

Prepare, Connect, Deliver: How One Group Thrives in an Environment of Change

Presented to the World Conference on Quality -
American Society of Quality
April 30th, 2007, Orlando FL

John L Blakinger, Blakinger Associates (www.blakinger.com)
Partner, Transformation Systems International
Vice Chair Strategic Planning – Customer Supplier Division of ASQ
PO Box 3497, Sunriver Or 97707; john@blakinger.com

© John L Blakinger 2006 All Rights Reserved

Summary

In the environment of organizational disruption that results from reorganization, leadership change, acquisition, or a shift in corporate strategy, having a solid methodology and technology are not always enough to ensure the adoption of proven performance practices. Often, internal political and cultural systems prevent the adoption of proven methods and can even result in the demise of the group sponsoring the performance practices. Adoption of proven practices by the new regime can only occur when the sponsoring group is well prepared for change so that it can connect within the new organization, quickly deliver results and ultimately thrive.

Introduction

While what is described in this paper is in the context of an acquisition, over the last ten plus years the author has used this approach to thrive in an organizational environment in which the chief constant has been change. These changes have included four transfers of ownership, eight changes of the senior leader (president, CEO) and a host of other executive leadership changes.

More than a decade ago the author of *Peak Performers*, Charles Garfield said in a keynote address, “the hierarchical meritocracy is over.”ⁱ Success at work is no longer analogous to climbing a mountain. It is now more analogous to rafting in white water. While this shift in how we view work requires each of us to have different tools and skills, even more important is the need for a shift in how we approach the work itself.

In *The Survival Personality*, Al Siebert, PhD states, “it isn’t what a person is like, it is how a person interacts with situations that determines survival.”ⁱⁱ Similarly, it is not the *function* of the group that improves its chance of survival; rather it is how the survivalist group interacts with its new stakeholders. These interactions can be very beneficial, if the group is prepared to effectively respond to organizational change.

Building strong relationships, purposefully seeking out connections with others, and focusing on delivering value are not just essential for survival; they are also important for achieving fulfillment at work. This set of values, beliefs and attitudes, developed over a period of years, has served to sustain one high performance group through the organizational changes described here. It is an iterative and evolutionary approach.

The steps or phases described in this paper – prepare, connect, deliver and thrive – are presented sequentially. In practice, however, it is important to adopt a posture and behavior that best fit the immediate situation. Adapting to the current environment and paying close attention to the political climate are key.

Throughout this paper the term “group” is applied to an internal support organization and the larger business entity (the Company, Division, or Department) is referred to as the “organization.”

Prepare

Since an organizational change can occur at any time, occasionally without warning, it is important to be positioned for change in advance. This state of readiness requires:

- Understanding – and being able to clearly articulate – the value the group delivers to the organization
- Possessing an approach to influence the new organization through interactions with stakeholders
- Cultivating a mindset of abundanceⁱⁱⁱ.

Understand The Group’s Value

“Try not to become a man of success, but rather become a man of value.”^{iv} Albert Einstein’s axiom can be applied to groups as well as individuals. The group’s status is often based on reporting structure, size of budget and number of members. While these attributes of a group may contribute to the group’s success, a keen focus on *delivering value* is vastly more important. The group must understand its value and be able to demonstrate that value to the new stakeholders and the larger organization.

Often, the definition of value is limited to a group’s outputs.^v A more in-depth review and definition of what the group offers to its many stakeholders helps to create more effective interactions in a changing organization.

Table 1 *The Value Matrix*, articulates the value delivered by a support group through its interactions with other entities. Notice that value delivered is more than just improved financial performance. Interactions also provide learning, respect, coaching and validation of performance.

Confirming the value delivered with a group's existing stakeholders is a good way to validate one's perspective and identify areas to work on in the group's interactions with those stakeholders. When an organizational change occurs, stakeholder substantiation of the group's value is always more powerful than the group's or an individual's assertion alone.

Table 1 *The Value Matrix*

Stakeholder	Value Delivered to Stakeholder by Group
Executive Leadership	Increased margins through cost reductions, productivity gains and improved quality A story for the shareholders Engaged employees
Managers	Meet financial targets Education, coaching Empowering employees
Supervisors	Education , coaching, empowerment Validation of performance and respect
Staff	Knowledge sharing Opportunity to influence the organization Validation of performance and respect
Professional Organizations	Knowledge sharing Membership Camaraderie
Supplier	Reliable lead time for deliveries Clear requirements References for potential customers Understanding and respect
Customer	Reliable products Involvement in supply chain design Opportunity to influence products and services Validation of needs and respect

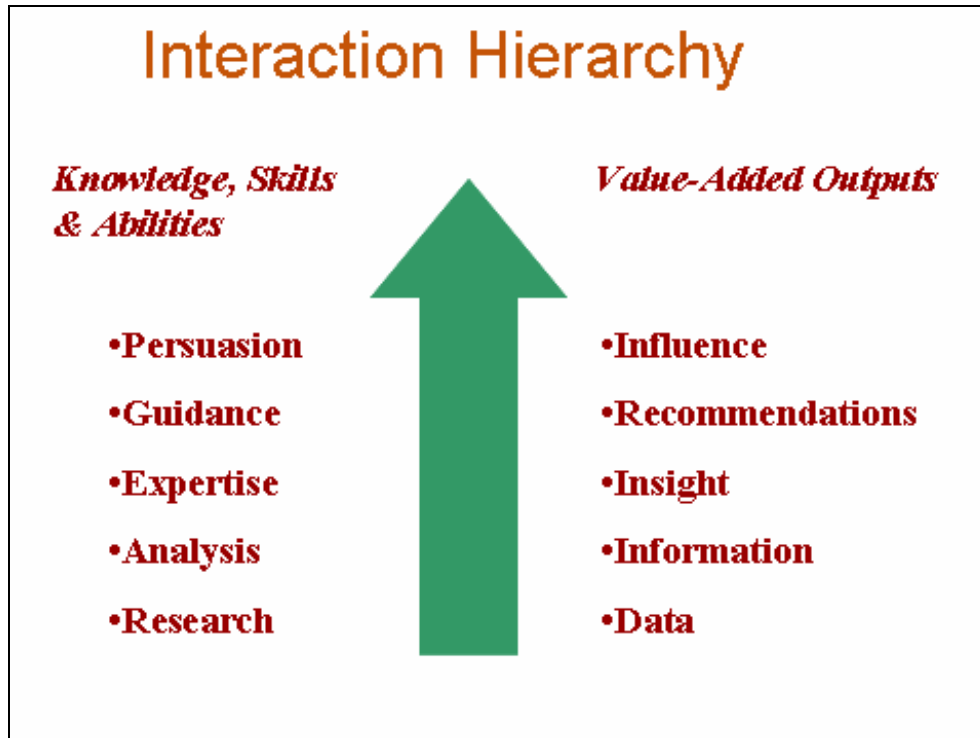
An Approach to Influence

There are many levels of communication, from simply relaying information and data to persuasion. The level of communication used depends on the situation. Figure 1 *Interaction Hierarchy*, shows progressive levels of communication from doing research and providing data to persuasive dialog that influences the organization. In the context of the day-to-day outputs delivered by a group, the interactions seem to be focused on the lower level of communication, providing data from research offering information from analysis. However, the group's

delivered value (see The Value Matrix above) requires many higher levels of communication, including guidance and persuasion. What is important is that the group has *experience* in higher-level communication and when an organizational change occurs, the group is positioned to provide recommendations and influence.

Lower levels of interaction serve to create outputs. Through higher levels of interaction the group connects and thrives.

Figure 1 *Interaction Hierarchy*



Mindset of Abundance

“An abundance mindset sees the unlimited resources that surround each of us.”^{vi} The opposite of the abundance mindset is a mindset of scarcity. “The scarcity mindset sees limitation everywhere.” During an acquisition or major organizational change, the scarcity mindset is all too often evident in the fight to keep one’s job. The abundance mindset on the other hand actively seeks out opportunity within the changing organization^{vii}.

Approaching an acquisition or major reorganization from the abundance mindset leads to questions such as, who benefits from the group’s value? What do others in the organization need that is similar to the value this group already provides? How can the group redefine the way value is delivered?

During an acquisition or major reorganization the scarcity mindset is predominant. A focus on cost reduction is a key objective of acquisitions and major reorganizations. But, cost savings is rarely the only objective. Most acquisitions are intended to grow the organization in areas including new geographies, new business sectors or new capabilities in the supply chain. A mindset of abundance is critical to identifying how the group can best deliver value to the new organization.

It is difficult to maintain an abundance mindset in the tumultuous environment of an acquisition. Be sure to check the group members’ mindset to ensure they are not focused on fighting for a job (scarcity) and instead are working to deliver value to the organization in new ways (abundance).

Connect

The goal of connecting is to secure an opportunity for the group to deliver. That opportunity is dependent on:

- Building a broad social network within the organization
- Linking the group's value to the needs and intentions of areas within the network
- Establishing partnerships within the organization to deliver value.

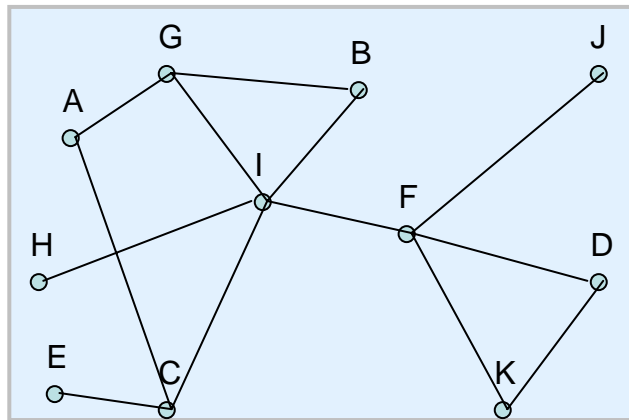
Social Networks

In the last several years the focus of organizational design has turned to the biological sciences and the study of social networking as valuable ways to gain insight to the organization. In the book *The Hidden Power of Social Networks – Understanding How Work Really Gets Done in Organizations*, Rob Cross

and Andrew Parker reveal that high performers are not differentiated based on individual expertise and use of technology, although the absence of these characteristics does define low performers. Rather, what does differentiate high performers from others is their larger and more diversified personal networks.^{viii}

In social network analysis the interactions among members of an organization are graphically depicted as nodes and information flows. Figure 2 depicts a social network diagram. The lines portray the flow of information and the letters (A – K) represent individuals within the organization.

Figure 2 The Social Network.



The social network diagram reveals the interactions of the individuals. Typically individuals interact with a few other individuals. However, there are some individuals that have more or less interactions than the typical individual. Individuals that have a high number of interactions are referred to as central individuals and are depended upon by many (I and F in the diagram). Individuals that have limited interactions are referred to as peripheral individuals (E, H and J in the diagram). Also the social diagram reveals sub-groups where there are many interactions within the subgroup but little interaction between the subgroups (left and right of the diagram). The role of the central individual is critical to thriving in a new organization. The group's leader should first seek out central individuals in the new organization and in the end become a central individual.

In connecting to the organization, two characteristics of the central individuals are particularly constructive. First, central individuals focus on ways to integrate others into their work, beyond just their own tasks. Second, they see building relationships within the organization as “not a political act, but a critical part of professional development.”^{ix} They continually take actions to broaden and deepen their networks.

Integrating the work of others and building a social network involves the act of moving interactions from those that provide insights to influencing the members of the network (Figure 1 Interaction Hierarchy).

Understand the New Organization

Understanding the new or transitioning organization begins with discerning the intentions of the stakeholders. Many times the objectives of the senior executive level are not in line with those of other areas of the organization. Table 2 Engagement Matrix provides a means to identify and document the intention of the new organization's stakeholders, how each member can impact the group, and what value the group can provide in assist the achievement of the stakeholders' intentions.

Too often groups advocate for a role in a new organization without fully understanding the opportunities. Developing an understanding of the organization requires a focus on inquiry and relating what is heard to the value the group can deliver.^x Inquiry and active listening require the group to set aside their biases and preconceptions and truly engage with stakeholders. Probing questions and paraphrasing to demonstrate understanding are the tools to understanding the organization.

Table 2 *Engagement Matrix*

New Stakeholder	Intention	Potential Impact	Value Provided
Division Leader	Bottom line Market Share Cost reduction Eliminate duplication	Eliminate or give sponsorship	Bottom line performance
Manager One	Grow Group Promotion Reduce rework and increase productivity	Champion	Improved performance A story to tell An approach (education)
Manager Two	Retire in 6 months Status Quo	Resist change	Work directly with supervisor Coaching
Supervisor One	Learn business Develop employees	Partner	An approach (education) Coaching
Supervisor Two	Take over for manager	Partner	Improved performance A story to tell An approach (education)
Staff One	Keep a job,	Participation in results	Education

Partner to Deliver

Too often a group focuses on establishing a champion or sponsor at the very top of the organization in an attempt to secure the group’s position. While this is necessary to thrive in the organization, it should not be the focus in the early stages of an organizational change. The Partner to Deliver step is successful when the group has an agreement with a first line manager to deliver results. Ideally the group obtains permission to proceed from the budget owner, although this is not critical.

During a major organizational change, senior leaders have numerous problems to solve. Communicating an understanding of a problem (that the leader may not even have on radar) and specifying how the group provides – or is able to provide – a solution is the first step to acquiring the permission to proceed. If the group’s proposal to a senior leader meets with a response of, “Makes sense - go do it.”, the group must quickly establish a partner and deliver results. Do not expect visible, explicit, or enthusiastic support from senior leadership. As with all other interactions the group must be intent on continuing to build its network. Gaining additional contacts from the senior leader can lead to valuable network connections and may lead to a partnership to deliver.

Partnerships are typically formed at the first line manager and supervisor levels. The partnership must be built on a shared understanding of deliverables, roles and responsibilities. Mutual understanding of the contributions of each of the partners is critical to successful delivery.

While inquiry is the primary communication approach when the group is gaining an understanding of the organization, a blend of inquiry and advocacy is required to establish a partnership. In advocating how the group will deliver results, one must be certain that the group’s approach, outputs and outcomes are aligned with the intentions of the prospective partner.

It is important that the group finds a partner in an area of the organization where results can be achieved quickly. Many groups attempt to address the largest or the most visible problem areas and get bogged down in the complexity and politics inherent in chronic problems. Since the group must quickly demonstrate value, establish partnerships where results can be delivered in weeks and not months.

Deliver

Success in this phase of the journey can be defined as delivering tangible results through the group’s partnership. Ideally, the group’s partner then gladly provides a testimonial to others in the organization. To be

successful the group *must* build trust with the partner organization. Demonstrating the group's commitment to the success of the partner^{xi} by delivering real value, is unequivocally the best way to build that trust.

One of the characteristics of the central individual described in the Connect phase is the focus on integrating others into the work of the group. This integration requires that the group adapt its approach in order to fit with what already exists in the partner organization. Adaptation may include such things as adopting extant language in use by the organization, compromise around processes, or acceptance of a different technology.

Once the group has the opportunity to deliver it is essential to supply tangible results quickly. Over-analysis and over-planning can inhibit the ability to deliver, as well as being viewed as demonstrating a lack of urgency. "Intended results and useful tools are more important than a detailed plan."^{xii} Constrain the scope of the work so that results can be delivered in weeks, not months. Figure 3 The Delivery Cycle illustrates the cycle of establishing partners, delivering value and communicating results.

It is most advantageous when the partners communicate the results to their peers or others with similar organizations, thereby creating demand for the group to establish additional partnerships for value delivery.

In an environment of rapid change, continually demonstrating value is essential. The time elapsed from establishing a partnership to communicating results must be brief, no more than three months maximum.

As the group continues to establish partnerships, the group's connections within the organization expand and strengthen. As its reputation for delivering results grows, the group's sphere of influence enlarges. This broader, more pervasive presence within the organization is what enables the group to thrive.

Thrive

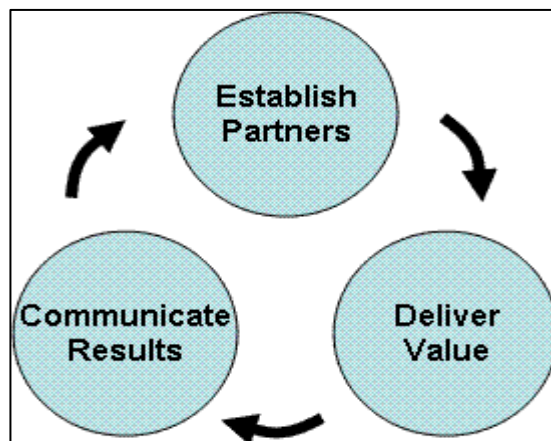
With the group's value to the organization demonstrated and multi-threaded connections established, the group is – finally – in a position to thrive. Success in this step takes the form of the group being championed at the executive level. This support is evident when the group's approach becomes the standard within the organization. Organizational communications are seen to acknowledge and make reference to the processes and outcomes that form the group's work. The group is actually sought out as a source for expertise and *results*.

This can be a heady time during which it is easy to stray from the concepts of value, connection and results. When the group "arrives," it might seem the difficult journey is at an end. Nothing could be further from the truth. "To curse a man, give him years of success" should be the group's unspoken maxim. In times of constant change, the flourishing phase can be short-lived indeed. Edwards Deming said, "It is not necessary to change. Survival is not mandatory."^{xiii} In order to continue to thrive, the group must diligently persist in applying all the steps that underpin its success - Prepare, Connect, Deliver. If the group views arrival as the stopping point, its survival will almost certainly be brief.

Conclusion

No matter the origin or nature of the organizational change – whether in ownership, senior leadership, an acquisition, or even a major strategic adjustment – change is constant. Maintaining a state of preparation for change can do more to ensure the survival of an internal group than almost any other action. This change-readiness includes not just an accredited toolset, but more importantly, the group's mindset. A mindset of abundance enables the group to envision and seize the opportunities inherent in the change. Building and sustaining strong relationships within the organization serves to establish partnerships throughout the organization. These partnerships form a platform from which the group can quickly identify opportunities to deliver in the new organization.

Figure 3 The Delivery Cycle



Demonstrating urgency around delivering results amplifies the group's value in the organization and expands its footprint, enabling the group to flourish through successive organizational changes. So long as it remains focused on providing value and aligning that value with the stakeholders' interests, the group's viability is assured, even in an uncertain future full of change.

References

- ⁱ Garfield, Charles. 1995. Texas Instruments IEF World User Group Conference Keynote Address. Orlando, FL.
- ⁱⁱ Siebert, Al, Ph.D. *The Survival Personality*. 1996. The Berkley Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Putnam, NY.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Hacker, Stephen with Noray, Bertrand Jouslin. 1999. *The Transformation Fieldbook*. Jossey-Bass, SF.
- ^{iv} Moncur, Michael. © 1994 – 2005. Quotations Page.com. <<http://www.quotationspage.com/quote/2959.html>>
- ^v Hacker, Stephen with Noray, Bertrand Jouslin. 1999. *The Transformation Fieldbook*. Jossey-Bass, SF.
- ^{vi} *ibid*
- ^{vii} *ibid*
- ^{viii} Cross, Robert L. and Andrew Parker. 2004. *The Hidden Power of Social Networks – Understanding How Work Really Gets Done in Organizations*. Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation. Boston, MA.
- ^{ix} *ibid*
- ^x Senge, Peter M.. 1994. *The Fifth Discipline Field Book*. Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, NY.
- ^{xi} Hacker, Stephen, Marsha L. Willard, and Laurent Couturier. 2001. *The Trust Imperative*. ASQ Quality Press, Milwaukee, WI.
- ^{xii} Senge, Peter M., Art Kleiner, Charlotte Roberts, George Roth, Rich Ross, and Bryan Smith. 1999. *The Dance of Change: The challenges to Sustaining Momentum in Learning Organizations*. Random House, NY.
- ^{xiii} Deming, W. Edwards, Copyright © 1993-2007. Famous Quotes and Famous Sayings Network. <<http://quotations.home.worldnet.att.net/wedwardsdeming.html>>