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WHAT IS CHANGE LEADERSHIP?



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Kelli Anderson |  Contributors

◇ Business in Society, Leadership, Management, Power and Influence for Positive Impact

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Change management is a common term among business leaders. A successful [change management process](#) requires efficient, effective execution and disrupting leadership methods.

Managing change to achieve short-term wins or enact large-scale transformation only takes you so far. Change management initiatives can leave people at every organizational level with feelings of uneasiness, which rarely results in success.

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[Change leadership](#) helps organizations during transitional periods by using the **power of vision**—translating a mission from paper to daily business operations. Too often, leaders miss opportunities to play specific roles throughout the change process. Understanding where you stand as a change leader, depending on the initiative and circumstances, is critical.

Here's everything you need to know about leadership's roles in organizational change, how those roles operate, and how to lead change effectively.

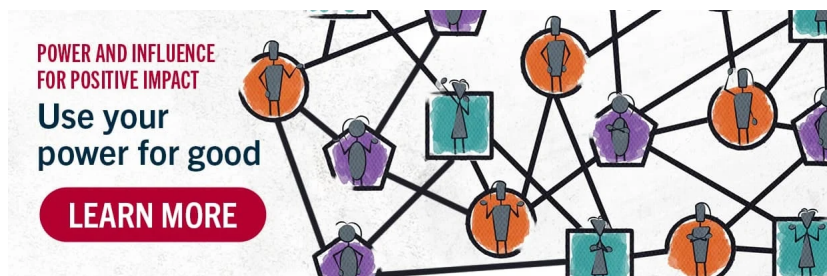
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WHAT ROLES DOES LEADERSHIP PLAY IN ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE?

Relying on the same leadership and management approaches used when your organization isn't going through a shift won't necessarily work as effectively during organizational change. There are three distinct roles you can adopt as a change leader that heed positive outcomes:

- **Agitator:** This role brings individuals' or groups' grievances to the forefront of public awareness and often results in preemptive organizational change. The agitator serves as a disrupter, acknowledging challenges and committing to action toward change that leads to solutions.
- **Innovator:** While the agitator reveals grievances, the innovator creates actionable solutions to address them. This role also serves as a planner.
- **Orchestrator:** The orchestrator takes the innovator's plan and coordinates actions across groups, organizations, and sectors to scale the proposed solution. This is often the most visible function of effective leadership.

Successful change leaders need all three roles. Without agitation, it's unclear where grievances lie unless leaders choose to ignore them. Innovation can't materialize without first understanding what needs to change. The ideas and solutions the innovation process establishes are central to leading change, but skipping orchestration produces limited results and impact.



HOW DIFFERENT LEADERSHIP ROLES OPERATE IN BUSINESS

While your leadership skills, style, and behavior may be better suited to a particular role, business models that embrace all three can achieve short-term wins and large-scale transformation.

Agitator

Leaders who designate as agitators pledge to understand organizational challenges and solve them. Once an underlying challenge is identified, the goal is to mobilize diverse parties to find solutions. Communication is a key driver in this role, as the agitator spends significant time listening to and learning from stakeholders.

The agitator role allows successful change leaders to investigate issues from perspectives previously unknown. A common purpose can be established with a clear focus on assessing the extent to which people feel agitated or frustrated by grievances.

Being an agitator in an organization can often cause unforeseeable problems. Leaders are challenged with multiple grievances and complaints, which can result in fragmented initiatives and stalled progress. It's an agitator's job to focus on the bigger picture while being aware of problem areas.

Innovator

If the agitator is a listener, the innovator is a creator. Once all team members' concerns are properly communicated, this role is responsible for bringing change to fruition. Innovators study issues and assess solutions through a strategic problem-solving lens.

This leadership position must anticipate roadblocks and be prepared to outline multiple scenarios. It's important for innovators to ask if their proposed solutions address problems in the most effective, efficient way.

While innovators are essential to successful organizational change, they can be unaware of their solutions' negative implications. While narrow focuses can be beneficial, being realistic and open to feedback can result in more successful change leadership.

Orchestrator

Once the innovator builds a plan toward change, the orchestrator ensures its diffusion and adoption. Assessing implementation's progress typically requires an in-depth understanding of timelines, milestones, task ownership, and setbacks.

Similar to a project manager, orchestrators maintain change leadership's role in achieving large-scale transformation and measurable results.

Orchestrators are hands-on leaders who guide businesses through every imaginable scenario, including short-term wins and unanticipated disruptions. Amid change, an agile leadership style best serves this role because most initiatives don't progress exactly as planned.

Orchestrators often experience difficulties with change initiatives. They're prone to shift away from their central mission, limiting their power of vision and focus on why the organization is changing its model. Consistently keeping the power of vision alive can ensure an orchestrator stays on track.

HOW TO CREATE EFFECTIVE CHANGE LEADERSHIP

For decades, businesses have managed change rather than leading it. This has often resulted from organizations wanting to make big changes and keep them under control.

Effective change leadership tries to expedite and fine-tune change implementation. With large-scale ambitions, change leadership requires involving all team members who hope to effect positive change.

Competition among leaders typically doesn't end well in the social and environmental sustainability space. There's a strong need for collaboration and communication among stakeholders willing and able to work toward a common goal.

Real, successful change is the result of collective action. By effectively dispersing change mechanisms, an organization can realize its mission.



START ADOPTING CHANGE LEADERSHIP IN YOUR BUSINESS

Strong change leaders attribute most of their success to shifting from managing change to leading it. Today's business leaders must understand the various roles they can take on to ensure initiatives are successful and sustainable.

With business sustainability on the rise, companies are projected to endure many changes over the next decade. They'll need the right leaders to drive those changes and succeed in a constantly evolving market.

Want to learn more about how change leadership can help your organization succeed during instability? Explore Power and Influence for Positive Impact—one of our online courses related to business in society—and download our free guide on becoming a purpose-driven, global business professional.



About the Author

Kelli Anderson is a copywriter and content strategist focused on education, business, and career development topics. Her work has been featured in a myriad of prestigious publications.