Change as a Process
What Business Management Can Tell Us About Instituting New Diversity Initiatives

MLDC Research Areas

Definition of Diversity

Legal Implications

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This issue paper aims to aid in the deliberations of the MLDC. It does not contain the recommendations of the MLDC.

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Abstract

Introducing and facilitating change is a challenge for any organization. Business management leaders have developed a three-phase process that can assist military leadership in planning for, introducing, and encouraging new behaviors and processes that will support new visions for an organization. This method may help leadership institute those changes necessary to provide opportunities for advancing minority members in the armed forces by lessening workforce resistance to the changes. This issue paper outlines the business management process for organizational change and provides considerations for leadership when orchestrating the phases of change. Because incorporating a new diversity management strategy will affect the entire workforce, a planned diversity change strategy may help an organization align its diversity initiatives with its goals, strategy, and culture.

Initiating change can be a challenge for any organization. When change comes into view, employees may react with fear or suspicion if they feel there is a threat to familiar organizational routines and values. Although some servicemembers will welcome policy and program changes that promote greater gender, ethnic, and racial diversity, others may react negatively, especially if they do not fully understand the reasons for the changes or how the changes may benefit the organization or themselves.

Business managers are often tasked with modifying programs and restructuring operations because of technological advances, market changes, and social pressures. Because of this, business management specialists have developed practices to more successfully introduce and sustain changes in the workplace. A planned strategy for introducing and sustaining workplace change may help the Department of Defense (DoD) effectively introduce and implement newer policies that increase diversity in the military (Friday & Friday, 2003).

This paper describes the process of *planned organizational change*. The process consists of three phases, which, in turn, are broken down into eight viable steps.

What Is Planned Organizational Change?
Planned organizational change is a strategy for introducing, implementing, and sustaining change in the workplace. It is not a quick-fix method; rather, it is a continuous process to improve the staying power of new programs and policies by developing employee commitment through planning and communication on behalf of an organization's management.

Generally, planned organizational change consists of three major phases: unfreezing, movement, and refreezing (Lewin, 1951). In the first phase, managers *unfreeze* old attitudes and behaviors by using supporting information or data to show the workforce that there is a need for change. Once the workforce is initially motivated, top leadership continually supports *movement* toward the new goals in the second phase. In the third phase, leadership *refreezes* the workforce in their new behaviors and attitudes through coaching, training, development, and accountability.

How Is Planned Organizational Change Implemented?
Successful implementation of organizational change depends on the development of visionary yet achievable goals, the leadership's commitment to change, and effective management of the change process. Before initiating change, it is necessary for leaders to diagnose areas of concern, obtain information, and create future action plans based on that information. Understanding the reasons that brought

about the need for change is a necessary element of the change process. Once these reasons are understood, plans of action can be established.

How might this process be translated into practice in the military? During the planning stages of new diversity initiatives, leaders may

- gather information by reviewing literature and collecting data on diversity management and leadership
- determine the primary issues at stake and how new goals can facilitate positive changes addressing those issues
- develop new policies and programs that will best promote the new goals
- consider potential areas of resistance.

After leaders have recognized the need for change, distinguished specific goals, and developed policies, programs, and processes that will accomplish these goals, they are ready to initiate change within the organization. That implementation occurs through the three phases discussed above. We divide the phases into the eight steps proposed by Kotter (1996).

Phase One: Unfreezing

The goal of the unfreezing phase is to generate the motivation to change within the workforce. People are the core of any organization, and they must be the ones to carry out changes in organizational goals and processes.

Step 1: Create a Sense of Urgency. Often, the need for organizational change is in response to a crisis or to a shift in external or internal conditions affecting the organization. Even without a crisis at hand, a sense of urgency about the issue must be fully constructed and delivered to the workforce.

For example, if past and recent data show low percentages of minorities and women occupying higher levels of leadership, information illustrating the problem should be shared with the workforce. In addition, information about how the issue affects everyone in the organization and why the situation must be changed for the organization to survive should be openly communicated.[1] Consequently, the more urgent the area of concern appears, the more motivated the workforce will be in moving forward with change.

Step 2: Construct a Guiding Coalition. The credibility and accountability of top leadership are absolutely critical when initiating change. A coalition of leaders should be established to serve as decisionmakers who will plan and monitor the change process. These leaders should work closely and collaboratively with one another. It is beneficial for the individuals who will be developing, implementing, and maintaining change to constantly reinforce each other while supporting the change process. If a leader's actions are viewed as contrary to the initiative, the workforce will no longer believe in the value of change and will lose mission focus.

It is the leaders' responsibility to understand their roles, communicate the new vision, and develop buy-in from members of the organization. Organizational change is a top-down process, and creating a powerful coalition of leaders to manage and maintain the change process is a critical component of the change initiative's success.

Step 3: Create a Vision. Creating a vision is often overlooked when planning to initiate change. A vision serves as the motivating force for change, allowing the workforce to see where they are and where their organization is going. It provides an energizing and desirable future state of the organization. Leaders should try to create a vision that applies to all individuals in the organization. A vision should be inspirational, clear, concise, and easy to communicate so that both leaders and the entire organization can remember it.

To increase its memorability, the vision may use imagery to invoke certain messages. Indeed, the phases of unfreezing, movement, and refreezing described in this issue paper are suggestive of ice melting; becoming fluid and, thus, changeable; and then re-solidifying into a new form. This imagery gives a memorable and clear picture to invoke an idea that some may otherwise consider vague.

Step 4: Communicate the Vision. A well-organized communication plan is vital for success. To disseminate the vision to all members of the organization, various forms of communication should be used. Although verbal communication is necessary, other supportive forms, such as posters, ads, policies, and processes, should also be used. These methods of communication serve as constant reminders of the vision and, therefore, of the goals and outcomes of the change initiative.

Phase Two: Movement

The goal of the movement phase is to encourage people to accept the organization's new vision and to develop new ways of working within that vision. Old ideas and processes are replaced with those that are consistent with this vision, and achieving short-term goals ensures movement toward larger ends.

Step 5: Remove Psychological Obstacles. Symbols and artifacts representing old values and goals should be removed without delay. They can serve as psychological obstacles, constantly reminding the workforce of previous norms and, thus, potentially creating resistance to change. Symbols of the new vision and subsequent polices and programs should immediately replace the old ones to remind the workforce of the promising future and to empower each member to move forward.

Step 6: Create Short-Term Wins. Short-term wins demonstrate progress toward the ultimate goals. Short-term wins must be carefully constructed to be achievable and to represent steps in the right direction. Leadership should research

and consider multiple avenues for guaranteed short-term wins. Short-term wins should be thought out *carefully* because, if they fail, they can provide fodder for those resistant to change. Researching previously successful methods in the organization provides a starting point. It is also critical for leadership to partner with the workforce to construct short-term wins early on to increase buy-in and maintain motivation.

A short-term win is nearly useless, however, if it is not communicated. Hence, many methods of communication (e.g., email, town-hall meetings, electronic media, social networks, newsletters) must be used so that everyone in the organization receives the good news.

Phase Three: Refreezing

The final phase fixes the vision and subsequent changes in policy and processes into the minds of the employees so that they adopt the new set of values and norms. Because change is stabilized during the refreezing period, refreezing should be pursued only after people have accepted new ways of working. Positive reinforcement is used to freeze, or make habitual, the organization's new equilibrium. Additional coaching and modeling can be used at this point to reinforce the stability of the change.

Step 7: Refrain from Declaring Victory Too Soon. A common mistake change managers make is to become satisfied with outcomes early on and, thus, to discontinue the change process. Once the process is brought to a halt, old behaviors soon reemerge, eliciting a return of the old culture, habits, and accepted norms. Implementing change takes time, and it is vital that the support for change continue so that the desired culture and behaviors become inculcated into the culture of the organization.

It is helpful to periodically evaluate the change initiative to determine areas of improvement and to assess the organization to find out the effects of change. By evaluating the actual change process (e.g., collecting data to identify problem areas, success areas, and parts of the change process that are not working well) and by evaluating member reactions to the initiative, change managers can improve the process, manage resistance more effectively, and identify the areas that need more attention.

Step 8: Anchor in the Changes. Once the change is embraced, leaders are responsible for maintaining the results. Leaders should adopt the notion that instituting change is a constant process: Old habits can easily reemerge if desired behaviors are not reinforced through an accountability system. Leaders can anchor, or stabilize, the progress they have made and continue to move forward by

- establishing ways to regularly coach and mentor employees through meetings and conferences
- constantly communicating the vision and leading by example

- continuously searching for and removing psychological obstacles to success (i.e., symbols and artifacts)
- establishing an accountability system.

Conclusions

Business management specialists have developed a three-phase system of introducing, encouraging, and locking in new behaviors and procedures that will support an organization's new vision. Integrating organizational change, such as the military's new leadership diversity initiative, is an ongoing process. While it is critical that leadership carefully study background data and information as they plan for change, it is equally important to provide different kinds of motivational and communicative support to the workforce as plans become reality. Additionally, there is a striking need for attention to initiatives, policies, and procedures even after change has been implemented. The need to evaluate the change initiative as it moves along cannot be stressed enough.

Each leader must subscribe to the same clear vision for the organization, because these leaders will be communicating the vision to all members in the organization. It is also important that the vision include the entire workforce. Aiming the vision at a subset of the organization will make it difficult for the others to embrace change. Leadership should express why the future state is better than the current state, explain how the organization will arrive at the future state, and inspire all members to reach the organization's goals.

Notes
[1]For more information on building a business-case argument for diversity, see Military Leadership Diversity Commission (2010).

References

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