The Role of Leadership in Fostering Individual Commitment to Organizational Change for Sustainability

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ABSTRACT:

The Road to Commitment describes the phases that individuals go through as they encounter organizational change. The model helps change leaders and consultants understand the people side of organizational change. Applying the model increases the likelihood that all employees will fully commit to effecting and sustaining organizational change.

Road to Commitment explores the journey individuals take towards making significant life choices and commitments. This abstract delves into the psychological and emotional factors influencing decision-making processes, examining how personal values, societal expectations, and past experiences shape individuals' paths towards commitment in various aspects of life such as relationships, careers, and personal development. The abstract also highlights the role of resilience, self-discovery, and interpersonal dynamics in navigating this journey towards fulfilment and purpose. Through a multidisciplinary lens, "Road to Commitment" offers insights into the complexities of human decision-making and the pursuit of meaningful engagement in life.

This paper presents both the model description and applications for use by change leaders and consultants.

KEYWORDS:

Commitment, Awareness and Understanding, Belief, Building commitment, Resistance and compliance.

INTORDUCTION:

Over the past 20 years, leadership literature hasrecognized that leading change is one of the primary tasks of leadership (O'Toole, 1995).Despitethe best efforts of leaders and others, organizationsare littered with failed attempts to make majorchange happen.Changes that were planned oftendo not achieve the intended results (Kotter, 1995).And, the breakdown of change efforts is often dueto failures in the human side of change versus thefailure of systems or technology (Kotter & Cohen,2002).

Typically, leadership teams may take severalmonths to devise a strategy or identify and plan amajorchange effort.Then the leadershold a seriesof two-hour meetings with employees to "roll outthe change."While these

meetings provide information about the change, they seldom result in realcommitmenttomakingsustainablechangehappen.

This paper describes the Road to Commitmentmodel and ways to use it to build commitmentamong a critical mass of people involved in anyorganizational change.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. Explore the psychological and emotional factors that influence individuals' decision-making processes regarding commitments.

2. Investigate the role of personal values, societal expectations, and past experiences in shaping individuals' paths towards commitment in different areas of life.

3. Examine the impact of resilience, self-discovery, and interpersonal dynamics on individuals' ability to navigate the journey towards commitment.

4. Identify common challenges and barriers individuals face on their road to commitment and propose strategies for overcoming them.

5. Provide practical insights and tools to help individuals make informed and meaningful commitments in relationships, careers, and personal development.

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EXPANDING AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING:

The Road to Commitment is a working model of anindividual journey that starts with awareness andunderstanding and ends at full commitment to makechange happen.Each of us takes this journey forevery change we are involved in. The model, asdepicted in Figure 1(on the following page), fol-lows the premise that to be committed to changeone must be engaged in the head (understanding),the heart (belief) and the

2.Belief

hands (action to make ithappen).

The focus of this paper is to twofold:

o Adescriptionof theRoad toCommitment

o Its application in organizations when makingmajorchange

Thethree phasesof The Roadto Commitment are:

1. ExpandingAwarenessandUnderstanding

2. EvokingBelief

BUILDINGCOMMITMENT:

The upper path to commitment is a path to successin making change.The paths below of Resistanceor Compliance are paths to failure on the humansideof change.

Moving through the 3 phases of the model helpsavoid the mistake of trying to get employees tojump from awareness and understanding directly toCommitment to a change. Another lesson from themodelisthatthroughhavingpeoplepartici patein the planning and actions to bring about thechange, they can overcome Resistance and Complance and return to the Road to Commitment. Wewill now look in more detail at each phase of theRoad to Commitment and ways to build participationto move fromone phase to another.
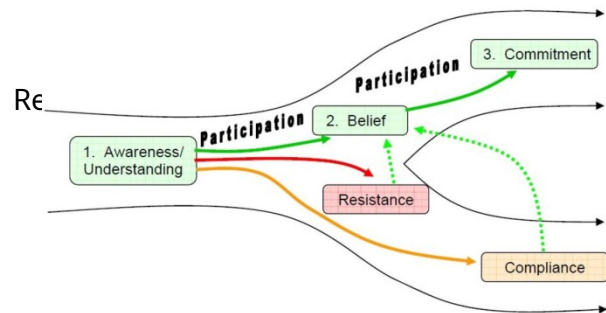

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Figure1:RoadtoCommitment

Expanding AwarenessandUnderstanding:

Thecase for change needs to begin to address the following:

- Reasonsthechangeisnecessary
- The intended results of the change
- Actionsneededtoeffectthechange
- The"What'sinitforme"(WIIFM)
- Features that distinguish this attempt frompreviousattempts to change

Two types of question usually arise in **AwarenessandUnderstanding** Why"questionsand"What"questions.Oncepe ople are aware of a change, it is natural for them toask questions, such as, "Why this change?Whynow?Why haven't we done this before?Whyshould I get behind this change?""It didn't worklast time, so why should I believe it will work thistime?"These questions help each person to buildhis/her own understanding of the need for change,and are often misunderstood as a challenge to theleader or change agent.Some organizationalcultures even view any questioning of leadership asinsubordination. Change leaders need to be pre-pared to address both the "why" and "what"questions in this phase.Although all of these questions cannot be answered at this

early point in achangeeffort,theyneedtobeaddressed.

Leaders also need to exercise patience in this phasebecause the same questions will be asked over andover again as different people in the organizationbuild their own understanding of the change.Whenthe answers are not yet available, leaders need tospeakcandidly,e.g.,becomfortablesaying,"Wedo not know the answer at this point, because …,"or,"HereiswhatIknownow," or "We willneedyour help answering this question." It is alsoimportant for leaders to tell why answers are notyet available and what the leadership is doing togettheanswers.

Some Ways to ExpandUnderstandingAboutaChange:

- Use the intended results of the change as aframework for discussing the need forchange.Talking about "Why Change" isveryimportantinthisphase.
- Conduct "Town Hall" type meetings ofemployees affected by the change to buildunderstanding of the major issues in thechange effort.Give them a voice in thesession.
- Post "Frequently Asked Questions" withanswers via communications vehicles thathave been successful in disseminatinginformationin the past.

In employee meetings, limit leadership presentations about the change to 15-20 minutes and then allow people to ask their own"questions of understanding."This giveseach person an opportunity to find outspecificallywhattheyneedtoknow.

BELIEF:

The goal of this phase is to have a critical mass ofpeopleintheorganizationbelieve thefollowing:

- Thechangeisgoodfortheorganization
- The change is good for me (What's in it forme? WIIFM)
- The organization can make the changesnecessary tosucceed.

If someone does not believe in any one of the threeareas of this phase, he or she stays stalled in compliance or resistance and cannot fully commit to thechange. This phase involves the individual'schoosing to either believe in or not believe in thechange.Without belief, there cannot be commitment.Only if an individual believes in the change,will he or she put his or her heart into actions tomakethe changes happen.

WaysLeadersCanEngageEmployee Participation toEvokeBeliefinChange:

- Listenwithout judgmentto:

- o disappointments in past changeefforts
- o fears about what will happen oncethechange has occurred
- o skepticism about this change reallyhappening
- o the need to hold onto the presentsituation
- o the need to feel supported byleadership throughout the changeprocess

- ▪ Hear the questions and discussion not asresistance to the change, but as theexploration of beliefs as people strugglewiththecurrentandpast changes.
- ▪ Nottakeanyofthequestionsorcommentspersonally; it is not about the leader, it isaboutthe journeyeach personis on.
- ▪ Provide forums for people in theorganization to engage in the change workso that they can explore their beliefs withoneanother.

Resist the temptation to continue buildingunderstanding.Aspeopletesttheirbeliefs about the change, they will need to hear lessabout the case for change and more aboutwhat leaders believe and feel about thechange.They will bounce their beliefs off theleaders; they will question the past, the present and the future as they revisit their

ownbeliefs,ofteninconfronting, notpolite,ways.

Listen and speak from his heart about whyhe believes in this change.Speak honestlyregarding what she believes and feels aboutthis change, and what it will take to make ithappen.

BUILDINGCOMMITMENT:

The goal of this phase is a critical mass ofcommitted employees taking the necessaryactions to make the change happen; everyonesees these actions as part of her everyday work.At this point, the individual takes the ownershipto implement the change.The individual, notcommanded by someone else, initiates actions ofcommitment.

Ways to EncourageParticipation to BuildCommitment:

- ▪ Engage cross-functional teams in planningandtakingactionstoexecutethechange.
- ▪ Hold large-group meetings to check in onprogress in implementing changes and tomapout revised plans for action.
- ▪ Give credit to those who are taking risksto make the change happen and to thosewhoare making progress.
- ▪ Build on the successes in the changeeffort.Tell stories of the

small and largesuccessesasthechangeunfolds.

- Embrace failures as learningopportunities.Failure is part of change;reward the effort, help those involved infailurelearnfromitandthenmoveon.
- Keep integrating change efforts andresults into the everyday life of theorganization, e.g., operational planningand budgeting.

RESISTANCEAND COMPLIANCE:

Resistance is a part of any change.In the Road toCommitment model, apparent resistance to the changeoccurs in the expanding awareness and understandingand the evoking belief.

Resistancemaylooklikeanyofthefollowing:
- PointedquestionsabouttheCaseforChange.
- Comments and arguments about why thischangewillnotwork.
- Indifferencetothechangeeffort.
- Doubts about the need for change or that theorganization will not be able to make thechange happen.
- Questioning whether the organization canmakethe change.

A tricky part of resistance is that some behaviors,attitudes and questions exhibited in building eitherunderstanding or belief in the change look likeresistance to the change. In other words, what lookslike resistance is part of the journey to commitmentand is not resistance at all. For example, whenworking on belief, people often ask the same types ofquestionsassomeonewho isresisting.

Compliance is conformity to what is required oradapting the minimum requirements in the changeeffort.Compliance is a natural act in anorganizations; preserving one's job is enlightenedself interest. Just as Good is the enemy of Great, asJim Collins said in his book, *Good to Great*, socomplianceis theenemy of commitment.

CONCLUSION:

When we first showed The Road to Commitment tothe CEO of an auto supplier, he was not impressed.Ithink the one-page chart with the phases stayed on theendof his desk for weeksashetoyedwiththeidea.
Then, one day he called and said, "I think you mayhave something with this Road to Commitment.Ibelieve that we have been spending a lot of timetrying to build understanding about our vision andwhat we are trying to do in the organization, but notenough time helping build the commitment amongourkeyemployeessothattheywillmakeithappen."
The CEO began to use the phases as a framework toplan meetings and activities

to build commitment tothe future vision of the organization.For example, hebecame clearer about whether the purpose of ameeting was to build understanding or to help peoplewrestlewiththeirbeliefs.Heworkedon findingwaysinhisownworktohelphisteamm ovetocommitment and to learn how to help others to movethrough the phases.He used the vocabulary of theRoad to Commitment to discuss where he and otherswere in the process.The Road to Commitmentbecamea common vocabulary for everyone.

Though we've worked with many different clientsin several industries using this model, the work tofurther develop applications has just begun.Weoffer The Road to Commitment to consultants andchange leaders as a working model to address thehuman side of change.Let us know how it worksfor you.

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