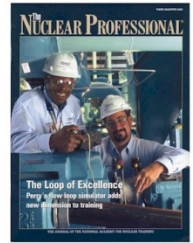


The Challenge of Change

Adapted from an interview with Dr. Rodger Dean Duncan by *The Nuclear Professional*, the Journal of the National Academy for Nuclear Training. The publication reaches nearly 70,000 people in the nuclear power industry. Dr. Duncan served two terms on the Advisory Council of the Institute of Nuclear Power Operations.



Why do people resist change?

Duncan: Change takes us out of our comfort zones and produces stress. It's often the stress that people resist, not the change itself. Even positive change produces stress. Just ask anyone who's planned a wedding.



Another reason for resistance is that change tends to be cumulative. In dealing with change, one CEO said it's like his company is undergoing four medical procedures at once. One person is in charge of a root canal, someone else is setting the broken foot, another person is working on a displaced shoulder, and still another is getting rid of a gall stone. Each operation is a success, but the patient dies of shock.

Simply put, there's a lot of simultaneous activity going on in most organizations – a lot of competition for time, budget and other resources. Even when we find smart people doing smart things, we often find a lack of integration. The result is what I call *fragmented focus*. It's very frustrating to good people – sort of the way you'd feel if you spent your day trying to push water uphill with a rake: lots of activity but only marginal results.

So, my conclusion is that it's not so much that people resist change *per se*; it's that we resist the stress that change often produces.

Can a workforce learn to welcome change?

Duncan: Absolutely. But the primary focus must be on the human dynamics of change. Effective change is not just about spreadsheets and project charts. It's about winning genuine commitment from real people. Remember, you can rent a person's back and hands, but you must earn his head and heart. For change to succeed, the emotional and behavioral aspects must be addressed as thoroughly as the operations issues. Change is inherently and inescapably an emotional human process.



Doesn't that sound kind of touchy-feely?

Duncan: The toughest-minded and most successful business people I know are carefully attuned to the human elements of their operations. You can have the best equipment and technology money can buy, but you're headed for trouble if your people are not in sync with your business goals. Strategic alignment is critical.

We talk a lot about building a strong "business case" for action. We must also build a strong "psychological case" for action. Show people the linkage between their own best efforts and the success of the enterprise. Show them the linkage between their needs and the needs of the organization. Give them a sense of psychological ownership. That's not touchy-feely stuff. It's smart business. Besides, aligning people with purpose is a hallmark of great leadership.

Change can be exhilarating and spawn the best work of a lifetime. Organizations that develop a tolerance and a competence for dealing with change have a sustainable competitive advantage. Effective change rarely happens by chance. It's deliberate, it's strategic, and it's carefully orchestrated.

You use the term "Strategic Alignment." In the context of change, what does that mean?

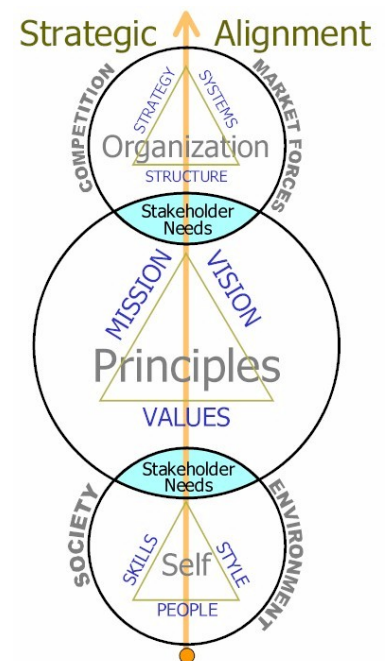
Duncan: Strategic Alignment is relatively simple, and it has the advantage of forcing you to take a wide-angle, holistic look at every important part of your operation. The result is a kind of decision making compass that helps you stay on course as you navigate toward the "true north" you've chosen. I use a simple Strategic Alignment Model to help organizations maintain the appropriate big picture mentality.

Strategic Alignment is a critical ingredient of all good planning and all good leadership. It's not an event. It's a process. It's not some warm and fuzzy add-on. It's a business-like approach to the real issues of running a business.

As I mentioned earlier, a critical challenge in many organizations is fragmentation: people, systems, structure, strategies, style, skills and other performance ingredients that – despite sincere effort – somehow lack harmony and cohesion.

Isn't it pretty obvious when strategic alignment is missing?

Duncan: Not necessarily. Let's use a physical metaphor. Your spinal column may be only slightly misaligned. At first you probably won't notice it. But over time it will produce symptoms – perhaps chronic discomfort in a hip, or maybe a chronic ache in the shoulder or neck. If you don't deal with the root cause – that is, if you don't get in alignment – the chronic symptoms will evolve into something more acute. Chronic symptoms are merely a nuisance. Acute symptoms can be painful and even dangerous.



The same principle applies to organizations. The “core doctrine” of mission, vision and values must be crystal clear in the heart and mind of every single person. Then strategy, structure, systems and behaviors must be aligned with the core doctrine. Slight misalignment must be corrected quickly. Chronic deviations cannot be tolerated. Strategic alignment requires constant vigilance.

How do organizations deal with that challenge?



Duncan: Unfortunately, there’s a temptation to apply a Band-Aid rather than identify and address root causes. This kind of “tampering” can produce a cure that’s worse than the original ailment.

Example: if you walk into an overheated control room of a nuclear power plant and begin adjusting dozens of instruments randomly, the results can be catastrophic. So it is with organizations.

It’s been said that every organization is perfectly aligned to get the results it’s getting. A sobering thought. If your organization is perfectly aligned to get the results it’s getting, and if you’re not satisfied with those results, then Strategic Alignment is not a luxury. It’s an imperative.

What’s the role of Strategic Alignment in the context of change?

Duncan: Strategic Alignment is about *leadership* because it’s a valuable tool for empowering people to make vision happen. And it’s about *management* because it focuses laser beam energy on planning, organizing, controlling and problem solving.

Effective leadership is all about effective change management. And both require Strategic Alignment.

The organization is not a machine to be “fixed.” It’s a living organism with many interrelated elements. The successful leader, then, is less of a mechanic and more of a gardener. He creates an environment that encourages growth – an environment full of light and nourishment and energy. I use those terms not in the physical sense, but in the human sense. Great organizations *are* great because they are people-friendly. People love to work there and they psychologically *own* the enterprise.

Strategic Alignment helps balance compliance and commitment. In the nuclear energy business there is obviously a very strong compliance component. The best compliance is coupled with solid commitment. True commitment is not about slogans and posters on the wall. It’s about ensuring that people feel genuinely connected to the business mission and have fire in the belly for personal accountability.



How does all this relate to managing change?

Duncan: Managing change does not mean a narrow, lock-step approach that controls all the variables. It means setting boundaries around the chaos, challenging the status

quo, and providing a deliberate and proactive process for getting from point A to point B.

My organization uses an approach we call the *Change-Friendly*SM framework. Rather than merely responding to change as it hits us in the face, I believe the smartest and most sure way of reaching the future state we desire is deliberately taking leadership over all the dynamics associated with change. This must include:

- Assessing the organizational, personal and cultural barriers to change, transition and implementation.
- Identifying work-life disruptions that are the consequences of strategic change.
- Developing strategies and tactics to minimize anticipated barriers to change.
- Developing strategies and tactics to leverage key strengths to increase readiness and capacity for change.

The bottom line, of course, is to accelerate the achievement of critical strategic business goals with fewer resources and fewer human casualties. In short, we must save time, save money and help our people avoid burnout.

How does the *Change-Friendly* framework help with Strategic Alignment?

Duncan: Strategic Alignment is essentially a navigation device. It helps you think both *systemically* – see all the parts and their relationship to and impact on the whole – and *systematically* – focus on the most critical interactions and those few true leverage points that have the greatest impact. Strategic Alignment is part of the mindset that operationalizes the *Change-Friendly* methodology or framework.



What does the *Change-Friendly* framework look like?

Duncan: It's based on what I call the power of four Ts: How we *Think*, how we *Talk*, how we *Trust*, and how we *Team*. Each of these is absolutely critical to our success in handling change.

The behaviors and skills we teach in our Think-FriendlySM training include adopting a growth mindset that you are indeed capable of solving problems in fresh ways. They include exercising curiosity by asking smart questions to explore and discover. They include challenging your own conclusions to ensure that your assumptions are valid. And they include making appropriate connections that lead to breakthrough ideas.

Our Talk-FriendlySM training is about the behaviors and skills of collaborative dialogue and appreciative inquiry.

The Trust-FriendlySM training we offer helps people consistently earn the confidence of others while reciprocating confidence. Effective change agents know how to make trust first in order to make it last.

And our Team-FriendlySM training helps people work with others in ways that foster genuine collaboration and engage their heads, hearts, and hopes.

These four Ts, then, inform all the behaviors in the Change-Friendly process.

The Change-Friendly process has seven steps. But don't think of the process as linear. Although the process is tightly organized for purposes of manageability, it's fluid enough that the steps overlap. The process is designed to be your servant, not your master.

What are the seven steps?

Duncan: Step 1 is *Validate the Journey*. That's about making a compelling business case for action *and* a strong psychological case for action. You generate early dialogue about people's concerns. You identify the CAST of characters – the Champions, Agents, Sponsors and Targets of the change. You address the *What, Why* and *Consequences* of the change. And you ensure that the key stakeholders have a commonly held definition of both the current state and the desired future state.

Step 2 is *Scan for Speed Bumps*. You assess the climate for change and identify the points of resistance that must be neutralized or converted. Change occurs in the context of organizational stress (competition for finite resources) and organizational history (lessons previously learned).



Step 3 is *Chart the Course*. This involves identifying the change approach, with special emphasis on the advantages of commitment over mere compliance.

Step 4 is *Build a Coalition*. Here we work more deeply with the CAST of characters. Champions are people who want the change and try to get commitment and resources for it, but they may lack sponsorship. Agents are people who plan and execute the implementation. Sponsors are people who authorize, legitimize and demonstrate "ownership" for the change. Targets are people whose assumptions, attitudes, behavior, emotions, knowledge, etc., must be altered. Targets have the potential to become Agents or Sponsors. Virtually everyone begins as a Target.

Are Sponsors primarily management personnel?

Duncan: You certainly need sponsorship on the management team. You need Authorizing Sponsors – people with sufficient organizational power to commit resources like time, budget and agenda space. That usually involves "managers." But you also need Reinforcing Sponsors – people with influence.

Real influence is not necessarily associated with title. It's a function of personal credibility. For a change effort to succeed, you need a good network of cascading sponsorship throughout the ranks. Otherwise, you'll have a kind of "black hole" where good intentions get lost in the bureaucracy.

Good sponsorship is the single most critical factor in ensuring lasting change. Don't mistake title or lip service for real sponsorship. Real sponsorship involves smoothing the landscape, removing barriers and creating a change-friendly environment.

What are the other three steps of the *Change-Friendly* process?

Duncan: Step 5 is *Ford the Streams*. Here we work to ensure that the change comfortably fits with the organization's pertinent cultural elements. Where there's a conflict between culture and change, culture always wins. If there's something in your culture that's at odds with the desired change, you must first adjust the culture. This often involves honestly addressing the "unwritten rules" at play in your work place.

Step 6 is *Stay on Message*. Here we address the issues of communication planning and practices as well as approaches to motivation and reinforcement related to achieving and maintaining desired change. The key is to communicate frequently, refute rumors quickly, repeat messages using multiple communication vehicles, and leverage your first line of supervision for face-to-face communications. Make it easier to perform the desired new behaviors and harder to perform the old ones. Remove rewards from the old behaviors and offer rewards for the new behaviors.

Step 7 is *Mind the Gap*. Effective change managers constantly evaluate lessons learned. They constantly make themselves smarter on change issues. They make course corrections. Then they prepare for future (continuous) change opportunities.

A common complaint about change is that it's often too much and too fast. How does the *Change-Friendly* process differ from other change approaches?

Duncan: The *Change-Friendly* process places a special emphasis on the human factors associated with change. Project management tools like spreadsheets and GANTT charts are necessary. But the all-important human component is what makes or breaks a change effort. Resistance is like a savings bond – it doesn't go away, it just matures with interest. Many sponsors don't really buy into change, they just rent. These human issues must be carefully monitored and managed with appropriate strategies and tactics.

Change-Friendly

The entire underpinning of the *Change-Friendly* framework is about "how to engage people's heads, hearts, and hopes." That's where the training in the Four Ts is so critical. Flow charts are nice. But real change can occur only when people are appropriately engaged.

Our Change-Friendly 360™ instrument is one of several ways to help leaders make this happen. This tool provides candid feedback from the leader's own manager, peers, and direct reports on his or her behaviors related change issues. It's very revealing.

If an organization already has a change approach, *Change-Friendly* training can often be overlaid to make the original approach even better.

What's your bottom line on change management?

Duncan: Again, effective leadership is all about effective change management. And at a time when the economy is less forgiving and stakeholders are less patient, the margin for error is smaller than ever. As Army General Eric Shinseki said, "if you don't like change, you'll like irrelevance even less."