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***Leading and Controlling Change:
A Role for Defence's Senior Leadership***

By / par Capt(N) R. Westwood

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ABSTRACT

Over the past ten years the Canadian Forces and the Department of National Defence have experienced change at an extraordinary rate. The pace of change has had an impact on the organization and its people; they are growing tired of change and showing signs of cynicism and burnout commonly associated with “change fatigue”. Nevertheless, requirements of the current environment dictate that organizations must continue to implement change. The senior leadership of Defence has recognized this new reality and it has developed a vision and strategy aimed at organizational renewal. This paper argues that having a strategy alone is not enough. It seeks to demonstrate that Defence must become an adaptive organization with a senior leadership whose primary role is to lead and control change.

A fundamental tenet for successfully implementing the strategy and its integral objectives is gaining and maintaining control of the change agenda within the organization. In addition, senior leadership needs to build an adaptive organization – an organization that will be more receptive to change. These two steps are essential to continued progress towards the objectives of the strategy. Senior leadership must play a key role in leading change within the organization.

LEADING AND CONTROLLING CHANGE:
A ROLE FOR DEFENCE'S SENIOR LEADERSHIP

By

Captain(Navy) R. Westwood

“The overriding function of management is to provide order and consistency to organizations whereas the primary function of leadership is to produce change and movement. Management is about seeking order and stability; leadership is about seeking adaptive and constructive change.”¹

INTRODUCTION

Over the past ten years the Canadian Forces and the Department of National Defence, referred to collectively as *Defence*, have experienced change at an extraordinary rate. In addition, to reacting to events such as the end of the Cold War and the fallout from the Somalia Inquiry², Defence has contended with a number of Government-mandated and self-initiated changes aimed at improving effectiveness and efficiency. Defence is not alone; change is permeating our society at an unparalleled rate. Champy and Nohria see it as follows:

“Without a doubt, today’s ever-quickenning cycle of change is unprecedented. Change is faster, more erratic, more elemental than ever before. A collision of technological, competitive, and cultural pressures is forming the vortex of what we have begun to call the ‘information age.’”³

¹ Peter G. Northouse, Leadership Theory and Practice. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publication Inc., 1997, 8.

² Officially called the *Commission of Inquiry into the Deployment of the Canadian Forces to Somalia*. Fallout from this inquiry plus a number of other unsavoury incidents resulted in the Minister of National Defence, the Honourable Doug Young, launching a detailed review into the state of the Canadian Forces. In March 1997, the review eventually led to the initiation of a comprehensive program of change in the Canadian Forces and the Ministry of Defence. The majority of the required changes have since been effected.

³ James Champy and Nitin Nohria, Fast Forward: The Best Ideas on Managing Business Change. Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing, 1996, xiii.

Rapid advances in information technology have resulted in the increased quantity and the immediate availability of information. This proliferation of information is helping to fuel the requirement for change and to accelerate the change cycle.

The pace of change has had an impact on the organization and its people; they are growing tired of change and showing signs of cynicism and burnout commonly associated with “change fatigue”⁴. After successfully executing a substantial change agenda during the past decade, they are seeking a degree of stability. After all in the past, periods of intense change have always been followed by a period of stability when organizations have learned to function in their new environment and structures. However, such a period of stability is very unlikely to occur today. The pace of change shows no signs of abating, rather it appears to be quickening and becoming more pervasive. All organizations, both public and private, need to be able to adapt to, and take advantage of, this new environment. This does not mean change for change sake but it does mean that organizations must be agile: ready to accept continuous change, capable of planning and controlling change and capable of implementing required changes in a timely manner.

The senior leadership of Defence has recognized this new reality to a certain extent and has taken steps to prepare the organization for the future. It has developed a

⁴ The Vice Chief of Defence Staff's office sponsored an Alternate Service Delivery Capacity Check conducted in the spring of 2001. The check was conducted through interviews of managers at the Director level at National Defence Headquarters and Commanding Officers of units in the Formations. Change Management was one of the areas covered in the report that found “There is a perception that the Department is plagued with change fatigue. Middle managers are most affected by change. This has an impact on productivity, which may actually impede change.” Canada, DND. ASD Capacity Check Assessment. Prepared for VCDS by KPMG Consulting LP, May 2001.

mission statement and a vision⁵ for the organization and with this base has further developed a strategy, *Shaping the Future of the Canadian Forces: A Strategy for 2020*.⁶ (This document is commonly known as *Strategy 2020*.) This strategy recognizes the changing environment in which Defence operates and “it provides a roadmap on how best to implement Canada’s Defence Policy in light of emerging defence challenges.”⁷ It further articulates eight long-term strategic objectives that underpin Defence’s agenda for change.

This brings us to where we sit today; we find ourselves faced with a conundrum.

levels and includes the need to stop change initiatives that do not contribute to strategic objectives.

NATURE OF CHANGE

Before developing the thesis further, it is necessary to characterize change. Change can be characterized in a number of different ways. Conner tells us “change is not an event, it is a process triggered by an event. Some of these events are voluntary, some are imposed, and many just seem to happen.”⁸ He goes on further to explain that the process that humans rely on to respond to these triggering events is known as “change.”

Ackerman considers change that affects organizations under three broad categories: development, transition and transformation.⁹ **Development change** can be generally defined as an improvement of an existing skill, method or condition. It is often thought of as a logical adjustment to normal operations. We encounter these types of changes daily in both our private and professional lives.¹⁰ Although we are not always comfortable with development change particularly when there is a lot of it, we usually understand it as an incremental improvement on the status quo and are able to contend with it readily. **Transitional change** is the implementation of a known new state. Leadership decides to change what exists and implement something new and is prepared

⁸ Darryl R. Conner, Leading at the Edge of Chaos: How to Create the Nimble Organization. New York: John Wiley and Sons Inc., 1998, vii.

⁹ Linda S. Ackerman, “Development, Transition or Transformation: The Question of Change in Organizations.” in Organization Development Classics: The Practice and Theory of Change – The Best of the OD Practitioner, eds. Donald F. Van Eynde, Judith C. Hoy and Dixie Cody Van Eynde, San Francisco: Josey-Bass Publishers, 1997, 45 – 58.

¹⁰ Ibid., 46.

to manage the interim transition state over a controlled period of time. Transitions may include reorganizations, mergers, divestiture, and introduction of new computer technology, products or services.¹¹ The key characteristic of transitional change is that the end state is known. Although transition is more difficult than development, it can be implemented effectively in most organizations through planning, communication and parallel management of both the ongoing operations and the transitional change.

Transformational change is the emergence of a totally new state, unknown until it takes shape, out of the remains of the old state. Transformation results from an organization's failure to handle its current environmental demands. It is the most difficult form of change and usually takes considerable time to implement. Often transformations take place as a series of transitions with each phase being carefully planned and implemented as the next phase is conceived. Although such an approach helps to ease transformation, it does not eliminate the overall feeling in the organization that it is out of control.¹²

Another common approach to defining types of change breaks change down into two categories: evolutionary and revolutionary. Revolution or drastic change

“... is discontinuous and often forced on the organization or mandated by top management in the wake of major technological innovations, scarcity or abundance of critical resources, or by sudden changes in the regulatory, legal, competitive or political landscape. Under such circumstances, change may happen quickly and often involves significant pain. Evolutionary change, by contrast, is gentle, incremental, decentralized, and over time produces a broad and lasting shift with less upheaval.”¹³

¹¹ Ibid., 46 - 48.

¹² Ibid., 48 - 51.

¹³ Debra E. Meyerson, “Radical Change, The Quiet Way.” Harvard Business Review, October 2001, 94.

It would appear that all development change could be considered evolutionary and all transformation revolutionary. Transition would also tend to be evolutionary but in extreme cases might also be considered revolutionary.

We should also recognize that change in any organization is difficult. Boleman and Lee tell us that change inevitably generates four categories of issue.¹⁴ Firstly, because it affects the ability of people to feel effective, valued and in control, major change should be accompanied by collateral investments in training. Then, as change undermines existing organizations and relationships, resulting in ambiguity, confusion and distrust, there is a requirement to revise and realign structures to support the new direction. Thirdly, change usually creates conflict. This conflict must be resolved in open “arenas” where ideas can be exchanged and divisive issues can be forged into shared agreements. Finally, some loss of meaning for people is an unavoidable by-product of change and a support program or mechanism must be provided that allows for people to let go of the old and build an affinity for the new. “Effective change requires a well-orchestrated, integrated design that responds to needs for learning, realignment, negotiation, and grieving.”¹⁵

The key points to be made here are that change has varying degrees of complexity and that the more complex the change, the more difficult it will be to implement. We must also note that change has a considerable impact on the people in the organization undergoing the change. “Change as it is usually orchestrated, creates initiative overload and organizational chaos, both of which provoke strong resistance from the people most

¹⁴ Lee Boleman and Terrence E. Deal, Reframing Organizations. San Francisco: Josey-Bass Inc., San Francisco, 1997, 318 - 339.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 339.

affected.”¹⁶ Hence to be effective, the implementation of change must recognize the needs of the people and must include appropriate measures to address those needs.

CHANGE IS HERE TO STAY

There are a number of people in the Defence organization who believe that following this flurry of change activity associated with the end of the Cold War and Government restructuring there will be a respite. As outlined in the introduction to this paper, this is unlikely to be the case. Fundamental to understanding today’s environment is an understanding that change is becoming the natural state of affairs. Conner believes we are living at the edge of chaos, caught in a discontinuity between two eras in human evolution.¹⁷ “Regardless of how ready people are to face it, more change is moving toward us at greater speeds and with more complicated implications than we have ever seen.”¹⁸

Conner’s thesis that change will continue at this breakneck pace for the foreseeable future is supported by most. The majority of recent books and articles on the subject of change management agree that change, as we have recently come to know it, is here to stay and we must learn to cope with it and use it to advantage. Another leading author on the subject of change, Kotter, comments “The change problem inside organizations would become less worrisome if the business environment would soon stabilize or at least slow down. But most credible evidence suggests the opposite: that the

¹⁶ Abrahamson, Eric, “Change Without Pain.” Harvard Business Review, July – August 2000, 75.

¹⁷ Conner, ix.

¹⁸ Ibid., ix.

rate of environmental movement will increase and that the pressures on organizations to transform themselves will grow over the next few decades.”¹⁹

Continuous change in Defence will be driven by a number of phenomena that are impacting all organizations. “Three major drivers are stirring change faster: technology, the changing role of government in business, and globalization.”²⁰ For example, rapid developments in computer-based technology are leading to continuous updates in the communications and command and control systems that are used by all elements of an armed force. The speed of advancements in this particular field, results in new equipments and systems being obsolete as soon as they are introduced. As a result, new fast-track procurement processes must be found in order to satisfy requirements in a timely manner. Globalization is also a driving factor. Many of the companies that provide products and services to Defence are competing within the global economy. Since Defence is not large enough to dictate the marketplace, the way that these companies respond to globalization has both direct and indirect impacts on the Defence organization and its operations. All organizations need to recognize this new environment and structure themselves for responding appropriately.

Within Defence today, there are a number of other factors, more directly related to the unique Defence mission that are also driving the change agenda. Lieutenant-General Macdonald sees it as follows:

“We live in a period where change is precipitated by new technology, changing defence needs, personnel demographics, new threats, and

¹⁹ John P. Kotter, Leading Change. Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1996, 30.

²⁰ Champy and Nohria, xiii.

regional conflicts that we never imagined. We are really not, therefore, in an 'era' of change, but in a continuum of discontinuous change."²¹

Defence has always coped with new technology; in the past many of the major changes realized have been based on the introduction of new weapon systems. All elements of the Canadian Forces have learned to assimilate the introduction of these new technologies while maintaining operational effectiveness. The difference this time around is the advent of the so-called "Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA). "Reduced to its simplest, RMA is a major change in the nature of warfare brought about by the innovative application of new technologies which, combined with dramatic changes in military doctrine and organizational concepts fundamentally alters the character and conduct of military operations."²² If the RMA evolves as most predict, it will result in profound and pervasive change in all modern military organizations.²³

Like most other organizations, Defence faces an unpredictable future. "If there is one inescapable conclusion, it is that all companies and institutions (including governments) now must redefine themselves. The fundamental forces at play are too compelling to deny the future."²⁴ Survival requires that the Defence organization adapt

²¹ Lieutenant-General George C. Macdonald, "Leadership in an Era of Change and Complexity." in Generalship and the Art of the Admiral: Perspectives on Canadian Senior Military Leadership, eds. Brend Horn and Stephen J. Harris, St. Catherines, Ontario: Vanwell Publishing Limited, 2001, 172.

²² Canada. DND. Shaping the Future of the Canadian Forces: A Strategy for 2020. Ottawa: NDHQ, June 1999, 1.

²³ The intent here is not to discuss the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) in any detail. RMA is a controversial subject. Is it truly revolutionary or rather evolutionary and a natural extension of applying new information technology in a military environment? Will it really result in a fundamental change in military operations? The answers to these questions are not overly important to the paper's thesis. What is important is to realize that whatever form RMA takes on, it will help to drive the future change agenda in Defence.

²⁴ Champy and Nohria, xv.

within this changing global environment. In order to remain effective in its rapidly changing world, Defence will need to continue with its previously initiated program of reform and renewal. Fortunately senior leadership has recognized the need to “adapt to change in a rapidly evolving, complex and unpredictable world.”²⁵ The challenge that remains ahead is to move the Defence organization towards this important goal.

RESPONDING TO STRATEGY 2020

Defence has situated itself to deal with the demanding change environment through the development of its 2020 strategy. Strategy 2020 recognizes the changing environment and outlines an agenda for change. Developed in June 1999, it fills a huge void in Defence by articulating a corporate strategy endorsed by senior management where no such strategy previously existed. Strategy 2020’s change agenda is aggressive calling for progress against eight objectives and setting five-year targets in each of these eight areas.²⁶ One has to wonder if perhaps it is too aggressive and perhaps too broad.

²⁵ Canada. DND. Shaping the Future of the Canadian Forces: A Strategy for 2020., Foreword.

²⁶ The eight defence objectives are:

1. Innovative Path: Create an adaptive, innovative path into the future.
2. Decisive Leaders: Develop and sustain a leadership climate that encourages initiative, decisiveness and trust while improving our leaders’ abilities to lead and manage effectively.
3. Modernize: Field a viable and affordable force structure trained and equipped to generate advanced combat capabilities that target leading age doctrine and technologies relevant to the battlespace of the 21st century.
4. Globally Deployable: Enhance the combat preparedness, global deployability and sustainability of our maritime, land and air forces.
5. Interoperable: Strengthen our military to military relationships with our principal allies ensuring interoperable forces, doctrine and command, control, communications, computers and intelligence.
6. Career of Choice: Position Defence as a rewarding, flexible and workplace that builds professional teams of innovative and highly skilled men and women dedicated to accomplishing the mission.
7. Strategic Partnerships: Establish clear strategic, external partnerships to better position Defence to achieve national objectives.

By identifying eight strategic objectives and not setting priorities on these objectives, it may be attempting to do too much, too quickly. Can an organization already reeling from change handle the enormous challenge presented by Strategy 2020? The Japanese concept of “hoshin” warns us “...no enterprise - small/large - public/private - for profit/not for profit - can afford to deal with more than two or three strategic level initiatives at any one time. Otherwise we get dilution of time, energy and effort and nothing gets done well.”²⁷

In response to Strategy 2020, the Vice Chief of Defence Staff’s office has established a Directorate of Strategic Change and developed a Strategic Change Framework. These are two necessary steps in support of implementing the long-term change strategy. The Strategic Change Framework recognizes that change within the organization must be continuous and that there is a need to build an adaptive culture within Defence.

Despite these positive steps, there remains considerable work to accomplish. The entire organization has yet to accept either the vision or the need to become adaptive; quite simply the organization is not yet comfortable with change. The importance of developing this adaptive type of culture cannot be stressed enough. Lamarsh’s research revealed that most current organizations have yet to build processes for facilitating change into their organizational cultures:

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8. Resource Stewardship: Adopt a comprehensive approach to planning, management and comptrollership, focused on operational requirements, that prepares us to respond rapidly and effectively to change.

²⁷ Lieutenant-General (Ret’d) Sutherland, “Human Resource Framework.” National Security Studies Course 4, Canadian Forces College, Toronto, 03 April 2002

“Companies have some work to do; the culture must integrate the value of change, change management, and change supportive behaviors into the organization. If not, employees will resist change – even those they feel are good – because they do not believe these changes can happen.”²⁸

In addition, elements of the Defence team continue to pursue change initiatives that are not linked to the strategy or are very low on the priority list. An organization has a finite change potential and cannot afford to squander this potential in pursuit of changes that do not support the corporate change agenda.

Kotter argues that a sense of urgency must be developed within the organization before change can proceed successfully. He believes that “ a majority of employees, perhaps 75 percent of management overall, and virtually all of the top executives need to believe that considerable change is absolutely essential.”²⁹ Arguably, Defence has not yet reached this stage. In developing Strategy 2020 in June 1999, the senior leadership of Defence had achieved the required sense of urgency within their cadre. However, this same sense of urgency was not necessarily shared by management overall or by the majority of personnel.

A further complication results in maintaining consistency of the vision and the strategy at all levels of the Defence organization. Key senior leadership positions change every two to three years. This characteristic of the organization requires that the vision and strategy be inculcated into the lower levels of the organization much more strongly than in most private corporations which can maintain continuity of leadership through long-term change programs. “Even more so, without a good vision, a clever strategy or a

²⁸ Jeanenne Lamarsh, Changing the Way We Change: Gaining Control of Major Operational Change. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1996, 108.

²⁹ Kotter, Leading Change, 48.

logical plan can rarely inspire the kind of action needed to produce major change.”³⁰ The future effectiveness of Defence is dependent on senior leadership’s ability to inculcate its vision and strategy throughout the organization.

Strategy 2020 provides a good start to preparing the Defence organization for the change that it will face in the new millennium. The challenge that lies ahead for Defence is how to execute that strategy and its ambitious change agenda in an organization that is already showing tell tale signs of fatigue. Somehow, Defence while pursuing change simultaneously needs to introduce a sense of stability within the organization. The key appears to be to introduce a degree of stability in two ways. First, by applying some structure and discipline to change within the organization and second by transitioning the organization to the point that it is truly an adaptive organization – an organization that is comfortable with a continuous change agenda. Senior leadership needs to align its efforts at gaining, and maintaining, control of the organization’s change agenda and leading a cultural renewal aimed at building an adaptive organization. The remainder of this paper looks at these two steps (Controlling the Change Agenda and Building an Adaptive Organization) in further detail. The paper will conclude by examining the key role that senior leadership must play if these efforts are to be successful.

CONTROLLING THE CHANGE AGENDA

Although Defence Strategy 2020 provides a seemingly comprehensive agenda for required change, by all standards it is an ambitious agenda. One is led to question

³⁰ Kotter, Leading Change, 71.

whether this strategy can be executed in the way that it is packaged and being sold to the organization. The editors of the Harvard Business Review have recently commented:

*“But the thinking about change is changing. A number of management experts have recently begun to assert that executives need the guts to say no to revolution. Radical change can impose more stress on an organization than it can bear and end up destroying what makes a company [organization] viable, if not wildly successful. By all means, they say, change continually, but do it incrementally, even in these turbulent times.”*³¹

Beer and Nohria report that 70% of all change initiatives fail and “the reason for most of those failures is that in their rush to change their organizations, most managers end up immersing themselves in an alphabet soup of initiatives”.³² In many respects, our experience in Defence has been quite similar. When this current wave of change first commenced in the 1990s, we sought any number of quick fix solutions or “fads” aimed at immediate transformation of the organization to function efficiently and effectively in a rapidly changing environment. We tried functional review, business process reengineering, total quality management and a host of others with a mixed success rate. The problem is not so much that many of these initiatives failed but rather they consumed valuable resources and through failure increased resistance to further change. There is no doubt that change within Defence must continue but it needs to be properly focused. A higher degree of control on the change agenda is required; for change to proceed, it should contribute to overall defence objectives.

³¹ “Change is Changing.” Harvard Business Review, April 2001, 125.

³² Michael Beer and Nitin Nohria, “Cracking the Code of Change.” Harvard Business Review, May – June 2000, 133.

In this paper, as in considering Defence's change agenda, we are considering all types of change. We need to recognize that there must be a degree of control on all types of change. Just because there is development change that can be relatively easily implemented by one element of the organization does not mean that it should proceed. It should align with the overall strategy of the organization or else it runs the risk of utilizing valuable resources or impacting other elements of the organization in an undesirable way. The same is true more obviously of transition and transformation changes; these are usually whole organization efforts driven by the corporate strategy but if they are not, they still should align with the organization's overall strategy. Too often in the past, individual elements of the organization have taken on change that has not contributed to the organization's overall objectives while wasting resources and moving the organization in the wrong direction. Some structure and discipline needs to be applied to the initiation of change.

The key to introducing structure and discipline to the change process is to develop a strategy with clear objectives. The majority of, if not all of, the change implemented should be directly related to these objectives and the priority should also be clearly linked to the strategy. As previously mentioned, Strategy 2020 is too broad based to provide the required degree of control on the change agenda. It should be reviewed with an eye to setting priorities and focusing the Defence Team's efforts on the two or three objectives that are most crucial to the future. One possible way to accomplish this would be to focus the strategy on the following three objectives from Strategy 2020:

3. Modernize: Field a viable and affordable force structure trained and equipped to generate advanced combat capabilities that target leading edge doctrine and technologies relevant to the battlespace of the 21st century.
4. Globally Deployable: Enhance the combat preparedness, global deployability and sustainability of our maritime, land and air forces.
5. Interoperable: Strengthen our military to military relationships with our principal allies ensuring interoperable forces, doctrine and command, control, communications, computers and intelligence.

Focusing on these three objectives and building a succinct vision around them would narrow the scope of the strategy to the point that it should be executable. This does not mean that the rest of the 2020 objectives are not important but rather they can be considered more as enablers than objectives. Corporate priority needs to put behind these core initiatives in order to provide a vehicle for driving the required change. In turn, this will allow priorities to be set on the change agenda.

Once the strategy has been focused, clear linkages need to be developed between the myriad of initiatives at all levels of the organization and the ultimate strategy. The means for forging these linkages exists in the organization's business planning process that has been progressively and increasingly used in the organization over the past 10 years and is rapidly gaining universal acceptance. The business planning process needs to be used to promote those initiatives that clearly contribute to the corporate objectives and to eliminate those that do not. Performance measurement is also essential as it will allow progress to be monitored against the objectives and adjustments to be made as required.

In gaining control of the change agenda, senior leadership will face two difficult challenges. First, they must eliminate those bright ideas that arise from within the organization and that do not contribute to the overall defence objectives. The tricky part is to curtail these unnecessary change initiatives without disenfranchising the originators. In a resource-strapped organization, we cannot afford to pursue those changes that do not contribute to the overall objectives. These initiatives must be closed out completely rather than putting them on-hold or providing “zero-funding” as in these cases they will continue to draw the efforts of the champion and others who become committed to the cause.

Perhaps a more difficult challenge is the need to turn off, or delay, externally driven change that does not positively contribute to Defence’s objectives. Unfortunately, this type of change can often be mandated change originating from the central agencies of the Government. A classic example of this was the Government’s Universal Classification System (UCS) initiative.³³ The timing of this initiative could not have been worse from a Defence perspective. The organization was still rebounding from a major downsizing, contending with the Management, Command and Control Reengineering initiative,³⁴ and implementing the reforms associated with Minister

³³ The Universal Classification System (UCS) was a late 1990s initiative of the Government to replace the current 72 classification standards used in the Federal Public Service with a new universal classification standard. After four years of attempting to implement this initiative, it failed for various reasons. It has been replaced with “a manageable, multi-year classification reform program”. More information on this new program can be found at Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat Web site: <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/classification>.

³⁴ The Management, Command and Control Re-engineering Team (MCCRT) was stood up in January 1995 with a mandate to re-engineer the command, control and resource management structure of Defence with an emphasis on National Defence Headquarters. Besides reducing the resources devoted to headquarters functions in the organization, MCCRT resulted in the Environmental Chiefs of Staff (i.e. Commanders of the Navy, Army and Air Force) being relocated to Ottawa and integrated into the National Defence

Young's detailed review of the Canadian Forces and the Department. In addition, the UCS initiative was certainly poorly planned and managed by Government's central agencies and one could argue that the concept was ill conceived. Nevertheless, Defence got behind the initiative, even making it the top priority within the entire organization at one time, and commenced implementation. For a variety of reasons, the UCS initiative failed but not before considerable resources had been expended with little useful outcome. Senior leadership needs to try harder to protect the organization from this type of fiasco. If an externally mandated change does not make a significant contribution to the objectives contained in the strategy, is clearly not ready for implementation and is not absolutely essential from a Government perspective, it must be avoided.

Gaining control of the change agenda is key to introducing a degree of stability in the organization and thereby positioning Defence to continue with its renewal program. Once the change agenda is under control, the control must be maintained. "With clarity of direction, inappropriate projects can be identified and terminated, even if they have political support. The resources thus freed can be put toward the transformation process."³⁵ The degree of stability that is introduced through disciplined control of the change agenda will buy the organization the resources and time it needs to move towards becoming an adaptive organization.

Headquarters. Additional information is available in the MCCRT Historical Report found at http://www.vcds.dnd.ca/dgsc/tem1_e.asp?doc=page4&sec=lin.

³⁵ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 69.

BUILDING AN ADAPTIVE ORGANIZATION

In addition to gaining control of the organization's change agenda, senior leadership needs to ensure that the organization is positioned to execute the change agenda effectively and efficiently. The flexibility of the organization should be increased through building an adaptive culture within the Defence team.

“The ability to live comfortably in the delta – a place that is unstable and constantly changing – is what will separate successful and unsuccessful companies, what will separate employees who like to go to work from those that cannot stand the tension and the stress.”³⁶

The requirement is to build a culture within the organization that will be receptive to change - a culture that when faced with change will stimulate renewal and growth rather than resistance. Such a culture is a prerequisite in any organization affecting transitional or transformational change. “Cultural change requires challenging deep-seated beliefs, habits, and practices. It requires a commitment to alter ‘the way things are done around here.’”³⁷ In an organization such as Defence, which is large, diverse and steeped in tradition, affecting such a cultural change is time consuming, can be extremely difficult, and sometimes fails. Some in senior leadership have clearly recognized this need to build agility in the organization. Lieutenant-General Macdonald sees it as follows:

“We in the Canadian Forces need to inspire appropriate organizational agility as a cultural strength. ... Being agile is being able to seize opportunities to learn and exploit them effectively”³⁸

³⁶ Lamarsh, 175.

³⁷ Champy and Nohria, xxiii.

³⁸ Macdonald, 184.

Unfortunately, it would seem that the only effective means of developing an adaptive organization is through executing successful change that results in benefits to the members of the organization, i.e. success breeds success. Arguably, Defence has started in this direction. A number of successful changes were implemented during the tumultuous 1990s. But there were failures as well and it is these failures that bolster the organization's resistance to change. Hence, the necessity to maintain strict control of the change agenda, to instigate only those changes that support the organization's objectives and to ensure that these change initiatives are executed effectively. Success will result in increased employee confidence and eventually in the required cultural transformation of the organization.

Affecting the required cultural change within the organization is directly related to the need to control the change agenda. Cultural renewal is unlikely to occur if the organization is being overwhelmed with change initiatives. There needs to be a degree of stability – the stability that comes about by applying discipline to the change agenda. Abrahamson advocates a concept that he calls “dynamic stability”. “To change successfully, companies should stop changing all the time. Instead, they should intersperse major change initiatives among carefully paced periods of smaller, organic change, using processes I call *tinkering* or *kludging*. By doing so, companies can manage overall change with an approach called *dynamic stability*.”³⁹

³⁹ Abrahamson, 75.

KEY ROLE OF LEADERSHIP

The senior leadership of Defence has a key role to play in effecting change within the organization. Northouse tells us “the emphasis of leadership is on direction setting, clarifying the big picture, building a vision that is often long term, and setting strategy to create needed organizational change.”⁴⁰ Kotter takes this concept of leaders fulfilling the key role in the facilitation of change one step further. His response to the question “What leaders really do?” is that “They don’t make plans; they don’t solve problems; they don’t even organize people. What leaders really do is prepare organizations for change and help them cope as they struggle through it.”⁴¹ In the Defence organization, senior leadership should be seized with this role.

As discussed previously, senior leadership has recognized the essential role that they must play in building a vision and setting a strategy for the organization; Strategy 2020 is the manifestation of this effort. However, there is a need to take this further, senior leadership has created the vision but now it must play a role in achieving the vision “Achieving a vision requires motivating and inspiring – keeping people moving in the right direction, despite major obstacles to change, by appealing to basic but often untapped human needs, values and emotions.”⁴² This task is too important to be left in the hands of the organization’s middle management. If the vision is to become reality, senior leadership must promote the vision throughout the organization; leadership theory

⁴⁰ Northouse, 8.

⁴¹ Kotter, John P., “What Leaders Really Do.” Harvard Business Review, December 2001, 86.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 86.

recognizes that top-down communication of the vision is a necessary prerequisite to achieving employee buy-in.⁴³

Senior leadership needs to turn its attention from the day-to-day operations of the organization and focus its efforts on refining and implementing Strategy 2020. “The essential characteristics of leadership include the ability to challenge the status quo, engage in creative visioning for the future of the organization, and bring about appropriate changes in followers’ values, attitudes and behaviors through inspiration and empowerment.”⁴⁴ This is an essential role for leadership, particularly now when change dominates almost everything we do. Senior leadership needs to become the change champion in Defence. Failure to take on this role renders Strategy 2020 to being another discarded publication and will eventually leave the organization floundering as it struggles to meet the demands of this new millennium.

CONCLUSION

“Change has been with us forever, and it always will be, but the idea of change is changing. Companies [organizations] are increasingly aware of the need to combat chaos, cynicism, and burnout by using change tools that are less disruptive. Oscillation between big changes and small changes helps ensure dynamic stability in organizations. More critically, it paves the way for change that succeeds.”⁴⁵

⁴³ Conger, Jay A., Speitzer, Gretchen M., and Lawler, Edward E., Editors., The Leader’s Change Handbook: The Essential Guide to Setting Direction and Taking Action. Josey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, 1999, 347.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 354.

⁴⁵ Abrahamson, 79.

Change represents a considerable challenge for any organization. In a complex and diverse organization such as Defence, the challenge of implementing change is exacerbated, as it is often difficult to achieve consensus on a way ahead. Defence has coped with a number of major changes in the past decade including a significant downsizing and a major change in organization. Recently signs of change fatigue have started to appear within the organization.

The current environment dictates that organizations must continue to adapt. This means that Defence needs to continue with the program of progressive reform that it commenced in the past decade. Strategy 2020 begins to set the required strategy for this program of reform but it needs to be refined and focused on its core objectives.

A fundamental tenet for successfully implementing the strategy and its integral objectives is gaining and maintaining control of the change agenda within the organization. In addition to gaining firm control of the change agenda, senior leadership needs to build an adaptive organization – an organization that will be more receptive to change. These two steps are essential to continued progress towards the objectives of Strategy 2020. Senior leadership must play a key role in leading and controlling change through developing and communicating its vision and building an adaptive organization.

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