

## Safety and Performance Excellence: Dictating Change

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Leaders and managers who have yet to embrace MBWA (Managing by Wandering Around) persist in thinking they can accomplish change simply by commanding it to be so. Like generals giving orders, they assume their entire organization clearly will understand what they want and know how to accomplish it and will do so unquestioningly.

In the real world, accomplishing change is much more complex. Meaningful change usually happens over a period of time, during which the original command can get lost. While there are too many elements of change to discuss here, there are a few that warrant attention.

**Influences** – When navigating toward a destination, it is critical to know your current exact location. This is true when trying to navigate your organization to a new state as well. It is critically important to assess your current status before mapping your way to a new one. The influences in your organization are perfectly aligned to give you the performance you currently are getting.

Forcing change without understanding and addressing the existing influences seldom results in sustainable transformation. People do things for a reason. If you don't change the reason, it will influence people to return to their former practices.

Significant change should begin with an assessment. That assessment should not just discover the current status, but why it exists. Only with a good understanding of current status and existing influences can you develop an effective strategy for change.

**Stasis** – The definition of stasis is a condition or state in which things do not change, move or progress. In physics, stasis can be caused by an equilibrium of opposing forces or an inactivity of non-opposing forces. In an organization, common practice is shaped by influences in the workplace. Once common practice becomes relatively constant, this is an indicator that influences are aligned to produce the current practices. These facts again reinforce the need for accurate assessment.

Stasis can work against change but it also can assist it, since stasis is based on current status. Objects at rest tend to stay at rest whereas objects in motion tend to stay in motion. If the organization is at rest, it might take significant energy to get it moving. It is best to know the magnitude of change needed before the change strategy is developed. On the other hand, if the organization is on the move in any area of endeavor, that momentum easily might be refocused on some new change initiative with much less effort.

**Culture** – Among the most powerful of influences on organizational performance is the culture. Some say culture is "the way we do things around here" or "what people do when you are not watching." Both of these are descriptions of common practice, not culture. Culture is the underlying set of influences that produce common practice. In other words, culture is why we do things the way we do around here and why people do what they do when you are not watching.

Culture is the set of influences that are shared or common to most or all the members of the culture. As one expert put it, it is not what is in the heads of your workers but what is between their heads.

Culture has its own version of stasis. Many say that cultures resist change. While it is true if you try to make a culture change you almost surely will meet resistance, the resistance often is to the force, not the change. Cultures often change themselves regularly and don't resist change coming from within. However, if the change comes from outside the culture and it is forced change, the culture almost certainly will resist.

Dictates from leaders or managers almost always are considered forced changes and the source of the force typically is considered to be outside the culture. Leaders and managers need to identify and convert change agents within the culture to assist in the change. Simply trying to push change from outside the culture is doomed to either complete failure or, at the very least, sub-optimization.

**Motivation** – Although the goal of motivation largely has been replaced in business with concepts like engagement, buy-in or ownership, the basic objective is to answer for everyone in the organization the old WIIFM (What's In It For Me?) question. Telling people what to do can get hands and feet moving, but it is the rationale of why it is important and what it will accomplish that gets hearts and minds involved.

Some management experts have described it as the difference between grudging compliance and willing cooperation. Getting people on board with change efforts is a powerful way to make change happen with minimum pushing from leaders and managers. True motivation is an increased energy focused on specific goals resulting in productive action. It is important to abandon the old thinking of motivational speakers who get people excited but not in a lasting or productive way.

**Road mapping** – Too many leaders think of change as an event rather than a process. Leaders tend to think of their job as making decisions, and the jobs of their subordinates are to carry out those decisions. While this is true in many cases, effective leaders accurately assess the magnitude of change their decisions will require and allow time and resources to accomplish them.

When change involves a journey, everyone on the trip needs a roadmap. Road mapping defines the steps of change in chronological order so no one is lost along the way. When we feel lost, our natural instinct is to go back to our old, familiar surroundings. Such action negates change.

While change can begin with a dictate, it cannot end there. True and lasting change requires knowledge of current status and a strategy that clearly defines and enables the change while fully enlisting the assistance of those involved.

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