

Summary:

- Organizational change is a process.
- There are different *kinds* of change, including incremental and transformational.
- A rich literature base offers a number of evidence-based models for charting the steps or phases of organizational change; this can be useful for those leading change.

What is Organizational Change?

Organizational change is a *process* which—when done intentionally—can help institutions shift from a current state to a more desired state. An organizational change approach can help museums implement DEAI efforts and become more inclusive.

Most of us are familiar with *incremental change*, which focuses on fine-tuning and improving what organizations already do well. We typically engage in this kind of change when, for example, we implement a program and make changes based on what we learn. The focus, therefore, is on modifying existing practices.

Another type of change, one critical to diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion (DEAI) efforts, is *transformational change*. This type of change tends to be broader in scale, involving many areas of an organization. Transformational change requires examining assumptions and practices and can result in changes to an organization's structure, processes, and culture. **Transformational change has organization-wide impact.**

Both types of change are important to and necessary for an organization.

Models of Organizational Change

The organizational development literature offers a number of models for charting the broad stages of organizational change. These models can be useful in understanding and leading change.

One of the earliest and most influential models, developed by Kurt Lewin, conceptualizes change as a three-stage process of unfreezing, moving, and refreezing.

In the *unfreezing* stage, an organization experiences disequilibrium, begins to consider change, and develops the motivation to do so. The second stage is *moving*. Here, the organization develops and implements specific strategies and actions toward change. This stage may involve letting go of old values and learning and adopting new behaviors/practices. In the *refreezing* stage, the organization stabilizes and integrates the change into its culture; the change becomes 'the way things are done' in the organization. This phase requires continual reinforcement of new behaviors and norms to successfully integrate them into the organization.

Many other models of change expand on this basic process. While the models differ in various ways, this table shows the correspondence of several of them with the three-stage model.

Three-Stage Change Models

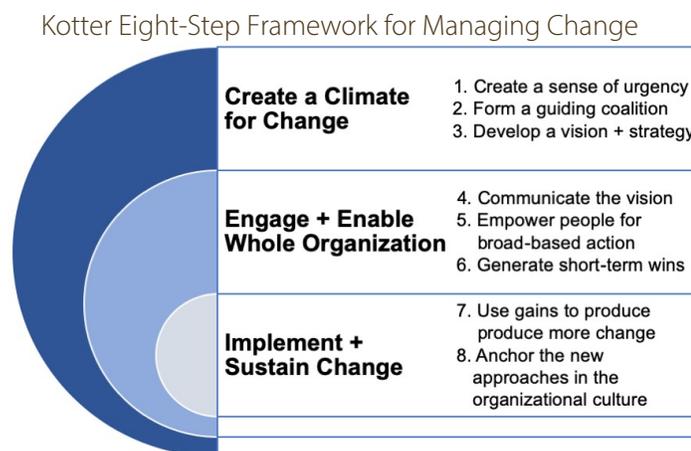
Change Model	Stages		
Lewin	Unfreezing	Moving	Refreezing
Backhard and Harris	Present state	Transition state	Future state
Beer	Dissatisfaction	Process	Model
Tichy and Devanna	Awakening	Mobilizing	Reinforcing
Nadler and Tushman	Energizing	Envisioning	Enabling

Kanter et al., 1992

Managing Change

Intentional organizational change requires assessing what needs to change, developing goals and a plan to move to the desired state, and implementing the change.

Therefore, one significant area scholars have focused on is developing frameworks that describe a series of steps or actions to facilitate the adoption of change. One of the most widely used frameworks involves an eight-step approach:



Although there are many other frameworks for managing change, they all emphasize the importance of change as a process and that change initiatives take time and should, therefore, include clear milestones along the way. These frameworks also stress the importance of reflection and assessing outcomes at key points in the process so that adjustments can be made along the way.

Managing change is not about managing schedules, project scope or simply avoiding resistance to change. Change is about the impact on people, culture, systems, and structures. Change is bringing about a new state that better positions the organization for success in the future.

Garfein, Horney, & Nelson

While organizational change models often outline what appears to be a linear process—mostly as a way of more easily describing concrete steps for implementing change—in actuality, change is a continuous process, a cycle that organizations go through. There may even be numerous overlapping cycles in the change process. Even

within an intentionally planned change, there are many aspects that will emerge through the change process that one cannot predict from the beginning. Being open and attentive to these emergent aspects can lead to new discoveries and insights that are critical to authentic and sustainable change.

A significant segment of the organizational change literature takes this notion further and discusses organizational change from a systems perspective. “Systems thinking” involves

understanding how various elements in a system (i.e., an organization) influence the whole. For a specific change to be sustainable, teams must also address an organization’s underlying structures and processes.

A holistic perspective also helps us understand that sustainable organizational change is not accomplished by a single individual or department. Rather, it is a collaborative effort across the organization.

Reflections

- What kind of change (incremental or transformational) is your CCLI strategic initiative?
- How can thinking about organizational change as a *process* shift your CCLI team's approach to your strategic initiative?
- Which of the presented models of organizational change most resonates with your CCLI strategic initiative? How might you incorporate a systems thinking perspective?

Select References

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