Changing your organizational culture is the toughest task you will ever take on. Your organizational culture was formed over years of interaction between the participants in the organization. can feel like rolling rocks uphill.

Organizational cultures form for a reason. Perhaps the current organizational culture matches the style and comfort zone of the company founder. Culture frequently echoes the prevailing management style. Since managers tend to hire people just like themselves, the established organizational culture is reinforced by new hires.

Organizational culture grows over time. People are comfortable with the current organizational culture. For people to consider culture change, usually a significant event must occur. An event that rocks their world such as flirting with bankruptcy, a significant loss of sales and customers, or losing a million dollars, might get people’s attention.

Even then, to recognize that the organizational culture is the culprit and to take steps to change it, is a tough journey. In no way do I mean to trivialize the difficulty of the experience of organizational culture change by summarizing it in this article, but here are my best ideas about culture change that can help your organization grow and transform.

When people in an organization realize and recognize that their current organizational culture needs to transform to support the organization’s success and progress, change can occur. But change is not pretty and change is not easy.

The good news? Organizational culture change is possible. Culture change requires understanding, commitment, and tools.

**Steps in Organizational Culture Change**

There are three major steps involved in changing an organization’s culture.

1. My earlier article discusses *How to Understand Your Current Culture*. Before an organization can change its culture, it must first understand the current culture, or the way things are now. Do take the time to pursue the activities in this article before moving on to the next steps.
2. Once you understand your current organizational culture, your organization must then, and decide what the organizational culture should look like to support success. What vision does the organization have for its future and how must the culture change to support the accomplishment of that vision?

3. Finally, the individuals in the organization must decide to change their behavior to create the desired organizational culture. This is the hardest step in culture change.

**Plan the Desired Organizational Culture**

The organization must plan where it wants to go before trying to make any changes in the organizational culture. With a clear picture of where the organization is currently, the organization can plan where it wants to be next.

**Mission, vision, and values:** To provide a framework for the assessment and evaluation of the current organizational culture, your organization needs to develop a picture of its desired future. What does the organization want to create for the future? **Mission, vision, and values** should be examined for both the strategic and the value based components of the organization. Your management team needs to answer questions such as:

- What are the five most important values you would like to see represented in your organizational culture?
- Are these values compatible with your current organizational culture? Do they exist now? If not, why not? If they are so important, why are you not attaining these values?

Take a look at the rest of the actions you need to take to change your organizational culture.

The first necessary components for organizational culture change. Next, you ask:

- **What needs to happen to create the culture desired by the organization?** You cannot change the organizational culture without knowing where your organization wants to be or what elements of the current organizational culture need to change. What cultural elements support the success of your organization, or not? As an example, your team decides that you spend too much time agreeing with each other rather than challenging the forecasts and assumptions of fellow team members, that typically have been incorrect.
In a second example, your key management team members, who must lead the company, spend most of their time team building with various members of the team on an individual basis, and to promote individual agendas, to the detriment of the cohesive functioning of the whole group. Third, your company employees appear to make a decision, but, in truth, are waiting for the "blessing" from the company owner or founder to actually move forward with the plan.

In each of these situations, components of the organizational culture will keep your organization from moving forward with the success you deserve. You need to consciously identify the cultural impediments and decide to change them.

However, knowing what the desired organizational culture looks like is not enough. Organizations must create plans to ensure that the desired organizational culture becomes a reality.

Change the Organizational Culture

It is more difficult to change the culture of an existing organization than to create a culture in a brand new organization. When an organizational culture is already established, people must unlearn the old values, assumptions, and behaviors before they can learn the new ones.

The two most important elements for creating organizational cultural change are executive support and training.

- **Executive support**: Executives in the organization must support the cultural change, and in ways beyond verbal support. They must show [behavioral support](#) for the cultural change. Executives must lead the change by changing their own behaviors. It is extremely important for executives to consistently support the change.

- **Training**: Culture change depends on behavior change. Members of the organization must clearly understand what is expected of them, and must know how to actually do the new behaviors, once they have been defined. Training can be very useful in both communicating expectations and teaching new behaviors.

Additional Ways to Change the Organizational Culture

Other components important in changing the culture of an organization are:
Create value and belief statements: use employee focus groups, by department, to put the mission, vision, and values into words that state their impact on each employee's job. For one job, the employee stated: "I live the value of quality patient care by listening attentively whenever a patient speaks." This exercise gives all employees a common understanding of the desired culture that actually reflects the actions they must commit to on their jobs.

Practice effective communication: keeping all employees informed about the organizational culture change process ensures commitment and success. Telling employees what is expected of them is critical for effective organizational culture change.

Review organizational structure: changing the physical structure of the company to align it with the desired organizational culture may be necessary. As an example, in a small company, four distinct business units competing for product, customers, and internal support resources, may not support the creation of an effective organizational culture. These units are unlikely to align to support the overall success of the business.

Redesign your approach to rewards and recognition: you will likely need to change the reward system to encourage the behaviors vital to the desired organizational culture.

Review all work systems such as employee promotions, pay practices, performance management, and employee selection to make sure they are aligned with the desired culture. As an example, you cannot just reward individual performance if the requirements of your organizational culture specify team work. An executive's total bonus cannot reward the accomplishment of his department's goals without recognizing the importance of him playing well with others on the executive team to accomplish your organizational goals.

You can change your organizational culture to support the accomplishment of your business goals. Changing the organizational culture requires time, commitment, planning and proper execution - but it can be done.

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