

# The painful truth of change management

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Over the past 40 years, the practice of organizational change management has evolved into a discipline of its own. Research and applied use across industries have shaped the development of change management standards, certifications, highly documented methodologies and endless tools. Firms just like LaMarsh Global were started to tackle the challenges and opportunities of organizational change.

Despite decades of advancement in change management, organizations still struggle with many of the same issues and challenges that they did years ago.

Here is the painful truth: **At its core, change management is about leadership.**

**It's hard to imagine a business process much simpler to execute than change management.**

The change management process is comprised of simple, common-sense tasks used by managers and leaders for years. It includes things like talking to employees, seeking stakeholder feedback, developing employees, making plans, measuring work processes and outputs, addressing pain points and developing motivated employees through comprehensive performance management.

However, organizations across industries repeatedly attempt organizational changes at tremendous cost without realizing the intended outcomes of those changes.

Employees in many organizations find themselves frustrated time and again as another organizational change is introduced and leaders eventually lose interest and move on. This behavior teaches and motivates employees how not to change while at the same time building resistance to future change efforts. Leaders are rewarded for repeatedly failing, and the rest of the organization notices this substandard performance. It is no secret to employees in these scenarios that unmotivated and unskilled leaders continue to expend valuable resources on change, and yet the employees don't have what they need to successfully change.

One of the biggest barriers to leaders adopting comprehensive change management techniques is the belief that change management is not needed. One could easily argue they are also saying leadership is not needed. In this scenario, leaders explain they simply need to tell employees to change. But a history of unsuccessful or difficult changes often proves this wrong. Leadership is about influencing employees and providing them with what they need to change.

Organizational development experts have scratched their heads for years over the odd and confusing dichotomy between what is needed to ensure repeated successful organizational change and what copious leaders are willing to do to ensure this same success.

We've seen the introduction of change management methodologies by change experts and gurus.

We've seen the promise of building change management capability by change consultants.

We've read about the importance of building a change-capable organization in professional publications.

We've seen project management firms diversify their product offerings by claiming to upskill project managers with change management skills.

We've seen change management tools digitized, simplified, modified and customized.

We've heard of change management being synced with Agile, Waterfall and whatever the latest inclination is.

We've seen change management standards developed.

We've seen online training developed.

We have change management conventions.

We've built change management certifications.

And yet—you don't have to look far to find organizations that still experience the same issues and challenges that they experienced 40 years ago.



## Is change management flawed?

Is there a problem with the execution of the process? Do organizations not really need the changes they invest in? Is the language associated with change management dooming it to failure? Are leaders and managers incapable of executing a business process that is people-focused?

The answers to these questions are a resounding *no*.

Any organization whose employees are successfully fulfilling change management roles, following a change management methodology and completing the tasks in a change management plan will tell you it works.

You would expect after years of failed and compromised change attempts, there would a sincere interest in finding out what the problem is. But there really doesn't seem to be.

In fact, the reaction seems to be almost an avoidance of discovering and overcoming barriers to successful organizational change efforts. Many

leaders distance themselves more and more from change efforts and change management. Employees expected to focus on this critical work have progressively moved down the organization from business leaders and senior staff to specialists and functional support staff.

The change management community has always been interested in discovering and overcoming organizational barriers to successful change, but they haven't been able to gain much interest from organizations that are attempting to change. As a result, the ongoing emphasis from the change management community has continued to be on developing change management standards, providing certifications and creating tools needed to manage organizational change.

To a large degree, change management is now focused on doing more of the same and more of what isn't working. The underlying problem has been known for years. But it continues to be ignored.



## **Change management is leadership**

One of the best-kept secrets within the change management community is that change management is nothing more than leadership.

Change management simply guides, influences and manages people from where they are today to where they need to be in the future.

Many organizations are large and complex, and leaders need to be able to manage large and complex changes. Change management provides the process, support, data and plans to achieve the business results and outcomes needed from organizational change.

This support is centered around the specific work of leaders to drive the priorities and alignment of the organization, influence to achieve the goals and objectives of the organization, and provide the guidance and resources needed for employees to be successful.

The success of leaders is greatly dependent on how they get the information they need to make good decisions, how they deliver information so others can make good decisions, how they synchronize the work of the organization, how

they ensure employees are ready, willing and able to meet expectations and how they lead the way.

In a nutshell, the work of change management: successfully moving employees from a current state to a desired state. The challenge here is obvious. If leaders are faltering or are unaware of their role in organizational change, then a methodology may be useless. The leaders are ill-equipped to execute or perhaps even understand the methodology.

Highlighting the shortcomings and weaknesses of leaders is often met with resistance or even indifference by the very people who need it.

One of the most troubling trends in organizational change today is the exact opposite of what is warranted. Many organizations invest significant resources attempting to change with little leadership involvement. This is often the result of not addressing leadership development or managing performance.

In fact, there are countless organizational changes underway that aim to change the foundation of an organization but the leaders are unaware of the changes, their intent or what they should be doing to drive those changes.

The trend is to remove leaders from change efforts. In other words, doing more of what is at the heart of organizational change failures. This is evident in significant disconnects between change efforts and the leaders who are responsible for their success. This is evident in organizations where change professionals are forbidden to interact with the leaders responsible for the performance of those employees who are expected to change. And this is evident when change management firms are asked to submit proposals outlining how they will ensure successful organizational change without expecting leader involvement or accountability.

Change management—like every other business process—begins and ends with leadership. The difference is that in this business process, the process is leadership.

When used appropriately and when the necessary roles are fulfilled, change management methodologies work. Yes, they likely need to be tweaked and updated as the world changes and people change. But they work. Leaders need to be readied and developed to lead successful organizational change. They need to be prepared and required to work hand in hand with change management professionals, whose job is to simplify their work and provide them with the unfiltered information needed to consistently deliver successful change outcomes.



## Essential factors for successful change management

At LaMarsh Global, we realize some of the paradigms in organizations need to change. Language can be powerful. There are a few leadership capability models that don't reflect the need for change leadership in some way, but we don't see a difference between leadership and change leadership. The primary work of organizations today is to change and move forward as the system in which they exist evolves at record pace and in ways that often can't be imagined.

We understand the focus needs to shift from the role of leadership in successful change management to the role of change management in successful leadership. Be careful not to miss the nuance here. The former has allowed leaders to claim the use of change management (which is often unsuccessful) while abdicating their work to others. The latter is the use of a business process that is the responsibility of leaders to execute.

Over the years when bringing this business process to life, we have identified several factors to pay very close attention to.

### **Do leaders know how to successfully execute a business process?**

This seems like a ridiculously simple thing—but it's not.

Take it from a company that has worked in many organizations across industries. Many of LaMarsh Global's clients spend their time verbalizing why they can't or won't bring discipline to the processes they are responsible for. They spend even more time avoiding measuring compliance with process and the outcomes of those processes.

We see stronger process controls in manufacturing and technology-based work. However, the more human involvement in process, the greater the likelihood of discipline failure. There is no doubt a lack of clarity and expertise in things like organizational flexibility and adaptability, organizational agility, decentralization of decision-making and empowering employees has led to more of an "anything goes" perspective from leaders and from employees.

LaMarsh Global brings process learnings and the opportunity to create process that introduces the right changes at the right time—in the right way and to the right people. It also brings the requisite measuring of outcomes and compliance, while building plans to course-correct and reinforce change efforts.

## **Do leaders know what is needed to successfully lead employees?**

Are leaders following archaic and outdated thinking and approaches? It is our experience that many leaders seem embarrassed and paralyzed to lead today. They go to great lengths not to make decisions they are responsible for making, they have little skill or motivation to execute decisions that are made, and they are not held accountable for successfully fulfilling their role as a leader.

LaMarsh Global's first questions for consideration in any change effort are: Is the leader responsible for the change ready, willing and able to do the work of a leader? Do they even know what that is? Are they being managed, developed and nurtured? Do they have clear accountabilities and metrics? Are they being observed and measured and ultimately course correct or reinforced before they ever attempt to do the same with others?

Our Contemporary Leadership Series is designed for intact leadership teams and begins with the executive leaders. It ensures leadership teams are aligned, ready, willing and able to introduce and realize successful organizational change. Ultimately the series is offered to leadership teams throughout the organization as the most senior team begins to change its approach to leading the organization and requiring change management as the mechanism for continually evolving the organization.

## **Do leaders know how to be a team player?**

If only LaMarsh Global had begun years ago to document how many leadership teams are not “teams.” We have seen leadership teams at all levels of organizations that have no defined collective purpose, no team roles or responsibilities, no work they do together as a team, no team accountabilities and who—oftentimes—work at odds with fellow team members as they lead their specific part of the organization. They are simply a group of people who meet weekly or monthly.

Typically, these teams don't accomplish anything at the meetings. They rarely bring any information or data to the meeting, and they leave the meeting without any work to do. Let's not forget monthly or yearly offsites they attend where the same meeting format is followed.



LaMarsh Global helps define the infrastructure needed to bring a leadership team to life. This produces powerful team outcomes along with leadership alignment and influence for employees to enjoy.

### **Do leaders understand they serve at the pleasure of those who choose to follow them?**

Too often, leaders don't understand or know how to bring to fruition the power of the role of leader. Without followers, there isn't a need for a leader. Successful leaders know their followers. They know what their followers need and how to help them become successful and self-sufficient. After all, it is up to their followers to decide to change or not change.

LaMarsh Global can build the knowledge, understanding and momentum needed for a culture where leaders respect themselves. In turn, the leaders are respected because they are empowering, engaging and building a followership capable of repeatedly delivering the organization's strategies, goals and objectives.

### **Do leaders attempt practices that don't add value?**

Many organizations attempt new thing after new thing without defining and understanding what the organization needs to meet current and future commitments. Leaders may not understand the practice, or they haven't properly vetted the practice.

The chaos and overwhelming feelings many employees report today came in part from so many changes being attempted and introduced without a logical and business-focused vetting process.

LaMarsh Global brings an approach for prioritizing work and expertise to help determine when it makes sense to change and when it's just adding to the chaos.



## Develop your leadership infrastructure

The change management community has known for a very long time that change management begins and ends with leadership.

The first step is to orchestrate leadership that can maximize the use and benefits of a simple—yet critical—business process. They must recognize that change management is leadership.

Attempting organizational change without capable leadership has proven time and again to be a tough road to travel. Attempting to lead in today's complex and fast-paced world without change management has proven to be naïve.

LaMarsh Global is your partner in developing the leadership infrastructure and processes that will serve your organization well into the future.

## About LaMarsh Global

LaMarsh Global has been a leader in change management since 1979. We bridge change management theory with the challenges that businesses face today. Change is an opportunity to improve performance and enable success, and change management will make it easier to change.

### Consulting for organizations

We streamline the change process, develop change capability and guide organizations to become ready for future changes.

### Training for practitioners and leaders

Our change management consultants are also experienced instructors, and we deliver workshops and customized training.

### Our methodology

LaMarsh Global developed Managed Change – our change management approach and toolkit – to improve the change process and contribute to consistent results.

### Adaptable to any change project

No project is too large or too small. Through a customized blend of consulting and training, LaMarsh Global will equip organizations with the knowledge and tools to succeed at all types of change efforts.

- Business transformations
- Process changes
- Mergers and acquisitions
- Technology implementations
- New products or services
- Culture changes
- Digital transitions
- And more

### For any organization

Our clients aren't defined by an industry or size, but rather a willingness to leverage change for growth, improvement and new opportunities.

### About Deborah Morrison

Deborah is the Executive Director of Consulting Services at LaMarsh Global. She improves the change capability of organizations by helping leaders evolve to what their organization needs from them today. Deborah uncovers opportunities for innovation that are available when leaders are aligned with the strategy and goals of an organization.



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