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## Chapter 9 Action Planning and Implementation

*When it is obvious that the goals cannot be reached, don't adjust the goals, adjust the action steps.*

—Confucius<sup>1</sup>

### Chapter Overview

- Change leaders recognize the usefulness of plans and the imperative of action. Prepare, take action, and learn from the results. Change initiators have a “do it” attitude.
- Action planning and implementation involves planning the work and working the plan. “Right” decisions mean approximately “right” as change agents obtain feedback from action and make adjustments as they act.
- Change agents learn to specify who does what, when, and how to monitor and track their change initiatives. Agents use a variety of management tools, such as responsibility and project planning charts, surveys and survey feedback, and critical path methods, to successfully plan and implement their change programs.
- Successful change agents develop detailed communications plans and understand how to manage transitions from the present to a future desired state.

This book has a philosophical bias for taking action. Rather than passively waiting or complaining from the sidelines, change agents get engaged. However, the goal is not action simply for novelty and excitement. Action must increase the likelihood of positive change. Great ideas don't generate value

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until they are effectively executed. One of the ways to improve the quality of action is to use proven tools to execute a change agenda.

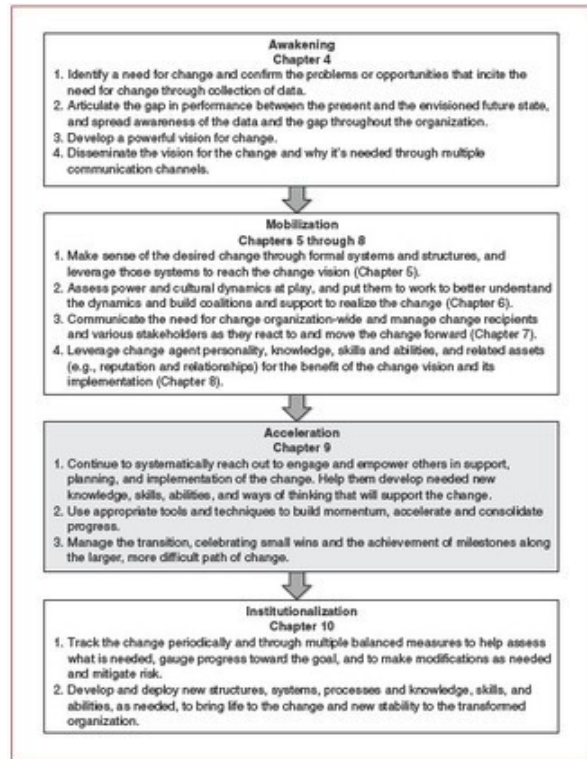
Tools in [Chapter 9](#) translate plans to action. If this were a political campaign, these tools would be steps that are deployed after the candidate has been selected, the platform finalized, and the election called. The chapter provides advice on implementation tactics and project management tools. It addresses communication and influence tactics during the change process. And finally, the management of transition, or the process of keeping the organization operating while implementing the change, is detailed. In terms of the model in [Figure 9.1](#), these are the implementation issues of “getting from here to there”—assessing the present in terms of the future, determining the work that needs to be done, and implementing the change.

## Without a “Do It” Orientation, Things Won’t Happen

Many major change initiatives start in the C-suite. Boards of directors and executives at the top of organizations have access to all of the data that an organization generates, and from this perspective and input they can observe a myriad of organizational problems and envision viable solutions. Two examples of boards who hired strong, change agent CEOs are IBM’s board when they brought in Lou Gerstner in 1993 and the board of New England Medical Center, Boston (now called Tufts Medical Center) when they hired Ellen Zane in 2002 to lead the transformation of the then-foundering nonprofit hospital (see cases at the end of this book or on the website for the story about Zane’s turnaround of the medical center). Gerstner and Zane were seasoned executives when they took on the extremely difficult task of pushing change from the top down into the basements of their organizations. Both had a **“do it” orientation** and both were authorized by their boards and by their titles, jobs, and positions to lead change within their institutions. Having the authority to act makes certain aspects of the job of change agent easier than working from the middle. Gerstner, for instance, when he claimed the title of CEO, quickly changed the reward system for his top executives, focusing their attention on the performance of IBM as a whole, rather than just their divisions or areas. Such quick structural change is unlikely in a mid-level role.

In an ideal world, change leaders located in the middle of the organization will also find support for their projects. They need ready access to supportive executives who provide directional clarity, ensure their organizations are ready for change, approve needed resources, provide other modes of support, and cultivate broad employee commitment for the change. In some instances, this is not the case. Many executives will have little or no knowledge of the initiative or its value and implications. If they have heard of the idea, they may lack interest because of other priorities and political realities; some may have heard of it and have concerns, while others will simply want to distance themselves from the change in the event it doesn’t work out. Some will fail to understand the important role they have to play in nurturing innovation from within the organization; others will not see it as their role.

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**Figure 9.1** The Change Path Model

Organizations are complex systems, and their prospects for successful adaptation are advanced when they can also learn and grow from the bottom up. This is one of the reasons that firms such as 3M, Procter & Gamble, and Deloitte have demonstrated such staying power: They grow from within and from the bottom up. Wise senior managers know how to nurture and leverage employees' adaptive energy.

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Wise change agents know how to save short-sighted senior managers from themselves. If you work in an organization such as 3M, then “lucky you!” If you do not, an early task is to seek—and hopefully acquire—senior-level support for your initiative, if it is needed. An e-mail from the CEO or SVP announcing her support for your project will help garner support from other organizational members.

If senior-level support for change is unlikely to develop in the near future, change initiators may feel that abiding by formal organizational protocols and waiting for official support will slow progress unduly. Faced with this situation, change agents may choose to follow the advice of Rear Admiral Grace Hopper, a pioneering female software engineer in the U.S. Navy, who said “it is easier to seek forgiveness than permission.”<sup>4</sup>

Pfeffer and Sutton state “actions count more than elegant plans or concepts” and that “there is no doing without mistakes.” They ask, however, a crucial question: “What is the company’s response?”<sup>5</sup> If the organization’s response to reasoned initiatives and honest mistakes is to scapegoat and blame, people quickly learn not to take risks that might lead to mistakes. Or they learn to cover up mistakes. Either way, the organization suffers.\* However, beliefs about likely organizational responses can also become a convenient excuse for inaction and the avoidance of risk taking (e.g., What if my idea really won’t work or what will I do if it does work?). If such beliefs are never challenged, their stability will produce self-fulfilling prophecies.

Effective executives and managers of change are aware of the consequences of their actions and intuitively test their organizational assumptions by engaging in an action–learning–reaction cycle.<sup>6</sup> Sayles recognized this when he wrote, “working leaders instead of simply waiting for and evaluating results seek to intervene. And the interventions they undertake require a more intimate knowledge of operations, and more involvement in the work than those of traditional middle managers.”<sup>7</sup>

For employees lower in the hierarchy, action is also key. Instead of being discouraged by lack of authority or reach, one must fully understand the resources and tools they have at their disposal. Dr. Ross Wirth, chair of Business, Franklin University, reflected on his 32-year career at Citgo Petroleum with the following wisdom:<sup>8</sup> “Traditional thought says that nothing happens without top management’s approval (but) change need not be something that is ‘done to you.’ Here is another way to think of it: empowerment is something you grasp until you find its limits. I tell people that they can constantly test the limits of their empowerment, carefully reading internal politics to see when they are pushing up against a boundary. Too many people think they are not empowered, but actually they have failed to test their limits.”

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The reality of much organizational life is somewhere between an environment that punishes those who dare to challenge the status quo and one in which all such initiatives are unconditionally embraced and rewarded. Organizational members who choose not to wait on formal permission and undertake reasonable self-initiated change initiatives may experience some chastisement for not first seeking approval, particularly if the initiative runs into difficulty. However, in many organizations, they are also commended for showing initiative and having a positive impact. The organization's culture and the personality of a boss (e.g., managerial style and tolerance for ambiguity) will obviously influence what response the initiator receives, but most managers value initiative.

What can be done to increase the likelihood that taking action will produce desired results? The following sections address this question by exploring a variety of planning and implementing tools. The purpose of these tools is to assist change leaders in designing and then managing their initiatives in ways that increase their prospects for success.

### **Innovation and Change at 3M**

Front-line freedom to innovate and senior-level support have been critical ingredients to 3M's success. Technical and marketing employees commit 15% of their time to work on projects of their own choosing, without supervision. The environment is open and informal, input from customers and lead users is sought, and collaboration and inquisitiveness are valued. Social media facilitates front-line collaboration and helps to overcome the communication barriers that organizational size and complexity bring. At the same time, 3M's culture is demanding, and the process for funding new ideas is highly structured.

The degree of management scrutiny and oversight increases as new ideas evolve to require significant resources. Products that are eventually successful in the marketplace are typically rejected several times in management's funding process before receiving funds, requiring persistence from innovators. Management and employees embrace and learn from failures because innovation won't happen otherwise. George Buckley, 3M's CEO and a Ph.D. in engineering, is deeply interested in innovation. He regularly visits the labs to find out what people are exploring, believing that "creativity comes from freedom, not control."<sup>2</sup> This commitment to innovation allows new products and services to percolate and develop from the ground up.<sup>3</sup>

## **Prelude to Action: Selecting the Correct Path**

Any action plan for change needs to be rooted in a sophisticated understanding of how the organization works and what needs to be achieved. Since there are a variety of action paths available, how do you decide which to take? Mintzberg and Westley provide guidance in this matter by setting out three generic approaches: thinking first, seeing first, and doing first:<sup>9</sup>

- **Thinking first strategy** works best when the issue is clear, data are reliable, context is structured, thoughts can be pinned down, and discipline can be established as in many routine production processes. The introduction of an initiative such as Six Sigma is an example where management needs to think first.

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- **Seeing first strategy** works best when many elements have to be combined into creative solutions, commitment to those solutions is key, and communication across boundaries is essential. New product development is an example of the need to see first.
- **Doing first strategy** works best when the situation is novel and confusing, complicated specifications would get in the way, and a few simple relationship rules can help people move forward. For example, if a manager is testing an approach to customer service and wants feedback about what works, then doing first is appropriate.

As complexity and ambiguity rise, Mintzberg and Westley argue that the preferred approach to action shifts. Thinking first fits when the situation is well structured, a manager has the needed data, and there is not much confusion about how to proceed. As ambiguity and complexity rise, though, certainty over how best to proceed becomes less clear. Seeing first approaches the challenge by experimentation, prototyping, and pilot programs so that commitment can be gained by having others see and experience an initiative. Doing first is a response to even more ambiguous situations and takes the process of exploration further in the search for new paths forward. As these paths begin to emerge, the approach can then be altered to seeing first or doing first, depending on what is suitable for the next stage.

Nitin Nohria offers a slightly different assessment of the generic change strategies available.<sup>10</sup> He identified three strategies, defined their characteristics, explained the typical implementation, and highlighted their risk points. **Programmatic change** (similar to Mintzberg and Westley's thinking first change) involves the implementation of straightforward, well-structured solutions. It is best suited to contexts that are clear and well defined and where the magnitude of the change is incremental in nature. Risks with this approach lie in potential problems with inflexibility, overreliance on a "one-size-fits-all" solution, and a lack of focus on behavior.

**Discontinuous change** involves a major break from the past. If the environment is shifting dramatically and a continuation of activities based on existing assumptions will not work, then discontinuous, top-down change may be fitting. Organizational restructuring due to downsizing, rapid growth, or the realignment of markets is an example of this category. Risks with this approach come from political coalitions that may form and derail the change, a lack of sufficient control to enforce the change, and the loss of talented people who become frustrated and quit.

**Emergent change** (similar to Mintzberg and Westley's doing first change) grows out of incremental initiatives and can create ambiguity and challenge for staff members. An employee-centered change initiative to modify the culture of the organization that emerges from customers' and staff's feedback would be an example. If the organization has a talented, knowledgeable workforce that understands the risks and possibilities, utilizing an emergent change approach may be appropriate. Risks with this approach come in the form of confusion over direction, uncertainty as to the impact of the change, and slow progress (See [Table 9.1](#)).

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**Table 9.1** Three Generic Change Strategies

| Change Type                 | Characteristic                                 | Implementation  | Issues or Concerns  |
|-----------------------------|--|---|---|
| <b>Programmatic change</b>  | Missions, plans, objectives                    | Training, timelines, steering committees              | Lack of focus on behavior, one solution for all, inflexible solutions             |
| <b>Discontinuous change</b> | Initiated from top, clear break, reorientation | Decrees, structural change, concurrent implementation | Political coalitions derail change, weak controls, stress from the loss of people |
| <b>Emergent change</b>      | Ambiguous, incremental, challenging            | Use of metaphors, experimentation, and risk taking    | Confusion over direction, uncertainty and possible slow results                   |

*Source:* Adapted from N. Nohria and R. Khurana, “Executing Change: Three Generic Strategies,” *Harvard Business School Note*. #494–039. August 24, 1993.

To counteract the pitfalls of programmatic or “thinking first” change, consider using employee engagement and feedback to connect with those on the receiving end, learn from their experiences, and decentralize decision making to allow for adaptation to local conditions. The pitfalls (including unintended consequences) from change will be lessened by processes that reduce ambiguity, promote feedback and learning, and build support by enhancing member understanding of the change and why it was undertaken.

The issues related to emergent or “doing first” change may be managed through the use of field experiments and task forces to provide engagement and feedback on an ongoing basis. These can be used to create clarity concerning what is emerging and build understanding and support for the next steps in the change process. In metaphorical terms, this points to a move from “ready—aim—fire” to “ready—fire—aim—re-fire—re-aim”<sup>†</sup> for an emergent approach to planning. In fast-moving contexts, it is likely that a traditional planning process will be too lengthy and that by the time the planning is finished, the opportunity may have been missed. This metaphor recognizes that significant information can be obtained from action feedback. When a change leader initiates action, reactions will occur that can provide insight into how to respond and take corrective actions.

A third approach to thinking about change strategies is found in the unilateral versus participative approaches to change. Advocates of a **unilateral approach** to



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change believe that if one first changes systems and structures, forcing behavioral changes, that action will in turn produce changes in attitudes and beliefs over time. Those who promote a **participative approach** believe the opposite. They argue that you first need to engage and change attitudes and gain acceptance of an initiative before restructuring systems and organizational structures.

Waldersee and Griffiths note that change initiatives have been traditionally grouped into two broad categories. **Techno–structural change** refers to change that is based in structures, systems, and technology. **Behavioral–social change** is focused on altering established social relationships. After investigating 408 change episodes, they concluded that the unilateral approach was perceived to be more appropriate for techno–structural change, while participative approaches were seen as more appropriate when behavioral–social changes such as cultural change were involved.<sup>11</sup> When Australian managers were asked about the perceived effectiveness of these two change approaches, they saw unilateral methods as more effective in bringing about successful change, regardless of the type of change. What does all of this mean for action planning? Waldersee and Griffiths concluded that:

Concrete actions taken by change managers are often superior to the traditional prescriptions of participation.<sup>12</sup> Forcing change through top-down actions such as redeploying staff or redesigning jobs may effectively shift employee behavior. With the context and behavior changed, interventions targeting attitudes may then follow. (p. 432)

While a unilateral approach may have appeal for those who want to ensure that things are done, such an approach can be risky and needs to be managed with care. When implementation lacks sensitivity, stakeholders may feel that their perspectives and concerns have been ignored. This can result in fallout and resistance that could have been avoided, and missed opportunities for valuable input.

What conclusions can be drawn from this material on a “do it” orientation and change strategies? Start a change process rather than waiting to get things perfect. Be willing to take informed risks and learn as you go. Finally, pick your change strategy with care and remember to take steps to manage the risks associated with the adopted approach. Regardless of how difficult change appears to be, Confucius was right—“a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.”<sup>13</sup> You need to plan your work and work the plan.

## Plan the Work

If the change leader’s approach to planned change has followed what this book suggests, then much planning will have already been done. In addition, Beer, Eisenstat, and Spector<sup>14</sup> offer a prescriptive list of “steps to effective change.” Beer et al.’s steps are:

1. Mobilize commitment to change through joint diagnosis of business problems.
2. Develop a shared vision of how to organize and manage for competitiveness.

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3. Foster consensus for the new vision, competence to enact it, and cohesion to move it along.
4. Spread revitalization to all departments without pushing it from the top.
5. Institutionalize revitalization through formal policies, systems, and structures.
6. Monitor and adjust strategies in response to problems in the revitalization process.

For many change situations, this checklist provides valuable guidance in the development of an action plan. However, assuming a “one-size-fits-all” approach to change is risky. For example, the above list assumes a fundamental cooperative orientation. That is, there is sufficient commonality of goals that a shared vision is possible. The list also suggests that change should evolve and not be pushed down by top management. However, change agents will need approaches that allow them to face situations in which cooperation and commonality of goals is weak or absent and where changes are being pushed from the top. The table below compares Beer et al.’s steps with the prescriptions of others, which may be helpful in thinking about planning through multiple perspectives.<sup>15</sup>

As well, the need for contingent thinking needs to be addressed. That is, an action plan depends significantly upon the action-planning context. In complex and ambiguous situations, plans and tactics must be able to adapt as events unfold. As such, it is useful to remember the old saying: “No plan survives first contact.”<sup>16</sup>

In summary, while careful planning is critical, change leaders must also recognize that planning is a means—not an end in itself. Don’t ignore vital emerging information just because it does not fit with carefully conceived plans. The abilities to think contingently, consider alternative paths forward, and adapt are important contributors to enhanced adaptive capacity.<sup>17</sup>

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**Table 9.2** A Comparison of Four Models of Change

| <b>Beer et al.'s Six Steps for Change (1990)</b>  | <b>Jick's The Ten Commandments (1997)</b>         | <b>Kotter's Eight-Stage Process for Successful Organizational Transformation (1996)</b> | <b>Lueck's Seven Steps for Change (2003)</b>   |
|---|---|---|--|
| Mobilize commitment to change through joint diagnosis of problems.                          | Analyze the organization and its need for change. | Establish a sense of urgency.   | Mobilize energy, commitment through joint identification of business problems and their solutions. |
| Develop a shared vision of how to organize and manage for competitiveness.                  | Create a vision and a common direction.           | Create a guiding coalition.   | Develop a shared vision of how to organize and manage for competitiveness.                         |
| Foster consensus for the new vision, competence to enact it, and cohesion to move it along. | Separate from the past.                           | Develop a vision and strategy.  | Identify the leadership.   |
| Spread revitalization to all departments without pushing it from the top.                   | Create a sense of urgency.                        | Empower broad-based action.   | Focus on results, not activities.  |
| Institutionalize revitalization through formal policies, systems, and structures.           | Support a strong leader role.                     | Communicate the change vision.  | Start change at the periphery, then let it spread to other units, pushing it from the top.         |
| Monitor and adjust strategies in response to problems in the revitalization process.        | Line up political sponsorship.                    | Generate short-term wins.   | Institutionalize success through formal policies, systems, and structures.                         |
|   | Craft an implementation plan.                     | Consolidate gains and produce more change.  | Monitor and adjust strategies in response to problems in the change process.                       |
|   | Develop enabling structures.                      | Anchor new approaches in the culture.   |  |
|   | Communicate, involve people, and be honest.       |   |  |
|   | Reinforce and institutionalize change.            |   |  |

**Source:** Based on Todnem, R. (2005). Organisational change management: A critical review. *Journal of Change Management*, 5(4), 369–381; and Beer, M., Eisenstat, R., & Spector, B. (1990, November -December). Why change programs don't produce change. *Harvard Business Review*, 1000, 158–166.

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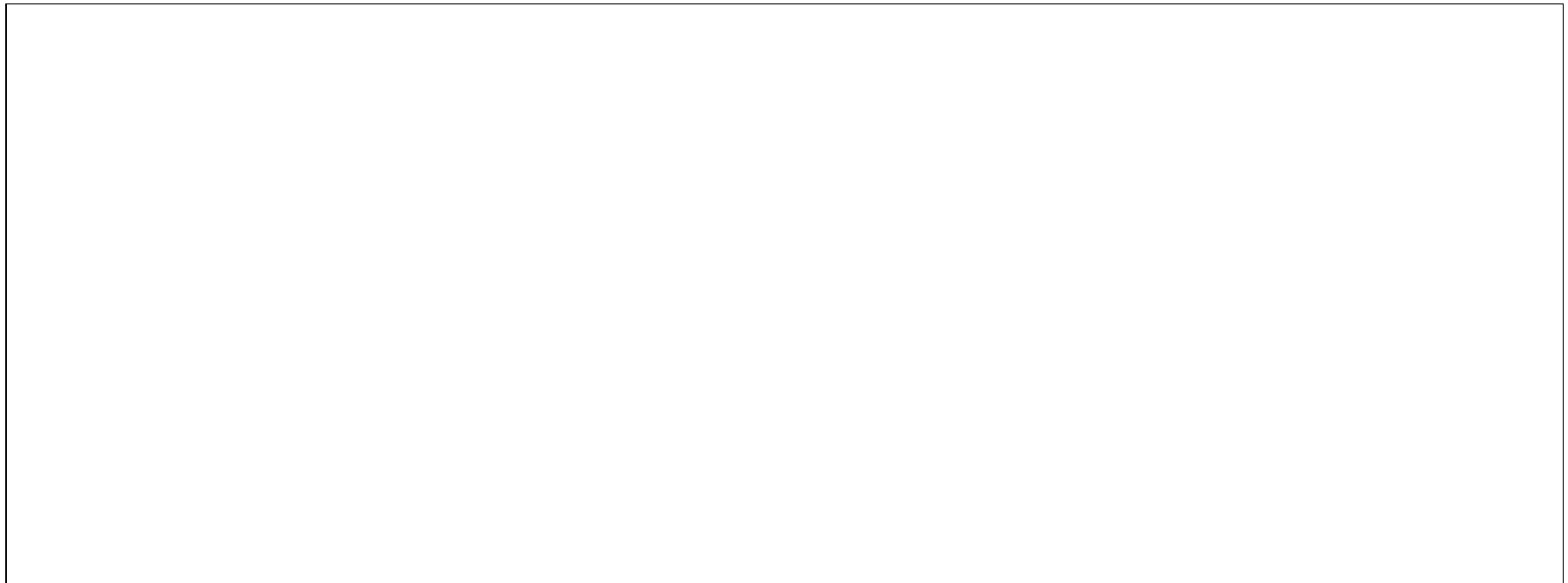
## Engage Others in Action Planning

Occasionally, change planning must be undertaken under a cloak of secrecy, such as when a merger is in the works and the premature release of information would significantly affect the price and the level of competitive risk. In general, though, the active involvement of others and information sharing enhances the quality of action planning for most change strategies. Consider one of the experiences of Barbara Waugh, who spent 25 years as a change agent at Hewlett-Packard:

Waugh's approach is instructive because it illustrates the power of presenting potentially boring data in an engaging and compelling manner. This was not the first time she nurtured change in an emergent, grassroots fashion. Her approach leveraged listening and questioning, built networks with individuals with complementary ideas, and when needed, arranged for access to financial resources for worthy endeavors.<sup>19</sup>

Underlying planning-through-engagement strategies are assumptions regarding top-down (unilateral) versus bottom-up (participative) methods of change. Although Waldersee and Griffiths's study<sup>19</sup> showed that unilateral implementation methods have much to offer, the success of a change is enhanced when people understand what it entails, why it is being undertaken, what the consequences of success and failure are, and why their help is needed and valued. All too often, techno-structural changes have floundered because of design problems getting tangled up with acceptance and implementation issues that never get sorted out.

Regardless of the change strategy preferred, the plan needs to be examined carefully for logic and consistency. The next section outlines a series of questions to improve change agents' abilities in this area.



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## Change at HP Labs

Barbara Waugh's campaign for change at HP Labs began when its director asked her, "Why does no one out there consider HP Labs to be the best industrial research lab in the world?" Rather than propose answers, she and the director began by asking questions through a survey. The inquiry generated 800 single-spaced pages of feedback related to programs (e.g., too many projects and too few priorities), people (e.g., poor performers are not removed quickly enough and researchers lack sufficient freedom to do their jobs well), and processes (e.g., the information infrastructure is inadequate).

The feedback, says Waugh, was "800 pages of frustrations, dreams, and insights." But how could she capture and communicate what she learned? She drew on her experience with street theater and created a play about HP Labs. She worked passages from the surveys into dialogue and then recruited executives to act as staff members and junior people to act as executives. The troupe performed for 30 senior managers. "At the end of the play, the managers were very quiet," Waugh remembers. "Then they started clapping. It was exciting. They really got it."<sup>18</sup>

## Ensure Alignment in Your Action Planning

Change agents often understand what needs to be done but get the sequence of activities wrong. They might leave a meeting after a productive discussion but fail to sort out who is responsible for what. Sometimes critical steps in the plan are risky and alternative strategies need to be considered in case things do not go as planned. At other times, change agents may over- or underestimate the available resources and constraints, the time and energy required by various steps, or their own power and competence. [Table 9.6](#) (later in this chapter) provides a checklist of questions to use when reviewing an action plan. This checklist tests the viability of the plan and asks for a rethinking of the connections between the analysis of the situation and the plan itself. Tough-minded thinking can improve the coherence and thoughtfulness of action plans.

## Action Planning Tools

This section explores a selection of action planning tools that change agents find particularly useful (see [Table 9.3](#)). Selecting the appropriate tool is both an art and science: An art as the story of Waugh at HP illustrated (see above), and a science as one analyzes data carefully and makes an appropriate selection.

### 1. To-Do Lists

When managers engage in action planning, they often begin by outlining in detail the sequence of steps they will take initially to achieve their goals. That is, they make a list. A **to-do list**, a checklist of things to do, is the simplest and most common planning tool. Sometimes this is all the situation requires. As the action planning becomes more sophisticated, simple to-do lists will not suffice and responsibility charting provides more control.

### 2. Responsibility Charting

**Responsibility charting** can be a valuable tool to detail who should do what, when, and how. As well, it can be used to help keep projects on track and provide

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a basis for record keeping and accountability. [Table 9.4](#) provides an example responsibility chart. The process begins by defining the list of decisions or actions to be taken. Then individuals are assigned responsibility for achieving specific actions at specified deadlines.

**Table 9.3** Tools for Action Planning

1. To-do list—a checklist of things to do
2. Responsibility charting—who will do what, when, where, why, and how
3. Contingency planning—consideration of what should be done when things do not work as planned on critical issues
4. Surveys, survey feedback, and appreciative inquiry—capturing people’s opinions and tracking their responses, observations, and insights over time, to assist in identifying what needs changing, nurturing engagement and support, and in tracking progress
5. Project planning and critical path methods—operations research techniques for scheduling work. These methods provide deadlines and insight as to which activities cannot be delayed to meet those deadlines.
6. Force field and stakeholder analysis—examination of the forces for and against change and the positions of the major players and why they behave as they do
  - a. Commitment charts—an evaluation of the level of commitment of major players (against, neutral, let it happen, help it happen, make it happen)
  - b. The adoption continuum or awareness, interest, desire, adoption (AIDA) analysis—examination of major players and their position on the AIDA continuum related to the proposed changes
7. Leverage analysis—determination of methods of influencing major groups or players regarding the proposed changes

### 3. Contingency Planning

**Contingency planning** is the importance of thinking through what should be done should events not go as planned. Two tools that aid in contingency planning are decision tree analysis and scenario planning.<sup>§</sup>

**Decision tree analysis** asks change agents to consider the major choices and the possible consequences of those alternatives. Analysts are then asked to plan for the possible next actions and consider what the consequences of those actions might be. Such alternating action–consequence sequences can be extended as far as reasonable. As well, probabilities can be assigned as to the likelihood of each consequence. For many applications, a simple scale (*very likely*, *likely*, *possible*, *unlikely*, or *very unlikely*) is sufficient. This approach helps model the possible consequences to change decisions and assess the benefits and risks associated with the different pathways.

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**Table 9.4** Example Responsibility Chart

| Decisions or Actions to Be Taken  | Responsibilities |            |              |  |
|---|------------------|------------|--------------|--|
|   | <i>Susan</i>     | <i>Ted</i> | <i>Sonja</i> | <i>Relevant Dates</i>                    |
| <b>Action 1</b>   | R                | A          | I            | For meeting on Jan. 14                   |
| <b>Action 2</b>   |                  | R          | I            | May 24                                   |
| <b>Action 3</b>   | S                | A          | A            | Draft Plan by Feb. 17; action by July 22 |
| <b>Etc.</b>   |                  |            |              |  |
| Coding:<br>R = Responsibility (not necessarily authority)<br>A = Approval (right to veto)<br>S = Support (put resources toward)<br>I = Inform (to be consulted before action)<br>Note that if there are a large number of As on your chart, implementation will be difficult. Care must be taken to assign As only when appropriate. Likewise, if there are not enough Rs and Ss, you will need to think about changes needed here and how to bring them about. |                  |            |              |  |

*Source:* Refer to Beckhard, R, *Organizational Transitions*, Addison-Wesley, Reading, Massachusetts, 1987 (p104) for a further discussion on responsibility charting.

A second tool that helps managers with contingency planning is **scenario planning**. Here a change strategy is formed by first developing a limited number of scenarios or stories about how the future may unfold and then assessing what the implications of each of these would be to the organization.<sup>20</sup> Change leaders typically frame these around an issue of strategic and/or tactical importance. For example, if a firm producing paper forms is concerned about the long-term viability of its business model, then management could develop scenarios of what a paperless form producer would look like. Once the scenarios were developed, managers would ask themselves: how likely is this scenario? What would need to happen to make the scenario a reality? And what contingencies might arise that would need to be addressed? If one or more of these future scenarios seemed worth investing in, then management would develop its plans accordingly. To open people's minds to possibilities and avoid blind spots, external parties are often brought into the process to offer data and insights (often from other perspectives), challenge assumptions, and stimulate thinking, discussion, and informed analysis.

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Scenario planning is different from forecasting. Forecasting starts in the present and uses trend lines and probability estimates to make projections about the future. Scenario planning starts by painting a picture of the future and works backward, asking what would have to happen to make this future scenario a reality and what could be done.<sup>21</sup>

While most uses of scenario planning are at a strategy level, the principles can be applied to frame possible visions for change and develop the action pathways that will increase the likelihood that the vision will be achieved. Royal Dutch Shell<sup>22</sup> was one of the first users of scenario planning. The firm used it as a way to link future uncertainties to today's decisions.

## 4. Surveys and Survey Feedback

Change agents may find it is helpful to use surveys to capture people's attitudes, opinions, and experiences at a particular point in time and then possibly track those attitudes over time. Tools in this area can provide anonymity to the respondents and make it possible to capture the opinions of a larger proportion of the participants than might otherwise be possible. Political agendas don't disappear with the use of a survey, but they may make it possible for people to say things that they would not feel comfortable stating publically. Services such as SurveyMonkey.com and EmployeeSurveys.com have made the design, delivery, and analysis easy to manage.

**Surveys** are used to access the opinions of internal and external stakeholders and assess attitudes and beliefs of relevance to the change. For example, how do customers view the firm's service levels, innovativeness, and product performance? What ideas do they have concerning new product offerings or service improvements? Employees can be sampled to assess the organization's readiness for change, the culture or work climate, their satisfaction and commitment levels, or what is helping or hindering their ability to do their jobs. Sometimes surveys are deployed to develop options and assess opinions on their viability. Later in the change process, surveys may sample understanding and knowledge levels, emerging attitudes and issues, and levels of acceptance and satisfaction with the change. The possible applications are restricted only by imagination, people's willingness to respond, and legal and ethical considerations.

Ready-made surveys are available on virtually any topic. Some are publically available at no cost, while others are proprietary and have charges attached to their use. Costs can vary from a few dollars per survey to thousands of dollars when outside consultants are used to design, administer, assess, and report the findings. When it comes to scoring and interpretation, some are straightforward and easy to interpret, while others require the assistance of a skilled practitioner. Some of these instruments have been carefully assessed for reliability and validity, while others have nothing more than face validity.

The bottom line with respect to surveys is that they can prove very helpful to change agents but need to be approached with care. Their design, administration, and analysis require the assistance of someone well trained in survey research. Even when a change agent is sampling opinions, the ability to frame good questions is a



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prerequisite to getting useful information. The same holds true for analysis and interpretation.<sup>1</sup>

A powerful use of surveys is an approach called **survey feedback**.<sup>23</sup> It is an action research method developed by organizational development (OD) practitioners as a way to stimulate and advance conversations and insights concerning what is going on in the organization, how members are feeling, and how things could be improved. As the name suggests, it involves the sharing of survey results with the individuals affected by the findings. Those involved in the discussion will have responded to the survey.

Skilled facilitators guide work groups through the discussion of the findings. They use this as an opportunity to enrich their interpretation of what the data means and where things are at, and to more fully explore the implications for action. The process is used to raise awareness and understanding, advance the analysis, and build support and commitment for actions that will benefit both the individuals and the organization. Appreciative inquiry approaches discussed earlier in the book can be married effectively with survey feedback to engage and energize participants, learn from them, and set the stage for future actions.

## 5. Project Planning and Critical Path Methods

**Project planning and critical path methods** can provide valuable assistance to change managers as they think about what action steps to take.<sup>\*\*</sup> These methods have been developed into sophisticated operations research techniques to aid the planning of major projects. Critical path methods ask planners to identify when the project should be completed and to work backward from that point, scheduling all tasks that will require time, effort, and resources. These are arranged in time sequence such that tasks that can occur simultaneously can be identified. These tasks are then plotted on a timeline. Sequential tasks are plotted to determine the needed time to complete the project.

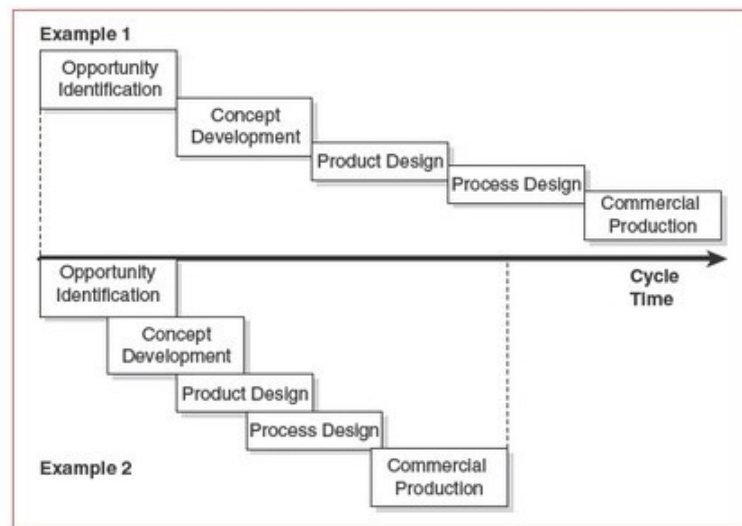
With this done, managers can assess bottlenecks, resource requirements, slack at particular points in the process (i.e., more time or resources than the minimum required), and progression paths. The critical path, the path with the least slack time, can be identified and special attention can be paid to it. If there are concerns about the time to completion, the project manager can add resources to speed up the project, revisit the specifications, look for viable alterations to the implementation path, or increase the amount of time required to complete the project. Likewise, if there are concerns over the cost of the project, the project manager can explore alternatives on this front.

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The critical path method introduces the notion of parallel initiatives. That is, it recognizes that different things may be able to be worked on simultaneously if the work is properly organized. Phase 1 tasks don't have to be totally completed before beginning work on Phase 2 tasks. Care and sophistication are required with this approach because it carries the risk of increasing confusion and redundant effort. When properly applied, though, it can shrink the time required to complete the change. This is readily visible in areas such as new product development. [Figure 9.2](#) gives an example of a sequential and a parallel plan for new product development. In the upper half of the figure, the tasks are plotted sequentially. In the lower half of the figure, the tasks overlap. Concept development begins before opportunity identification ends and the cycle time to completion is reduced.

## 6. Tools to Assess Forces That Influence Outcomes and Stakeholders

**Force field analysis** asks change agents to specify the forces for and against change. **Stakeholder analysis** and related maps ask that the key players be identified and the relationships among players and the change initiative be examined. (See [Chapter 6](#) for discussion of these topics.) Two additional tools that are helpful when planning actions related to stakeholders are commitment analysis charts and AIDA (awareness, interest, desiring, action) charts.



**Figure 9.2** Sequential Versus Partly Parallel Process in New Product Development

Source: M. A. Shilling and W. L. Hill, "Managing the New Product Development Process: Strategic Imperatives," *Academy of Management Executive* 12, no. 3 (1998): 67–81.

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## A. Commitment Analysis Charts

Managers can use **commitment charts** to analyze the engagement of each stakeholder. Stakeholders can be thought of as being weakly to strongly opposed (against) to your change project, “neutral” (let it happen), slightly positive (help it happen), or strongly positive (make it happen). Change leaders also need to consider the level of understanding that underpins stakeholders’ commitment level. Identifying the existing level of commitment is the first step in planning tactics designed to alter those preexisting patterns. [Table 9.5](#) provides an example commitment chart. (Note that the “X” in the table shows where the person is and the “O” shows where a change agent wants them to be.)

## B. The Adoption Continuum or AIDA

Stakeholder analysis will have identified the people who are critical to the change process. With this information in hand, change agents need to consider how they propose to encourage those individuals to move along the **adoption continuum** until the needed stakeholders are aligned with the change, or at least their opposition has been minimized.

As noted in [Chapter 6](#), change agents can think of the process of getting people onside with change as one of first creating awareness and then encouraging them to move from awareness of the issues to interest in the change to desiring action and, finally, to action or adopting the change. This is called the AIDA or adoption continuum. [Table 9.6](#) provides an example of how a change agent might map people on to the adoption continuum as a method of tracking their change attitudes.

**Table 9.5** An Example Commitment Chart<sup>24</sup>

| Key Players | Level of Commitment        |         |               |                |                | Level of Understanding (high, med, low) |
|-------------|----------------------------|---------|---------------|----------------|----------------|---|
|             | Opposed Strongly to Weakly | Neutral | Let It Happen | Help It Happen | Make It Happen |   |
| Person 1    |                            | X       | →O            |                |                | Med                                     |
| Person 2    |                            |         |               | X              | →O             | High                                    |
| Person 3    |                            | X       | □             | →O             |                | Low                                     |
| Etc.        |                            |         |               |                |                |   |

*Source:* Beckhard, R., & Harris, R. (1987). *Organizational transitions* (p. 95). Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

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Different individuals will be at different points on the AIDA continuum, which makes change strategies complex. For each stage, change agents need to use different tactics. For example, to raise initial awareness, well-designed general communication vehicles such as e-mails, newsletters, reports, and videos can be used. The messages should raise awareness of the need for change, set out the vision for the change, and provide access to thought-provoking information and images that support the initiative.

To move people to the interest phase, managers need to outline how the change will affect stakeholders personally and/or why this change should be of interest to them. Discussion groups on the issue, benchmark data, simulations, and test runs showing results can be effective in stimulating interest. Once interest is aroused, specific tactics to demonstrate and reinforce the benefits and build commitment are needed. Change agents might use one-on-one meetings to influence stakeholders, to persuade them to get directly involved with the change, or to connect them with influential supporters of the change. Change agents might reallocate resources or designate rewards in ways that reinforce adoption. Influencing people one at a time or in small groups can be valuable if influential individuals are identified and the right message is communicated to them.

## 7. Leverage Analysis

People's position on the adoption continuum is influenced by their general orientation to change—whether they tend to be an innovator, early adopter, early majority, late majority, or laggard in matters related to change. One of the action planning challenges for the change leaders is to sort out people's overall predisposition to change in general and the proposed change in particular.

Moving individuals on the adoption continuum is aided by engaging in **leverage analysis**. Leverage analysis seeks to identify those actions that will create the greatest change with the least effort. For example, if opinion leaders of a key group of individuals can be identified and persuaded to back the proposed organizational change, the job of the change leader is easier. Likewise, if the task is to persuade senior management, one needs to identify influential individuals in this group. Identifying high-leverage methods will depend on the quality of your knowledge of the participants and your analysis of the organization and its environment. (One successful change agent ensured the adoption of a new software system by persuading the CEO to personally call every regional manager as they were key stakeholders in the change, and ask for their support!)<sup>25</sup>

**Table 9.6** Mapping People on the Adoption Continuum

| <b>Persons or Stakeholder Groups</b> | <b>Awareness</b> | <b>Interest</b> | <b>Desiring Action</b> | <b>Moving to Action or Adopting the Change</b> |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------|------------------------|--|
| <b>Person 1</b>                      |                  |                 |                        |  |
| <b>Person 2</b>                      |                  |                 |                        |  |
| <b>Person 3</b>                      |                  |                 |                        |  |
| <b>...</b>                           |                  |                 |                        |  |

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Gladwell presents an excellent example of the notion of leverage in his book *The Tipping Point*.<sup>26</sup> Gladwell points out how little things can have large consequences if they occur at the right moment and are contagious. If things catch on and momentum builds, eventually a tipping point is reached. This is the point where a critical level of support is reached, the change becomes more firmly rooted, and the rate of acceptance accelerates. As Burke puts it, change agents need to find the critical few individuals that can connect with others in ways that change the context and tip things into a new reality. The vision needs to be sticky (i.e., cast as a story so that it will stay in people's minds), and change agents need to understand the connectors in the organization to get this message out.<sup>27</sup> Moore notes that one of the biggest challenges to reaching the tipping point is to build sufficient support to allow the acceptance of the change to cross the "chasm" between the early adopters and visionaries and the early majority.<sup>28</sup> Once this gap has been bridged, the rate of progress accelerates. As things accelerate, new challenges emerge, such as how to scale your efforts so that momentum is maintained and enthusiasm is not soured due to implementation failures or stalled progress.

This discussion of Obama's campaign points to the value that the Internet and social media can play in raising awareness and advancing commitment levels, and politicians of all stripes have recognized this and become increasingly sophisticated. Blogs, Facebook pages, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, . . . the terrain continues to evolve, and change agents need to pay attention to how these technologies can be used to leverage their plans. In their global survey of the corporate deployment of social media tools in change initiatives, McKinsey and Company reports their use has become mainstream and that they are playing significant roles in the success of change initiatives. They are being used to communicate with and inform staff; seek feedback; and engage, energize, and otherwise enhance the sense of front-line ownership in change initiatives.<sup>30</sup>

### **Tipping Points and the Momentum for Change in the Obama Election**

Barack Obama's path to the presidency was dotted with several tipping points during the state primaries and the federal campaign. Some were related to specific things done by the candidate; some related to the actions of others; and some tied to specific situations (e.g., the mortgage/banking crisis). His creative use of social media (e.g., Facebook) is particularly noteworthy. It allowed him to reach out virally to groups of electors and move them along the commitment continuum at speeds not seen before. This generated grassroots financial support and media buzz that legitimized his candidacy very early on.

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During the primaries, Representative James E. Clyburn, a prominent uncommitted South Carolina Democrat, felt the tipping point occurred around midnight on Tuesday, May 6, 2008. "I could tell the next day, when I got up to the Capitol that this thing was going to start a slide toward Obama. I don't believe that there is any way that she (Hillary Clinton) can win the nomination." Contentious remarks by former President Bill Clinton created a rift with African Americans, Obama's 14-point North Carolina victory exceeded expectations, and Hillary Clinton's weaker-than-expected win in the Indiana primary all conspired to take the wind out of her campaign while energizing Obama's.

Super-delegates were still not committing in large numbers to Obama in early May. Clyburn saw this as "the long shadow of the Clintons in the Democratic Party stretching back more than a decade and the reservoir of goodwill." However, he expected to see a steady and significant movement in the days ahead. "That's pretty much where everybody knows it's going to end up." Representative Rahm Emanuel, the Democratic conference chairman, went further and labeled Obama the presumptive nominee.<sup>29</sup>

## 8. Operation Management Tools

The operations management area provides useful planning tools and diagnostic aids: Pareto diagrams (which classify problems according to relative importance), cause-effect diagrams, histograms, approaches to the development of benchmark and normative data, control charts (to show abnormal trends), and scatter diagrams are some of the tools that can be used to manage a change initiative.<sup>31</sup> The selection of which of these tools to use depends upon the nature of the change challenge, the needs of the change agents, and the resources available to them. In general, the value of these tools lies in focusing attention, sorting out patterns and underlying effects, and assessing progress.

The variety of techniques and tools to bring about change continues to grow. Over the years, Darrell Rigby and Barbara Bilodeau have tracked management's use of different change tools on a global basis and assessed managerial satisfaction with them (see [Table 9.7](#) and [Figure 9.3](#)).<sup>32</sup> By tracking usage patterns by region and types of firms, differences in the sorts of change issues seen as most needing attention become apparent. This generic listing of change approaches provides a useful touch point for change leaders when they are considering how to proceed given the needs for change that they have identified.

In summary, planning the work asks change leaders to translate the change vision into specific actions that people can take. The plan outlines targets and dates and considers contingencies—what might go wrong (or right), how managers can anticipate those things, and how they can respond. Further, it examines how realistic the chances are for success and how a change agent increases the probabilities for success. [Table 9.9](#) provides you with a checklist of things to think about when developing and assessing your action plan.

### Working the Plan Ethically and Adaptively

Working the plan requires change agents to focus, develop support and delivery capacity, test their thinking, see things as opportunities, adapt to changes in the environment, and take appropriate risks. At the same time, change agents need to proceed ethically. Otherwise they risk destroying credibility and the trust others have in them. Relationships can and do recover from strong disagreements, but recovery is less likely if people feel they have been lied to or otherwise ethically abused. A permanent sense of betrayal tends to ensue when you have been dealt with unethically.

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**Table 9.7** Rigby's List of the Best Tools for the Jo

| Type of Tool   | Impact of the Change Tool |                 |                          |                         |                            |
|--|---------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
|  | Financial Results         | Customer Equity | Performance Capabilities | Competitive Positioning | Organizational Integration |
| Customer Retention   |                           | ++              |                          | +                       |                            |
| Customer Satisfaction Measures   |                           | ++              |                          | ++                      |                            |
| Customer Segmenting  |                           | ++              |                          |                         |                            |
| Cycle Time Reduction   | ++                        |                 | +                        | +                       |                            |
| Growth Strategies  | +                         |                 | +                        |                         |                            |
| Merger Integration Teams   |                           |                 |                          |                         | +                          |
| Mission and Vision Statements  |                           |                 |                          |                         | ++                         |
| One-to-One Marketing   | ++                        | ++              | ++                       | ++                      | ++                         |
| Pay for Performance  | +                         |                 |                          |                         |                            |
| Strategic Alliances  |                           | +               |                          | +                       |                            |
| Strategic Planning   |                           | +               | ++                       | ++                      | ++                         |
| Supply Chain Integration   | ++                        |                 |                          | ++                      |                            |
| Total Quality Management   |                           | ++              |                          |                         |                            |
| Virtual Teams  |                           |                 |                          |                         | ++                         |
| + Significantly above the mean in 1 year++<br>Significantly above the mean in every year (over 10 years) |                           |                 |                          |                         |                            |

Source: D. Rigby, "Management Tools and Techniques: A Survey," *California Management Review*, 43, no. 2 (2001, Winter).

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