

Sustaining the Gains of Change: Lessons for Organizational Leadership

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With the aim of drawing valuable lessons for the management and planning of similar business transformation initiatives, this paper critically evaluates a change project at an organization in South Africa, from three inter-woven dimensions: creating the climate for change, engaging and enabling the organization, and sustaining change. Firstly, a key achievement demonstrates that attempts to create a conducive climate for change should recognize that the unit of change in any organization is, ultimately, the individual. Levers for such initiatives should navigate the macro-organizational change narrative and translate change generalities into specific individual actions and behaviors. Secondly, learning from an implementation gap, similar efforts would gain better traction in engagement and empowerment by leveraging on an influential cross-functional team made up of enthusiastic supporters of the required change, to foster ownership and to embrace change across the organization. Key characteristics that should be represented on the team include leadership skills, expertise, credibility, effective communication, and a sense of urgency. Thirdly, in terms of sustaining change, twin lessons surge to the fore. On a positive note, by progressing its values-set into an annual staff award, there is a pointer to the potential of innovatively encouraging and rewarding employees to live the value qualities. And, on the flip side, a need is underscored of the critical role of seamless executive leadership, providing ongoing co-creating windows for instilling positive attitudes and creating synergies among related strategic initiatives.

Keywords: organizational leadership, South Africa, sustaining change, TCTA

Introduction

Various studies indicate that more than 70% of all change initiatives fail fully or partly—either the objectives of the initiatives are not achieved or the initiatives are not completed on time or on budget (Todnem, 2005; Kotter, 2012; Zhou & Lee, 2013). This poor success rate is attributable to lack of a valid framework of how and why to implement and manage change (Burnes, 2004). Within this context, two critical facets of change designs are important. First, a complete assessment of the current environment is pivotal to beginning the process of implementing change in an organization. Second, the role of the individuals involved in working together to implement change is critical: change is easier if the whole organization wants and understands it. In this regard, there is need for a new paradigm in managing change to involve more people, to widen the scope of involvement, and to thoroughly comprehend the business environment (Kotter, 2007; 2012). Another important

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aspect of a change initiative is understanding of the “culture” of an organization in order to work in more cohesive manner. Knowledge of organizational culture is primarily the responsibility of the leaders, so as to determine how to lead. Therefore, understanding the nature of the change, the context, and the required cultural evolution is key to determining appropriate strategy.

For some practitioners in the field of organizational change management, change initiatives consist of two dimensions: individual change management and organizational change management. The former describes “the process of providing tools and training to employees to enable them to manage their personal transition through change”; the latter refers to “the application of a systematic process for managing change across an organization” (Hiatt & Creasey, 2012, p. 45). In this context, organizational change needs individual change, and vice-versa. This linkage underscores the symbiotic relationship between individual and organizational change. For Hiatt and Creasey (2012), change only materializes when individuals in an organization start using new ways of working: displaying new behaviors, using new tools, adhering to new processes, and adopting new values.

Also, implicit in the above-mentioned definitions of change is the crucial distinction between management and leadership of change. In a nutshell, management is a set of processes that keep a complex system running smoothly, while leadership delineates the future and aligns people with that future. However, for most change initiatives, too much emphasis is often placed on managing change and not enough on the element of actually leading the change. In the context of the change initiative to be explored in this paper, the two concepts—management and leadership—are juxtaposed to assess how change was managed and led.

The frequency and pace of change in modern times are emphasized in the change literature. For instance, Bamford and Daniel (2005, p. 392) summarized that several authors concur that the frequency of change is increasing to a level where change is becoming a continuous feature of organizational life. Also, technological revolution made change inevitable, and, therefore, its effective management provided a competitive edge. From a critical management perspective, Todnem (2005, p. 369) canvassed a generic view of change management as “the process of continually renewing an organization’s direction, structure, and capabilities to serve the ever-changing needs of external and internal customers.”

In view of the above descriptions of change, management of change became the common feature of organizational development and growth—organizations needed to respond, in real-time, to ever-changing business environments in terms of pace, scale, and complexity. Todnem (2005, p. 370) argued that there appeared to be a convergence of views on two important areas. First, there seemed to be a common feeling that the pace of change had never been greater than in the existing business environment. Second, change was viewed as being triggered by internal and external factors, coming in all shapes, forms, and sizes, and affecting all organizations.

Globally, the economic crises and political transitions in the last two decades have added new dimensions of change: accelerating the pace of change and increasing the pressure on organizations to adapt to an ever-changing environment. As a consequence, acceleration in the rate of change culminated in an increased need for reorganization. But, reorganization is often feared, because it means disturbance of the status quo, a threat to people’s vested interests in their jobs, and an upset to established ways of doing things (Kotter & Schlesinger, 2008).

In South Africa, since the dawn of democracy in 1994, structural change has been a constant feature of the water sector—both at strategic and operational levels. Effective management of such change or transformation initiatives within the public sector, more so in the water sector, is critical to minimizing risks of poor service

delivery and associated institutional failures; but change initiatives are all too often lost in the “noise” of the process (Freeth, 2003).

Recently, South Africa’s only national state-owned enterprise mandated to finance and develop bulk water infrastructure without recourse to the fiscus, the Trans-Caledon Tunnel Authority (TCTA), launched a climate and culture change initiative, christened “Project Bosele”. In a local language in South Africa, the *Sesotho*, the term *Bosele* stands for “A New Dawn”. And, indeed, the change initiative was envisioned to usher in a new culture, to improve employee morale and, ultimately, to ensure a high performing organization. In particular, the initiative was expected to “assist the organization with defining a new culture, which would set the foundation for a successful TCTA.” For the change initiative itself to succeed, it was underscored that leadership, ownership, and commitment were critical, and that employees should be co-creators of the desired “new culture and future”. In response to a baseline climate and culture survey, which highlighted low levels of employee engagement, the initiative sought to help articulate and cultivate leadership accord, create a common vision, as well as develop consensus on a set of collective values that would become the bedrock of the organization.

The principal focus of this paper is to present the findings of an evaluative study of Project Bosele, over its three-year period, and to assess the effectiveness of the project in bringing about change, and in managing and reinforcing change. It does so against the background of a review of a number of change models, with a view to empowering similar future change initiatives. In particular, the study investigates the following broad questions: What were the underlying issues that brought about the need for change? How was change conceptualized by the employees? And how effective was the implementation and management of the change initiative?

The evaluation covers all three phases of the initiative: beginning with the first phase of data collection and leadership consensus about the need for change, the second phase of the creation of a collective vision, and concluding with the last phase of the institutionalization of the new approaches. As such, the emerging lessons documented herein would be valuable to the implementation and management of change initiatives of the same scale, as well as assist to prevent and minimize associated risks.

Following a brief summary of the change initiative, in phases, and the evaluation methodology, the paper presents a review of key literature on organizational change models and highlights lessons for sustaining change into the future, as well as in other institutional settings, including the critical element of leadership and executive sponsorship.

Brief Study Methodology

The scope of the evaluative study at the center of this paper encompasses the following dimensions:

- Analyzing the processes of change adopted in developing Project Bosele, from the perspective of employees, seeking to identify strengths and weakness in the processes;
- Assessing the achievement of the objectives of Project Bosele, as mapped out at the outset;
- Evaluating the effectiveness of the change initiative and;
- Generating lessons that could be useful in the planning and implementation of similar interventions.

The data collection process involved a multi-prong approach, including the following aspects: review of internal documents, particularly the review of existing project progress and performance reports; focus group discussions conducted with a sample of senior managers and other employees; and structured person-to-person interviews with key executive managers.

In the main, the interview protocol developed for the evaluative works ought to gather information about the selection and role of change agents, the role of sponsors and the general framework of the change process, including corporate communication about the following agendas: the substance of change, the activities established to implement change, as well as the management of the change process.

The Change Initiative

To realize the objectives of ushering in a new culture, improving employee morale, and ensuring a high performing organization, the change initiative—Project Bosele—was conceptualized as a three-prong project. In the phased manner previously alluded to, the initiative sought to carry out the following key activities: gathering data and gaining leadership alignment (first year); defining and agreeing on the desired culture (second year); and embedding the new TCTA values (third year and beyond).

During Phase I, which was the first year, the project focused on gaining traction in two areas: create a consensus among leadership about TCTA's vision, galvanizing their energy and commitment to lead the cultural change intervention; and obtain feedback from TCTA employees on the current culture, and how it could be shaped going forward.

In Phase II, the second year, the initiative was directed to another twin project dimension, as follows: create awareness and seek employee buy-in into the TCTA vision, values and supporting leadership behaviors; and demonstrate executive leadership and commitment to the co-creation of a “new culture”, which would be all-inclusive.

Finally, Phase III was intended to embed the newly co-created organizational values into a way of life in the organization. To realize the last phase's core aim, three processes were mapped out. First, it was planned to embed the new values—mainstreaming the values into organizational processes and systems, including the Performance Management System and Total Rewards Framework. Second, the project sought to introduce the nomination of value ambassadors—fellow employees would nominate each other as value ambassadors based on the view of how the values have been demonstrated through behavior. Third, there was a conscious move to exploit the initiative to brand the organization through engraving values on mugs, email signatures, and wall posters.

Literature Review

In relation to change design, management, and strategy, several models are documented in the literature. Kurt Lewin pioneered the first organizational change model, which is described in his Field Theory in Social Science (Lewin 1951). The approach perceives change as occurring through a linear process, from a satisfactory state to an identified desired state. According to Lewin, a successful change initiative involves three steps. The three-step process is articulated by Bamford and Daniel (2005, p. 392) as follows: (i) unfreezing the present—exploring ideas, issues, and approaches; (ii) freezing—stuck with the tradition; and (iii) refreezing—identifying, utilizing, and integrating the values, attitudes, and skills.

In terms of this model, old behaviors, structures, cultures, and values are discarded in order to adopt new approaches (Bamford & Forrester, 2003). As the early pioneer of group dynamics, Lewin proposed a methodology for analyzing change, termed “field force analysis”, which included the following processes: (a) analyzing the restraining or driving forces and how they would affect the transition to the future—the restraining forces would include the reactions of those who perceive change as unnecessary or as constituting a

threat; (b) assessing which of the driving or restraining forces are critical; and (c) taking steps both to increase the critical driving forces and to reduce the critical restraining forces.

Following on Lewin's model, Beckhard (1969) developed a change program, which incorporated four steps. The first and second steps involved the setting of goals and defining the future or organizational conditions desired after the change; and then diagnosing the existing condition in relation to the goals. The third step defined the transition state activities and commitment required to meet the future state; while the last developed strategies and action plans for managing the transition in the light of an analysis of the factors likely to affect the introduction of change.

Furthermore, Beckhard (1969) defines change as an effort, deployed organization-wide, and managed from the top, to increase organizational effectiveness and health through planned interventions in the organization's process, using behavioral-science knowledge. This definition adds extra insights into how a change initiative can be deployed in a business setting.

Another change model was developed by Thurley (1979) and, described by Lockitt (2004), who presents five main strategies for managing change, in the following manner:

- Directive—the imposition of change and use of managerial power without consultation;
- Bargained—recognition that power and influence are shared between employer and the employed. This is an acknowledgement that change requires negotiation and compromise agreement prior to implementation;
- Hearts and minds—this normative approach seeks commitment and shared vision, but does not necessarily include involvement or participation. It is an all-embracing thrust to change the attitudes, values, and beliefs of the workforce;
- Analytical—involves diagnosis sequentially of the situation, through setting the objectives: the design of the change process, the evaluation of the results, and the determination of the objectives and;
- Action-based—this strategy stresses full involvement of all those involved and affected by the anticipated changes; it recognizes that the way managers behave in practice bears little resemblance to the analytical and theoretical model. Real life often results in a “ready”, “aim”, and “fire” approach.

Similar to the models explained above, Bridges and Mitchell (2000) provide another perspective and argue that it is not the changes that you are in, it is the transitions. In their model, Bridges and Mitchell offer a three-step approach. First, the model identifies the ending phase—saying goodbye to the way things were: a particular job, associates, a location, even a manager or supervisor can all be changed when realignment happens in an organization. Second, comes the natural zone—new environment, new responsibilities and the rules have changed, there are different people to work with and report to; this can all be unsettling as one explores and experiments in the new setting. Then, third, roll in new beginnings—this phase requires the final adjustments to new ways of doing many different tasks or even similar tasks, but in handling them in a new manner.

In his classic article, “Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail”, Kotter (2007) outlines an actionable eight-step process for implementing successful transformation. Following a review of mounting complexity and increased pace of change, Kotter was convinced that the notion of strategy has evolved. For Kotter, the strategy should be viewed as a dynamic force that constantly seeks opportunities, and identifies initiatives that will capitalize on them. In response to the changing dynamics, Kotter proposed a second system that would be devoted to the design and implementation of strategy, and used an agile network structure and a different set of processes. According to Zhou and Lee (2013), the network's core is a guiding coalition that represents each level and department in the hierarchy, with a broad range of skills.

In this regard, Kotter identified eight accelerators for leading change, which would enable strategy network to function. The eight accelerators are: 1) create a sense of urgency; 2) build and maintain a guiding coalition; 3) formulate a strategic vision and develop change initiatives; 4) communicate the vision and strategy to create buy-in and attract a growing volunteer army; 5) accelerate the movement toward the vision and opportunity by ensuring that the network removes obstacles; 6) celebrate visible, significant short-term wins; 7) never let up; and 8) institutionalize new approaches. In essence, from a practitioner's perspective, Kotter successfully brought all the change models into an eight-step process. Despite its dominance of the field, the Kotter model has been criticized for its linearity and top-down approach, which provides no room for co-creation or true participation.

Table 1 below illustrates a summary of the commonalities among the change models explored in the foregoing sections.

Table 1

Model Commonalities (Adapted From Zhou and Lee, 2013, p. 250)

Lewin model	Beckhard model	Thurley model	Bridges model	Kotter model
Unfreezing	Analyzing the present	Directive, bargained, hearts and minds		Sense of urgency, form a guiding coalition
	Setting goals for the future, plan of action	Analytical	Ending phase, neutral zone	Work together as a team
Changing	Implementing the plan	Action-based		Create a vision, communicate the vision, empower others to act on the vision and plan for short-term wins
Freezing			New beginnings	Improve on the changes, institutionalize new approaches

From the above models, it can be deduced that change does not occur as a series of linear events within a given period of time, but as a continuous and open-ended process (Todnem, 2005; Kotter, 2007). Therefore, there is a need to promote an “extensive and in-depth understanding of strategy, structure, systems, people, style, and culture, and how these can function, either as sources of inertia that can block change, or alternatively, as levers to encourage an effective change process” (Todnem, 2005, p. 375). Similarly, from a project-specific approach, DelGrosso (2014, p. 3) advises that, to successfully deliver a strategic transformation initiative, an organization must identify change enablers, which incorporate certain practices it deems important to success. Such enablers include having well-defined milestones and metrics; having senior management committed to change; establishing and communicating concrete ownership and accountability; using standardized project management practices; and having engaged executive sponsors.

For Harrington and Douglas (2013), the sponsor plays a key role in promoting and sustaining the focus on the project's critical nature and its urgency, as well as by coaching employees and executives and, finally, by communicating a shared sense of the need for change.

The foregoing conceptual background demonstrates the inevitability of change and the need for organizations to manage it effectively to become leaders of their peers. Such move requires a commitment to transform an organization from what it is to what it wants to be. Indeed, organizational change literature shows that struggling organizations often have hard time keeping employees engaged. Instilling a culture of purpose revitalizes the organization, while simultaneously energizing its employees.

Considering the complexity and pace of change, in his seminal article on the failures of change and transformation, Kotter (2007) contends that traditional hierarchies and processes, which constitute an

organization's operating system, do a great job of handling the operational needs of most organizations, but they are too rigid to adjust to quick shifts in today's marketplace. Thus, creating a sense of urgency or mandating a directive based simply on market forces, is not good enough. Rather, to reflect on the whole situation, there is a need to analyze the problems, develop an action plan with support, proceeding to unfreeze, and form cross-functional teams that would result in a collective conscience of both the problems and solutions.

In this paper, TCTA's Project Bosele is evaluated against the fundamental frame of the models described herein. It is worthy of note, however, that the study approach only adopts Kotter's framework (1995; 2007) in its modification. In terms of the adaptation of Kotter's model, steps 1-4 help set the scene for change, steps 5-7 introduce new practices, and step 8 anchors the changes in a new culture to ensure sustainability.

Phased Implementation of Change Initiative

As previously alluded to, in order to effectively carry out the change activities outlined above, Project Bosele was delivered through a series of phases. Project implementation emphasized recognizing the need for change, developing a culture that will accept change, and fostering actual change in individuals' approach to the changing business environment and the associated requirements from stakeholders. The following three sections group the various activities implemented toward realizing the objective of the change initiative.

Creating a Climate for Change

The Trans-Caledon Tunnel Authority was established as a special purpose vehicle in 1986 to fulfil South Africa's treaty obligations in respect of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project, an iconic bi-national infrastructure project between the governments of the Republic of South Africa and Kingdom of Lesotho. TCTA was, furthermore, obligated through the National Water Act of South Africa (No. 36 of 1998) to implement directives issued by the then Minister of Water Affairs, toward the development of bulk water infrastructure. Since its inception, the scope of TCTA's activities has grown considerably in scale and complexity, from managing only a treasury function on a single project, to the management of a current portfolio of several major infrastructure projects, in various stages of the project life-cycle. In addition to the original mandate, TCTA also undertakes institutional arrangements, negotiates off-take agreements, obtains a project credit rating, sources project finance, establishes environmental, health, and safety parameters, facilitates land acquisitions, and procures engineering consultants and construction contractors.

As a consequence of its expanded role, TCTA as an organization grew in size needed to develop the capacity to function in a more complex environment. The TCTA of today bears little resemblance to the SPV of 1986; its role has grown exponentially, and it has become a fully-fledged state-owned enterprise in all aspects. Moreover, it acquired various support structures, which were commensurate with the expanded role and governance requirements: Corporate Services, Risk Office, Knowledge Management, Human Resources, Information Technology, Supply Chain, Legal Services, Communications, and the Secretariat. The following factors contributed to the urgent need for change at TCTA: increasing complexity of projects and greater need for agility and implementation efficiency; anticipated strategic shift in TCTA mandate to cover a wider scope of water infrastructure development and management, in the context of a potential national water agency; instability of organizational governance and resultant difficulties with deciphering strategic guidance at the oversight level; and need to re-establish senior executive leadership, define organizational direction, and obtain TCTA-wide alignment.

Thus, the understanding was that, if the organization did not evolve with the changing circumstances and associated complexities, it risked becoming irrelevant. In particular, there was an external uncertainty promoted by an idea of both disestablishing TCTA and creating an organization to function like it, but with a bigger mandate. As a consequence of the proposed change, many employees felt disenchanted and de-motivated.

Correspondingly, leadership dynamics, in the year preceding the change initiative, punctuated both external and internal uncertainties, to an extent that a change initiative was conceptualized to minimize business risk and to usher in “a new cultural behavior and to create a collaborative business environment”. Thus, the change initiative was to pursue a phased re-orientation of the organization in a manner that would not only allow people to go through change as they experienced it, but that also recognized the shifts in the external situation and circumstances which impact on and affect the organization.

The change initiative was implemented through a series of inter-dependent activities. To establish a powerful coalition to ensure executive sponsorship, accord and commitment to the change initiative, during the first year of the change initiative, executives held several participatory workshops to map out the new leadership style and to identify requisite leadership behaviors. Concomitant with the leadership development plan, two conversation cafés were organized: one for the entire body of employees at an internal venue and the other for managers at an external venue. Conversation cafés, typically, provide an open platform for diverse people to talk about their feelings, thoughts, and actions in the complex changing world of work.

Furthermore, the TCTA management organized cafés to explore the opinions of non-managerial employees about the future of the organization—in fact, employees were accorded an opportunity to shape and influence the emergent organization. The feedback from these cafés was shared in a workshop with the executive team. Key issues raised in the cafés included the following: hierarchical organizational culture, lack of effective empowerment, lack of clarity about the Board-EXCO interface, as well as lack of trust and respect between managers and executive leadership team, and between managers and junior employees (TCTA, 2010). Data gathered through the conversation cafés regarding leadership and the organizational culture became the primary input into the co-creation of a common vision of the desired TCTA culture and future.

Engaging and Enabling the Organization

Following the successful setting of the stage, during the second year or Phase II, Project Bosele sought to transform the information gathered in phase one to generate a vision and to present a draft of the new values to senior managers. In essence, this phase sought to generate awareness on the business condition and the rationale for change, thereby instilling a desire for change among the employees.

The values developed exclusively by the executive team, interchangeably referred to as the TCTA Values or Leadership Imperatives, were subjected to critical scrutiny by all other employees. Resistance to these values was expressed through non-participation in the organizational process for nomination of employees reflecting the values in their behavior: only 10% of the employees participated in the nomination. The values were presented as transformation, empowerment, building collaborative relationships, focus on operation, and future focus.

Subsequent to the above-mentioned feedback, a focus group discussion was undertaken to find out the reasons for employee non-participation in the values nomination process. Employees expressed critical views of the values in the following manner: “the values were exclusively designed for the executive team; they were too academic and complicated; there was no executive sponsorship of the actual value nomination process; the collective does not identify or associate themselves with the values” (TCTA, 2009, p. 10).

In response to this introspection, management sought to undergo a process of re-determining appropriate values to be integrated in the Leadership Development Program and to be used as the enablers of the newly designed organizational vision of being the leader in the sustainable supply of water in the Southern Africa region. This vision was crafted by the executive committee during Phase I of Project Bosele.

To engage and enable the organization, a number of strategies were proposed toward the change process, which involved hosting a feedback session with the senior management forum, essentially broadening participation to include employees immediately below the executive cadre. The process entailed presenting the newly proposed values; organizing a focus group discussion to solicit views, ideas, and comments on the proposed new values; coffee engagements with the executive team; conducting an electronic snap survey of the draft values; and an organization-wide intervention to reach an agreement on the final TCTA values.

According to a progress report (TCTA, 2010), nearly all the planned activities in this phase were undertaken, except for the coffee engagements. The hosting of an organization-wide project event to profile and integrate values—through a series of activities aimed at teambuilding—was the hallmark of the second phase. During this session, employees were encouraged to explore and imagine what each value signifies to them, and their reactions to the values were expressed in numerous forms: artistically, dancing and singing, all pointing toward a decisive agreement on the new values and a new vision of the future. The newly co-created values are growth, respect, integrity, unity, and excellence.

These values replaced the unpopular TCTA Leadership Values, and the launching and institutionalization of the approved values was the ultimate milestone of this phase.

Implementing and Sustaining Change

Consequent upon the launch of the new values, the next step was to embed the values into organizational systems and processes. Through a process of organizational nominations, value ambassadors were put forward by fellow colleagues for each value. Compared to the previous value nomination process, employee engagement was significantly higher.

To determine the short-term impact of the values on the behavioral patterns of employees and to ascertain whether the employees were starting to assimilate the organizational values between the second and third phases of Project Bosele, two polls were conducted, which indicated a significant positive trend—with over 50% participation rate. Also, during this phase, value ambassadors were nominated for each of the five values with the exception of “unity”, which served as a team-building community outreach program. Email signatures and mugs were branded with the new values. Values were also included in the performance contracts of individual employees, constituting 20% of the performance scorecard rating.

Evaluating Change: Study Findings

The following sections provide the findings of the evaluative study—the interview responses from employees juxtaposed with change management frameworks in the literature. Also, the sections examine the appropriateness of the change approaches and processes adopted; the achievement of planned activities; and the effectiveness of the implementation and management of the change initiative.

Conceptualization of the Change Initiative

Researchers and practitioners, alike, agree that change should be informed by extensive and in-depth appreciation of the existing dynamics, including structure, system, people, and culture, as well as the

identification of levers for change and sources of inertia from the beginning of the initiative (Todnem, 2005; DelGrosso, 2014). In line with this thinking, the need for change should be extremely compelling and, most importantly, driven by organizational leadership. Project Bosele was initiated to articulate a new climate and culture; to stimulate a consensus around a common vision and the associated values; to improve employee morale; and, ultimately, to ensure a high performing organization.

Conceptually, the design process for the change initiative was sound: it followed a systematic approach seeking to define the need for change and establish the collective desire for change. It is also significant that a baseline climate and culture survey was conducted, with the aim of diagnosing the existing conditions and developing a compelling case for change. In terms of activities, several planned forums were held, including two conversation cafés, organized in accordance with the organizational hierarchy: one separate session for executive leadership, and another for managers and other employees. The hierarchical planning of the conversation activities disregarded the sentiment expressed by managers and other employees pertaining to the previous TCTA Leadership Values and the rigidity of traditional hierarchies. These values were perceived as representing the interests of the leadership, not the entire organization. In addition, during the design phase, no evidence of the practical depth and breadth of the step-wise approach could be found from reviewed documents, in terms of the mapping of stakeholders, the assessment of change readiness, and the capacity for change, for instance.

In designing the change initiative, it appears that there was a single senior manager, with the assistance of an external change agent, responsible for the change initiative. Industry practices dictate that during the conception and planning of a change initiative, a strong cross-functional change team (a powerful coalition) made of employees in positions of authority, with good management and communications skills, among other strengths, should be appointed (Kandt, 2003; Kotter, 2007). Evidence from progress reports and internal communications indicates that the responsibility for the design and roll-out of the process was given largely to the external change agent, owing to lack of capacity: this was probably the best decision at the time. However, according to 65% of the interview respondents, the responsibility lines became blurred as they did not know who was managing and leading the process. In response to the questions concerning the design and planning of the change initiative, majority of the interviewees felt that there was no sufficient consultation with employees and that, when they were consulted, their views were not fully incorporated into the planning of the initiative.

In terms of the foregoing, the process incorporated an element of the “directive strategy” as propounded in the model of Thurley (1979). Although external consultants often provide value-add to a change process, the organization needed to closely engage its managers and employees to establish the kind of capabilities internally that could be utilized in designing and carrying out the activities, so as to improve commitment, and for employees to embrace the initiative. According to interviewees, “external consultants should provide strategic advice, and not drive operations.” Further, respondents stated that initiatives designed and planned by external consultants are easily accepted or approved by executive leadership, compared to the ones internally originated and led—an indication of lack of trust in the output capabilities of internal senior professionals—a common shortcoming of the directive strategies. Nonetheless, respondents conceded that, despite these issues, the project theory, that is, the project as intended and its rationale, not as it actually turned out to be, was well-conceptualized.

Implementation of the Change Initiative

In terms of Lewin's three-step approach, Project Bosele had no significant "freezing" stage. There was no evidence of employees resisting change, at least not openly, probably because the initiative did not incorporate organizational restructuring, which could have resulted in disturbance of the status quo, threatened people's vested interests in their jobs and upset established ways of doing things (Kotter & Schlesinger, 2008).

At the outset, the implementation of the initiative leveraged strong and reliable platforms for engagement: through conversation cafés for employees, as well as strategy sessions for the executive leadership, the project explored ideas, issues, and approaches to instilling a culture and establishing the foundation for the new organization—the "unfreezing" learning stage. Phases II and III constitute what Bamford and Daniel (2005) describe as the unfreezing and refreezing-stages—identifying, utilizing, and integrating new values and attitudes. During this phase of implementation, the old values (TCTA Leadership Values) were discarded and replaced with the co-created ones. An internal newsletter was established to communicate the new values.

In terms of its implementation, Project Bosele followed the linear stable process, from a satisfactory state to an identified state (Bamford & Forrester, 2003). Majority of the respondents contended that change was not implemented through a fully negotiated relationship of a multitude of variables; rather, the entire process was dictated by the executive leadership team, with many employees participating, in their own words, "as mere spectators of the change process, though we are heavily affected by it."

Furthermore, organizational change practitioners argue that change is so rapid that executive leadership cannot effectively implement change initiatives without devolving some responsibilities to managers (Bamford & Forrester, 2003; Kotter, 2007; Hiatt & Creasey, 2012). Contrary to Kotter's advice for establishing a powerful coalition to drive change initiatives, in Project Bosele, managers were not appointed as champions of the change initiative—and this was a deal-breaker for the project, according to 60% of the interview respondents. Predominantly, non-managerial employees were appointed as change champions. In terms of the Kotter model (2007), these were not powerful individuals to garner support for the program, minimize risk, and keep the current system operating. For Kotter (2007), successful change is 70% to 90% leadership and only 10% to 30% management.

Project Bosele was hamstrung by lack of executive sponsorship. Harrington and Douglas (2013) argue that the sponsor plays a critical role in promoting and sustaining the focus on the project's critical nature and its urgency, as well as mentoring employees and, finally, by communicating a shared sense of the need for change. According to DelGrosso's research findings, since lack of leadership was the second biggest cause of organizational change failures, after insufficient communication, it was critical that executive leadership was on board to lead and manage people through change (DelGrosso, 2014, p. 6). Corroborating this position, Kandt (2003) advises that executives must make time to communicate the vision to all of the organization's employees in small groups. Whereas the Project Bosele action plan for Phase III indicated planned engagements with the executives, these sessions struggled to materialize.

The process of organizational nomination of value ambassadors appeared to have occurred fairly and justly, but evidence also shows that it was characterized by inconsistencies. Reinforcing this position, majority of the respondents stated that the nomination process was influenced by the size of a division, not the concrete "living of values". It appears that the nomination process happened "smoothly" for values of excellence, integrity, and growth based on anonymous electronic rating; however, it had to be "reworked" for the respect value to include

manual ballots and the change champions had to walk about to remind employees to nominate their colleagues. Also, about half of the respondents felt that communication about the change initiative activities was not very effective, in particular, regarding the awarding of the “winner of unity value” for the community you treach competition. This perception underlines the role of sponsorship and strong communication, which should include both senior managers and executives, to build a collaborative sphere informed by trust and peer-to-peer relations.

Further, strong views were expressed about the process agenda, established to implement change: lack of trust, little scope to influence the agenda and lack of “voice” from managers. Some respondents felt that the only memorable milestone achieved during the implementation of Project Bosele was “the organization-wide launch of the values”, during which what they usually experienced as hierarchy and silo-mentality were “concealed by team work”. However, there is overwhelming evidence, including video recording, that all employees and their executives participated as equals in the inauguration and celebration of the new values—the organizational hierarchy alluded to was flattened when embracing the values and associated behaviors (TCTA, 2010). Also, interview respondents appreciated the processes for co-creating values and the all-embracing approach to launching the new values.

On the whole, Project Bosele achieved most of its project activities, which culminated in the launching and embedding of the new values. Lack of employee direct involvement in the implementation of change as leaders of change, prompted by not constituting a cross-functional change team, reduced the scope of the initiative.

From an implementation and management perspective, there was insufficient focus on the management of individual change, which would have entailed processes and strategies to enable employees to manage their personal transition through change. Hiatt and Creasey (2012) consider the employee-oriented component of change management as the critical ingredient that allows a change team to help employees through the change process; it provides feedback loop to business leaders; and it helps diagnose communication and training gaps. According to focus group discussion, important organizational sessions were organized and held, but often the approach was to deal with “soft” issues and, thereafter, no feedback report on the way forward would be provided. Thus, the sole focus was on the organization-wide values nomination process, which was a limited perspective of change, overlooking the deeper individual change issues relating to development, growth, and recognition.

While interviewees highlighted implementation bottlenecks, employees seem to appreciate working at TCTA. Employees emphatically stated that the organization needs a revival strategy informed by effective, direct, and positive leadership. Overall, Project Bosele brought about change in the organization through the development of requisite leadership behaviors and the co-creation of organizational values, but managing the resulting change seemed less effective.

Sustainability of Change

To successfully bring about change is but half of the story; the biggest challenge is sustaining that change into the future, so as to deliver the benefits which the change initiative promised. For change to be sustainable, leaders need to change and employees should see the change process as fair (Kotter, 2007; 2012). The promise of Project Bosele lay in its broad-based participation. In turn, there is a commendably wide awareness of the new organizational values among all employees. The change initiative targeted leaders, but also engaged employees across the organization.

Over the past couple of years, the values nomination process has advanced, albeit in a different format, into annual Vuma Awards. The Vuma Awards are intended to encourage employees to continuously live and demonstrate the spirit of the values and, ultimately, creating a healthy organizational climate. In the last instalment of the Vuma Awards, two of the five organizational values—excellence and integrity—were showcased and the deserving employees were recognized and rewarded.

The long-term success of the change initiative required effective executive sponsorship, formation of a strong cross-functional change management team and proper use of project management practices. Failure to rally managers to champion and accelerate change meant that employees felt that change was “done” to them, not implemented with them, leaving employees feeling as spectators. As Kotter (1995) argues, not empowering others to drive the initiative to enhance sustainability has limited the focus and commitment to the long-term objective of the initiative. Incorporating values into the organizational performance system and launching the nomination of value ambassadors became an end itself, not a means to an end.

To secure lasting change, the literature recognizes that all organizational systems and processes, including performance and extending into rewards, should be aligned with the overall objective of a change initiative. This does not seem to have been the case in the organizational setting of the change initiative under review, in view of the almost parallel existence of other strategic initiatives in simultaneous implementation.

In summary, elements of a people-oriented change process were not fully pursued and managed, resulting in perceptions in some quarters that Project Bosele would struggle to sustain its gains as a strategic change initiative. Without effectively managing the enablers and constantly reinforcing the desire to change, the change initiative seems to have earned short-term success.

Lessons and Conclusions

Against the backdrop of the explored project phases and in the light of the study findings presented herein, a number of lessons are drawn for improving similar initiatives. Project Bosele produced significantly positive changes, but while most of the planned activities were implemented, the initiative only partially progressed towards the realization of its objectives: to usher in a new culture, to improve employee morale, and, ultimately, to ensure a high performing organization.

In the following three sections, the lessons drawn for change programs in other settings highlight the critical role of executive leadership, providing strong participatory platforms for instilling positive attitudes, and creating synergies among related change and other strategic initiatives.

Providing Executive Leadership and Direction

Executive leadership of strategic initiatives plays a pivotal role in ensuring effective change. However, beyond executive sponsorship, entrenching a sense of urgency among all employees is crucial to getting cooperation for change. Organizational leadership needs to establish the vision for the future and map out the strategy for getting there. In this light, a positive lesson from Project Bosele is that paramount to the success of a change initiative is an adequate and proper planning: diagnosing the need for change, articulating the vision, agreeing on the scope of work against change dimensions, determining implementation approach, and mapping out stakeholders to effectively engage them from the outset.

Sponsorship of the change initiative in focus was limited to unfreezing the status quo and introducing new practices, but not anchoring the new values, culture, and behavior into the organizational system. To

successfully deliver strategic change initiatives, leadership should take cognizance of the fact that managers and senior professionals are more disposed to making incremental, programmatic improvements. For an organization-wide initiative to gain traction, it is critical to have an influential cross-functional team made up of enthusiastic supporters of the required change, to foster initiative ownership and to embrace change across the organization. Key characteristics that should be represented on the team include leadership skills, credibility, effective communication, expertise, analytical skills, and a sense of urgency.

Coupling Group and Individual Dynamics

Strong platforms for engagement are of utmost importance to facilitating organizational change and increasing awareness about the change desideratum. Chiefly, learning from the gap in Project Bosele, instilling positive values, attitudes, and behaviors with tangible result, by ensuring genuine employee involvement and commitment to organizational objectives, is critical to supporting and accomplishing change.

The unit of change in an organization is, ultimately, the individual. Levers for a change initiative should navigate the macro-organizational change narrative and also translate such change generalities into specific individual actions and behaviors in terms of development, growth, and reward. Also, for a change initiative to be implemented successfully, it is crucial to not under estimate the difficulties of producing change and, thus, the importance of a guiding coalition with energy and authority.

Sustaining Change Into the Future

To sustain change, an organization should look for innovative ways to celebrate effective milestones and gains. In continuing to recognize professionalism in business, uncompromising integrity and diligence, the examined change project progressed the values nomination process into a bigger recognition initiative—Vuma Awards—encouraging all employees not only to live the values, but also to acknowledge their peers who demonstrate value qualities, thereby instilling a sense of unity and a drive to succeed.

Change drivers and change agents need to recognize that a stronger window for sustaining change initiatives lies in leveraging synergies with existing organizational processes and systems, including the annual performance framework and the recognition and reward system.

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