

## **SURVIVING AND THRIVING IN ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE**

Robin A. Orr, Ph.D.                      Karen L. Zotz, Ed.D.  
University of Illinois                      North Dakota State University  
Champaign-Urbana, Illinois              Fargo, North Dakota

Association of Leadership Educators  
Toronto, Canada  
July 14, 2000

### **Abstract**

The world of yesterday is not the world today. Twenty years ago businesses, organizations, and university systems employees expected continuity, stability, and longevity in their jobs. Today, that is not the case. Change occurs daily in our work and community. We are required to adjust, learn, and move forward as individuals and organizations. Or, we move out of the organization. Organizations are looking within themselves for the initiative to move with the technology of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Individuals are required to adapt and change. Organizations need to look for new alliances and partnerships to support change and growth. The course of action we take within ourselves and as leaders in our organizations will affect the success of surviving and thriving for ourselves, others, and the organization.

## **SURVIVING AND THRIVING IN ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE**

Robin A. Orr, Ph.D. and Karen L. Zotz, Ed.D.  
University of Illinois and North Dakota State University

A challenge for organizations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be renewal and revival of the organization and the personnel that address the needs of the organization and the people they serve. The quality of leadership in an organization influences the course of action and acceptance towards change. Warren Benus and Burt Nanus (1998) see the continuance of organizational components as vision, passion, integrity, self-knowledge, empowerment, and doing things right continuing to be important for the survival of the organization. Benus and Nanus expect other factors like technology to influence organizational change.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Jean-Lipman Blumen (1996) sees change initiating a new form of connectivity in the wireless, digital world. Dr. Blumen's predictions are for short term coalitions, fast-moving flexible organizations, and connections among organizations that force us to deal with an uncertain future. The fundamental shift in leadership will need to address six areas of change in social, political and economic arenas, including: science and technology; military posture, energy appetites and ecological changes; nuclear power; communication and transportation technology; biotechnology and global economics. Big and small companies, big and small university systems will seek out networks and alliances recognizing they can no longer exist by themselves.

John P. Kotter (1996) notes that the globalized economy is forcing organizations to make dramatic change and improvements in order to compete and prosper and survive. The ramifications are like a earthquake. One organizational change precipitates changes within and outside the organization. Major company lay off employees and the local economy is affected. People limit their use of local goods and services or stop buying those goods and services altogether. People leave the community and the school population is reduced, in turn, reducing the number of teachers needed in the classroom.

To avoid this earthquake effect, how do companies, agencies, and organization guide their employees to positive change? What does it require from the leadership to move the organization forward to meet the needs of a globalized economy?

Peter Senge (1990) introduced the idea of learning organizations ten years ago in the *Fifth Disciplines: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. Change agents soon learned that change was not easy. Some change agents even lost their jobs trying to bring about effective changes in their organizations.

We soon learned that making change within an organization required new skills. Change in an organization requires new ways of thinking about people and organizations. Change is not lead from the top but must permeated throughout the organization and requires an individual effort on the part of all employees.

According to Senge (1999), in his latest book, *The Dance of Change*, change requires a willingness, a sense of openness, a sense of reciprocity, a kind of vulnerability. It requires one person to be influenced by another person.

To enable organizational change, the expectation is for small steps toward change. It's like eating an elephant, one bite at a time and you eventually finish the job. Change requires a new learning process for the leader and the people in the organization.

To enable the process, the leader needs to identify people in the organization that will

take the lead. These individuals will informally build networks or support groups within the organization to create new practices that change the organization. Senge (1999) calls these people the "seed carriers."

For change to occur, people need to be able to understand how they will benefit from the changes. They have to see the connection to their future. Senge (1999) goes on to define the 10 challenges of change, sustaining the momentum, and changes of system wide redesign and rethinking.

David Hutchens' (1998) book, *Outlearning the Wolves: Striving and Thriving in a Learning Organization*, uses a metaphor for understanding the issues organizations face when they learn they must learn differently to initiate change. Hutchens' focus on the metaphor enables the reader to look at how learning can lead to change in a simple, entertaining way. It provides an outline to use as you direct a group towards learning in a new way.

Hutchens' capitalizes on the team work of a flock of sheep learning to adapt and make changes within their flock to avoid the hungry pursuit of the wolf pack. The sheep learn about some of the common barriers that can stifle learning and change within their flock (organizations). As is common to organizations anticipating change, in the beginning, the sheep were disabled by false assumptions about the wolves. By working as a team the flock learns that it can face challenges and achieve success by changing the way they work.

Using the metaphor takes some of the serious anticipation away from the process. The metaphor enables people to look outside of their organization and view change through learning in a new way.

#### References:

Hutchens, D. (1998). *Outlearning the Wolves: Striving and Thriving in a Learning Organization*. MA: Pegasus Communications, Inc..

Kotter, J.P. (1996). *Leading Change*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Labarre, P. *Fast Company*, March 2000. Koestenbaum, P. *Do You Have the Will To Lead?*

*Leading Organizations: Perspectives for a New Era*. Editor. Gill Robinson Hickman. Benus, W., and Nanus, B., "Toward the New Millennium." Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishers, 1998.

Lipman-Blumen, J. (1996). *The Connective Edge*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Senge, Peter (1999). *The Dance of Change: Mastering the Twelve Challenges to Change in A Learning Organization*. New York: Doubleday.

Senge, Peter (1990). *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of The Learning Organization*. New York: Doubleday.

Wheatley, M.J. and Kellner-Rogers, M. (1998 ). *A Simpler Way*. Berrett-Koehler.