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‘OUR ICEBERG IS MELTING’: MANAGING ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE

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“Culture changes with as much difficulty in penguin colonies as in human colonies” - Kotter and Rathgeber

INTRODUCTION

John Kotter and Holger Rathgeber’s *Our Iceberg Is Melting: Changing and Succeeding Under Any Conditions* (2006) is a sought-after, award-winning book on leadership. The eight principles mainly revolve around managing change, initiating change, getting others to change, and creating a new culture in an organisation/workplace. The penguin colony in Antarctica is used as an analogy to show the challenges faced by employers and employees in the real world. The story and characters in this fable are like people that we know and recognise, including ourselves. It evokes powerful emotions where most people fear change, which is often associated with confusion and resistance. Thus, this article sets out to review the eight-step process required for change in any organisation.

The story

Louis led a colony that had a Leadership Council known as the Group of Ten. Two hundred and sixty penguins lived in the colony, and among them was Fred, the curious and observant one, who fished less and researched more about the iceberg and sea. He gathered information (based on his observation) that the iceberg they are currently inhabiting could collapse, which would be disastrous for the penguins. He approached Alice, one of the ten leaders who had a reputation for getting things done, alerting her about this phenomenon. When Alice contacted all the members of the Leadership Council, they were very sceptical.

Alice asked Louis to invite Fred to give a talk at the next Leadership Council meeting, and he agreed. Fred had discovered a huge hollow inside the iceberg filled with seawater. As winter approached, the water would freeze, expanding the ice and subsequently shattering the iceberg into pieces. Fred’s explanation was compelling – he constructed a model of the iceberg to show the hollow inside. Some of the other leaders resisted, saying Fred could not prove his theory, claiming that he was creating unwarranted anxiety and worry. Alice told Louis that the

colony would hold him and all the leaders responsible if Fred was right.

Louis knew that to survive this catastrophe, they needed to work together as a team. Despite all the challenges, discussions, arguments and setbacks, just before the winter, the penguins moved to their new home. It was different, unfamiliar, but somehow not as bad as what they thought. The next season, they moved again – the important lesson they learned was not to become complacent and contented. The second move was relatively easier to cope with than the first one. Now, they move like nomads, and most of the colonists have accepted it.

Alice then asked Louis to restructure the Leadership Council. It was not an easy task to 'preserve the dignity and respect' for penguins who worked hard to help and serve the colony. Nevertheless, Louis managed to do it and felt that the penguins were now open to changes and adjusting to new circumstances, especially the youngsters who worked for the betterment of the colony. Transformation is never easy, especially when dealing with changes. The following eight-step process was put into practice by the penguins that can be implemented in any workplace or organisation to cope with changes as well as challenges.

8-STEP PROCESS FOR SUCCESSFUL CHANGE IN ANY ORGANISATION

To successfully navigate the turbulent waters of organisational transformation, these eight pivotal steps are deemed crucial:

1. **Establishing a Sense of Urgency:** Communicate the need for change clearly so that everyone understands the importance of immediate action. In any organisation, including ours, this might mean highlighting competitive pressures or customer feedback that necessitate a rapid response. We must inspire people to act with passion and purpose.
2. **Forming a Strong Team:** Assemble a diverse team with the skills and authority to lead change. This includes individuals with leadership, communication, and analytical skills, as well as credibility within the organisation.
3. **Developing and Planning for a Better Future:** Craft a clear strategy through initiatives linked directly to the vision. Move away from past practices and outline a new direction. This helps align all members of the organisation towards common goals.
4. **Communication:** Ensure that everyone comprehends and accepts the vision and strategy through consistent and transparent communication. Use various channels to reach all employees and address their concerns.
5. **Tearing Down Walls and Empowering People:** Encourage and empower employees to take initiative and contribute towards the common objective. This may involve flattening hierarchies and promoting a culture of collaboration. Unity is central in achieving the goals together.
6. **Achieving Short-term Wins:** Identify and celebrate small victories that show progress and energise employees to persist. This helps maintain enthusiasm and demonstrate that the changes are working.

7. Remaining Tenacious and Persistent: Stay committed to the change process despite obstacles and setbacks that could be linked to structures and policies. Consistent effort and determination are critical for long-term success.
8. Creating a New Workplace Culture: Develop new norms, behaviours, and mindsets that align with the current realities, and every progress made is significant. This replaces outdated practices and sustains the change.

CONCLUSION

The transformation within the colony, including the restructuring of the Leadership Council and the adoption of an eight-step process for managing change, serves as a blueprint for organisations to navigate and embrace change effectively. This process includes establishing urgency, forming a competent team, planning for the future, effective communication, empowerment, achieving short-term wins, persistence, and creating a new culture aligned with current realities.

In summary, the story underscores that change, however difficult, is essential for survival and growth. Effective change management requires a clear vision, strong leadership, and a collaborative approach.

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Kotter, J. P., & Rathgeber, H. (2006). *Our iceberg is melting: Changing and succeeding under any conditions*. Pan Macmillan.