**Building the case for change**

A significant aspect of the planning phase for a change project is the building and distribution of the ‘case for change’ which is the story the organisational leadership craft to gain organisational wide legitimacy and support for the change project. This is a process that ideally should be highly participative, involving key stakeholders in its authorship through surveys, workshops, focus groups, conversational circles, and presentations. The case for change should be based upon a thorough analysis of the change drivers that are shaping the system both in the present and importantly, in the future. Adopting PESTEL and SWOT analyses to map out change drivers using stakeholder group facilitation methods is a proven way of capturing a comprehensive account of key change drivers. Also, crafting future scenarios and using graphic illustrators to storyboard the case for change are effective techniques. Stakeholder mapping is also an important tool at this stage to make sure all stakeholder groups are consulted as part of the process for building the case for change.

Building the case for change is arguably one of the most important aspects of the planning stage as it affects the subjectivities of those involved in the change process. This is especially important when one bears in mind that organisational change is concerned, at one important level, with winning over popular opinion throughout the organisation. Conceptualising and talking about organisational change can also be aided by using the building metaphor. As with all constructions, the change programme requires a foundation to support its overall structure. Change foundations are made up of the soft material of human subjectivity and these materials are symbolic in form and usually presented through language mediated through conversations and the telling of organisational stories. The case for change is the foundation and it must be weatherproof. It has to be able to withstand a corporate storm.

The materials that support the case for change are the interconnected narratives that both managers and staff recognise as the legitimate reasons for the need for organisational change. Certain narratives can be described as ‘mini-narratives’, whilst others can be described as ‘grand narratives. Mini narratives are often represented by a simple statement and storyline, e.g. ‘profit is good’ or ‘compete to win’. Mini narratives need to compete for performance space in an organisation. These mini narratives have the potential of fusing together into a grand organisational narrative that could be called ‘The case for change’. Noam Chomsky (1992) called this process ‘manufacturing consent’.

Although Chomsky’s work is mainly analysis and discussion at the macro level of societal forces it is easily transferable as a model into organisations as ‘the logic of the market’ (Willmott, 1993). As a grand narrative, market logic, which assumes we strive to maximise our own benefits, subjugates all alternative narratives to manufacture consent for the assertions of the need for organisational change. Building such a change narrative takes time. The case for change should be a simple narrative.

The case for change requires a clear description of the consequences of ‘not changing’. This should be evidence-based and drawn from a collaborative analysis of market change drivers backed up with compelling scenarios. The impact of not changing on key stakeholders should be explained and the positive advantages of changing also described and advanced clearly. The scope of the change project and its timeline should be clearly accounted for. What is required from key stakeholders should also be stated with conviction. It is also very useful to frame the case for change in an internal marketing plan and communicate it via roadshows, podcasts, presentations, videos, and newsletters.

In conclusion, the case for change aims to motivate stakeholders to engage with the change project and inspire the desire for its success. If the change project lacks meaning and relevance to key stakeholders, then the likelihood is that the change project may not be successful. A strong and convincing case for change that is built upon a collaboration between key stakeholders can significantly minimise resistance and act as a catalyst for support.

**Key Lessons**

Recalling Kurt Lewin’s change management model, we can relate to building the case for change as the unfreezing stage. Before a change can be implemented, it must go through the initial step of unfreezing. Building the case for change is a human-centred approach that enables unfreezing. It helps to loosen the lid on hardened beliefs regarding the stability of the organisation or the value of established work methods and behaviours. This highly interactive and collaborative process engages people intersubjectively and invites them to have a shared dialogue that has the potential of unfreezing established cultural norms and mindsets and opening these up for change consideration.