STABILITY MANAGEMENT OR CHANGE MANAGEMENT?

6 RECOMMENDATIONS BY PROF PETER DE PRINS, EXPERT IN CHANGE MANAGEMENT AND COACHING

Change is happening all around us and it's impossible to overlook. Change can be internally motivated or externally motivated. Changes can be anticipated or unexpected – and the change can be minor or a dramatic departure from what we know. But in all cases, the fundamental nature of change is a movement from the current state through a transition state to a future state.

While change is about moving to a future state, change management is about supporting employees who are impacted by the change that the organisation's project or initiative has created: that is, supporting employees through their transitions from their own current state to their own future state.

But while they are busy managing the change, organisations often forget to manage their stability: the foundations that created their success, the pillars that the current situation has been built on, current and past achievements. However, research shows that, for change to be successful, it is essential to maintain a balance between change and stability.

To help you achieve this balance, we have defined 6 recommendations for you, as a change leader, to keep in mind:

1. KEEP ALL 6 OF YOUR BATTERIES OF CHANGE CHARGED

Our literature study has shown that books on change management can be divided into 4 main groups, according to their fundamental beliefs regarding how successful change management should be driven:

- Starting from a well-defined and clear strategy
- Starting from a strong shared ambition, promoted by a coherent dominant coalition group
- Starting from a well-designed project management dashboard
- Starting from a cultural and employee focus

Although each approach has its raison d’être, research shows that the highest probability of success lies in keeping all 4 dimensions in balance.

We have combined these 4 dimensions in a 6 Batteries of Change model. To be able to function properly, each battery needs to be charged to a reasonable level (think about a toy car that needs batteries in serial connection: if one doesn’t work, the car won’t run). The 6 batteries are grouped along 2 axes: rational/emotional and corporate/local:

**RATIONAL**
1. Strategic orientation and direction (corporate)
2. Powerful management systems (transitional)
3. Action planning and implementation (local)

**EMOTIONAL**
4. Powerful coalitions and shared ambition (corporate)
5. Culture and climate (transitional)
6. Connection with employees (local)
2. OVERCOME THE 3 REASONS FOR BEING STUCK AS AN ORGANISATION

After being struck by a threatening external event (such as new technology, new markets, new players), organisations often stay stuck in a blind fairness mode. It’s difficult to give up the systems and resources that have been used so well for so long, and companies become blind to the outside world, holding on to the old systems and creating arguments for why they should not change. There are 3 reasons why this stuck state happens:

FAILURE TO SEE
Employees might not always understand exactly what is needed and how the change impacts their behaviour and current situation. Change managers need to create a high level of contrast (what is different from today) and a high level of confrontation (sensory experience of the impact of the change).

FAILURE TO MOVE
Implementing change works either with a Bright Spot approach or a Slice & Dice approach. A 3rd order of change – implementation across a whole organisation at once – will most likely fail.

FAILURE TO FINISH
Ambassadors of change are often very visible and present at the beginning of the process, but they start to lose focus and interest along the way. This can bring the change process to a halt before the objectives have been reached. Keep the ambassadors involved and alert until the end.

3. USE THE EFFECTS OF PROGRESS

The closer people are to their goals, the more effort they will exert to reach them. It is more motivating to fill up a carwash loyalty card that’s already half-full than to start with a completely empty one. Showing your employees often what has already been achieved helps drive the change.

4. MANAGE THE CO-CREATION OF CHANGE AND STABILITY

Successful companies in competitive environments operate in a zone between structure and chaos in order to maintain both consistent execution and adaptive innovation.

5. MANAGE THE EFFECTS OF ORGANISATIONAL TRAUMA

Organisations today can be faced with events that can be perceived as ‘life-threatening’: the event might put them out of the market or cause them to lose turnover, customers, employees, image, … The first reaction is survival mode: fight, flight, freeze, follow. It’s hard to focus on change – let alone manage it well – during this survival stage.

When change is ‘forced’ upon these organisations from the top, the new organisation is built on a ‘wounded’ one. The organisation has not had time to recover or digest the effects of the external event, and some (often invisible) cracks start to erupt in the organisation’s ‘emotional foundations’. Like a building after an earthquake, which might look good from the outside, but that has numerous defects upon closer inspection. Change leaders need to create room for emotional institutionalisation: learn to deal with the person behind the function.

6. MEASURE YOUR CULTURE

Finally, far too often organisations talk about their culture (the way things are done) by repeating the 4 or 5 values that are printed on the poster on the wall (which is often, in fact, meaningless). If you want to create buy-in from your people and have them recognise your change messages and be motivated by your future plans, measure your culture. There are lots of tools out there for doing this (at very reasonable prices). So, there’s no excuse for assuming your culture when you can actually measure it objectively.

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Peter presented his new model of change in his recent Feed Your Mind session.

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