How to Improve the Process of Change: The Sanctuary Model

This new model will help you fine-tune change in your organization.

By Wendy M. McSparren & Darlene Y. Motley

Today, more than ever before, there's a need to be proactive and strategic in changing organizational and fiscal practices. Rather than letting the future happen to you, you must learn to manage change.

What Is Change Management, and Why Is It Important?

Change management is a structured way of moving people to a desired future condition. Leaders use established change models to encourage employees to work toward a new reality. The literature is filled with change-management techniques, including:

• **the cognitive approach,** which uses goal setting and coaching to create a positive mental picture that appeals to people's logic

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• **the psychodynamic method,** which uses insight to seek understanding of a person's experience of change

• **behavioral strategies,** such as the use of rewards and punishment to modify behavior

• **the humanistic psychology approach,** which uses the ideas of development, growth, and potential to help people see the benefits of change.[1]

Change experts agree that, despite the number of theories that abound, change initiatives fail more often than they succeed. Most attempts to produce major change fall short of their goals.

At the same time, effective change is vital to an organization's success. "Change is one of the most important and constant features of this era," notes Darwish Yousef, and the people in organizations "are the most important determinants of the success or failure of the organizational change process."[2]

One distinguishing factor between successful and unsuccessful change is that effective change leaders recognize the importance of organizational culture—the unconscious beliefs and norms that people in the organization follow.[3] Before they can expect success, leaders must be sure the organization's culture encourages people to take risks and embrace change.

What Is the Sanctuary Model?

The sanctuary model of change was developed by psychiatrist Sandra Bloom as a result of work with adults hospitalized because of traumatic childhood events. The model incorporates theories related to trauma, social learning, democracy, and nonviolence.

How Can You Use This Model to Assure Lasting Change?

In an innovative twist, nonprofit organizations are using the sanctuary model to process more effective change and improve organizational performance.[4] For this model to be successful, leaders must do the following:

• **View individuals and the organizational system** in terms of historical context (where people came from and what has happened to them). Consider how the past affects today's interactions and relationships.

• **Offer continuing education** for staff and board members, including information on change management.

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• **Form employee teams,** and hold team meetings regularly.

• **Assure that everyone** in the organization shares similar assumptions, beliefs, and values, including an understanding of the complexity of the change process.

• **Address the impact** of organizational stress.

• **Create democratic systems,** providing opportunities for everyone connected with the organization to have a voice.

• **Build a culture** that ensures physical, emotional, psychological, and moral safety and well-being.

• **Evaluate outcomes** of your change efforts, and provide feedback to members.

What Are the Seven Characteristics of Sanctuary?

The overall goal of the sanctuary model is to enable organizations to develop seven characteristics in the workplace and weave them into the organization's culture:

• **Nonviolence.** Build skills in

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managing conflict, deterring anger, allaying tension, and creating a safe, healthy environment.

• **Emotional Intelligence.** Teach such abilities as empathy, compassion, and reading body language.

• **Inquiry & Social Learning.** Build cognitive skills, and champion continuous learning.

• **Democracy & Shared Leadership.** Develop organization-wide skills in self-control, self-discipline, and self-governance.

• **Open Communication.** Establish trust, and overcome barriers to communication.

• **Social Responsibility.** Build social connection, and forge relationships.

• **Growth and Change.** Encourage hope, meaning, and purpose, and help people cope with change.

What Are the Keys?

To apply the sanctuary model in your organization, follow these guidelines:

• **Seek input** from employees at all levels in the organization before, during, and after enacting change.

• **When people's jobs are altered,** be sure they have the tools and training they need to perform their work well.

• **Help people understand** that change is expected and acceptable.

• **Establish networks** and relationships to guide people through the change process.

• **Create an environment of trust** where people feel free to share ideas and concerns.

The sanctuary model is especially applicable to nonprofits because it recognizes that people and their emotions are the most important factors in instituting change. Using it will help you create an open, inclusive, value-driven culture that will reward and welcome change. ■

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Finding Sanctuary

For more on managing change and using the sanctuary model, see these articles (www.snpo.org/members):

• **12 Heuristics that Will Raise Your EQ** (Vol. 26, No. 4)

• **The Promise and Pitfalls of Organizational Change** (Vol. 28, No. 4)

• **How to Reduce Employee Stress** (Vol. 24, No. 3)

• **Using Your Organization's Culture to Build Productivity and Reputation** (Vol. 11, No. 6)

• **The Nonprofit Executive as Chief Learning Officer** (Vol. 16, No. 2)

• **Zen and the Art of Team Building** (Vol. 20, No. 1)

Also see www.sanctuaryweb.com for more articles and books on the subject.

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