



Becoming an Effective Change Leader

By Carol Rovello, SPHR

Poor planning and inconsistent execution of change initiatives can stop a company in its tracks. Very often the HR leader becomes the change agent by default, with a reactive role in cleaning up the backlash from employees and scrambling to pick up the pieces of a well-intentioned initiative. But HR leaders can take a more proactive role, carefully planning and executing change initiatives to minimize resistance and ensure a better chance of success. The HR leader is in the best position to serve as the primary change agent, overseeing the key elements of organization development from a strategic perspective.

When I help organizations through major change initiatives, I typically combine the following three complementary models: organizational development (OD), appreciative inquiry (AI), and Invitational Workplace Strategy© (IWS)¹. An integration of these approaches can help your organization to:

- establish common goals that better align with your strategic goals
- reduce stakeholder fear and resistance
- facilitate a collaborative approach to increase stakeholder ownership in the initiative
- build and maintain trust among employees at all levels
- stay focused on the desired outcomes
- create a climate of accountability

OD is a well-established change model. It is “an effort (1) planned, (2) organization-wide, and (3) managed from the top, to (4) increase organization effectiveness and health through (5) planned interventions in the organization’s processes, using behavioral-science knowledge.”² Today, OD well known as a *systems approach to change* that helps you guide your organization on a particular course of action to meet established goals. While it requires senior leadership commitment, it should be more collaborative than authoritative (top down) in order to engage your employees and better ensure their ownership of both the process and its outcomes.

¹ IWS is adapted from the Invitational Education Model that serves as the basis for the International Alliance for Invitational Education’s work. See website: www.iaie.net.

² Richard Beckhard, *Organization Development: Strategies and Models*, 1969

OD stresses the development of clear goals/objectives followed by equal attention to process, structure, and relationships. Process is essentially your approach, e.g. who will be involved, what are the major phases, what are the benchmarks for completion. Structure provides your tools for organization and accountability. Relationships are built and nurtured throughout the OD process and communication is key. In fact, creating a preliminary communication plan should be the first thing you do when you become aware of an impending change initiative.

When you utilize the tenets of AI, you follow goal setting with the identification of what is already working well – what are we doing that is already leading us to this desired result/outcome? AI suggests that building on strengths, figuring out how to expand on what is already working, is a really good way to begin your planning after the goals/objectives have been established.

The objective of IWS© is to create a workplace that cordially summons everyone associated with it, employees and customers alike, to be successful. Its four core values of respect, intentionality, trust, and optimism integrate well with OD's focus on relationships (respect, intentionality, and trust) and AI's strategy to focus first on what is working (optimism).

The basic principles of OD are as follows:

- **Engagement** – getting employee attention and maintaining their interest
- **Involvement** – creating a viable means for input
- **Empowerment** – creating a sense of importance and encouraging independent thinking
- **Relationships** – facilitating interpersonal, intra and inter-group, within and across work units
- **Structure** – planning & organizing in order to effectively lead

Having an intentional process that fosters good working relationships and utilizes sufficient structure will help you guide your organization toward goal attainment. So, start with the end in mind, communicate-communicate-communicate, and remember that you have two desired outcomes – to achieve the established goals/objectives AND to have a meaningful process. When you make the “process” as important as the “product,” you will not just achieve your current organizational goals. You will also better position your company for successfully executing future change initiatives.

If you would like sample OD questions to guide the development of your process, structure, and relationship strategies for your organization's upcoming change initiative, send your request via email to: carol@strategic-workplace-solutions.com.



Carol Rovello is President of Strategic Workplace Solutions, LLC. She has provided HR/OD consulting services for 25 years and was selected as the NCSHRM 2009 State HR Professional of the Year.