



## Consultants: Finding the Heart of Organizational Change

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### Abstract

As our world becomes smaller, it is imperative that organizational leaders and managers understand the importance of utilizing consultants to navigate organizational change and the value of understanding that no organization can travel this road alone. The organization that realizes the potential for greatness will seek the help of those who can break through internal politics with objectivity, take a more comprehensive approach to problem-solving and give a bird's eye view of their organization.

In a world that looks much differently than the world of our parents and grandparents, change has become the norm for our society. Each day we are faced with significant challenges which not only change our organizations but the culture and the havoc that it inflicts on our employees' willingness to accept change and commit to the overarching goals and visions of the leaders who are navigating the change process. Edward Cornish, in his book, *Futuring: The Exploration of the Future*, shares Peter Senge's explanation of vision as "a force in people's hearts, a force of impressive power. It may be inspired by an idea, but once it goes further—if it is compelling, enough to acquire the support of more than one person—then it is no longer an abstraction. It is palpable. People begin to see it as if it exists. Few, if any, forces are as powerful as a shared vision."

### Organizational Change – What is it, why is it important

Organizational change is about adjusting management structures and how business is conducted. Organizational change, although a 21<sup>st</sup>-century buzzword, is not a new phenomenon. W. Warner Burke, Professor of Psychology and Education at the Teachers College, Columbia University, explains that the first organizational change was recorded in the Bible in the Old Testament (Exodus 18: 13– 27). It details the story of Moses who had escaped from the tyranny of the Egyptian pharaoh with thousands of Israelites as his followers. Moses had to deal with a daunting number of social system issues; while thousands of his followers

had direct access to him. Moses was a leader, counselor, judge, and minister to all. His father-in-law, Jethro, suggested what would later be known as a reorganization, wherein Moses would select a few good men to be rulers of thousands. These men would have lieutenants who would have rule over hundreds and so forth down to the lowest rulers of 10 persons.

Throughout history, there has been a variety of organizational change initiatives from the Bible to countries and nations, within the church, different organizations, and even in families. However, what is new, is the study of organizational change and the effective accomplishment of planned change and strategy initiatives. Since entering the 21<sup>st</sup> century, our world has changed rapidly by becoming more interconnected by the incredible power of the digital age of personal computers, iPads, cell phones, and social media. Globalization has created a need for leaders who have the conviction to connect across borders of diversity, change, and time where the status quo is no longer acceptable. During this time of change, leaders are needed who have the ability to share the vision with their followers to create organizations that can move past stereotypes, prejudices, and stagnant mindsets.

Globalization has forced every market in the world to “rethink” how they do business. Organizations must align their global consistencies and competencies with their internal practices and strategies. This fast-paced environment needs leaders who are willing to push themselves and others towards a world that is bound together by our connections and move past the brokenness of our differences. How do you know when it is time for culture to change? Simply put, it is time to change when what you have been doing is no longer working. Jaynelle Stichler, Professor of Nursing at San Diego State, shares a wonderful analogy that says, “The only people who like change are babies with wet diapers.” She further expresses that people have great difficulty letting go of what is familiar even when it no longer works.

Organizations across the globe are continually changing whether they want it or even know it. Everywhere you look, there are new personnel, new economic conditions, new needs, new policy, and new directives, which are evidenced in an ever-changing global environment. At this critical time, it is important and productive for leaders to understand the value of consultants, those who are trained to understand the nature of change and how to harness it. An experienced consultant can lead your organization to discuss your concerns and questions about change and how it will affect your organization. They are willing to ask the “hard” questions that are intended to encourage your organization to think about each stakeholder’s role in embracing change.

## **Trends in Organizational Change and Development**

As organizations enter this new era of rapid, dramatic and often turbulent changes, understanding change and how to navigate it has become a viable part of the success or failure of many organizations. Joo-Seng Tan, an Associate Professor of Management at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore, suggests the following emerging trends affecting organizations across the globe:

- Globalization – for organizations to be successful, they are faced with more competition, greater economic interdependence, and collaboration. With more products and services being consumed outside their country of origin, companies have to adapt corporate and business strategies, marketing plans, and production efforts to local domestic markets.
- Diversity – with globalization and changing demographics, diversity is increasing in organizations. Today, the number of people who live outside the country of their birth has significantly increased. According to Joachim Hagopian, a contributor to Global Research contends that the number of people living outside their nation of origin has risen from 120 million in 1990 to an estimated 215 million in 2012. According to the U.S. Census projections published in 2012, the U.S. population will be considerably older and more racially and ethnically diverse by 2060. Although no ethnic group will make up the

majority, 57 percent of the current minorities (Black, Hispanic, Asian, American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians) will be the “new” majority by 2060.

- **Flexibility** – Changes in business and operational processes coupled with globalization have created a need for organizations to become more flexible and adaptable. Leaders and employees have to become more flexible in developing skills and strategies in working with diverse groups of people within the workplace and across the globe. Organizations are trying to navigate the difficult process of constantly changing and restructuring to increase flexibility and decrease costs.
- **Flat Organizations** - Organizations across the globe are requiring significant changes from hierarchal, micro-managed operational styles toward organizational models based on “flattened” hierarchies. Flat organizations provide a framework for process-oriented companies where decisions are made at the lowest possible level. The quest for decentralization focuses on creating an organization that can make decisions quicker without the control of more centralized organizational structures.
- **Networks** – Many organizations have downsized to just their core competencies and are now outsourcing all other functions. Networked organizations are important to industries with complex products where technologies and customer needs change rapidly. This structure allows for more flexibility and creates a more competitive marketplace while creating a new tension of independence and interdependence.

Joo-Seng Tan proposes the following breakdown that focuses on each trend and the tensions that are developing:

Trends	Tensions
<b>Globalization</b>	Global versus Local
<b>Diversity</b>	Heterogeneity versus Homogeneity
<b>Flexibility</b>	Flexibility versus Stability
<b>Flat</b>	Centralization versus Decentralization
<b>Networks</b>	Interdependence versus Independence

## Challenges

Change is never easy. Any parent will provide many stories of how parenting from one phase to the next phase is never a smooth transition. Like parenting, organizational change will have its moments of victory and moments of defeat. However, the end goal is changing the organization to meet the demands of the global marketplace. The following are challenges that most organizations encounter:

- **Change Fatigue** – Ken Perlman, an engagement leader at Kotter International, describes that when individuals are stretched to their limits and are overly stressed, the need to change can become overwhelming and “change fatigue,” sets in. W. Warner Burke suggests that stakeholders may argue that change is diverting them from the *real* work and may focus on history in order to avoid the change. Burke further equates organizational change with losing weight, the first 5 or 10 pounds are easy, but the next 5 or 10 are tougher.

- The Sense of No Control - People feel forced to change without input. Burke once more asserts that although most people are not naturally resistant to change, they do resist change when they feel that their freedom is in jeopardy. He also advocates that research “shows that when a smoker is *told* to stop smoking, the typical reaction is either to continue as usual or increase the rate. Because most change is from the top down with any input from those at varying levels within the organization, the first reaction is almost a blind resistance to change whether it is in their best interests or not.
- Sustainability – Will the organization have the skills to ensure that the levels of change can last over time? Sustainability requires the organization to embrace the capacity for change while developing continuous innovation and transformation. If stakeholders lack the capacity to change, sustainability will become a distant dream.

### What Effective Consultants Offer

No matter where you turn, there is an “expert” on EVERYTHING. If you need help with something, there is someone who can show you how to do it better; from ‘Life Coaches,’ ‘Career Coaches,’ ‘Personal Trainers,’ to ‘Leadership Coaches.’ However, the experienced consultant understands that their job is more than just telling you what to do. A consultant’s education, experience, and expertise often provide them with the knowledge skill set to effectively motivate change using skillful communication skills that help individuals and businesses navigate the uncertain terrain of organizational change.

In a volatile and continuously changing global society, consultants are able to assist your organization in implementing positive organizational change by helping to identify challenges that affect the business and assist in creating formidable plans of action that fit your leadership styles, organization’s goals, and workforce dynamics. The experienced consultant understands that they are giving more than advice. They provide leadership with successful concepts and techniques that undergird organizational effectiveness to adapt future strategy and behavior to environmental change.

Your organization has no doubt been the victim of the “flavor of the month” concept when it comes to new strategies and initiatives. Additionally, like some organizations you may believe that the more things change the more they stay the same. However, using a consultant can help you change this mindset by assisting your leadership and managers in the process of organizational design and implementing initiatives in ways that will produce lasting changes for the organizations. The goal is to guide your organization through the process of embedding procedural and behavioral change long before the “real” change initiatives get under way. Effective consultants can assist you in creating an environment, which enables employees to take ownership of the new processes and integrate them in their day-to-day work. This is done through initially defining the changes, creating learning opportunities, which redefine and realign the processes to enable change to thrive.

The effective consultant utilizes their gifts and talents to offer objectivity, a comprehensive approach, with a bird’s eye view of your organization to assist you in defining problems, evaluating possible solutions, and choosing the best way to implement those solutions.

### Final Thoughts

Organizational change and development are definitely complicated and can be quite time-consuming. Michelle Randall, President of Enriching Leadership International, uses a compelling analogy of comparing an organization with an artichoke. The artichoke has many layers, and some of them are thorny, however, at its core is a heart. She eloquently states, “At the core of our interactions there are people. Through the maze of shifting cultures, we’re really just looking to connect, listen, build relationships, and lead. And if you leave an artichoke on the stalk, it will blossom into a beautiful flower.” The dedicated consultant has taken the time to

develop a real understanding of organizations and their various cultures. They are willing to look at every layer, even the thorny ones, to get to the heart of your people and will work tirelessly to get to the heart of the artichoke and help make change a reality in the way you do business in this ever-changing global society.

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### **About the Author**

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