

Creating Advocates through Involvement and Influence

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It is tempting to frame organizational change implementation in terms of straightforward events, such as when new software is installed or when a training initiative is completed. However, these measures do not get to the essence of change. At its heart, an organizational change is an idea about improving how work gets done. It could be an idea about how to improve quality or get to market quicker or control costs. Only when people understand the value of the idea behind the change can it begin to take root. Only after employees accept the idea and adopt its practices, it can generate change in an organization. Turning the lessons learned from public health inside out can help us understand how to spread acceptance for a new idea—an organizational change.

The Spread of Change

Ideas spread when people advocate them. The best advocates are people with expertise in the area affected by the change who have experience with the change and have “contagious” enthusiasm for it. When Advocates explain their experience with the new way of working to colleagues, some of their colleagues begin to mentally test it against their own experience both about how work get done and how changes are supported in the organization. They begin to “incubate” the idea. Not every Apathetic who hears about a change from an Advocate will incubate it. Without leadership that demonstrates support for the change, many will either ignore it or nod in agreement but take no action and remain Apathetic.

Through experience with the change and support from management, some of those who are incubating the idea may become Advocates and further spread the change. Other Incubators will lose interest and become Apathetic again. Still others will resist the change and actively work to undermine it. It is the role of leaders to create the environment that makes the case for change clear, demonstrates the value of the change, shares a vision of what the organization will look like when the change is successfully implemented, and ensures that Advocates are supported. Advocates will retain their contagious enthusiasm for the idea only if they continue to see value from the change and are supported by leadership. Otherwise, they may become disillusioned and return to apathy. When enough people become enthusiastic Advocates for the idea, there is momentum to create a positive epidemic of change.

Resistance to Change

We know that people can develop resistance to a disease—even complete immunity to it. Without good leadership, people can also develop resistance to change. Initially, resistance may manifest in constructive ways. People may express concerns that a change is too much of a leap for the organization, too ambitious, misunderstood, inappropriate, incomplete, or ill-timed. Resistance that stems from genuine concern can serve as an early warning system that helps the organization strengthen the initiative and avoid failure. Resistance can spark exploration for better methods of implementation or improvement of the change effort itself.

When constructive concerns are aired and acted on suitably, they become a source of improvement for the change or its implementation. Strong leaders who walk the talk by surfacing and addressing the concerns of Apathetics or Resisters and involving them in planning for change will enlist more of them as Advocates.

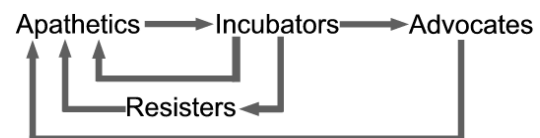
However, if leaders in the organization interpret legitimate fears and concerns as challenges to the change effort or to management's authority, then they lose an opportunity to learn from people closest to the change. Worse, if leaders try to push the project in the face of resistance or try to punish Resisters for their stance, Resisters will likely become more covert in their opposition, increasing their potential to undermine this effort. A very dangerous source of resistance stems from too much exposure in an organization to change initiatives that were touted as important innovations, never fully implemented, and ended up simply as slogans on T-shirts and coffee mugs. This kind of resistance can damage future change initiatives—regardless of how important they are—because employees will associate change with meaningless hype.

Change Leadership Strategy

The real goal of any change leadership team should be to prevent resistance before it develops. Consistency and clarity go a long way toward preventing resistance. Carefully selecting the change needed to address a problem or opportunity, making an unambiguous business case for it, and being prepared to fully sponsor the change through to successful implementation represent consistent and clear leadership. Creating a safe environment where

Incubators and Apathetics can voice their concerns and taking appropriate actions to address these concerns can stem resistance before it develops—making a difference in the current change and changes that are needed in the future.

Using the Tipping Point model of change in a workshop helps participants understand the power of advocacy and the power of good leadership that is committed to collaboration and involvement in implementing change. This is summarized well by the CEO of WD-40, Garry Ridge, who told us, *“Awareness of the concerns people have when faced with change is the key to a successful change effort. Often, people are sharing these concerns with their colleagues, but not with you. By involving them in planning for the change, you gain their cooperation and their good ideas that will help you succeed. A serendipitous benefit is that the conversations about the change bring advocates for the change into contact with people who are neutral and they begin to see the value of the change.”*



Enthusiasm for a change spreads as Advocates contact Apathetics to explain their experiences with the change. Some Apathetics will begin to Incubate the new idea. Some go on to become Advocates themselves; others return to the Apathetic pool; and some may become Resisters. Strong leaders create an environment that supports both the change process and the Advocates' efforts.

Summary

Ideas can be contagious. When ideas put forward are new and better ways of working, we want to make them contagious. By supporting conditions and behaviors analogous to those that produce the spread of disease, we can catalyze

healthy epidemics of enthusiasm for and commitment to proposed organizational changes. Leveraging the power of Advocates of a change and also demonstrating clear consistent leadership can make change initiatives both contagious and sustainable.

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