Build the Guiding Team

Toward Successful Large-Scale Change

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STEP 2

Build the Guiding Team

A FEELING OF URGENCY HELPS greatly in putting together the right group to guide change and in creating essential teamwork within the group. When there is urgency, more people want to help provide leadership, even if there are personal risks. More people are willing to pull together, even

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if there are no short-term personal rewards. But additional effort is necessary to get the right people in place with the trust, emotional commitment, and teamwork to do the job. That's the step 2 challenge.

When the Team Is Not a Team

A common step 2 problem is that those who should be driving change are not doing their job, and nobody wants to confront the issue.

The Blues versus the Greens

From Gary Lockhart

Nobody wanted to admit it, and we refused to talk about it, but we were like two gangs, the Blues and the Greens. We didn't fight, because someone said, "I expect you guys to be friendly and nice to each other." The only reason we didn't go after each other was because there were "cops" around.

This all started with the merger. We knew we needed to get our act together in order to create a new company. Doing this well was very important because although the public might think firms like ours are all alike, it's not true. Our two companies had different product offerings, different strengths and weaknesses, different cultures. We needed to settle whether this was going to be more like Company A or more like Company B, and then make it happen.

Nobody wanted to talk about the problem in public, but we knew senior management was not up to the task. A couple of groups went to a well-known institute to think and talk. They read and heard ideas from great books and great people. They filled up paper. It was

very civilized. If you'd have walked in and asked if they were now a team, people probably would have said, "Sure. Now we are a team with shared values. See, the values are over there on that flip chart." But it wasn't true.

Not much was worked out at that meeting or afterward because there was too little open, honest communication. When there were things people didn't like, they wouldn't speak up. They would just harbor bad feelings.

You'd have these conversations where someone would say, "I think with the opening in the marketing group, Jerry Johnson is the best man for the job. Jerry has 16 years of experience and excellent reviews. He is very skilled at X and Y and don't forget about Z." That would be someone from the Green team. Of course, Jerry would be a member of the same team. Then someone from the Blue team would say, "Well Jerry sounds excellent, but in this job the number one challenge is going to be such and such, and I would worry that Jerry, terrific person that he is, doesn't have that experience. But Fred Jones does." Fred, of course, is from the Blue team. Then a Green team player says, "You make a good point, but I think if you look closely—and I know Jerry so I can say this with great confidence—he is just the type of person who can learn to handle that challenge in no time at all. He's a very quick take." But at the same time, you could almost hear the conversation going on over a different channel: "You're getting too many of the good jobs. If you don't stop the land grab, we're going to rip the heart out of one of your people." "Oh yeah, you want to fight now? It's seven against five and we've got the seven. You sure you want to do that? Remember, our leader's nickname is The Decapitator." "You guys are going too far. Our Larry is a bad guy and he knows how to use a chain."

No one was willing, or at least no one could figure out a way, to talk about this honestly in public. The merger-related politics were very difficult. We talked around the issues. Meanwhile the business problems were growing.

The firm was not achieving the "synergies" and economies of scale promised in the merger proposal. Worse, it was slowing to 50 miles an hour in a world where slow is a death wish. After a brief boost by the merger announcement, the stock began sinking.

With fragmentation at the top, there was no cohesive force strong enough to drive the difficult, nonincremental change that was needed. Out of frustration, the CEO tried at one point to work around his senior team. But he knew, at least intuitively, that the approach was hopeless. Even an extremely talented person does not have enough time, skills, connections, reputation, leadership capacity, and energy to lead change alone except in small groups. Somebody in the firm, again out of frustration, suggested delegating big pieces of the needed change to task forces. That strategy may have been tried once or twice, and, if so, with little effect. When the CEO can't do it, how can a lower-level task force?

It was about a year later that we hired a respected facilitator to run a management meeting. We had the top 100 or so of us over at a Northwestern University conference facility. For the first time we really started getting at the real issue, which of course was the top team itself.

The facilitator who was trying to take us through this process ended up becoming very frustrated and mad. He picked up that we were being very polite and cautious in what we were saying and that we would not engage in the real issues. So I guess he figured it was hopeless unless we were willing to look at ourselves, and he said so. He's the one that started talking about the split into the Blue and Green teams.

After the facilitator let us have it, the meeting the next day became full of "honest conflict." Once we stopped biting our tongues, the management issues came out in a more forthright fashion than ever before—as a much more open, less politically correct
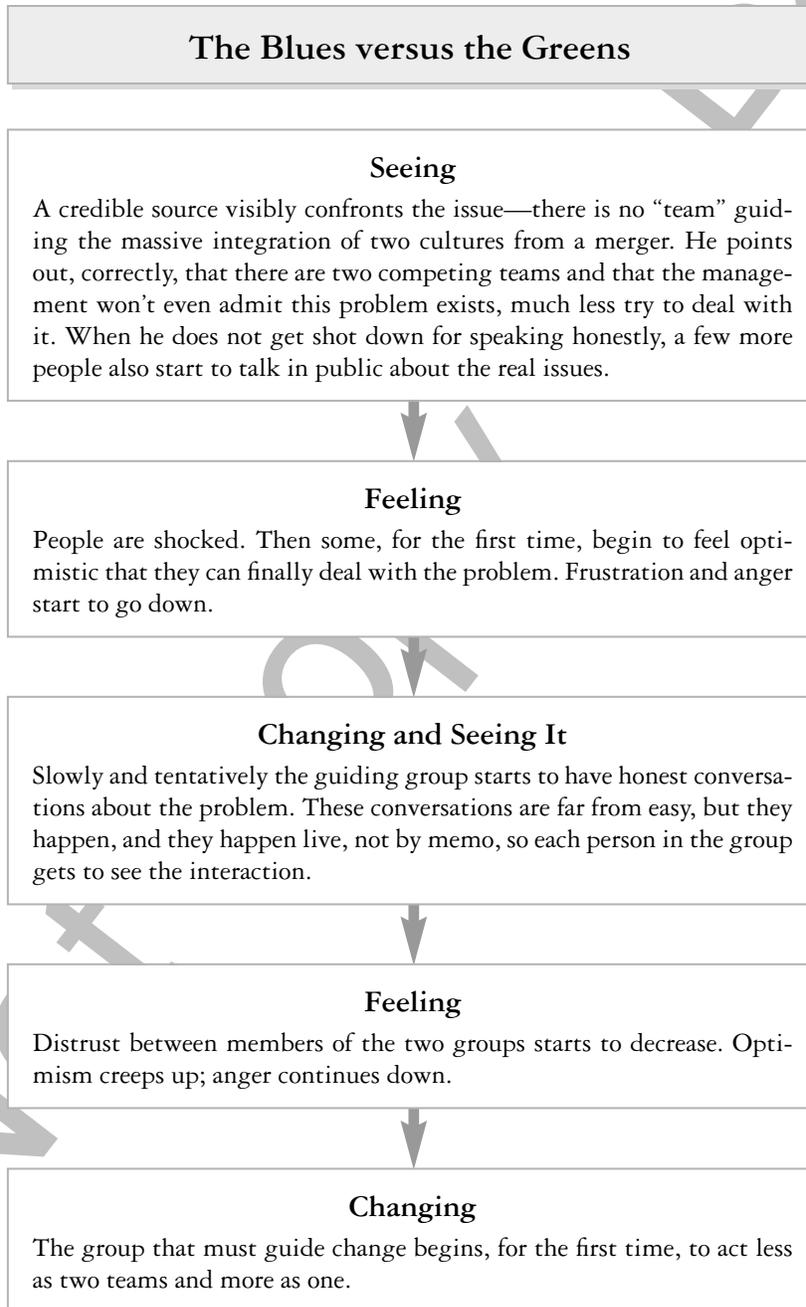
dialogue. People began to let their hair down. "We've been meaning to say this. We've been needing to get it off our chests." I think there was this great relief in letting that out into the open and giving people a chance to respond. If nothing else, we left with a better respect for each other.

From that point, our "leadership team" finally started to become a leadership team. It wasn't a matter of "We had that meeting and now everything is okay." What the meeting did, I think, was allow us to get started. And when the genie is out of the bottle, it's hard to cram it back in. It's been a long road since then in building the new company, but that meeting began a more open dialogue that has helped us build trust and ultimately an actual team.

This company ignored the step 2 challenge at first, then attacked it with an overly intellectualized discussion of "values." In both cases, the underlying feelings creating fragmentation, undermining the formation of a powerful enough guiding group, and blocking progress were largely avoided. This dynamic changed only when someone showed emotionally honest and open behavior, spoke the unspeakable, connected to the feelings of others, and was able to do so without being shot down. Then a team that could drive change began (slowly) to form.

The details of "Blues versus Greens" may be idiosyncratic, but the basic problem is not at all unusual. Large-scale change does not happen well without a powerful guiding force. A fragmented management team cannot do the job, even if the individual members are strong people. A hero CEO doesn't work either—there aren't enough hours in the day for even the strongest executive to accomplish change single-handedly. Lower-level task forces can be a joke—unless you're on the task force, in which case the joke can be much more painful than funny.

Something else is needed.

The Blues versus the Greens

Seeing

A credible source visibly confronts the issue—there is no "team" guiding the massive integration of two cultures from a merger. He points out, correctly, that there are two competing teams and that the management won't even admit this problem exists, much less try to deal with it. When he does not get shot down for speaking honestly, a few more people also start to talk in public about the real issues.

Feeling

People are shocked. Then some, for the first time, begin to feel optimistic that they can finally deal with the problem. Frustration and anger start to go down.

Changing and Seeing It

Slowly and tentatively the guiding group starts to have honest conversations about the problem. These conversations are far from easy, but they happen, and they happen live, not by memo, so each person in the group gets to see the interaction.

Feeling

Distrust between members of the two groups starts to decrease. Optimism creeps up; anger continues down.

Changing

The group that must guide change begins, for the first time, to act less as two teams and more as one.

Putting Together an Effective Guiding Team

A powerful guiding group has two characteristics. It is made up of the right people, and it demonstrates teamwork. By the "right people," we mean individuals with the appropriate skills, the leadership capacity, the organizational credibility, and the connections to handle a specific kind of organizational change. We do not mean "good individuals" in any generic sense. Nor do we necessarily mean the existing senior management committee.

Many factors contribute to putting the wrong people in charge, with history being the most fundamental. Mergers, as in "Blues/ Greens," can leave politically constructed groups at the top. Too much success can leave cronies of cronies running an organization. But instead of confronting the residue of history and making the appropriate changes, we often duck the issues. We leave an inappropriate group in charge, or we dump the work elsewhere. In a pessimistic or cynical mood, we might think that organizational politics inevitably dictate ducking and dumping. But that's not so.

The New and More Diverse Team

From Tom Spector

Until recently, our company was on an acquisition spree, buying large competitors and merging them into our operations. It was a business model that we became very successful with and that produced substantial growth for the company. But now, we've hit the point where there is no one else left to buy. The remaining competitors in the industry are behemoths that are too large to acquire. As a result, our company is grappling with how to transform itself from an organization reliant on growth through acquisition and assimilation

to an organization focused on organic growth. This has required us to contemplate changes to both the internal workings of the company and to the way we service the customer.

The team that had been in charge did a great job with the old, acquisition-focused business model. But with the switch, things began to change. I remember sitting in a café last fall with one of our senior people. He said to me in a soft voice, "Before we used to get a deal done and then work like hell to make it work. It was exciting. Now there's none of that." I think the whole team was feeling a bit this way. The intellectual work of deal making and the adrenaline rush were gone. Now it was communicating constantly to large groups of our employees. It was being visible and not secretive. It was dealing with all the many soft issues and with a much greater need to empower others to do the work.

The deal-maker group, and other management committees in the recent past, had been small and like-minded. This was just the way it was done. They were dominated by people with hundreds of years of combined banking experience who often thought and looked alike. So we had a small and homogeneous group of deal makers in a big and heterogeneous company making a huge transition to internal growth.

If Jack, our COO, had let the flow flow, we probably would have still ended up with a small group of people with similar experiences and skills, even if he had switched a few individuals to move from external growth to internal. I'm sure there were some people, maybe many people, who expected this is the way it would be, and should be. That's not what happened.

I still remember receiving the call from his secretary to inform me that Jack wanted to meet. "I'd like you to participate in our operating committee," he told me. "You have a unique perspective that I think is going to help us mold the future of the company." I was surprised and honored. The management committee? I was very excited to become part of this team. He added, "You have an opportunity on this team to create our future. We probably only have a short time to do this before the industry moves beyond this period of transition.

It's a once-in-a-career opportunity that you should embrace." It was a very inspiring meeting and I signed up on the spot. I was committed to making this work before we even had the first operating committee session.

If I didn't fully appreciate why I was being asked to join this group, it began to sink in when we first got together. There was incredible, and calculated, diversity in the room. I mean astonishing. Every major function in the company was represented—finance, human resources, corporate affairs, and IT. He also chose four regional leaders and one from asset management. He chose one of the four key leaders out of the International Commercial Finance Group—a man who had recently worked for Goldman Sachs before joining us. He picked people at different levels, not just people who reported to him. Overall, the group was full of different perspectives and backgrounds. It was diverse not only in skills but also in the mix. We represented the entire company.

It's been a challenging group to manage. But with leadership from Jack and others, so far we're doing it. With that much diversity you can't expect everyone to easily agree, but that's the point. In a typical exchange, I'll say something like, "The only way we can grow is to spend money on career development. We need to invest in developing an online learning program. Our people need new and different skills to be successful in our transforming organization." This, of course, runs counter to what John, one of our corporate finance guys, believes. "I disagree. We need to drive down our costs and trim head count. We can worry about development later. First we need to streamline." Of course, to some extent we're both right. So we have to think and talk. Ultimately, we usually get to a more balanced and creative solution.

We're still early in our transformation, but so far this group seems to be working extremely well, doing what we had more or less hoped. We're beginning to move in a direction that makes much more sense for the new conditions in which we live. The group driving this is bringing a fresh perspective to shaping the future. It is bringing a

perspective that is less biased or parochial than you normally see, more creative in shaping what needs to come next. And, with its firm-wide credibility, it has a capacity to communicate powerfully to all parts of the organization. This will become very important some-time soon when we have a lot of important news to communicate.

People let the flow flow all the time. The net result is often a group without the right characteristics, which means a group without the power to make the transformation happen, even if the individuals involved are "good" people.

In most highly successful change efforts, as in this story, effective guiding groups are created in the following way:

1. A single individual who feels great urgency usually pulls in the first people.

2. Individuals are selected to have the right combination of capabilities within the team:

    • Relevant knowledge about what is happening outside the enterprise or group (essential for creating vision)

    • Credibility, connections, and stature within the organization (essential in communicating vision)

    • Valid information about the internal workings of the enterprise (essential for removing the barriers that disempower people from acting on the vision)

    • Formal authority and the managerial skills associated with planning, organizing, and control (needed to create the short-term wins)

    • The leadership skills associated with vision, communication, and motivation (required for nearly every aspect of the change process)

3. The team is created by pulling people in and occasionally pushing people out.

   • *Pulling* means just that—showing others the importance of the effort and the privilege of being chosen. People then understand why they have been selected. More important, their hearts are usually touched. So they feel inspired, which leads to an excited acceptance—not "Oh no, another task force!" In highly successful change, this happens even if the membership of the group has been in place for some time. People are still "pulled into" a guiding team for the change effort.

   • In a similar way, when the strains of a new diverse group develop, people are pulled back together with acts that engender a sense of faith and commitment. In "The New and More Diverse Team," Jack was the central person in displaying these acts at first, then he received help from others.

   • If the makeup of the group is wrong, *pushing* means taking steps to correct the problem, even if that means firing someone or performing other difficult, emotion-packed actions. The status quo and momentum from the past do not win.

4. As change progresses throughout large organizations, additional groups are formed at lower levels. These teams help drive action within their units. With multiple levels of drivers, the term *guiding coalition* may be more appropriate than *guiding team* because groups of 50 or 500 are rarely teams in any sense that we normally use the word. If a leap into the future is for only one unit in a big organization, or for all of a small enterprise, then one guiding team may be sufficient.

All too often, this pattern is not found—not even close. The task force problem is pervasive. You see this often with systems projects. A firm's executive committee approves the expenditure of tens of millions of dollars and then hands the responsibility and accountability over to a twelve-person task force staffed mostly by people buried in the organization. Ask the execs about this approach and they say, "Those are the people who understand the technology. So they must be in charge." The members of the task force try to do the job. But they are not expected to create a vision, and they don't. When they do try to communicate something about their objectives or plan, it is ignored or not seen as credible by many people. When they start to bump into barriers—a threatened middle management, the wrong compensation formulas, a resisting executive vice president—they become frustrated and look to someone above them to solve these problems. Top management is preoccupied elsewhere—this is not their job, they are not the software people—so they do little and do it slowly. Others do less, since no one wants to make sacrifices for this task force, especially with the hanging question "If this change is so important, why aren't the real bosses guiding the effort?"

Realizing the problems with individuals and weak committees, frustrated systems consultants are often pushed into creating complex governance structures full of sponsors, cross-functional task forces, ownership teams or owners, and the like. These complex structures are usually an improvement over a single weak committee, which is why people use them. But this approach usually works poorly. Complicated governance systems are never at the core of the enterprise, where the real power lies. They are overlays on top of the existing formal and informal relationships that make the organization function. Using this approach is like sitting on the roof of a house and trying to stick an incredibly complex mechanism down the chimney to move the furniture around. Also, all

too often these overlays are staffed by people who already have full-time jobs. When these people discover that the structure will not work well and that they will receive little credit for their extra effort, they often invest a minimum of time and energy. Without that investment, the structure works even less well. And complex overlays usually add much too much bureaucracy. That slows down decision making. At the extreme, this begins to look silly. It's rather like a family whose problem is that the children need new skills, and whose proposed solution is a project team at the state's Child Services Agency working in conjunction with the Department of Education and the Governor's Task Force on New Skills.

Even when the "what" is understood, the "how" can become mechanistic in ways that fail. "You are on the new team. Here is the agenda. Your job is X and Y." Not addressed are queries full of affect: "But what's the purpose? Can we succeed? What will this demand of me? Can I supply what will be demanded? What about the implications to my career if we do not succeed?" In "New Team," Jack seems to have been sensitive to these issues. He addressed the feelings—softening the negatives (suspicion, fear) and inspiring the positives (optimism, pride). In "Blues/ Greens," a retreat to an overly intellectualized discussion about "values" missed the point.

Unlike many challenges in life, these problems can often be avoided with insight. It's not a tornado, which is out of your control. People *create* guiding team problems. Once you see the issues, you can steer clear of the pitfalls. That's the power of insight. The division president can learn and use the lessons. The employee two levels down can help the division president learn the lessons. But if you are two levels down, remember, finding a way to *show* the boss the issues is much more powerful than a valid but boring memo.

The Issue of Trust

The right group of people is necessary but insufficient. The group must also work together well. Here the key issue seems to be one of trust.

Trust is often missing in senior management teams, although top managers are loath to admit this in public. If the individuals do not need to work together closely, because the work is routine or because the changes are small and can be made slowly, weak trust is not necessarily a problem. With big changes in a fast-moving world, it's a huge problem. How can you create a sensible vision and strategies for the overall group in a team with low trust? People will think of themselves or of their subgroups first and be protective and suspicious. Smart strategy does not emerge from a pond full of politics, parochialism, and guarded communication.

Here's an extreme case of the problem, and a solution. After reading the first two paragraphs, what would you have predicted was possible?

General Mollo and I Were Floating in the Water

From Roland de Vries

The war was over and we knew we had to work together somehow. It was a negotiated peace, not a military victory where one side could impose its will on the other. There was a new nation, and a new army, to build. I was charged with leading a team of officers to develop a vision, strategy, and implementation plan for the merger of the seven armies into one National Defense Force.

We brought together the representatives from the seven groups

that made up the new South African Army. The seven were the Defense Force of the apartheid regime, two liberation armies, and four armies from the homelands. They had been on opposite sides of a long and bitter struggle from which I still carry a few physical scars from a land mine that virtually destroyed the command vehicle I was in. We had been enemies and now we were suddenly being asked to work together to create a unified organization.

The initial meeting was difficult, but not in the way you might think. We were professional soldiers. There was no shouting or shoving. In some ways, it was just the opposite, which maybe was worse. We *sounded* cooperative. "Our new situation requires a new order with a new vision. In order to develop a new vision we need to become trusting, truthful, and candid." The words were nice, but they were clearly just words.

Everyone was cautious, feeling each other out. There was no trust, no truth, and no candor. I doubt if anyone said what was on his mind. Why would you expect anything else? But with the history and the suspicions, I could imagine this group meeting for a year and nothing much changing. More likely, everything would get worse. When the meetings did not resolve anything, or resolve it fast enough, people would start to blame others. That's only human. They would huddle more and more with their groups. It was clear that all the terrible hate and pain could resurface, and then what would happen?

At our second meeting I made a very personal decision. I felt I had to do what I thought was right in this situation. I could not see how we could create one organization unless we could somehow learn to be trustful and candid with each other. Of course it would be difficult. But what was the alternative? So I told them some truth about my situation: "Key people on our side want the new army to be just like our old National Defense Force. They do not want to merge all the elements. They expect me to make everyone else to be like them." I ended my comments by saying "I have no intention of doing that. It does not make sense to me. It is wrong, and I will not do it."

You could say that this was insane. Many things could have happened—less in the meeting than over the following week—that would not have been helpful to the group or to me personally. But was that not the right thing to do? If you spend all your life calculating what is safest, is it a good life?

The conversation could have turned in a number of different directions immediately after my comments. What actually happened was this: Others began to tell similar stories! It did not happen fast, but one person also took a risk, then another. Someone admitted, "I too have people who want no real merging." Another said, "I have people who want everything to be on their terms. They want the new vision to be their old vision." And so on. Not everyone spoke up, but it was still amazing.

With that meeting, we made our first small step in the right direction.

One of the things we then did to get to know each other on a personal basis was to have regular camping trips, which everyone on the team came to enjoy. At night we would sit around an open fire telling war stories. Some of my new colleagues were able to do this more comfortably than others, but we did it. After a few of these, we actually discussed the various battle strategies we used when we were fighting each other. We would also break into smaller groups and just go off and talk to get to know each other on a deeper level.

The "moment of truth" incident for us happened when a boat capsized in the sea, throwing me and Solly Mollo overboard. Solly was a senior commander with the Spear of the Nation liberation army. The two of us were floating in our life jackets for a while when he looked at me and said, "I can't swim." I looked at him and said, "You should not worry because I am a strong swimmer, and I can and will take care of you until we reach the shore." Can you imagine how this must have looked, the two of us hanging onto each other in the open sea?

We floated for over an hour before we were rescued. In order to pass the time, we shared stories with each other. I don't remember

how we got started, but our tales were very personal. We talked about our families and the sacrifices they had to make as a result of our being soldiers. We talked about our feelings on the racial problems that had been pulling our country apart. We talked about issues we faced in bringing two very different cultures together.

The candid conversations, talk around the campfires, floating in the water—many things, by both design and chance, pulled us together. And it is rather amazing, in my opinion, what can happen to a group of enemies.

When we throw up our hands and declare that in *our* situation the teamwork problems are hopelessly difficult, it is useful to remember this story.

Here is a dramatic example of the basic method by which trust is established, no matter the situation. Its lessons include:

- Show people what is needed through modeling (in this story, for example, taking a risk in the second meeting).

- Act in a way that is fiery, that hits the emotions (e.g., "It is wrong and I will not do it").

- As behavior starts to change, add new activities in a different setting (e.g., sitting around the campfire).

- When a "moment of truth" event happens, grab it, then turn it into a story that is told vividly and dramatically, so that it will be passed along to as many people as possible (e.g., clinging to each other while floating in the sea).

- Through all of these steps, help people believe and feel that change is possible, that they can work together, and that a great organization can be built.

People do this in settings far less dramatic than "General Mollo." The protagonists of "Blues/Greens" followed the same basic pattern: The first two points can be seen in the meeting at the university, and the last three in the follow-up to that session.

The key is not "organization" in a managerial sense. Although we often say "Those people need to get organized," here it isn't a matter of formal authority or obedience to status. Both are weak ties if trust is absent. And weakness is a killer when guiding teams go through a big change.

The Mechanics of Meetings

Teamwork, and the underlying feelings of trust and emotional commitment to others, can be undercut by many factors. Individuals who aren't team players or who aren't trustworthy can destroy a group. More subtle, but just as important, is the very mechanical question of meeting format.

How often do you meet and for how long? What is the typical agenda? Who runs the sessions? What work is done outside the formal meetings? Are non–group members welcome? If yes, who and when? Get the format wrong and frustration grows, trust collapses, and you have a guiding team in name only. Get it right and the group pulls together into a sufficiently powerful force to do the work.

Poor meeting structure hurts particularly when a group is new. Smart people make mistakes here all the time. They pull good individuals together, and, because there is some trust and goodwill, they talk about the real issues. They discuss this point, then that one. Then another, and another. Then they go back to the first because it is still important. And they talk and talk—until it starts to drive people nuts.

Meetings Down Under

From Ross Divett

We selected fifty-five people in numerous locations to lead the change in their areas. Our first meeting of this group was held in one of the nicest hotels in downtown Sydney. People from some of our more remote offices arrived on Thursday evening and had the chance to get to know one another and exchange ideas over drinks at the hotel bar. Then on Friday, everyone met in one of the hotel conference rooms for more formal discussion about their roles in leading this change. Our second meeting followed a similar format, but it was held in Melbourne.

There was excitement during the first meetings, and people liked the fact that they had been selected as one of the change effort's key leaders. We discussed the direction of the organization and brainstormed ideas that would help us become more customer focused. But in the second meeting and throughout the third, the discussion started lurching. We'd go one way. Then we'd go another. One person would say, "I have a great idea on how to give our offices a more customer-friendly feel: Let's have our service reps wear name tags, so that customers can get to know them on a first-name basis." Someone else might say, "Yes, and let's redesign our offices so that they're less formal. Let's have seating areas for our customers to read about our services, and give each service rep their own desk." Then somebody else would pipe in with, "I don't think that having our service reps wear name tags, or redesigning our offices, will really change the way we work. The first thing we need to do is scrap our 900-page HR policy manuals." That comment would be counterargued with, "No, no. To really get our employees to change their focus, we need to put in new performance measures. We need to start rewarding people differently."

Everyone had their own ideas about where we should be focusing, so we'd get onto this issue, then off to that one. With all of this

jumping around, we couldn't get into any substantive detail, which was frustrating. We tried to have group votes to determine our top priorities, but that didn't get us anywhere either. Initial enthusiasm for the work drained fast. In a way, the group was still locked into its old command-and-control style. And we were all trying to command and control one another!

On about our fifth session, we tried a new approach. To begin, we scheduled our meeting for a day and a half, as opposed to just one day. When the team arrived, we gave them a detailed schedule of the next two days' activities. At the top of the schedule, one issue was listed: performance management.

The CEO began the first day's activities by stressing how important it was that the group change its focus and work together to reach consensus. She said that we were going to try something new. She said that we had discussed many good ideas, but that it was now time to get to work. From here on out, we would discuss one major issue per meeting, which would last a day and a half. When necessary, we would use a facilitator to help us stay on track.

The rest of the morning began with a guest speaker who talked about the various ways to approach performance management. That started us thinking outside of our own little worlds and gave us new ideas. We then flagged critical issues for changing our performance management system. We used the afternoon to discuss what needed to be done next. We decided that we would begin by surveying employees to determine areas they'd like to see improved.

On day two, we addressed the timeline we were operating under and broke up some of the work that needed to be done over the next couple of weeks. We also identified what most people thought the next meeting's key issue should be, then agreed to have certain team members create discussion documents that would be distributed one week before the next meeting.

We continued to use this format for the rest of our sessions. They were always a day and a half long. Day one always involved a guest speaker; day two always addressed concrete next steps. Complex

issues were assigned to subgroups for more analysis and planning. These subgroups would then report their progress back to the entire group during the next meeting.

It took a couple of sessions for the group to get used to this format, but we soon discovered that whenever we drifted from this formula, we were not as effective.

If an outsider were to attend our meetings now they'd likely be surprised at how little we get sidetracked, at the level of attendance even though people are busy and have to travel, and at how few disruptive sidebar conversations there are. And over time this format has become easier as people have learned to trust the process, and each other.

It took us nine months to turn this big and geographically dispersed group into an effective team, but the payoff has been substantial. We're creating an entirely new organization.

Bad meetings undermine trust, especially with a new group. Here we see a simple, well-known, yet clever approach to this problem. The key is focus and discipline. Have one topic per meeting. Do your homework to better launch the work. Make sure the next steps are clear. Put someone credible in charge. In "Down Under," this formula resulted in better discussions, which reduced frustration. Less frustration helped build the trust that supports teamwork.

This simple but effective formula was not started with a discussion and vote on the format. It was started, mostly, with a demonstration of its power. People could see it work.

The same rules apply in smaller and older groups. Every situation will have its peculiarities that may demand additional or slightly different methods. But the key point is simple: Make sure the formula has been thought out clearly and is not only a product of history.

Overlap among the Eight Steps

In "Down Under" we see an example of how the eight steps overlap, how the sequence is not start step 1, finish step 1, start step 2, finish step 2, and so on. While the Australians were still developing the sort of guiding team that could transform their organization, they began the work of developing a change vision and strategies. They didn't just have a year of "team building" meetings.

A similar overlap can often be found across steps 1 and 2. You are still building urgency among people in general while you begin creating the guiding team in a group that now has a relatively low complacency level. With steps 4 and 5, you are still communicating the change vision to people in general while you start to empower action on that vision among people who now have bought in. With steps 5 and 6, you are still destroying obstacles to action while you are organizing for short-term wins within channels where the obstacles are gone.

You always have to be cautious that you don't recklessly jump ahead. Trying to empower people who don't feel much urgency doesn't work. Trying to produce a third wave of change with no short-term wins won't work. Nevertheless, some overlap in stages is normal.

When the Bosses Seem Hopeless

Just as the CEO in "Down Under" took control of the meetings, so too the boss in charge of any unit to be changed—a division or a department—has to be a central force in the guiding team. For the sake of the credibility of the effort, and to avoid the constant threat of the boss pulling the plug on the change, this is essential. Trying to dance around the most powerful figure is futile. Nevertheless, determined people do try. They try to prop up the

boss, sort of giving him or her cue cards. They try to run around the boss, create their own guiding team with like-minded friends, and then rush ahead to create a vision. But none of this ever works well.

Those who know these facts often retreat. "George can't do it," they say. "So what can I do? Be realistic."

When we run around or retreat, we miss an essential point. If key players are not playing key roles in the guiding team, that usually means their sense of urgency is too low and their complacency or anger or fear too high. Perhaps the organization has been very successful—hence, complacency. Perhaps the boss seriously wonders if he or she can lead a big change and survive—hence, fear. Under those circumstances, the change effort needs to focus on this issue and this issue *alone*. Forget the team and teamwork (step 2). Forget vision (step 3). Forget communication (step 4) and empowerment (step 5). The only issue is urgency (step 1). Period. When the problem is framed this way, we can see how almost anyone can be of help. Remember "Gloves."

Yes, the executive vice president can help, but so can the first-line supervisor. So can the staff professional with no subordinates. So can the consultants. So can a summer student! The key is focusing on the right issue.

This is a very important point, and one we miss all the time. Watch out!

Build the Guiding Team

Help form a group that has the capability—in membership and method of operating—to guide a very difficult change process.

WHAT WORKS

- Showing enthusiasm and commitment (or helping someone do so) to help draw the right people into the group
- Modeling the trust and teamwork needed in the group (or helping someone to do that)
- Structuring meeting formats for the guiding team so as to minimize frustration and increase trust
- Putting your energy into step 1 (raising urgency) if you cannot take on the step 2 challenge and if the right people will not

WHAT DOES NOT WORK

- Guiding change with weak task forces, single individuals, complex governance structures, or fragmented top teams
- Not confronting the situation when momentum and entrenched power centers undermine the creation of the right group
- Trying to leave out or work around the head of the unit to be changed because he or she is "hopeless"

STORIES TO REMEMBER

- The Blues versus the Greens
- The New and More Diverse Team
- General Mollo and I Were Floating in the Water
- Meetings Down Under

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