**Leadership: The Hard Side of Change Management**

Change is a challenge. This isn’t news. We focus on all the elements that may stand in our way such as human resistance, poor leadership, or lack of motivation. But sometimes we get so wrapped up in these soft elements of change that we overlook the nuts and bolts, the hard elements that are important to making change successful.

From the textbook, On Change Management, read “The Hard Side of Change Management” this week.  After you read the chapter, it will be fruitful to explore additional theories of change management. To prepare for the discussion forum this week, conduct some research on other theories: complexity theory; Kurt Lewin's Force Field Analysis (Unfreeze, Change, Freezing); Morgan's Images of Organization or related articles.

Compare and contrast these models with Kotter's 8 Steps to Change. At this point, refrain from personal opinion - focus on an objective analysis of the theories themselves.

The Hard Side of Change Management

by Harold L. Sirkin, Perry Keenan, and Alan Jackson

WHEN FRENCH NOVELIST JEAN-BAPTISTE Alphonse Karr wrote “Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose,” he could have been penning an epigram about change management. For over three decades, academics, managers, and consultants, realizing that transforming organizations is difficult, have dissected the subject. They’ve sung the praises of leaders who communicate vision and walk the talk in order to make change efforts succeed. They’ve sanctified the importance of changing organizational culture and employees’ attitudes. They’ve teased out the tensions between top-down transformation efforts and participatory approaches to change. And they’ve exhorted companies to launch campaigns that appeal to people’s hearts and minds. Still, studies show that in most organizations, two out of three transformation initiatives fail. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

Managing change is tough, but part of the problem is that there is little agreement on what factors most influence transformation initiatives. Ask five executives to name the one factor critical for the success of these programs, and you’ll probably get five different answers. That’s because each manager looks at an initiative from his or her viewpoint and, based on personal experience, focuses on different success factors. The experts, too, offer different perspectives. A recent search on Amazon.com for books on “change and management” turned up 6,153 titles, each with a distinct take on the topic. Those ideas have a lot to offer, but taken together, they force companies to tackle many priorities simultaneously, which spreads resources and skills thin. Moreover, executives use different approaches in different parts of the organization, which compounds the turmoil that usually accompanies change.

In recent years, many change management gurus have focused on soft issues, such as culture, leadership, and motivation. Such elements are important for success, but managing these aspects alone isn’t sufficient to implement transformation projects. Soft factors don’t directly influence the outcomes of many change programs. For instance, visionary leadership is often vital for transformation projects, but not always. The same can be said about communication with employees. Moreover, it isn’t easy to change attitudes or relationships; they’re deeply ingrained in organizations and people. And although changes in, say, culture or motivation levels can be indirectly gauged through surveys and interviews, it’s tough to get reliable data on soft factors.

What’s missing, we believe, is a focus on the not-so-fashionable aspects of change management: the hard factors. These factors bear three distinct characteristics. First, companies are able to measure them in direct or indirect ways. Second, companies can easily communicate their importance, both within and outside organizations. Third, and perhaps most important, businesses are capable of influencing those elements quickly. Some of the hard factors that affect a transformation initiative are the time necessary to complete it, the number of people required to execute it, and the financial results that intended actions are expected to achieve. Our research shows that change projects fail to get off the ground when companies neglect the hard factors. That doesn’t mean that executives can ignore the soft elements; that would be a grave mistake. However, if companies don’t pay attention to the hard issues first, transformation programs will break down before the soft elements come into play.

Idea in Brief

Two out of every three transformation programs fail. Why? Companies overemphasize the soft side of change: leadership style, corporate culture, employee motivation. Though these elements are critical for success, change projects can’t get off the ground unless companies address harder elements first.

The essential hard elements? Think of them as DICE:

• Duration: time between milestone reviews—the shorter, the better

• Integrity: project teams’ skill

• Commitment: senior executives’ and line managers’ dedication to the program

• Effort: the extra work employees must do to adopt new processes—the less, the better

By assessing each DICE element before you launch a major change initiative, you can identify potential problem areas and make the necessary adjustments (such as reconfiguring a project team’s composition or reallocating resources) to ensure the program’s success. You can also use DICE after launching a project—to make midcourse corrections if the initiative veers off track.

DICE helps companies lay the foundation for successful change. Using the DICE assessment technique, one global beverage company executed a multiproject organization-wide change program that generated hundreds of millions of dollars, breathed new life into its once-stagnant brands, and cracked open new markets.

That’s a lesson we learned when we identified the common denominators of change. In 1992, we started with the contrarian hypothesis that organizations handle transformations in remarkably similar ways. We researched projects in a number of industries and countries to identify those common elements. Our initial 225-company study revealed a consistent correlation between the outcomes (success or failure) of change programs and four hard factors: project duration, particularly the time between project reviews; performance integrity, or the capabilities of project teams; the commitment of both senior executives and the staff whom the change will affect the most; and the additional effort that employees must make to cope with the change. We called these variables the DICE factors because we could load them in favor of projects’ success.

Idea in Practice

Conducting a DICE Assessment

Your project has the greatest chance of success if the following hard elements are in place:

Duration

A long project reviewed frequently stands a far better chance of succeeding than a short project reviewed infrequently. Problems can be identified at the first sign of trouble, allowing for prompt corrective actions. Review complex projects every two weeks; more straightforward initiatives, every six to eight weeks.

Integrity

A change program’s success hinges on a high-integrity, high-quality project team. To identify team candidates with the right portfolio of skills, solicit names from key colleagues, including top performers in functions other than your own. Recruit people who have problem-solving skills, are results oriented, and are methodical but tolerate ambiguity. Look also for organizational savvy, willingness to accept responsibility for decisions, and a disdain for the limelight.

Commitment

If employees don’t see company leaders supporting a change initiative, they won’t change. Visibly endorse the initiative—no amount of public support is too much. When you feel you’re “talking up” a change effort at least three times more than you need to, you’ve hit it right.

Also continually communicate why the change is needed and what it means for employees. Ensure that all messages about the change are consistent and clear. Reach out to managers and employees through one-on-one conversations to win them over.

Effort

If adopting a change burdens employees with too much additional effort, they’ll resist. Calculate how much work employees will have to do beyond their existing responsibilities to implement the change. Ensure that no one’s workload increases more than 10%. If necessary, remove nonessential regular work from employees with key roles in the transformation project. Use temporary workers or outsource some processes to accommodate additional workload.

Using the DICE Framework

Conducting a DICE assessment fosters successful change by sparking valuable senior leadership debate about project strategy It also improves change effectiveness by enabling companies to manage large portfolios of projects.

Example: A manufacturing company planned 40 projects as part of a profitability-improvement program. After conducting a DICE assessment for each project, leaders and project owners identified the five most important projects and asked, “How can we ensure these projects’ success?” They moved people around on teams, reconfigured some projects, and identified initiatives senior managers should pay more attention to—setting up their most crucial projects for resounding success.

We completed our study in 1994, and in the 11 years since then, the Boston Consulting Group has used those four factors to predict the outcomes, and guide the execution, of more than 1,000 change management initiatives worldwide. Not only has the correlation held, but no other factors (or combination of factors) have predicted outcomes as well.

The Four Key Factors

If you think about it, the different ways in which organizations combine the four factors create a continuum—from projects that are set up to succeed to those that are set up to fail. At one extreme, a short project led by a skilled, motivated, and cohesive team, championed by top management and implemented in a department that is receptive to the change and has to put in very little additional effort, is bound to succeed. At the other extreme, a long, drawn-out project executed by an inexpert, unenthusiastic, and disjointed team, without any top-level sponsors and targeted at a function that dislikes the change and has to do a lot of extra work, will fail. Businesses can easily identify change programs at either end of the spectrum, but most initiatives occupy the middle ground where the likelihood of success or failure is difficult to assess. Executives must study the four DICE factors carefully to figure out if their change programs will fly—or die.

The Four Factors

THESE FACTORS determine the outcome of any transformation initiative.

D. The duration of time until the change program is completed if it has a short life span; if not short, the amount of time between reviews of milestones.

I. The project team’s performance integrity; that is, its ability to complete the initiative on time. That depends on members’ skills and traits relative to the project’s requirements.

C. The commitment to change that top management (C1) and employees affected by the change (C2) display.

E. The effort over and above the usual work that the change initiative demands of employees.

Duration

Companies make the mistake of worrying mostly about the time it will take to implement change programs. They assume that the longer an initiative carries on, the more likely it is to fail—the early impetus will peter out, windows of opportunity will close, objectives will be forgotten, key supporters will leave or lose their enthusiasm, and problems will accumulate. However, contrary to popular perception, our studies show that a long project that is reviewed frequently is more likely to succeed than a short project that isn’t reviewed frequently. Thus, the time between reviews is more critical for success than a project’s life span.

Companies should formally review transformation projects at least bimonthly since, in our experience, the probability that change initiatives will run into trouble rises exponentially when the time between reviews exceeds eight weeks. Whether reviews should be scheduled even more frequently depends on how long executives feel the project can carry on without going off track. Complex projects should be reviewed fortnightly; more familiar or straightforward initiatives can be assessed every six to eight weeks.

Scheduling milestones and assessing their impact are the best way by which executives can review the execution of projects, identify gaps, and spot new risks. The most effective milestones are those that describe major actions or achievements rather than day-to-day activities. They must enable senior executives and project sponsors to confirm that the project has made progress since the last review took place. Good milestones encompass a number of tasks that teams must complete. For example, describing a particular milestone as “Consultations with Stakeholders Completed” is more effective than “Consult Stakeholders” because it represents an achievement and shows that the project has made headway. Moreover, it suggests that several activities were completed—identifying stakeholders, assessing their needs, and talking to them about the project. When a milestone looks as though it won’t be reached on time, the project team must try to understand why, take corrective actions, and learn from the experience to prevent problems from recurring.

Review of such a milestone—what we refer to as a “learning milestone”—isn’t an impromptu assessment of the Monday-morning kind. It should be a formal occasion during which senior-management sponsors and the project team evaluate the latter’s performance on all the dimensions that have a bearing on success and failure. The team must provide a concise report of its progress, and members and sponsors must check if the team is on track to complete, or has finished all the tasks to deliver, the milestone. They should also determine whether achieving the milestone has had the desired effect on the company; discuss the problems the team faced in reaching the milestone; and determine how that accomplishment will affect the next phase of the project. Sponsors and team members must have the power to address weaknesses. When necessary, they should alter processes, agree to push for more or different resources, or suggest a new direction. At these meetings, senior executives must pay special attention to the dynamics within teams, changes in the organization’s perceptions about the initiative, and communications from the top.

Integrity

By performance integrity, we mean the extent to which companies can rely on teams of managers, supervisors, and staff to execute change projects successfully. In a perfect world, every team would be flawless, but no business has enough great people to ensure that. Besides, senior executives are often reluctant to allow star performers to join change efforts because regular work can suffer. But since the success of change programs depends on the quality of teams, companies must free up the best staff while making sure that day-to-day operations don’t falter. In companies that have succeeded in implementing change programs, we find that employees go the extra mile to ensure their day-to-day work gets done.

Since project teams handle a wide range of activities, resources, pressures, external stimuli, and unforeseen obstacles, they must be cohesive and well led. It’s not enough for senior executives to ask people at the watercooler if a project team is doing well; they must clarify members’ roles, commitments, and accountability. They must choose the team leader and, most important, work out the team’s composition.

Smart executive sponsors, we find, are very inclusive when picking teams. They identify talent by soliciting names from key colleagues, including human resource managers; by circulating criteria they have drawn up; and by looking for top performers in all functions. While they accept volunteers, they take care not to choose only supporters of the change initiative. Senior executives personally interview people so that they can construct the right portfolio of skills, knowledge, and social networks. They also decide if potential team members should commit all their time to the project; if not, they must ask them to allocate specific days or times of the day to the initiative. Top management makes public the parameters on which it will judge the team’s performance and how that evaluation fits into the company’s regular appraisal process. Once the project gets under way, sponsors must measure the cohesion of teams by administering confidential surveys to solicit members’ opinions.

Executives often make the mistake of assuming that because someone is a good, well-liked manager, he or she will also make a decent team leader. That sounds reasonable, but effective managers of the status quo aren’t necessarily good at changing organizations. Usually, good team leaders have problem-solving skills, are results oriented, are methodical in their approach but tolerate ambiguity, are organizationally savvy, are willing to accept responsibility for decisions, and while being highly motivated, don’t crave the limelight. A CEO who successfully led two major transformation projects in the past ten years used these six criteria to quiz senior executives about the caliber of nominees for project teams. The top management team rejected one in three candidates, on average, before finalizing the teams.

Commitment

Companies must boost the commitment of two different groups of people if they want change projects to take root: They must get visible backing from the most influential executives (what we call C1), who are not necessarily those with the top titles. And they must take into account the enthusiasm—or often, lack thereof—of the people who must deal with the new systems, processes, or ways of working (C2).

Top-level commitment is vital to engendering commitment from those at the coal face. If employees don’t see that the company’s leadership is backing a project, they’re unlikely to change. No amount of top-level support is too much. In 1999, when we were working with the CEO of a consumer products company, he told us that he was doing much more than necessary to display his support for a nettlesome project. When we talked to line managers, they said that the CEO had extended very little backing for the project. They felt that if he wanted the project to succeed, he would have to support it more visibly! A rule of thumb: When you feel that you are talking up a change initiative at least three times more than you need to, your managers will feel that you are backing the transformation.

Sometimes, senior executives are reluctant to back initiatives. That’s understandable; they’re often bringing about changes that may negatively affect employees’ jobs and lives. However, if senior executives do not communicate the need for change, and what it means for employees, they endanger their projects’ success. In one financial services firm, top management’s commitment to a program that would improve cycle times, reduce errors, and slash costs was low because it entailed layoffs. Senior executives found it gut-wrenching to talk about layoffs in an organization that had prided itself on being a place where good people could find lifetime employment. However, the CEO realized that he needed to tackle the thorny issues around the layoffs to get the project implemented on schedule. He tapped a senior company veteran to organize a series of speeches and meetings in order to provide consistent explanations for the layoffs, the timing, the consequences for job security, and so on. He also appointed a well-respected general manager to lead the change program. Those actions reassured employees that the organization would tackle the layoffs in a professional and humane fashion.

Companies often underestimate the role that managers and staff play in transformation efforts. By communicating with them too late or inconsistently, senior executives end up alienating the people who are most affected by the changes. It’s surprising how often something senior executives believe is a good thing is seen by staff as a bad thing, or a message that senior executives think is perfectly clear is misunderstood. That usually happens when senior executives articulate subtly different versions of critical messages. For instance, in one company that applied the DICE framework, scores for a project showed a low degree of staff commitment. It turned out that these employees had become confused, even distrustful, because one senior manager had said, “Layoffs will not occur,” while another had said, “They are not expected to occur.”

Organizations also underestimate their ability to build staff support. A simple effort to reach out to employees can turn them into champions of new ideas. For example, in the 1990s, a major American energy producer was unable to get the support of mid-level managers, supervisors, and workers for a productivity improvement program. After trying several times, the company’s senior executives decided to hold a series of one-on-one conversations with mid-level managers in a last-ditch effort to win them over. The conversations focused on the program’s objectives, its impact on employees, and why the organization might not be able to survive without the changes. Partly because of the straight talk, the initiative gained some momentum. This allowed a project team to demonstrate a series of quick wins, which gave the initiative a new lease on life.

Effort

When companies launch transformation efforts, they frequently don’t realize, or know how to deal with the fact, that employees are already busy with their day-to-day responsibilities. According to staffing tables, people in many businesses work 80-plus-hour weeks. If, on top of existing responsibilities, line managers and staff have to deal with changes to their work or to the systems they use, they will resist.

Project teams must calculate how much work employees will have to do beyond their existing responsibilities to change over to new processes. Ideally, no one’s workload should increase more than 10%. Go beyond that, and the initiative will probably run into trouble. Resources will become overstretched and compromise either the change program or normal operations. Employee morale will fall, and conflict may arise between teams and line staff. To minimize the dangers, project managers should use a simple metric like the percentage increase in effort the employees who must cope with the new ways feel they must contribute. They should also check if the additional effort they have demanded comes on top of heavy workloads and if employees are likely to resist the project because it will demand more of their scarce time.

Companies must decide whether to take away some of the regular work of employees who will play key roles in the transformation project. Companies can start by ridding these employees of discretionary or nonessential responsibilities. In addition, firms should review all the other projects in the operating plan and assess which ones are critical for the change effort. At one company, the project steering committee delayed or restructured 120 out of 250 subprojects so that some line managers could focus on top-priority projects. Another way to relieve pressure is for the company to bring in temporary workers, like retired managers, to carry out routine activities or to outsource current processes until the changeover is complete. Handing off routine work or delaying projects is costly and time-consuming, so companies need to think through such issues before kicking off transformation efforts.

Calculating DICE Scores

COMPANIES CAN DETERMINE if their change programs will succeed by asking executives to calculate scores for each of the four factors of the DICE framework—duration, integrity, commitment, and effort. They must grade each factor on a scale from 1 to 4 (using fractions, if necessary); the lower the score, the better. Thus, a score of 1 suggests that the factor is highly likely to contribute to the program’s success, and a score of 4 means that it is highly unlikely to contribute to success. We find that the following questions and scoring guidelines allow executives to rate transformation initiatives effectively:

Duration [D]

Ask: Do formal project reviews occur regularly? If the project will take more than two months to complete, what is the average time between reviews?

Score: If the time between project reviews is less than two months, you should give the project 1 point. If the time is between two and four months, you should award the project 2 points; between four and eight months, 3 points; and if reviews are more than eight months apart, give the project 4 points.

Integrity of Performance [I]

Ask: Is the team leader capable? How strong are team members’ skills and motivations? Do they have sufficient time to spend on the change initiative?

Score: If the project team is led by a highly capable leader who is respected by peers, if the members have the skills and motivation to complete the project in the stipulated time frame, and if the company has assigned at least 50% of the team members’ time to the project, you can give the project 1 point. If the team is lacking on all those dimensions, you should award the project 4 points. If the team’s capabilities are somewhere in between, assign the project 2 or 3 points.

Senior Management Commitment [C1]

Ask: Do senior executives regularly communicate the reason for the change and the importance of its success? Is the message convincing? Is the message consistent, both across the top management team and over time? Has top management devoted enough resources to the change program?

Score: If senior management has, through actions and words, clearly communicated the need for change, you must give the project 1 point. If senior executives appear to be neutral, it gets 2 or 3 points. If managers perceive senior executives to be reluctant to support the change, award the project 4 points.

Local-Level Commitment [C2]

Ask: Do the employees most affected by the change understand the reason for it and believe it’s worthwhile? Are they enthusiastic and supportive or worried and obstructive?

Score: If employees are eager to take on the change initiative, you can give the project 1 point, and if they are just willing, 2 points. If they’re reluctant or strongly reluctant, you should award the project 3 or 4 points.

Effort [E]

Ask: What is the percentage of increased effort that employees must make to implement the change effort? Does the incremental effort come on top of a heavy workload? Have people strongly resisted the increased demands on them?

Score: If the project requires less than 10% extra work by employees, you can give it 1 point. If it’s 10% to 20% extra, it should get 2 points. If it’s 20% to 40%, it must be 3 points. And if it’s more than 40% additional work, you should give the project 4 points.

Executives can combine the four elements into a project score. When we conducted a regression analysis of our database of change efforts, we found that the combination that correlates most closely with actual outcomes doubles the weight given to team performance (I) and senior management commitment (C1). That translates into the following formula:

DICE Score = D + (2 x I) + (2 x C1) + C2 + E

In the 1-to-4 scoring system, the formula generates overall scores that range from 7 to 28. Companies can compare a project’s score with those of past projects and their outcomes to assess if the project is slated for success or failure. Our data show a clear distribution of scores:

Scores between 7 and 14: The project is very likely to succeed. We call this the Win Zone.

Scores higher than 14 but lower than 17: Risks to the project’s success are rising, particularly as the score approaches 17. This is the Worry Zone.

Scores over 17: The project is extremely risky. If a project scores over 17 and under 19 points, the risks to success are very high. Beyond 19, the project is unlikely to succeed. That’s why we call this the Woe Zone.

We have changed the boundaries of the zones over time. For instance, the Worry Zone was between 14 and 21 points at first, and the Woe Zone from 21 to 28 points. But we found that companies prefer to be alerted to trouble as soon as outcomes become unpredictable (17 to 20 points). We therefore compressed the Worry Zone and expanded the Woe Zone.

Creating the Framework

As we came to understand the four factors better, we created a framework that would help executives evaluate their transformation initiatives and shine a spotlight on interventions that would improve their chances of success. We developed a scoring system based on the variables that affect each factor. Executives can assign scores to the DICE factors and combine them to arrive at a project score. (See the sidebar “Calculating DICE Scores.”)

Although the assessments are subjective, the system gives companies an objective framework for making those decisions. Moreover, the scoring mechanism ensures that executives are evaluating projects and making trade-offs more consistently across projects.

A company can compare its DICE score on the day it kicks off a project with the scores of previous projects, as well as their outcomes, to check if the initiative has been set up for success. When we calculated the scores of the 225 change projects in our database and compared them with the outcomes, the analysis was compelling. Projects clearly fell into three categories, or zones: Win, which means that any project with a score in that range is statistically likely to succeed; worry, which suggests that the project’s outcome is hard to predict; and woe, which implies that the project is totally unpredictable or fated for mediocrity or failure. (See the figure “DICE scores predict project outcomes.”)

Companies can track how change projects are faring by calculating scores over time or before and after they have made changes to a project’s structure. The four factors offer a litmus test that executives can use to assess the probability of success for a given project or set of projects. Consider the case of a large Australian bank that in 1994 wanted to restructure its back-office operations. Senior executives agreed on the rationale for the change but differed on whether the bank could achieve its objectives, since the transformation required major changes in processes and organizational structures. Bringing the team and the senior executives together long enough to sort out their differences proved impossible; people were just too busy. That’s when the project team decided to analyze the initiative using the DICE framework.

DICE scores predict project outcomes

When we plotted the DICE scores of 225 change management initiatives on the horizontal axis, and the outcomes of those projects on the vertical axis, we found three sets of correlations. Projects with DICE scores between 7 and 14 were usually successful; those with scores over 14 and under 17 were unpredictable; and projects with scores over 17 were usually unsuccessful. We named the three zones Win, Worry, and Woe, respectively. (Each number plotted on the graph represents the number of projects, out of the 225 projects, having a particular DICE score.)

Doing so condensed what could have been a free-flowing two-day debate into a sharp two-hour discussion. The focus on just four elements generated a clear picture of the project’s strengths and weaknesses. For instance, managers learned that the restructuring would take eight months to implement but that it had poorly defined milestones and reviews. Although the project team was capable and senior management showed reasonable commitment to the effort, there was room for improvement in both areas. The back-office workforce was hostile to the proposed changes since more than 20% of these people would lose their jobs. Managers and employees agreed that the back-office staff would need to muster 10% to 20% more effort on top of its existing commitments during the implementation. On the DICE scale, the project was deep in the Woe Zone.

However, the assessment also led managers to take steps to increase the possibility of success before they started the project. The bank decided to split the project time line into two—one short-term and one long-term. Doing so allowed the bank to schedule review points more frequently and to maximize team members’ ability to learn from experience before the transformation grew in complexity. To improve staff commitment, the bank decided to devote more time to explaining why the change was necessary and how the institution would support the staff during the implementation. The bank also took a closer look at the people who would be involved in the project and changed some of the team leaders when it realized that they lacked the necessary skills. Finally, senior managers made a concerted effort to show their backing for the initiative by holding a traveling road show to explain the project to people at all levels of the organization. Taken together, the bank’s actions and plans shifted the project into the Win Zone. Fourteen months later, the bank completed the project—on time and below budget.

Applying the DICE Framework

The simplicity of the DICE framework often proves to be its biggest problem; executives seem to desire more complex answers. By overlooking the obvious, however, they often end up making compromises that don’t work. Smart companies try to ensure that they don’t fall into that trap by using the DICE framework in one of three ways.

Track Projects

Some companies train managers in how to use the DICE framework before they start transformation programs. Executives use spreadsheet-based versions of the tool to calculate the DICE scores of the various components of the program and to compare them with past scores. Over time, every score must be balanced against the trajectory of scores and, as we shall see next, the portfolio of scores.

Senior executives often use DICE assessments as early warning indicators that transformation initiatives are in trouble. That’s how Amgen, the $10.6 billion biotechnology company, used the DICE framework. In 2001, the company realigned its operations around some key processes, broadened its offerings, relaunched some mature products, allied with some firms and acquired others, and launched several innovations. To avoid implementation problems, Amgen’s top management team used the DICE framework to gauge how effectively it had allocated people, senior management time, and other resources. As soon as projects reported troubling scores, designated executives paid attention to them. They reviewed the projects more often, reconfigured the teams, and allocated more resources to them. In one area of the change project, Amgen used DICE to track 300 initiatives and reconfigured 200 of them.

Both big and small organizations can put the tool to good use. Take the case of a hospital that kicked off six change projects in the late 1990s. Each initiative involved a lot of investment, had significant clinical implications, or both. The hospital’s general manager felt that some projects were going well but was concerned about others. He wasn’t able to attribute his concerns to anything other than a bad feeling. However, when the general manager used the DICE framework, he was able to confirm his suspicions. After a 45-minute discussion with project managers and other key people, he established that three projects were in the Win Zone but two were in the Woe Zone and one was in the Worry Zone.

The strongest projects, the general manager found, consumed more than their fair share of resources. Senior hospital staff sensed that those projects would succeed and spent more time promoting them, attending meetings about them, and making sure they had sufficient resources. By contrast, no one enjoyed attending meetings on projects that were performing poorly. So the general manager stopped attending meetings for the projects that were on track; he attended only sessions that related to the three underperforming ones. He pulled some managers from the projects that were progressing smoothly and moved them to the riskier efforts. He added more milestones to the struggling enterprises, delayed their completion, and pushed hard for improvement. Those steps helped ensure that all six projects met their objectives.

Manage portfolios of projects

When companies launch large transformation programs, they kick off many projects to attain their objectives. But if executives don’t manage the portfolio properly, those tasks end up competing for attention and resources. For instance, senior executives may choose the best employees for projects they have sponsored or lavish attention on pet projects rather than on those that need attention. By deploying our framework before they start transformation initiatives, companies can identify problem projects in portfolios, focus execution expertise and senior management attention where it is most needed, and defuse political issues.

Take, for example, the case of an Australasian manufacturing company that had planned a set of 40 projects as part of a program to improve profitability. Since some had greater financial implications than others, the company’s general manager called for a meeting with all the project owners and senior managers. The group went through each project, debating its DICE score and identifying the problem areas. After listing all the scores and issues, the general manager walked to a whiteboard and circled the five most important projects. “I’m prepared to accept that some projects will start off in the Worry Zone, though I won’t accept anything outside the middle of this zone for more than a few weeks. For the top five, we’re not going to start until these are well within the Win Zone. What do we have to do to achieve that?” he asked.

The group began thinking and acting right away. It moved people around on teams, reconfigured some projects, and identified those that senior managers should pay more attention to—all of which helped raise DICE scores before implementation began. The most important projects were set up for resounding success while most of the remaining ones managed to get into the Win Zone. The group left some projects in the Worry Zone, but it agreed to track them closely to ensure that their scores improved. In our experience, that’s the right thing to do. When companies are trying to overhaul themselves, they shouldn’t have all their projects in the Win Zone; if they do, they are not ambitious enough. Transformations should entail fundamental changes that stretch an organization.

Force conversation

When different executives calculate DICE scores for the same project, the results can vary widely. The difference in scores is particularly important in terms of the dialogue it triggers. It provokes participants and engages them in debate over questions like “Why do we see the project in these different ways?” and “What can we agree to do to ensure that the project will succeed?” That’s critical, because even people within the same organization lack a common framework for discussing problems with change initiatives. Prejudices, differences in perspectives, and a reluctance or inability to speak up can block effective debates. By using the DICE framework, companies can create a common language and force the right discussions.

Sometimes, companies hold workshops to review floundering projects. At those two- to four-hour sessions, groups of eight to 15 senior and middle managers, along with the project team and the project sponsors, hold a candid dialogue. The debate usually moves beyond the project’s scores to the underlying causes of problems and possible remedies. The workshops bring diverse opinions to light, which often can be combined into innovative solutions. Consider, for example, the manner in which DICE workshops helped a telecommunications service provider that had planned a major transformation effort. Consisting of five strategic initiatives and 50 subprojects that needed to be up and running quickly, the program confronted some serious obstacles. The projects’ goals, time lines, and revenue objectives were unclear. There were delays in approving business cases, a dearth of rigor and focus in planning and identifying milestones, and a shortage of resources. There were leadership issues, too. For example, executive-level shortcomings had resulted in poor coordination of projects and a misjudgment of risks.

To put the transformation program on track, the telecom company incorporated DICE into project managers’ tool kits. The Project Management Office arranged a series of workshops to analyze issues and decide future steps. One workshop, for example, was devoted to three new product development projects, two of which had landed in the Woe Zone and one in the Worry Zone. Participants traced the problems to tension between managers and technology experts, underfunding, lack of manpower, and poor definition of the projects’ scopes. They eventually agreed on three remedial actions: holding a conflict-resolution meeting between the directors in charge of technology and those responsible for the core business; making sure senior leadership paid immediate attention to the resource issues; and bringing together the project team and the line-of-business head to formalize project objectives. With the project sponsor committed to those actions, the three projects had improved their DICE scores and thus their chances of success at the time this article went to press.

Conversations about DICE scores are particularly useful for large-scale transformations that cut across business units, functions, and locations. In such change efforts, it is critical to find the right balance between centralized oversight, which ensures that everyone in the organization takes the effort seriously and understands the goals, and the autonomy that various initiatives need. Teams must have the flexibility and incentive to produce customized solutions for their markets, functions, and competitive environments. The balance is difficult to achieve without an explicit consideration of the DICE variables.

Take the case of a leading global beverage company that needed to increase operational efficiency and focus on the most promising brands and markets. The company also sought to make key processes such as consumer demand development and customer fulfillment more innovative. The CEO’s goals were ambitious and required investing significant resources across the company. Top management faced enormous challenges in structuring the effort and in spawning projects that focused on the right issues. Executives knew that this was a multiyear effort, yet without tight schedules and oversight of individual projects, there was a risk that projects would take far too long to be completed and the results would taper off.

To mitigate the risks, senior managers decided to analyze each project at several levels of the organization. Using the DICE framework, they reviewed each effort every month until they felt confident that it was on track. After that, reviews occurred when projects met major milestones. No more than two months elapsed between reviews, even in the later stages of the program. The time between reviews at the project-team level was even shorter: Team leaders reviewed progress biweekly throughout the transformation. Some of the best people joined the effort full time. The human resources department took an active role in recruiting team members, thereby creating a virtuous cycle in which the best people began to seek involvement in various initiatives. During the course of the transformation, the company promoted several team members to line- and functional leadership positions because of their performance.

The company’s change program resulted in hundreds of millions of dollars of value creation. Its once-stagnant brands began to grow, it cracked open new markets such as China, and sales and promotion activities were aligned with the fastest-growing channels. There were many moments during the process when inertia in the organization threatened to derail the change efforts. However, senior management’s belief in focusing on the four key variables helped move the company to a higher trajectory of performance.

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By providing a common language for change, the DICE framework allows companies to tap into the insight and experience of their employees. A great deal has been said about middle managers who want to block change. We find that most middle managers are prepared to support change efforts even if doing so involves additional work and uncertainty and puts their jobs at risk. However, they resist change because they don’t have sufficient input in shaping those initiatives. Too often, they lack the tools, the language, and the forums in which to express legitimate concerns about the design and implementation of change projects. That’s where a standard, quantitative, and simple framework comes in. By enabling frank conversations at all levels within organizations, the DICE framework helps people do the right thing by change.

Error 1: Not Establishing a Great Enough Sense of Urgency

Most successful change efforts begin when some individuals or some groups start to look hard at a company’s competitive situation, market position, technological trends, and financial performance. They focus on the potential revenue drop when an important patent expires, the five-year trend in declining margins in a core business, or an emerging market that everyone seems to be ignoring. They then find ways to communicate this information broadly and dramatically, especially with respect to crises, potential crises, or great opportunities that are very timely. This first step is essential because just getting a transformation program started requires the aggressive cooperation of many individuals. Without motivation, people won’t help, and the effort goes nowhere.

Compared with other steps in the change process, phase one can sound easy. It is not. Well over 50% of the companies I have watched fail in this first phase. What are the reasons for that failure? Sometimes executives underestimate how hard it can be to drive people out of their comfort zones. Sometimes they grossly overestimate how successful they have already been in increasing urgency. Sometimes they lack patience: “Enough with the preliminaries; let’s get on with it.” In many cases, executives become paralyzed by the downside possibilities. They worry that employees with seniority will become defensive, that morale will drop, that events will spin out of control, that short-term business results will be jeopardized, that the stock will sink, and that they will be blamed for creating a crisis.

Idea in Practice

To give your transformation effort the best chance of succeeding, take the right actions at each stage—and avoid common pitfalls

A paralyzed senior management often comes from having too many managers and not enough leaders. Management’s mandate is to minimize risk and to keep the current system operating. Change, by definition, requires creating a new system, which in turn always demands leadership. Phase one in a renewal process typically goes nowhere until enough real leaders are promoted or hired into senior-level jobs.

Transformations often begin, and begin well, when an organization has a new head who is a good leader and who sees the need for a major change. If the renewal target is the entire company, the CEO is key. If change is needed in a division, the division general manager is key. When these individuals are not new leaders, great leaders, or change champions, phase one can be a huge challenge.

Bad business results are both a blessing and a curse in the first phase. On the positive side, losing money does catch people’s attention. But it also gives less maneuvering room. With good business results, the opposite is true: Convincing people of the need for change is much harder, but you have more resources to help make changes.

But whether the starting point is good performance or bad, in the more successful cases I have witnessed, an individual or a group always facilitates a frank discussion of potentially unpleasant facts about new competition, shrinking margins, decreasing market share, flat earnings, a lack of revenue growth, or other relevant indices of a declining competitive position. Because there seems to be an almost universal human tendency to shoot the bearer of bad news, especially if the head of the organization is not a change champion, executives in these companies often rely on outsiders to bring unwanted information. Wall Street analysts, customers, and consultants can all be helpful in this regard. The purpose of all this activity, in the words of one former CEO of a large European company, is “to make the status quo seem more dangerous than launching into the unknown.”

In a few of the most successful cases, a group has manufactured a crisis. One CEO deliberately engineered the largest accounting loss in the company’s history, creating huge pressures from Wall Street in the process. One division president commissioned first-ever customer satisfaction surveys, knowing full well that the results would be terrible. He then made these findings public. On the surface, such moves can look unduly risky. But there is also risk in playing it too safe: When the urgency rate is not pumped up enough, the transformation process cannot succeed, and the long-term future of the organization is put in jeopardy.

When is the urgency rate high enough? From what I have seen, the answer is when about 75% of a company’s management is honestly convinced that business as usual is totally unacceptable. Anything less can produce very serious problems later on in the process.

Error 2: Not Creating a Powerful Enough Guiding Coalition

Major renewal programs often start with just one or two people. In cases of successful transformation efforts, the leadership coalition grows and grows over time. But whenever some minimum mass is not achieved early in the effort, nothing much worthwhile happens.

It is often said that major change is impossible unless the head of the organization is an active supporter. What I am talking about goes far beyond that. In successful transformations, the chairman or president or division general manager, plus another five or 15 or 50 people, come together and develop a shared commitment to excellent performance through renewal. In my experience, this group never includes all of the company’s most senior executives because some people just won’t buy in, at least not at first. But in the most successful cases, the coalition is always pretty powerful—in terms of titles, information and expertise, reputations, and relationships.

In both small and large organizations, a successful guiding team may consist of only three to five people during the first year of a renewal effort. But in big companies, the coalition needs to grow to the 20 to 50 range before much progress can be made in phase three and beyond. Senior managers always form the core of the group. But sometimes you find board members, a representative from a key customer, or even a powerful union leader.

Because the guiding coalition includes members who are not part of senior management, it tends to operate outside of the normal hierarchy by definition. This can be awkward, but it is clearly necessary. If the existing hierarchy were working well, there would be no need for a major transformation. But since the current system is not working, reform generally demands activity outside of formal boundaries, expectations, and protocol.

A high sense of urgency within the managerial ranks helps enormously in putting a guiding coalition together. But more is usually required. Someone needs to get these people together, help them develop a shared assessment of their company’s problems and opportunities, and create a minimum level of trust and communication. Off-site retreats, for two or three days, are one popular vehicle for accomplishing this task. I have seen many groups of five to 35 executives attend a series of these retreats over a period of months.

Companies that fail in phase two usually underestimate the difficulties of producing change and thus the importance of a powerful guiding coalition. Sometimes they have no history of teamwork at the top and therefore undervalue the importance of this type of coalition. Sometimes they expect the team to be led by a staff executive from human resources, quality, or strategic planning instead of a key line manager. No matter how capable or dedicated the staff head, groups without strong line leadership never achieve the power that is required.

Efforts that don’t have a powerful enough guiding coalition can make apparent progress for a while. But, sooner or later, the opposition gathers itself together and stops the change.

Error 3: Lacking a Vision

In every successful transformation effort that I have seen, the guiding coalition develops a picture of the future that is relatively easy to communicate and appeals to customers, stockholders, and employees. A vision always goes beyond the numbers that are typically found in five-year plans. A vision says something that helps clarify the direction in which an organization needs to move. Sometimes the first draft comes mostly from a single individual. It is usually a bit blurry, at least initially. But after the coalition works at it for three or five or even 12 months, something much better emerges through their tough analytical thinking and a little dreaming. Eventually, a strategy for achieving that vision is also developed.

In one midsize European company, the first pass at a vision contained two-thirds of the basic ideas that were in the final product. The concept of global reach was in the initial version from the beginning. So was the idea of becoming preeminent in certain businesses. But one central idea in the final version—getting out of low value-added activities—came only after a series of discussions over a period of several months.

Without a sensible vision, a transformation effort can easily dissolve into a list of confusing and incompatible projects that can take the organization in the wrong direction or nowhere at all. Without a sound vision, the reengineering project in the accounting department, the new 360-degree performance appraisal from the human resources department, the plant’s quality program, the cultural change project in the sales force will not add up in a meaningful way.

In failed transformations, you often find plenty of plans, directives, and programs but no vision. In one case, a company gave out four-inch-thick notebooks describing its change effort. In mind-numbing detail, the books spelled out procedures, goals, methods, and deadlines. But nowhere was there a clear and compelling statement of where all this was leading. Not surprisingly, most of the employees with whom I talked were either confused or alienated. The big, thick books did not rally them together or inspire change. In fact, they probably had just the opposite effect.

In a few of the less successful cases that I have seen, management had a sense of direction, but it was too complicated or blurry to be useful. Recently, I asked an executive in a midsize company to describe his vision and received in return a barely comprehensible 30-minute lecture. Buried in his answer were the basic elements of a sound vision. But they were buried—deeply.

A useful rule of thumb: If you can’t communicate the vision to someone in five minutes or less and get a reaction that signifies both understanding and interest, you are not yet done with this phase of the transformation process.

Error 4: Undercommunicating the Vision by a Factor of Ten

I’ve seen three patterns with respect to communication, all very common. In the first, a group actually does develop a pretty good transformation vision and then proceeds to communicate it by holding a single meeting or sending out a single communication. Having used about 0.0001% of the yearly intracompany communication, the group is startled when few people seem to understand the new approach. In the second pattern, the head of the organization spends a considerable amount of time making speeches to employee groups, but most people still don’t get it (not surprising, since vision captures only 0.0005% of the total yearly communication). In the third pattern, much more effort goes into newsletters and speeches, but some very visible senior executives still behave in ways that are antithetical to the vision. The net result is that cynicism among the troops goes up, while belief in the communication goes down.

Transformation is impossible unless hundreds or thousands of people are willing to help, often to the point of making short-term sacrifices. Employees will not make sacrifices, even if they are unhappy with the status quo, unless they believe that useful change is possible. Without credible communication, and a lot of it, the hearts and minds of the troops are never captured.

This fourth phase is particularly challenging if the short-term sacrifices include job losses. Gaining understanding and support is tough when downsizing is a part of the vision. For this reason, successful visions usually include new growth possibilities and the commitment to treat fairly anyone who is laid off.

Executives who communicate well incorporate messages into their hour-by-hour activities. In a routine discussion about a business problem, they talk about how proposed solutions fit (or don’t fit) into the bigger picture. In a regular performance appraisal, they talk about how the employee’s behavior helps or undermines the vision. In a review of a division’s quarterly performance, they talk not only about the numbers but also about how the division’s executives are contributing to the transformation. In a routine Q&A with employees at a company facility, they tie their answers back to renewal goals.

In more successful transformation efforts, executives use all existing communication channels to broadcast the vision. They turn boring, unread company newsletters into lively articles about the vision. They take ritualistic, tedious quarterly management meetings and turn them into exciting discussions of the transformation. They throw out much of the company’s generic management education and replace it with courses that focus on business problems and the new vision. The guiding principle is simple: Use every possible channel, especially those that are being wasted on nonessential information.

Perhaps even more important, most of the executives I have known in successful cases of major change learn to “walk the talk.” They consciously attempt to become a living symbol of the new corporate culture. This is often not easy. A 60-year-old plant manager who has spent precious little time over 40 years thinking about customers will not suddenly behave in a customer-oriented way. But I have witnessed just such a person change, and change a great deal. In that case, a high level of urgency helped. The fact that the man was a part of the guiding coalition and the vision-creation team also helped. So did all the communication, which kept reminding him of the desired behavior, and all the feedback from his peers and subordinates, which helped him see when he was not engaging in that behavior.

Communication comes in both words and deeds, and the latter are often the most powerful form. Nothing undermines change more than behavior by important individuals that is inconsistent with their words.

Error 5: Not Removing Obstacles to the New Vision

Successful transformations begin to involve large numbers of people as the process progresses. Employees are emboldened to try new approaches, to develop new ideas, and to provide leadership. The only constraint is that the actions fit within the broad parameters of the overall vision. The more people involved, the better the outcome.

To some degree, a guiding coalition empowers others to take action simply by successfully communicating the new direction. But communication is never sufficient by itself. Renewal also requires the removal of obstacles. Too often, an employee understands the new vision and wants to help make it happen, but an elephant appears to be blocking the path. In some cases, the elephant is in the person’s head, and the challenge is to convince the individual that no external obstacle exists. But in most cases, the blockers are very real.

Sometimes the obstacle is the organizational structure: Narrow job categories can seriously undermine efforts to increase productivity or make it very difficult even to think about customers. Sometimes compensation or performance-appraisal systems make people choose between the new vision and their own self-interest. Perhaps worst of all are bosses who refuse to change and who make demands that are inconsistent with the overall effort.

One company began its transformation process with much publicity and actually made good progress through the fourth phase. Then the change effort ground to a halt because the officer in charge of the company’s largest division was allowed to undermine most of the new initiatives. He paid lip service to the process but did not change his behavior or encourage his managers to change. He did not reward the unconventional ideas called for in the vision. He allowed human resource systems to remain intact even when they were clearly inconsistent with the new ideals. I think the officer’s motives were complex. To some degree, he did not believe the company needed major change. To some degree, he felt personally threatened by all the change. To some degree, he was afraid that he could not produce both change and the expected operating profit. But despite the fact that they backed the renewal effort, the other officers did virtually nothing to stop the one blocker. Again, the reasons were complex. The company had no history of confronting problems like this. Some people were afraid of the officer. The CEO was concerned that he might lose a talented executive. The net result was disastrous. Lower-level managers concluded that senior management had lied to them about their commitment to renewal, cynicism grew, and the whole effort collapsed.

In the first half of a transformation, no organization has the momentum, power, or time to get rid of all obstacles. But the big ones must be confronted and removed. If the blocker is a person, it is important that he or she be treated fairly and in a way that is consistent with the new vision. Action is essential, both to empower others and to maintain the credibility of the change effort as a whole.

Error 6: Not Systematically Planning for, and Creating, Short-Term Wins

Real transformation takes time, and a renewal effort risks losing momentum if there are no short-term goals to meet and celebrate. Most people won’t go on the long march unless they see compelling evidence in 12 to 24 months that the journey is producing expected results. Without short-term wins, too many people give up or actively join the ranks of those people who have been resisting change.

One to two years into a successful transformation effort, you find quality beginning to go up on certain indices or the decline in net income stopping. You find some successful new product introductions or an upward shift in market share. You find an impressive productivity improvement or a statistically higher customer satisfaction rating. But whatever the case, the win is unambiguous. The result is not just a judgment call that can be discounted by those opposing change.

Creating short-term wins is different from hoping for short-term wins. The latter is passive, the former active. In a successful transformation, managers actively look for ways to obtain clear performance improvements, establish goals in the yearly planning system, achieve the objectives, and reward the people involved with recognition, promotions, and even money. For example, the guiding coalition at a U.S. manufacturing company produced a highly visible and successful new product introduction about 20 months after the start of its renewal effort. The new product was selected about six months into the effort because it met multiple criteria: It could be designed and launched in a relatively short period, it could be handled by a small team of people who were devoted to the new vision, it had upside potential, and the new product-development team could operate outside the established departmental structure without practical problems. Little was left to chance, and the win boosted the credibility of the renewal process.

Managers often complain about being forced to produce short-term wins, but I’ve found that pressure can be a useful element in a change effort. When it becomes clear to people that major change will take a long time, urgency levels can drop. Commitments to produce short-term wins help keep the urgency level up and force detailed analytical thinking that can clarify or revise visions.

Error 7: Declaring Victory Too Soon

After a few years of hard work, managers may be tempted to declare victory with the first clear performance improvement. While celebrating a win is fine, declaring the war won can be catastrophic. Until changes sink deeply into a company’s culture, a process that can take five to ten years, new approaches are fragile and subject to regression.

In the recent past, I have watched a dozen change efforts operate under the reengineering theme. In all but two cases, victory was declared and the expensive consultants were paid and thanked when the first major project was completed after two to three years. Within two more years, the useful changes that had been introduced slowly disappeared. In two of the ten cases, it’s hard to find any trace of the reengineering work today.

Over the past 20 years, I’ve seen the same sort of thing happen to huge quality projects, organizational development efforts, and more. Typically, the problems start early in the process: The urgency level is not intense enough, the guiding coalition is not powerful enough, and the vision is not clear enough. But it is the premature victory celebration that kills momentum. And then the powerful forces associated with tradition take over.

Ironically, it is often a combination of change initiators and change resistors that creates the premature victory celebration. In their enthusiasm over a clear sign of progress, the initiators go overboard. They are then joined by resistors, who are quick to spot any opportunity to stop change. After the celebration is over, the resistors point to the victory as a sign that the war has been won and the troops should be sent home. Weary troops allow themselves to be convinced that they won. Once home, the foot soldiers are reluctant to climb back on the ships. Soon thereafter, change comes to a halt, and tradition creeps back in.

Instead of declaring victory, leaders of successful efforts use the credibility afforded by short-term wins to tackle even bigger problems. They go after systems and structures that are not consistent with the transformation vision and have not been confronted before. They pay great attention to who is promoted, who is hired, and how people are developed. They include new reengineering projects that are even bigger in scope than the initial ones. They understand that renewal efforts take not months but years. In fact, in one of the most successful transformations that I have ever seen, we quantified the amount of change that occurred each year over a seven-year period. On a scale of one (low) to ten (high), year one received a two, year two a four, year three a three, year four a seven, year five an eight, year six a four, and year seven a two. The peak came in year five, fully 36 months after the first set of visible wins.

Error 8: Not Anchoring Changes in the Corporation’s Culture

In the final analysis, change sticks when it becomes “the way we do things around here,” when it seeps into the bloodstream of the corporate body. Until new behaviors are rooted in social norms and shared values, they are subject to degradation as soon as the pressure for change is removed.

Two factors are particularly important in institutionalizing change in corporate culture. The first is a conscious attempt to show people how the new approaches, behaviors, and attitudes have helped improve performance. When people are left on their own to make the connections, they sometimes create very inaccurate links. For example, because results improved while charismatic Harry was boss, the troops link his mostly idiosyncratic style with those results instead of seeing how their own improved customer service and productivity were instrumental. Helping people see the right connections requires communication. Indeed, one company was relentless, and it paid off enormously. Time was spent at every major management meeting to discuss why performance was increasing. The company newspaper ran article after article showing how changes had boosted earnings.

The second factor is taking sufficient time to make sure that the next generation of top management really does personify the new approach. If the requirements for promotion don’t change, renewal rarely lasts. One bad succession decision at the top of an organization can undermine a decade of hard work. Poor succession decisions are possible when boards of directors are not an integral part of the renewal effort. In at least three instances I have seen, the champion for change was the retiring executive, and although his successor was not a resistor, he was not a change champion. Because the boards did not understand the transformations in any detail, they could not see that their choices were not good fits. The retiring executive in one case tried unsuccessfully to talk his board into a less seasoned candidate who better personified the transformation. In the other two cases, the CEOs did not resist the boards’ choices, because they felt the transformation could not be undone by their successors. They were wrong. Within two years, signs of renewal began to disappear at both companies.

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There are still more mistakes that people make, but these eight are the big ones. I realize that in a short article everything is made to sound a bit too simplistic. In reality, even successful change efforts are messy and full of surprises. But just as a relatively simple vision is needed to guide people through a major change, so a vision of the change process can reduce the error rate. And fewer errors can spell the difference between success and failure.