



## Large Scale Change Methodology for the 21st Century

by Lynnea Brinkerhoff

For every ten workers in your organization, three will retire over the next ten years. Out of that same ten, three others are looking for new jobs even as you read this. And if you've hired younger "20-somethings," expect them to stay no longer than 18 months before moving on. What about the replacement cost when a skilled worker leaves? Estimates range from a few thousand to hundreds of thousands, depending on their position in the organization.

In today's increasingly complex organizational structures, the concept of planned organizational change is a hope rather than a reality of the business world. Recent brain research shows that, while the human being must have ample change in order to be properly challenged, too much can overwhelm our systems. New, more collaborative strategies are imperative. Organization development consultant Roland Sullivan states, "Old ways of organizing and doing business have been made irrelevant by fast, even quantum change." Organizations typically deal with change in one of three ways:

**Reactively:** Wait until things get bad and do something fast, no matter what it is.

**Adaptively:** Figure out what changes are occurring, whether they are in control or not, and bring in the experts to help them respond to the new environment.

**Anticipatively:** Analyze what is happening around them, engage a 360° view of the current and future reality, and plan collaboratively with key stakeholders for future scenarios.

### Strategy Planning for the 21st Century

Whether you are kicking off a new initiative, expanding operations, dealing with changes in the competitive environment, improving performance, or planning for a better future, organizational theory postulates that senior managers should involve as many people as possible. That includes all levels of employees, clients, and even vendors. Unfortunately, most strategic planning and implementation are done in the name of employees and customers who are not in the key meetings.

Theory and observation of successful implementation show that if an organization wants or needs to undertake change and respond to it with any semblance of effectiveness, critical mass (20%) within the organization must have an opportunity to generate ideas together, hear experts, respond and be part of the implementation. The planning process itself should be 'modeling' the future the organization wants to create.

### Being Efficient or Effective... You Choose

Many executive groups make the mistake of trying to be efficient and think that a managerial style of command and control will get them the results they seek and that their soldiers will fall in behind them, ask no questions, and be enthusiastic about the change. While this strategy may be efficient in the short term, the trade-off with this strategy is in long-term effectiveness. 'Pay now or pay later,' as the old adage goes. When employees and other stakeholders have not been brought into the process early, don't have a chance to make comments and don't have their thoughts and ideas included in the challenges and options facing the organization, employees then reserve the right to resist later as the implementation is underway.

### The Typical Approach by Management to Organizational Change

It is always baffling and frustrating to senior managers that employees are not as enthusiastic about making changes or following through on plans, but instead are seen as spreading "gossip" by the water cooler or outright sabotaging the planning. The typical response by management is to write an article in the company newsletter extolling the virtues of the new change or new facility. Of course, this only adds to employee resistance because it is a one-way communication process. Time after time, senior management will then augment this communication process by having managers schedule meetings with employees to explain the change, yet there are no mechanisms within the meetings to record and act upon all of the suggestions. And worse yet, what the employee really wants to be scheduled for the last time slot when senior managers themselves are bored and burned out, and many times the managers will skip out because they have "more important" engagements to attend. What message does that send to the staff?

### A Vastly Improved Approach: Large-Scale Technology (LST)

Large-Scale Technology (LST) is based on the work of Richard Beckard in the 1960s and refined by Ron Lippitt's work in the 1970s and 1980s and then taken up by many experts since that time. "Prior to this, change was implemented with separate organization units and top down drive. LST broke this paradigm by thinking about the entire system. At the heart of it was getting 'the whole system into the room' and 'all the arrows pointed in the same direction.'" ([www.coachingandmentoring.com](http://www.coachingandmentoring.com)) Organizations can alleviate

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the need to go department by department, meeting to meeting for the next several months or years, trying to update everyone on what was planned and the effect on operations, schedules, etc. and then repeating the meeting process to help staff through the inevitable change cycle. Herein lie not only true efficiency but ultimate effectiveness as well. By including key stakeholders in the planning and implementation process early on, senior managers ensure that implementation has as many 'believers' on board who are scattered throughout all levels of employees and even key vendors. This is not a one time "meeting" but a carefully planned, designed, researched, and coordinated event that can have from 40 to 2,000 in the room at one time for up to three days with extensive follow-up and implementation procedures. The results are routinely astounding and tend to release a massive amount of positive energy in the organization.

### **Elements of Success and Key Principles**

Organizational consultants, Gil Steil Jr. and Nancy Aronson, PhD, discovered the underlying principles of the most successful change efforts:

**Clarity of purpose** - the narrower the purpose, the quicker a group can mature.

**Active engagement** - ask people to get involved quickly. Remember, this is not a workshop or training but rather requires collaboration and creativity on everyone's part. And concerns real work and real decisions.

**Whole organizational “system” is invited** - tap the knowledge and experience of those on the front lines, and the key vendors and customers. Something magical happens when people see the whole system and experience themselves as an integral part of it.

**Development of shared understanding of the context** - generating broad-based understanding of the initiative by creating shared meaning of the changes considered.

**Self-management of working groups** - when outsiders facilitate working processes too much, ownership and responsibility are slowed down. Conversely, action emerges quickly when groups take responsibility for their own process.

**Discovery of common ground** - disagreement can slow

down the change process. The purpose of this meeting is to allow disagreement while focusing on what is mutually positive.

**Focus on the future** - let a shared dream of a desirable future draw energy and action to it.

**Equal standing** - everyone has equal opportunity to speak and be heard, not just management.

### **Galvanizing Employees to Pull in the Same Direction**

By employing this methodology the organization moves from resistance and dispersion of energy to a shared understanding of where the organization is going and the roles everyone has in its success.

### **Results**

One organization spent hundreds of thousands of dollars using outside research firms to conduct pre- and post-test measurements around culture change and customer satisfaction. The findings were that significant positive improvement occurred when this methodology was employed. In a successful large-scale event, change occurs in how participants interact. These special skills and learnings - from new ways of interacting with co-workers to conducting better meetings - become part of the organization's new culture.

As you are spending huge amounts of money for bricks and mortar, plants and decorations for your new casino expansion, do not overlook the need to develop new approaches to organizational change and communication. While the new facility may be dazzling, the long-term commitment by the staff is equally as important. Participation and high involvement have been the bedrock of both the Native American culture and our system of government. This way of sharing information and creating collective wisdom for future action has worked for generations. In just the same way, Large Scale Change has been employed by countless organizations, and has been proven to help facilitate positive change within organizations. ♣

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