

Organizing Change: Preparing Managers to Create a Culture of Accountability and Support

by Mark Samuel

This article looks at what changes need to be made to achieve a total quality environment in an organization, and the role and skills required by management to make those changes.

Although implementation of total quality has had varying degrees of success, it has maintained momentum as the process for involving employees at all levels in the improvement of customer service and quality. Leaders in industry have acknowledged the measurable improvements attained through total quality efforts as a major contributing factor in the success of their organizations. Yet in many organizations, total quality is still a separate program not to be confused with daily operations.

Two issues which contribute to this segregation are:

- While people have a better understanding of problem-solving tools and techniques, they don't have the tools and processes to measure and improve the relationship issues that can break down a team's effectiveness.
- Total quality has not been accepted by all managers. Even the managers who buy-in to the philosophy of total quality haven't always been able to translate total quality into a leadership role for day-to-day activities.

What it is recognized that management's role in a total quality environment is different from a traditional management role, we have not provided management with the leadership skills necessary to adopt this new role. We know that management must contribute to and lead the culture change towards total quality, but the question is how, and what skills will they need to accomplish this visionary change?

Instead of approaching this subject by assessing the skills required, let us explore the factors that are getting in the way of making the culture change. By examining the current state of most organizations, and the current state of most management groups, we can determine what changes need to be made.

People In Pain: The Organizational Challenge

It is an understatement that organizations are going through change. If an organization isn't downsizing, it is restructuring, or continuously working to change its operations and/or internal management systems. Change involves risk, and many people approach taking risks with uncertainty and fear.

Managers and individual contributors are facing the pressures of increasing customer service, quality, and responsiveness with diminishing resources – and this with the pressure of organizational and employment survival at their heels. People are being asked

to change their roles within the organization. Some are being asked to be team players when they have been conditioned and educated to be independent and autonomous. Others are being asked to be leaders and facilitators of change, exhibiting the skills to strategize, mobilize groups behind a mission and to lead task forces to accomplish challenges never faced before. What makes this even worse is that many people are being uprooted from their existing work groups and placed with strangers from other parts of the organization. These changes are not necessarily negative, they are just part of the environment in most organizations.

Some organizations have prepared for these changes by providing their employees with skill development to cope with their new roles and job duties. This includes programs in team-building and total quality problem-solving techniques.

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Unfortunately, the new processes are often perceived as time wasters that create more work when people are already feeling overwhelmed by current workload levels. In many cases, managers are not provided appropriate training to deal with the changes with which they are faced. While they are being taught skills in communication, managing conflict, or team building, they are not providing the strategizing, facilitation and consulting skills necessary for filling their new role.

The result: employees are feeling overwhelmed by changes in organizational direction, increased demands to produce higher quality and greater output, and new operational procedures to learn and perform. Managers are rightfully feeling overwhelmed by their new leadership role (having to produce results and lead change efforts) accompanied by a lack of training support from upper management, or cooperation from their peers, who are competing for the same jobs to maintain their employment.

Managers and employees express their pain in the form of frustration, anger, cynicism, apathy, resistance, or stress. Regardless of how people are expressing their pain and fear of surviving and thriving in the modern organization, performance and teamwork is negatively impacted. Instead of ignoring or blaming those individuals who have difficulty coping with the demands of change, we must create an organizational culture where people can face their fears, learn from their experiences, and make the necessary changes to adapt in a way which will support their success.

Safety To Take Risks

Many organizations are asking employees to take more initiative, make more decisions, solve more problems on their own, and to work more closely in cooperation with other team members, both inside and outside of their functional team. However, is the organization supporting these kinds of efforts? If support is measured by reorganizing a few employees for their efforts, or for demonstrating exceptional performance, the

answer is yes. But if the organization fails to recognize the majority of people who are attempting to make efforts to improve performance, then support is questionable.

Some organizations are giving mixed messages. Sometimes, employees and managers take the initiative and make a mistake, or fail to recognize political ramifications, and are then reprimanded in one form or another. Some organizations are in such a crisis mode that working on improvement efforts is perceived as overwhelming, even though the organization talks total quality. Many organizations are still using a form of forced ranking, or ranking of employees which is perceived as forcing team members to compete against one another for merit increases. Other organizations are only rewarding individual performance, while they are asking employees and managers to be team players. These mixed messages create an unsafe environment, breeding confusion, mistrust, and ultimately the reaction of individuals not wanting to invest the energy to take the risks necessary for improvement.

Organizations must rethink their views of creating a safe environment. Safety is not created for employees so that they can get away with non-performance, or to do away with standards of performance or behavior. In fact, creating a safe environment has nothing to do with creating a comfortable environment. For example, the only 'safe' position within organizational life is being unemployed. Unemployed people have no fear of reprisal, failure of poor performance, or conflict. However, they also don't have the chance for achievement, growth, or rewards. Safety is measured by the following criteria: "Is it safe for individuals to experience the discomfort of uncertainty and to take the necessary risks for improvement and change?"

If people don't feel safe enough to take the risks for change, they won't make improvements which requires change. If people don't feel safe enough to speak their minds when they have ideas for making team improvements, then they won't make those improvements. Therefore, the first priority of managers who are leading a culture change in their organization is to foster the safety of their direct reports to take risks of change to make improvements.

The following guidelines represent some of the ways managers can create safety in their team:

- Set clear expectations and parameters with your team for performance and behavior, based on satisfying customer needs and responding to organizational goals and constraints.
- When input is being requested, clearly state up-front who will be making the final decision, the team or yourself.
- Facilitate the team in creating agreements for dealing with relationships or team meeting breakdowns to avoid unnecessary conflicts that end in resentment.
- Share information with the team to minimize surprises, and let people know where they stand.

- Provide guidance, coaching, support and encouragement for improving oneself, contributing to the efforts of other team members, and for streamlining operational systems/improving quality.
- Remove organizational barriers to making improvements.
- Assist the team in connecting with people outside of the team to gather information and share results of improvement efforts.
- Recognize individual and team successes and promote those successes to other in the organization.
- Support the development of each employee's skills to foster greater leadership, and to assure that each team member has enough skill depth to adapt to future job changes within or outside of the organization.

Accountability: The Missing Link In Creating A Safe Environment

When we think of accountability in the context we think of accountability in the context of organizations, we usually think of a form of punishment, reprimand or blame. Unfortunately, this impression of accountability is too often validated by managers or employees who are frustrated or afraid of losing control.

However, accountability is one of the major roots of individual empowerment, and is the basis for learning and improvement.

Accountability is defined as reflecting how an individual created, promoted or allowed a situation (positive or negative) to occur, or their reaction to the situation. According to this definition, a person is accountable even if he didn't create the situation, but was involved as someone who is 'feeding' the situation or who is 'allowing' the situation to continue without trying to change it.

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Accountability is a reflection of one's level of integrity, which leads to trust when the situation involves other people. Accountability results in the actions that support one's words. Without that accountability, the safety created by promises, commitments and goals disappears. As an example, one of the major complaints expressed by employees at all levels includes non-performers who are not coached or reprimanded, and who bring down the performance and reputation of the entire team. A second example is when management talks about an organizational change or new vision, but then takes contrary action. This results in mistrust, confusion and the breakdown of safety, since people don't know where they stand, or what the truth is.

As an organization increases the level of safety for people to take risks and make changes, it must also assure that there is a system for holding individuals accountable for taking the actions necessary to keep their commitments. The key is to keep from moving into the 'blame game' when holding one another accountable. This is accomplished by acknowledging a mistake without judgment and providing support to assist the person in

making the changes to improve the situation on their own. By doing this, the mistake and the accountability for it is not ignored (which would allow the person to continue making the mistake), and blame is not placed which causes a person to feel defeated or punished, resulting in defensiveness and self-doubt.

The following guidelines represent some of the ways managers can create an environment of accountability while enhancing the safety in their team:

- Follow-up on commitments and/or monitor progress made on suggestions for change, and communicate those results to the team.
- Facilitate team members to hold each other accountable with acknowledgement and support, so that the team can create greater safety with one another.
- Facilitate the team in creating its own action plans for accomplishing a vision of excellence which they created.
- Assist the team in finding ways to measure their performance, for assessing internal systems and for setting up projects/action plans for improving those systems.
- Provide the team with clear directions and choices, along with potential results, so that they can make informed and intelligent choices.
- Create accountability linkages between management levels by identifying agreements, and putting in place a monitoring system to support the vision and improvement actions committed to by the employees.

Preparing Managers to Create A Culture of Accountability and Support

Before we can ask management to create a culture change for the employees, we must guide them in creating a culture change for themselves. While this involves some awareness training, typical skill-building will not achieve this outcome. The 'right' skills applied to the 'wrong' role or the 'wrong' functions will still result in producing the same culture.

Therefore, we must focus on redefining the role of leadership, the accountability of management, the parameters of their job, and the operational processes that management are responsible for performing. Once we have their accountability defined, we must also redefine the support and safety that they will need in the form of organizational processes and systems which will empower them to deal with the fears and challenges associated with performing their new role – then we can create the skill-building training that will support them in being successful.

The following steps can be used as a foundation for facilitating management in creating for themselves a new culture of accountability and support, in preparation for leading organizational culture change:

- Define the customer's needs and expectations in the future, as well as the changes the organization will need to make to respond to the customer's future demands.
- Determine the most effective characteristics of the culture which will provide the highest levels of quality while being responsible and adaptable to satisfying changing

needs in an expedient and efficient manner. This includes identifying the positive and negative attributes of the current culture, and enhancing the future culture with total quality principles and other values that will contribute to the organization's success.

- Identify the role and vision of leadership in making the transition to the new culture. This includes establishing clear critical success factors which would be examples of how managers should operate in the new culture.
- Identify the weak areas of leadership according to the future ideal, and identify the organizational processes and practices that are counter culture, and which are obstacles to the change efforts. This includes performance appraisal, recognition, hiring, and decision-making practices.
- Develop management teams that use total quality processes to begin resolving and changing these fundamental processes and practices which affect daily routines, contradicting the ideal direction of the culture and goals of the organization.

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- Define the linkages between management levels and create the necessary agreements to ensure that managers have the safety to take the risks of making these changes, along with clear criteria for getting results that support the culture change.
- Create agreements between a managers on how they will collaborate, support one another, and break down any territorial behaviors that prevent their culture change, and install a system of interlocking accountability, so that they can hold each other accountable using acknowledgement and support, breaking traditional political power games.

Once the management team members demonstrate the internal safety and accountability through their progress in breaking down territorialism among themselves, and improving some of the processes that have previously been a barrier for the employees, they can begin to involve employees in the culture change effort. Again, involving employees is not an issue of skill-building as much as it is a process for building safety and accountability so that they are able to invest themselves in making the effort to learn, change and improve.

The following steps can be used by management to guide, assist and support employees in making changes to create a culture of accountability and support:

- Meet with employees to discuss the future demands of their customers, and the organizational changes that will be necessary to satisfy these new requirements.
- Review the vision and critical success factors for the leadership team, and ask the employees to assess management on its current level of effectiveness. Then, compare the assessment to management's self-assessment, so that alignment between management and employees can be demonstrated.

- Review the actions that the management team is taking to begin creating the new culture of accountability and support, and get added input from employees on those changes.
- Involve the employees to assist management in making the changes. Discuss ways that they can support management through behaviors that promote greater safety and accountability as required by the new culture.
- Facilitate employees in creating their part of the culture change of accountability and support by determining their own vision and critical success factors based on more effectively satisfying customer needs through improving quality, responsiveness and efficiency.
- Create agreements between the employees and with management on how they will collaborate, support one another, and break down any territorial behaviors that prevent effective relationships necessary for creating a new culture. Install a system of interlocking accountability so that they can hold each other accountable with acknowledgement and support.
- Determine a system for monitoring the commitments that each individual has made, and measure the results so that adjustments can be made to improve on their new process of teamwork and service to their customers. Ultimately, this would include surveying customers for their input.
- Acknowledge both individuals and management and employee teams for their efforts and contributions to customer service and the support of the other teams.
- Meet with each individual (manager or employee) to determine their future role in the organization as changes are made to satisfy the future demands of the customer. Create a development plan of training and coaching to assist each individual in preparing for his new role.

Developing Managers To Be Change Agents

It is important to provide managers with the skills to facilitate change based on the mentioned activities which describe management's changing role. This goes beyond topics typically offered in management development programs. This type of development focuses on the integration of many skill sets necessary for practical application, rather than perfecting separate topics.

The following lists represent examples of some of the skill sets needed as integrated tools that managers could use to increase their effectiveness as change agents:

Troubleshooting

- Problem-solving.
- Decision-making.
- Facilitation.
- Project planning.
- Critical thinking.

Coaching

- Coaching strategies.
- Facilitation skills.
- Negotiation skills.
- Monitoring processes.
- Measurement skills.
- Recognition skills.

Operational strategic planning

- Facilitation skills.
- Negotiation skills.
- Strategic/tactical planning.
- Critical thinking.
- Project management.
- Monitoring systems.
- Measurement processes.

While each of these skill areas can be taught as separate topics, it's the integration of these skills that results in an ability to lead and manage the complexity of modern organizations. In addition to these skills, it will be increasingly important for managers to participate in self-awareness and self-growth programs. One's ability to effectively implement the skill sets depends on a person's awareness of his own biases and blind spots, as well as technical strengths and weaknesses. This is especially important for the skills which relate to dealing with individual and team relationships.

Different than the skill sets, which only require that you go to a workshop, and then gives you a tool or technique that can be applied immediately thereafter, self-awareness and self-growth is an on-going, continual learning process which is never fully achieved. Understanding this will require organizations to rethink their management development programs.

Back to Reality: Letting Go of Expecting Perfection

While this process for achieving cultural change emphasizes creating an environment of safety, it does not discourage people from experiencing the fear, anxiety and frustration of organizational change, even when the change will benefit them. It is no different than the reactions that you see when someone begins a diet or gives up smoking. Many times these individuals are grumpy, short-tempered, and resentful of the fact that they have to change in order to become healthy.

It is important that we maintain our focus on our purpose and our vision of creating a culture within organizations which assists people through their fears and frustrations, not one that tries to make these reactions disappear. The best we can do is to minimize these reactions, and assist people in building their belief in themselves to meet the challenges of change in the future.

In the future, those who can successfully respond to change and even promote change, will be the safest individuals, since they will be able to respond to the unpredictable nature of our business environment.