

Revolutionary Goals But Incremental Changes!

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Set ambitious goals but lead the path of change without disruptions!



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The proverb that "Change is the only constant thing" cannot be more applicable as it is in today's environment. At present times, most of us are facing some kind of change in our respective organization and team. There is news of organizational realignment, re-design and re-sizing all around us. A lot of established businesses are getting challenged by newer and nimble players. Business models are getting challenged as innovation by these players are creating new rules of engagement. In order to protect their position, the incumbent players are also making changes to respond to the new world order. All this creates enormous pressure on the management and employees alike to keep up with the change.

Pace of change

Typically, Strategic Planning is a 3 to 5-year exercise with an annual refresh cycle. The annual refresh is an event when one need to understand if the company has to re-think its strategy or make minor tweaks to maneuver market forces. It may sound easy to change anytime but it is not straight forward. A large organization often takes time to adjust to organizational changes and management decision which impacts people at large. A typically change initiative often runs for months and sometime years to achieve the end outcome. The size of the organization is an important factor and is inversely proportional to the pace of change. Smaller organizations are much more agile and can carry out these changes much faster. Unfortunately, there is no choice left but to change. How fast you drive the change in an organization is a subjective call and another key determinant is the culture of the organization.

Difference in expectation of customers and employees with respect to change

Customer expectations are often shaped by various best practices they see with key players in the market. If an incumbent is not able to provide value in certain areas, it runs the risk of getting substituted by others. Hence, customers expect agility and the best value for money. Yet customers also run the risk of disruption when they are transitioning from one provider to another as well as incur cost of change plus exit barriers which can be contractual, relationships or process change. Based on the value they put in the relationship and the risk involved, often customer delay switching decisions to the new provider.

In contrast, typically employees push back change. Everyone understands that change is inevitable and they have to eventually align but the initial reaction to change is seldom positive. There are several reasons for such behavior. Any change often leads to different ways of working as compared to the set process and inertia is a usual deterrent. Sometimes the value of change and the impact it is going to make is not very well understood at all levels. Water cooler conversations are often usual in such times



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Organizations often face this expectation to change fast from external forces and resistance to change from internal forces. Strong management presence is required to balance these counteracting forces. The management team needs to provide a clear vision for change which need to be supported by setting revolutionary and inspiring goals for the organization along with practical change management efforts through incremental changes leading to those goals.

Set revolutionary goals

Change requires inspiration. While there are operational ways of driving change through KPIs and dashboards, yet people find ways to fulfil them without driving real change on the ground. When people are truly inspired and understand that change is necessary, they are driven by a sense of purpose. The Management team should set revolutionary goals that has the clarity of their vision and can generate a sense of purpose and bring the entire organization together. Such goals should be easy to articulate, recall and relate to everyone’s contribution in the organization. The goals should be aspirational and meaningful and should help the organization to move to the next orbit of success. No one would change if they have to endure the pain of change yet the achievement is hardly impactful in terms of goals.

Drive incremental changes

While the goals should be revolutionary, the steps to achieve them should be carefully charted out. Often a big bang approach to make changes is met with strong resistance. On the other hand, small successes add up to become a grand success eventually. If the change milestones look seemingly tough, even with the all inspiration people won’t feel operationally comfortable. It is important to maintain operational momentum to such change management efforts. This is possible only by driving incremental change. Incremental change also helps in maneuvering when something is not going in the right direction. It is always better to make small mistakes than an irreversible damage.

An important thing to remember is that every incremental changes made in an organization should be done keeping the end goal in perspective. If the change doesn’t move you in the direction of the end goal, then it adds no value. Also, while some would argue that instead of making small changes they would rather make big changes, in my view it is counter-productive and creates immense amount of disruptions within the organization as well how the organization interacts with its stakeholders.

Alvin Toffler, the American author and futurist has said “Future shock is the shattering stress and disorientation that we induce in individuals by subjecting them to too much change in too short a time”.

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Rahul is passionate about Strategy and Change Management. He has around 15 years of experience in Management Consulting, Business Transformation and driving Strategy and M&A across multiple industries, business domains, technologies & geographies. Rahul holds an MBA from XLRI and is a Gold Medalist in Engineering from Jadavpur University

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