

Islands of Change

Even adventurous explorers sometimes are hesitant to leave their own comfort zones.

By Randy Kesterson and Susan Broome

IT SEEMS LIKE every successful organization is trying to venture away from the Land of the Status Quo, where time stands still, things stay the same, and processes never improve. Those organizations usually send people out to test the waters of change—maybe providing a general direction on the compass—but they never completely chart the course.

Often, individual explorers discover a new Island of Change, on which exist exciting new tools and techniques for improving their organizations. Yet even the most adventurous explorers sometimes decide to settle down on the first island where they feel comfortable. Might they be missing a chance to travel to another new Island of Change, where different and complimentary techniques for improving their organization can be found?

Consider these questions:

- What are the differences among vision, mission, strategy, objective, goal, target, and initiative?
- How can you use Lean Six Sigma in conjunction with a balanced scorecard and strategy maps?
- What are your workplace style and your possible leadership blind spots?
- What should you do when confronted by significant resistance to an important change initiative?
- When might you use a Five S program,

a process map, or Six Sigma's Design of Experiments and Failure Modes and Effects Analysis tools?

- What is an intervention, and how should you design one to close performance gaps?
- Can you develop a comprehensive change management strategy that includes plans for communication, training, sponsor road maps, coaching, and resistance management?

If you can confidently answer all of those questions, then you are obviously well traveled in the world of organizational change. If, however, you are unsure about one or more of the questions, you should spend a few minutes taking this short tour through the Islands of Change.

Naming the islands

Basically, there are three key components of organizational change: strategy, tactics, and people. Let us take a closer look at each component and why they are all important.

Strategy. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, *strategy* is skill in managing any matter, especially by using a clever plan, scheme, or system. For our purposes, strategy will mean the plans for organizational change—establishing a vision and defining what needs to change and why.

Strategy is essential in organizational change, because without a plan or a vision, there is no direction. For example, there was once a band of people, who were lost deep in a dense jungle. They wandered around for days in hopes of returning to civilization. They worked very hard, cutting their way through the jungle with machetes. After two days, they found themselves right back where they had started. At that point, one member of the group climbed to the top of the tallest tree and saw smoke rising in the distance. "The nearest village is that way!" he said, pointing the way with his machete. With the direction now in sight, the people were able to envision their destination and make plans to reach it.

In organizations today, there are people working very hard, using every tool at their disposal, to help improve processes and achieve change. But without understanding their company's strategy or vision, they simply may be moving in the wrong direction, and, ultimately, end up where they started.

Tactics. When we refer to *tactics*, we mean the methods used to bring about change. How do we make needed changes? What tools do we use? How do we manage the change process? Without being aware of the most effective tools available for creating change, people can waste a lot of time attempting to achieve their objectives. Worse yet, they may never achieve the desired change at all.

Imagine that there is a carpenter building a house. She is a highly skilled carpenter, but only has one tool in her tool belt—a hammer. While she pounds nails successfully with her hammer, she also uses it to

pound wood screws into place and to break boards in half. One day, a new carpenter arrives at the job site. He also has only one tool, but it's a saw. Then, a third carpenter shows up. His only tool is a screwdriver. For days, the three carpenters watch each other work, noting how one could perform some tasks more quickly than the others. Soon, they decide that they would be far more successful if they worked together, applying the most effective tool for the particular application. So, they use the hammer to pound nails, the saw to cut boards, and the screwdriver to fasten screws.

Similarly, many tools for creating organizational change are most valuable when used properly. A balanced scorecard, for example, is a great tool for establishing and communicating vision, mission, and strategy, and for aligning day-to-day work to the strategy. But for reducing time and cost, you might choose to use a Lean Enterprise tool.

Also like in the example, change tools are extremely powerful when used in conjunction with one another. So, while people often master one tool, they may neglect others that could be of great help to them.

People. Have you ever noticed that in the workplace, no one else is quite like you? Put simply, people are different: They have different genetics and different life experiences. Each individual reacts differently, based on his personal combination of human nature and environment. Each develops her own unique filters, or perceptions. Different personalities, styles, preferences, and filters help to determine how people behave and react to change. Some may welcome it and will want to be involved or lead the process; others may prefer to watch from the sidelines. A few may be threatened or afraid of change, and resist it. They even could want to impede the change efforts.

When implementing organizational change, it's vital to realize that people are the most important component of change. Without them, all of the change strategy and tactics together would accomplish nothing.

One of the first steps of interpersonal work is to learn more about you. What is

your workplace personality? What are your thinking preferences and decision making styles? Once you better understand yourself, you can then learn to interact and communicate with others. These first steps will show you how to explain the need for change in ways that everyone can understand.

Understanding island language

Strategy, tactics, and people are essential components of organizational change and the basis for the three islands. Now that you know the importance of each island, let's examine the language and tools used by its inhabitants.

People who reside on the Island of Strategy often ask these questions: Where are we going? How are we doing? What needs to change? Why? They are concerned with both the bottom line and the big picture. Their language includes words such as vision, purpose, competition, performance, goals, critical analysis, brainstorming, logistics, key point, and of course, strategic. Basically, they look forward to where they believe their organization should be in the next five, 10, or 20 years. They compare themselves to the neighboring tribe, evaluate the effectiveness of current practices, and often explore new ways of doing things. The people who live on the Island of Strategy use tools such as balanced scorecards, strategy maps, and benchmarking approaches such as Malcolm Baldrige's criteria.

On the Island of Tactics, the people are concerned more with how to make needed changes instead of why change is necessary. They are interested in the tools and processes that can bring about effective change. Sometimes, they are concerned with the present, and worry less about the future than the people on the Island of Strategy. In their vocabulary, you will find words such as tools, hardware, sequence, discipline, details, control, and plan. The people from the Island of Tactics create order by allocating tasks, and organizing, scheduling, and performing follow-ups. They are hard workers, who rely on order to gain closure. Some of the tools used by these people are Six Sigma, Lean Enterprise, Human Performance

Technology/Improvement, and project and supply chain managements.

Finally, residents of the Island of People are most concerned with involving others, gaining trust, and eliminating fear when going through changes. They are often interested in reducing conflict and improving teamwork. You'll hear them using words such as communication, values, growth, interaction, participation, training, intervention, development, emotion, and interpersonal. The residents of this island are concerned with kindling the spirit of community, and they often achieve goals through sharing, listening, expressing, and collaborating. On the Island of People, team building tools, change and conflict resolution tools, and workplace-style assessments are popular.

Leave the land of status quo

When someone sees the need for change within her organization, she gathers enough courage to leave the comforts of the mainland—the Land of Status Quo—and swim to a nearby island, typically one where she believes she'll be most comfortable. People who are interested in the bigger picture swim to the Island of Strategy, while those favoring methods, tools, and technology swim to the Island of Tactics. Similarly, the Island of People appeals to those interested in communication, learning, feeling, and knowledge.

Many people reside happily throughout their entire careers on their islands of choice. That's because people tend to form tribes. The tribe may be a functional department at work or a professional membership association. Often, other tribe members are similar to them. The more time they spend together, the more similar they and their perspectives about change may become.

In order to effectively lead change efforts in an organization, a change leader should visit other tribes on other islands to gain an understanding of the language and tools they use. Think back to the three carpenters who each possessed only one tool of choice. Remember how much more effective they were once they combined their tools and applied them to the appropriate tasks? A change process is similar:

If leaders possess a general understanding of the languages and tools used in all three components of change (strategy, tactics, and people), they increase their likelihood of achieving successful and sustainable change. Through their ability to communicate with people who use different approaches, they form a strong team that will use the most powerful tools available for the tasks at hand.

Building bridges

Think again about your answers to the questions posed at the beginning of this article. Were you able to answer each question? If so, you may be qualified to become a “bridge builder.” If you already speak the language of each island and understand its tools, you can help individuals who reside on the different islands to communicate and appreciate each other’s value.

If, however, you realize that you are most comfortable on one island, that doesn’t mean that you can’t become a bridge builder. You can become a well-rounded change leader by attending seminars and conferences that are sponsored by individuals from unfamiliar islands. You can read books and articles that expose you to new ideas and practices, and you can take classes, join a new association, or invite people from other islands to make presentations at your meetings.

You stand challenged to invest in your personal development as a change leader or change agent by traveling and exploring the unfamiliar. What better way to grow than to become a frequent visitor to the various Islands of Change? **TD**

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