Very often, people think that it is just a question of people leadership. A great leader at the top communicates enthusiastically, inspires and recreates motivation. True, personal leadership and model role are key ingredients. But this is far from being enough. Simply because the structure, inherited company's culture and individual people interests will always come back very quickly.

Therefore, we need to address all resistance factors: *don't know*, *can't do*, *don't want*. And we need to understand that the structure influences the *can't do* or *don't want*: for instance, why would your sales force agree to emphasize client satisfaction from now on if they are only compensated (through bonus or promotion or both) on quarterly sales quotas? just to give one example. Sales forces will always choose the shortest way to achieve their personal objectives (money usually ranks #1). And imagine if there is no process in place to deliver well defined client satisfaction measures at the right time...

For sustainable results, you need careful and comprehensive change management. Any change management effort always requires vision, alignment and endurance.