



Make It Stick

Embedding Change in Organizational Culture

EXCERPTED FROM

*The Heart of Change Field Guide:
Tools and Tactics for Leading Change in Your Organization*

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STEP 8

Make It Stick

Tradition is a powerful force. Leaps into the future can slide back into the past. We keep a change in place by helping to create a new, supportive, and sufficiently strong organizational culture. A supportive culture provides roots for the new ways of operating. It keeps the revolutionary technology, the globalized organization, the innovative strategy, or the more efficient processes working to make you a winner.

—from Step 8 of *The Heart of Change*

Purpose

Once you've had some key short-term wins, gained good momentum, and have actually shifted people's behaviors to fit the change vision, these new behaviors need to be truly woven into the fabric of the organization. If your organizational transformation is not properly supported and reinforced by a vital organizational culture, the effort needed to maintain the desired outcome will continue to seem like extra effort, and will become too difficult to sustain. In order to achieve lasting integration of the change, leaders must model the new behavior themselves, and reward and recognize others who also demonstrate the new behavior. This will enable the changes to take root and a new corporate culture to emerge.

Approach

To make change last, new behaviors need to become a part of the formal and informal systems, practices, and habits that form the organization's culture. The key elements that make new behaviors stick involve:

1. Achieving tangible results as quickly as possible.
2. Showing *how* the change is working, and *why* the old ways won't work.
3. Measuring and supporting the sustained performance.
4. Ensuring that leadership will support and model the new behaviors.
5. Initiating necessary turnover.

Following are some of the key areas to consider when focusing on how to make the new behaviors stick:

- Management systems
 - ✓ Structures, roles, and responsibilities
 - ✓ Goals and performance
 - ✓ Information systems
 - ✓ Management processes
- Organizational infrastructures
 - ✓ Recruiting and hiring processes
 - ✓ Orientation, education, and training
 - ✓ Goal setting
 - ✓ Performance appraisals
 - ✓ Reward and recognition systems
 - ✓ Career development and promotion
 - ✓ Communication processes

- Informal practices
 - ✓ Coaching and mentoring
 - ✓ Social gatherings
 - ✓ Informal recognition
 - ✓ Networks
 - ✓ Clubs

Achieving Tangible Results Quickly

As you can see, this aspect of step 8 is closely related to step 6, create short-term wins. It is crucial that the new behaviors achieve tangible, desired results for a sustained period of time during (and after) the change initiative. Positive results make it very clear that the new practices work and that they are preferable to old habits. These results may come in the form of short-term wins, such as a rise in customer retention, a decrease in service calls, or a more efficient method for sharing customer information; or they could be longer-term payoffs, such as a rise in recognized performance rankings or customer rankings, a more positive and energized atmosphere in the organization, or a renewed creativity and entrepreneurial spirit among employees.

Showing *How* the Change Is Working, and *Why* the Old Ways Won't Work

People need to witness and understand the connection between new practices and performance improvement before they will admit the validity of the changes and feel secure enough to experiment with and adopt them. You need to clearly show all involved in the change effort just how their new behaviors and practices are leading to improved results. Just as important, they need to understand how the behavior in the old culture was formed and why it will no longer work in the new culture, so that the powerful pull and inertia of tradition—the way things were—is kept to a minimum.

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Measuring and Supporting Sustained Performance

To make change last, the management systems, leaders, and organizational infrastructure need to develop, reinforce, measure, and reward the new behaviors.

This process began in previous steps:

- Step 5 (enable action): Change the systems and infrastructure to remove significant and immediate barriers to the change.
- Step 6 (create short-term wins): Demonstrate that progress is being achieved in a visible, meaningful, and timely manner.
- Step 7 (don't let up): Broaden the effort to change interdependent systems and structures that do not fit the vision.

This step entails following up to ensure that the changes to the organizational systems are working as intended as well as highlighting examples of how the change is taking effect. Moreover, sharing stories of individuals who are demonstrating the new behaviors and the success they are having will get others to see the positive effects and help weave the change into the fabric of the organization.

Developing Means to Ensure Leadership Support

If the change effort is to last, the ongoing leadership development and succession process needs to select and promote leaders who will model and support the new behaviors. Future leaders should have enthusiasm for the new practices and values that are compatible with the vision, as well as any specialized skills or experience it requires. To ensure that new leaders are aligned with the evolving organization, it is important to consider the following questions:

- What criteria are used to select and promote new leaders?
- How are corporate values communicated to new leaders?

- What behaviors by new leaders will and will not be recognized and reinforced?
- What opportunities are given to new leaders to develop and demonstrate these behaviors?

If leaders are not selected carefully, retaining them may be challenging, since groups tend to reject those with different values. Bringing in a new leader whose values or perspective is significantly out of alignment with those he will be leading can be disastrous. To enhance the success of new leaders, consider these questions:

- What level of coaching do new leaders get?
- What type of support can they expect from their peers?
- What informal activities, gatherings, networks, or habits are perpetuated that may keep out new individuals or those with different beliefs?
- Are decisions made in situations that are inaccessible to new leaders?

Initiating Necessary Turnover

By definition, a transformation requires people to change their behavior. Not all individuals will be able to make the change—that's only human. Individuals who cannot or will not change should be afforded a reasonable opportunity to turn their performance around. A performance improvement plan that identifies the problem, expectations, and a date for resolution is an important first step. In addition, if knowledge, skills, or ability is an issue, be sure that training and development opportunities are suggested and made available. If these efforts still fail, it is important to show your compassion and respect for your people by offering meaningful alternatives to those who cannot perform effectively in the new organization. If there is no reasonable alternative within the organization, offer outplacement

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assistance so that individuals have some support while seeking other employment.

Outcomes

When the change is “sticking,” more than likely you’ll know it and feel it. If you’re effectively using the eight steps and your change effort is truly being absorbed, you’ll witness the following:

- An organization that selects, develops, and promotes the leaders who model, encourage, and support the desired behaviors.
- An organization that has embedded the changed behaviors so thoroughly into its operating style that a new culture has emerged.
- An organizational infrastructure that develops and reinforces the correct practices and behaviors within the workforce.
- A workforce that has the capability and motivation to achieve and sustain the desired results and that has enhanced its ability to manage change effectively.
- Management systems that measure and reward the desired outcomes.

Key Implementation Challenges

Making change stick is the classic challenge associated with organizational transformation efforts. Probably anyone reading this has been involved with change initiatives that had some early success, but then could not be sustained. Making change stick is difficult for many reasons. The challenges described next are likely to emerge during any significant change effort. The key to meeting each of them is having an aligned set of guiding teams that can handle

issues as they come up in a manner that is consistent with the change vision.

Culture Resists Change

Corporate culture consists of two main elements:

- *Norms of behavior:* Behavioral norms define the ways in which people are expected to act in the organization. They persist because people teach these practices to new employees, both explicitly and through modeling of behavior, accepting and rewarding those who fit in and ostracizing those who do not.
- *Values:* Culture also reflects the values of the people in the organization. These values persist because organizations tend to attract and retain individuals who share the same beliefs, and criticize and reject those who do not.

Therefore, the culture of an organization can stymie any transformation efforts that go against the established norms of behavior, attitudes, and values. To overcome this challenge, leadership must get management and employees to see the benefits that will be derived once the change has been woven into the day-to-day operations of the organization.

Culture Change Comes Last

Leaders often identify the organizational culture as a key obstacle to a change initiative. Although the groundwork for a change in culture is laid early in the transformation process, the changes cannot be firmly entrenched until the “new” behavior is no longer seen as “new” but rather as “the way we do things around here.” People need to practice the new behaviors for a period of time before they can become ingrained. Therefore, organizations can find themselves in a bit of a catch-22: it is difficult to adopt the new behaviors until the culture has changed, but the culture is not likely to change until the

new behaviors have been adopted. Organizations can manage this particular challenge by having leaders at multiple levels model the new behaviors as well as reward and recognize others who do so. Key to this strategy is not overreacting when an employee tries to behave in accordance with the change initiative but stumbles. It is at this point that all eyes are on leaders to see how they respond.

Gauging Effectiveness

Indicators That a Change Is Sticking

The behaviors shown in table 8-1 indicate whether the organization is adopting the change. Some of the indicators (at the beginning of the list) may be seen early in the change process; others (toward the end of the list) will be witnessed only after some time, in some cases as long as three to five years. In addition, be creative in looking at specific areas across the organization for new ways to ensure the new behavior becomes the norm.

Inevitably, some individuals will hold on to the old behaviors and habits. A culture change *will* happen, however, when a critical mass of employees exhibit the new behaviors consistently, over an extended period of time, and see that this has become the “way things get done around here.”

The Make It Stick Diagnostic

As we’ve discussed, for new behaviors to stick, leaders throughout the organization must model those behaviors as well as reward and recognize others who demonstrate the behavior. This tool helps determine the extent to which the new behavior is sticking and, as a result, the probability that the new culture will emerge.

To use the diagnostic successfully, follow these steps:

- Distribute the Make It Stick Diagnostic (assessment tool 8-1) to individuals whose perspective is desired.

TABLE 8-1

Making it stick effectiveness checklist

Indicators of a behavioral shift	Indicators that behavior is not changing
Change leaders are sought for advice and input.	Change leaders are criticized.
Results of the changes are used to evaluate how best to continue or improve.	Benefits of the change are challenged, questioned, or discounted.
Emphasis is on what needs to be adjusted, revised, or improved.	Emphasis is on what can be maintained or kept.
Focus is on successes and learning.	Focus is on the costs and sacrifices.
More decisions are made consistent with the vision and the marketplace.	More decisions are made consistent with historical successes and past practices.
Old behaviors and traditions are used to describe how things have changed.	Old behaviors and traditions are used to rationalize mistakes and justify new decisions.
People seek to understand what they need to do and what is expected of them to be successful in the new environment.	People act consistently with the way they (or others) have been successful in the past.
Change leaders and promoters gain more influence.	Change resisters get more and more time and attention.
Change leaders and promoters are finding support and resources for more changes.	Change leaders become increasingly frustrated.
People with high tenure begin to leave the organization or subunit because they acknowledge they don't fit in anymore.	Recently hired people leave the organization because they don't fit in or are frustrated in their efforts.

- Ask the individuals being surveyed to answer the questions according to their own experiences and knowledge of the organization.
- As indicated on the directions that accompany the diagnostic, respondents will assign a rating of 1 to 6 to each question, with 1 indicating “strongly disagree” and 6 indicating “strongly agree.”
- Tally the results after the sheets have been returned to you. The farther the results are from the maximum score possible, the more pressing the problem.

ASSESSMENT TOOL 8-1

The make it stick diagnostic *(continued)*

Making change stick	Strongly disagree (1)				Strongly agree (6)		Do not know
15. See new behavior becoming a part of the way we operate.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Subtotals	x 1	+ x 2	+ x 3	+ x 4	+ x 5	+ x 6	
= Grand total							

To get your totals

Add the check marks in vertical columns to get subtotals. Multiply that total by the number at the bottom of each column. Then add the subtotals together to get the grand total.

Grand total: 15 = serious problems, 90 = no problems. Any score below a 60 indicates a need for improvement.

Open-ended feedback

1. What additional things can be done to make the change initiative stick?

2. Do you feel that the organization truly supports the change effort? What evidence do you have?

3. What new behaviors do you see leaders and employees exhibiting on a daily basis?

4. How are employees who exhibit new behaviors consistent with the change effort recognized and/or rewarded?

Suggestions for Improvement

Creating an environment where change will stick involves creating new habits, behaviors, and traditions. This may be the hardest step in the change process because it requires breaking away from traditional, entrenched behaviors both during and after the change has been implemented. If your respondents scored low in this area, you have probably stopped the change effort one step too soon—employees are not exhibiting the behavior needed to make the change stick. The following suggestions may help ensure that your hard-earned changes endure.

Don't Equate Behavioral Change with Cultural Change

We often act as if we believe that any change in a group's behavior means a change in their culture. Don't confuse culture with an influential boss, a compensation system, or even a group habit. Culture has deeper roots than rational thought, so when an individual or group tries something new, even if it makes powerful sense, the organization nudges the individual back to the norm. A change in a group's behavior becomes part of the new culture only when the behavior becomes ingrained. Without constant attention and reinforcement from guiding teams or a performance-reward system, the behavior will not stick over the long haul.

Hire the Right People

Getting succession right is crucial, especially when replacing a member of a guiding team. Make sure the successor understands the importance and value of the change, behaves appropriately, and understands where the team stands in the progress toward change. Also, keep in mind that, due to the power and visibility of the positions, promotions are important in solidifying the new culture. When there is rapid growth, you need to hire and promote people

who not only mesh well with the new way of doing things, but who *embody* these new ways. Be aware that hiring many new people in a short period of time requires extra awareness and effort to acculturate the new employees. In addition, a large influx of new leaders could either help you build a new culture quickly (since the new employees are not part of the old culture) or create huge problems (because they didn't go through the initial change effort and don't understand the value of the vision and the norms).

Be Patient and Persistent

First, realize that culture cannot be changed overnight. Breaking old habits and embracing new values are difficult, especially if your organization dates back a few decades or more. Be patient. Persistence is the key to success. Often, people feel satisfied with the change effort and do not build the roots that will make the change stick. Their efforts will be wasted when people revert to their old habits. Make sure all the key leaders know what the winning behaviors are, the actions that need to be sustained, how they will model the new behaviors, and the need to recognize others for exhibiting the new behavior. Eventually, through such relentless efforts, the vision will sink in and the old ways will be replaced by the new culture.

Communicating in This Step

At this stage of the change process, many changes have been implemented. People are focused on getting along in the new environment and solving problems as they arise. They are trying to establish a new routine and a sense of stability in this new reality.

Thus, communication efforts should focus on showing how the vision is working and embedding the new behaviors and practices as norms in the organizational culture. These efforts should emphasize the following actions:

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- Broadly publicizing the results and benefits of the change.
- Recognizing and celebrating achievements and personal contributions.
- Linking organizational successes to the change initiative.
- Acknowledging how the old culture served the company but is no longer appropriate.
- Educating employees on how the new/modified values serve as the foundation for continued success.
- Promoting role models that embody the new behaviors and values.
- Reinforcing the need to continuously change, and where to focus effort.
- Maintaining dialogue among leaders, managers, and employees about challenges arising in the new work environment, the solutions found, and the adjustments needed.
- Seeking feedback when the benefits of this change are questioned or misunderstood, or when changes are criticized.

Stories to Remember from Step 8 of *The Heart of Change*

Use the following story summaries and questions to help you weave the new behavior into the fabric of the organization.

“The Boss Went to Switzerland”

John Harris’s division successfully eliminated excess layers of management and supervision, enabling them to react more quickly to challenges. Other leaders in the company would challenge the minimal

structure, arguing that growing areas needed more supervision to prevent mistakes or that they needed to create management opportunities for promising employees. However, John stuck to his plan, which gave empowerment and accountability to front-line employees. When John was transferred to Switzerland, his former division's results collapsed in just three years, so John was sent to work with his old division and get them back on track. John found that his replacement did not share his vision for a lean organization structure and had added multiple layers. As John began working with the division again to remove the layers of management, increase accountability, and empower his staff, he realized how critical it was for others to share his vision in order to sustain the results.

(Summarized from *The Heart of Change*, pages 162–164)

- What should you be doing to ensure that the intended behavior is sticking?
- Does your governance model reinforce the principles of your vision?
- What are you doing to keep old behavior from creeping back?
- Are your guiding teams modeling the new behavior and reinforcing/recognizing others?

“The Path to the Patient”

The researchers and developers in this pharmaceutical company viewed themselves as successful in contributing to the launch of new drugs into the market. However, they learned that because they had operated in silos, it was costing them 50 percent more than necessary for each launch and taking twice as long. They began a change initiative to achieve their new vision of creating value from research and development, which resulted in significant improvement. Their biggest challenge was making this new culture stick as new employees entered the company. To bring new employees on board, they created “The Path to the Patient” video, which demonstrated their collaborative process beginning with the CEO and ending with messages from patients helped by

the drugs. This video *was a powerful way to ingrain the vision into the culture.*

(Summarized from *The Heart of Change*, pages 166–169)

- What are you doing to ensure that your new employees see and feel the behavior you really want?
- Do your people really see and feel the results of their efforts?
- What are your guiding teams doing to communicate the vision so that it is seen and felt?

“Promoting the Thirty-Something”

This newspaper underwent significant change in a six-year period, expanding from a regionally based newspaper to a national one. While there were several logical candidates for the new head of planning, they did not always support the new culture by following the company’s “Rules of the Road.” Denise Warren, a woman in her thirties who was on a flexible work schedule, was selected for the position instead because she had consistently lived the Rules of the Road while also achieving results. By carefully considering the individuals who are right for the open jobs, this newspaper has found a way to stay on track.

(Summarized from *The Heart of Change*, pages 171–172)

- Are you promoting the right people?
- What bold steps do you still need to take to demonstrate your conviction about the new way of doing things?
- What can you do to put the spotlight on individuals who exemplify the new behaviors?

“The Home Mortgage”

This financial company found a way to involve all employees in reevaluating corporate values by creating something called a “Visionquest.” During a Visionquest, all 40,000 employees are linked via

satellite, and stories are told that reinforce their values. To demonstrate the value of fairness, one bank executive told a powerful story about how he had allowed a retired couple, virtually ruined by the stock market crash of 1987, to stay in their home. By revisiting stories of their past, they helped to solidify their culture.

(Summarized from *The Heart of Change*, pages 173–175)

- What stories are you sharing regularly that demonstrate your way of doing things?
- How are you using emotion to energize your change effort?
- How do you get your people to see what you care about, and more important, to feel the same way?
- How do you make your new behavior a self-reinforcing process?

More Resources

Beer, Michael, and Nohria, Nitin. **Breaking the Code of Change**. Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2000.

This book presents a series of articles that address various change issues, from motivation and leadership to compensation issues to developing lasting organizational change.

Flannery, Thomas P., Hofrichter, David A., and Platten, Paul E. **People, Performance and Pay**. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002.

In this book, the authors point out that the pay philosophies of most businesses require radical updates to more closely align with the most common organizational work cultures.

Gibson, Elizabeth, and Billings, Andrew. **Big Change at Best Buy: Working Through Hypergrowth to Sustained Excellence**. Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press, 2003.

In this book a companywide transformational change at Best Buy is evaluated. The authors outline the proven methods and tools used to help Best Buy achieve its success, including a new tool, the Change Scorecard.

Huselid, Mark A., Ulrich, David, and Becker, Brian. **The HR Scorecard: Linking People, Strategy, and Performance**. Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2001.

This book argues that HR needs to shift emphasis from administration to becoming a vital partner in achieving business strategy. Each element of the HR system should

be designed to enhance performance, maximize the quality of human capital, and reinforce the right behaviors across the workforce.

Kotter, John P., and Heskett, James L. **Corporate Culture and Performance**. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992.

The authors of this comprehensive and critical analysis of corporate culture—the shared beliefs, attitudes, and practices of a company’s managers and employees—show how the unwritten rules of a company can profoundly enhance economic performance or, conversely, lead to failure to adapt to changing markets and environments.

Kouzes, James M., and Posner, Barry Z. **Encouraging the Heart: A Leader’s Guide to Rewarding and Recognizing Others**. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997.

To properly embed change into the organization, leaders must encourage and reinforce the right set of behaviors in their employees. This work discusses the principle of “encouraging the heart,” which includes building self-confidence through high expectations, connecting performance and rewards, and making people feel like heroes.

Schein, Edgar H. **Organizational Culture and Leadership**. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996.

In this work, the author focuses on the complex business realities of the ‘90s and updates his influential understanding of culture. Leaders play a crucial role in successfully applying the principles of culture to achieve their organization’s goals.

Rappaport, Alfred, Kohn, Alfie, Hall, Brian, Zehnder, Egon, and Nicoson, Robert D. **Harvard Business Review on Compensation**. Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2001.

This collection presents the pros and cons of different compensation plans and discusses a variety of compensation-related issues, such as making salaries public, stock options, executive compensation, and incentive plans.

Vollman, Thomas E. **The Transformation Imperative: Achieving Market Dominance Through Radical Change**. Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1996.

Change programs must be deep and fully integrated across the organization for real transformation to take place. The author presents useful tools and a practical framework for analyzing, implementing, and measuring change programs.