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Five Preventable Problems that Occur in Global Change Projects

A View from the Field (Asia)

By Yoshiko Zoet-Suzuki
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Abstract:

Global change initiatives can create complex dynamics and issues between HQ and regional offices. We highlight five preventable issues that we regularly observe in global change projects. These five issues are: 1. Assuming and imposing assumptions of at-will employment markets in countries with different labor dynamics, 2. Not developing real global–local collaboration but instead using a top-down, “planned change” approach with little space for dialogue, 3. Underestimating or overestimating Cultural Otherness, 4. Change Fatigue, and 5. Introducing advanced models too fast, with too many assumptions and expectations, and too many oversimplifications in the (mental) models used for implementing change. We explore each of these themes and provide examples and critical points for reflection, some suggestions for avoiding these common pitfalls, and some references and resources for readers interested in further exploring any of these themes.

Keywords: Change management, Global change initiatives, Global–local dynamics, VUCA, Change leadership effectiveness

This article discusses a number of issues and breakdowns we see occur regularly in the dynamic between global Headquarters (HQ) and regional/local country subsidiaries when corporations roll out global change or restructuring initiatives. The problems are often preventable and moreover, we see possibilities to improve agility to local opportunities and direct chances to embed key Organizational Development (OD) values such as respect and inclusion, collaboration, self-awareness, and empowerment and make them work for the global corporation and its members.

The article aims to provide insights and topics for consideration to global leaders pursuing change, corporate teams designing and implementing global change initiatives, consultants and OD practitioners supporting such initiatives, and

local/regional leaders. In other words, we come from the field but want to present the issues and suggestions in a way that is helpful for each of these participants. OD scholars may find some ideas for research orientation and framing, but the article is primarily practitioner-oriented. The article is a response to the question “How do we practice OD with a global mindset?” (Gilpin-Jackson, 2016) with emphasis on the term “practice.”

We address the five themes with a focus on the dynamic between Headquarters or “Home country” on the one hand and regional or local national offices on the other hand. Regional and local will imply areas with a distinct (different) culture, legal system, and often, language. We use the terms “regional” and “local” interchangeably, although depending on

organizational structure, “regional” may sometimes imply a country, and sometimes a group of several closely related countries. “Local” almost always refers to a country. We realize that the (cultural) distance between a New York HQ and a Houston regional office can sometimes be greater than the distance between Minnesota and Thailand. The working assumption of this text however is that “regional” and “local” refer to different countries than the home country and HQ.

Let us start off with some expressions and issues that may sound familiar to OD colleagues and managers who have spent time in the thick of global change initiatives.

Voices from the Field

‘We thought we hired a local country head potential, but he is not performing well. Can you do something?’ ‘We have change-adverse individuals in our management team, so we need to clean out the house and get more driven, open-minded people in our management here.’ ‘We cannot work with managers who don’t trust us.’ ‘HQ never really listens to us.’ ‘We have explained this model, this new concept, already for months, nothing is happening. Why?’

Problems from the Field

Problems from the field include: global restructuring mandates that ignore local legal constraints and cultural impact; “Resistance to change”; Unexplored implications of a global plan based on an “employment at-will” culture; Change fatigue; Neo-colonial management attitudes towards “locals”; lack of listening; “ineffective” regional leaders; loss of authenticity; distrust; tone-deaf messaging; ineffective upward communication; lack of “human touch,” inclusion, global-local collaboration; matrix organizations effectively monopolizing functional business lines over regional reporting lines; lack of HQ agility; and lack of regional/local responsiveness to HQ.

These are some of the breakdowns we see and frustrations we hear regularly from the field (and HQ!) when global corporations pursue global change projects.

The economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, changes in work practice, unexpected global commodities shortages and logistics challenges, and the impacts of war in eastern Europe give ample meaning to the four dimensions of VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity). The resulting market dynamics add pressure to the urgency of corporate restructuring and the need to develop resilience and capacity

labor practices of other cultures and jurisdictions. For people used to operating in an at-will employment environment, the constellation of cultural and labor dynamics implications of this one factor can be like water to a fish: it is all around you but it is hard to gauge its significance until it is gone. Managers and staff in different regions, who are confronted with change initiatives that inadvertently rely on at-will employment assumptions, are likely to indeed respond to the plans like a fish out of water, and it can be easy to attribute their flapping around or lack of movement to

We have seen examples where global HQ directs a 10% headcount reduction and then within the same quarter, rolls out a “global company culture” initiative to improve employee buy-in for vision, corporate values, or improving collaboration and innovation. This may actually compound the sense of alienation experienced by remaining employees who have unexpectedly seen their long-time colleagues get laid off and who have experienced anxiety from the sudden realization that nobody’s job in this company is very secure.

to continuously adapt. The added pressure can increase the risk that the above issues get ignored, at a time when it is increasingly important to have visibility on these often-preventable problems.

In the remainder of this article we will highlight five problem themes, which we selected based on the significance of their impact and the potential ease of preventing the issues. These are not definitive categories but rather topics we believe are substantial enough to merit individual attention by change leaders keen to avoid leaving important assumptions unexplored.

Theme/Pitfall 1: Implications of At-Will Employment Culture

At-will employment (the legal ability to fire employees for any reason or no reason at all) is a labor law doctrine unique to the USA. The tenets of at-will employment may to more or less extent be part of the

unwillingness to cooperate, lack of drive or incompetence. For example, a US HQ directive to off-shore Japan-based manufacturing to lower-cost Asian countries and thereby reduce overall Asia region operating expenditures may rely on the assumption that the Japan headcount can easily and inexpensively be reduced, and that this will not unduly impact team cohesion and motivation or client relations.

From their perspective, local managers and staff may perceive the plans as completely unexpected, impossibly harsh, legally difficult or impossible to implement, damaging to the corporate reputation, client relationships, and employee morale of the company, and impossible or completely tone-deaf to combine with other (global) management communications, culture change initiatives, and corporate image development. We have seen examples where global HQ directs a 10% headcount reduction and then within the same quarter, rolls out a “global company

culture” initiative to improve employee buy-in for vision, corporate values, or improving collaboration and innovation. This may actually compound the sense of alienation experienced by remaining employees who have unexpectedly seen their long-time colleagues get laid off and who have experienced anxiety from the sudden realization that nobody’s job in this company is very secure. And then they are asked to be innovative, or to think about the “company values.”

Implications of at-will employment culture could be sketched in many ways. We will present some here as factors that can be put on a sliding scale or spectrum, as this can highlight some of the trade-offs and opportunities for effective adaptations.

Transactional vs. long-term relational

While people around the world can be relied on to look after their own immediate interests, human nature also contains a long-term social gene. The spectrum here may not actually be between short-term transactional and long-term relational, but more about to what extent people perceive these two as diametrically opposed or not. People from at-will environments may be more comfortable accepting, combining, and working with both transactional and long-term relational actions and dynamics, while people in not-at-will environments may experience transactional attitudes and actions as directly opposed to or undermining long-term relational values and interests, as the above example of a company combining lay-offs and a ‘corporate culture’ initiative demonstrates.

Assumption of personal responsibility for one’s career vs. surrendering this responsibility in loyalty to the company

This spectrum may be related to *identity development in employees*. People in an at-will environment may tend to construct their identity in terms of their specialization, what they do and what they have accomplished, whereas people in a not-at-will environment may tend to construct their identity in terms of what social groups they belong to (i.e., tending to fuse their identity with the company and with their colleagues) and in terms of how other

people and groups perceive them. The latter, incidentally, provides built-in motivation for people *not* to emphasize their individual skills and achievements, as this can isolate and alienate them from the group identity. Furthermore, for local managers, dismissing members from their own team can be difficult because it can be akin to banishing an individual from your town: either it creates the impression that the individual is at fault, or if there is no fault, it can leave the town leader with a loss of trust and respect from the rest of the villagers, and possibly unable to be effective as leader any longer.

Assumption of labor mobility vs. shame, public embarrassment, and internalization of failure upon dismissal

Managers from at-will employment environments can be caught off guard with the difficulties surrounding dismissal of employees in not-at-will environments, whether for individual performance reasons or for economic downsizing purposes. The behavior of a dismissed employee can be confounding—‘why doesn’t he just move on and find another job,’ and likewise, the local legal and regulatory requirements can just be underestimated (especially by managers who are at a geographical distance from these events), and we often see a tendency to cut corners or stay as tight to the letter of minimal requirements as possible—which only exacerbates cost and difficulties in many cases. We try to illuminate the latter by pointing at some aspects that are at the other end of this spectrum: the absence of (perceived) labor mobility translates into some hefty psychological motivators for employees who are dismissed. It also translates into a society that simultaneously is more likely to place shame on the dismissed person, and provides condemnation and a well-developed regulatory/legal mechanism for what would be considered unlawful or insensitive, profit-motivated dismissals.

The important point here is that the assumption of labor mobility plays a role not only when managers work on dismissals, but long before that: in planning (especially for expansion), hiring, and ongoing

management, mistaken assumptions for possible exit strategies can significantly distort optimal scenarios. Hiring with abandon can lead to very serious constraints on movement for the company in the future.

A cultural, legal, and business environment optimized towards mobility, efficiency, and agility vs. a cultural, legal, and business environment optimized towards stability, downside risk avoidance, and long-term well-being for all stakeholder

We don’t present an ideological or political preference here, but we do suggest that at-will environments are likely more geared toward the former while not at-will environments will be optimized towards the latter. Change leaders will need to be aware of their own ideological or political preferences and if they come from an at-will environment, they will need to realize that a global corporate change initiative or restructuring is not the right place or time for pursuing their own preferences in a cultural environment that is optimized toward different values and standards. It may mean extra work and effort to avoid either imposing one’s own “common sense” and values on a culture where these are not at all common, or simply accepting the “this culture is different” rationale that may be provided by local offices. Some care and openness to really understanding the “Other” will be required.

While transformation initiatives, especially those involving employee dismissals, may often have elements that are perceived as antagonistic or negative by some part of local management and staff, it makes little sense to exacerbate this by taking an approach that ignores local realities and legal, reputational, client relationship, and employee morale implications.

Lastly, we should note that implications of the at-will employment culture impact organization dynamics not only at the time staff gets dismissed or otherwise leave their positions. The spectrums we sketched out above already hint at factors that would impact working dynamics throughout people’s participation in the workforce of a company. How people respond to directions (or other power expressions such as harassment), levels

of comfort with expressing alternatives, initiating direction, deferring to hierarchy, participating in co-creating, etc., may all be influenced by the contextual factors of labor mobility in and outside the company, and by what the end game (i.e., risk for dismissal) looks like for employees who act outside the accepted local norms, or who are caught at the short end of downsizing measures.

It is hard to determine causality in this respect. It may well be fair to assume common cultural causes give rise to at-will (or not-at-will) employment environments and the other behavioral dynamics mentioned in this section. More precisely, the causality relations are probably complex and the patterns of at-will (or not) employment dynamics and social/cultural dynamics emerge co-arising as both cause and effect.

We mention this for a few reasons. First, complex social systems can be notoriously difficult to change, especially with singular inputs. This implies that defiance, massive change ambition, or otherwise going counter to the prevailing dynamics is not a recipe for success and change because it would require engineering a shift from the current systemic equilibrium to another equilibrium (Coleman, 2011). Rather than charging at windmills, it will pay off to operate with better awareness of the (Home office) at-will employment environment and its inherent assumptions and implications, and to leave space in thinking, planning, and resources for understanding and adapting to local realities so that reasonable and effective transformations become possible.

Underestimating local complexity is a pitfall that may extend to topics other than just the at-will/not at-will employment environment. We focused on the latter because it is a concrete topic to consider, explore, and address in change initiatives, especially as the Volatility and Uncertainty dimensions of VUCA create pressure to pursue short-term restructuring projects, at the cost of insufficiently recognizing the Complexity and Ambiguity dimensions of the acronym.

In this section, we explored the implications of silent assumptions stemming from an at-will employment environment. These can include: Assumption of flexibility and freedom for the company to act with limited consequences in hiring and firing; Assumption of mobility for employees, i.e. the assumption that it is just as easy for them to move to a different company and position fitting their skills; Assumption of a transactional mindset for both sides of the employment equation; underestimating the impact of factors like dignity, shame, uncertainty avoidance, how the company is perceived in the local culture and business environment; Assumption of personal responsibility for one's career and acceptance of the collateral implication that loyalty to the company is limited; Assumptions regarding legal and labor regulatory practices and possibilities; and impact of such assumptions on planning, managing, and other parts of corporate dynamics well before end-of-employment events take place.

The most concrete aspect of this pitfall might be to underestimate regulatory and legal frameworks; local labor laws may simply prohibit arbitrary dismissal. Beyond the legal rules and regulations, national/cultural environments have typically evolved an accepted set of practices, much of which can be "soft" or cultural in nature, but the implications may nonetheless be concrete. Local managers and staff response will likely be more attuned with those local realities than with a mismatching global plan or directions. Local labor legal requirements or societal labor practices and norms may dictate a very different optimal transformation path than expected based on home conditions.

Theme/Pitfall 2: Not Developing Real Global-Local Collaboration

Underestimating global diversity, time, and resource pressure, overwhelmingly "clear" and appealing global change numbers and narratives, and an unexplored or ingrained "planned change" (Marshak & Bushe, 2018) perspective can all conspire with the

ambitions of "global change leaders" (and their agents) to result in centrally driven change initiatives whereby regional or local counterparts are positioned or effectively reduced to roles that receive other people's ideas and are then tasked to implement those ideas without meaningful dialog or adaptation. The result is not developing real global-local collaboration and missing out on combining the best of global strength and standardization and local constraints and opportunity.

This can start out with just odd¹ forms of HQ centricity, such as simply being unaware of time zones when planning meetings with people in other regions. Friday 1 PM in Chicago is Saturday 4 AM in Japan: just not a good time to set up a weekly change project status call with all the regions. It may send an equally disenfranchising message to split calls and do one call with the Americas and Europe, and another to catch up with Asia. The home/EU call will end up dominating the direction and any adaptations of the "global" change initiative, and the people in Thailand or the Philippines will end up saying little more than "yes" on their secondary call. We mention this issue as an example and it is something that we still see happening repeatedly. So, people are miss-stepping on the basics and then have a hard time selling the idea that their Change Initiative is a "global" thing.

HQ centricity includes other oversimplifications towards hometown assumptions and practices, ranging from how easy it is to mail a certain item to how straightforward or expensive (or how necessary) it is to hire a lawyer or to negotiate a discount with a contractor. By extension, HQ centricity often also includes oversimplifying regional differences, for example placing hiring approval authority for Japan headcount in China, or vice versa. In matrix organizations, another frequent source of problems is the assumption of certain authorities at the HQ level, for example the expectation of functional heads in the US or Europe to be able to fire someone in Japan: the Japan CEO or

1. as seen from the field...

legal representative is, legally speaking, the only person who can make termination decisions *and* can be held personally (and sometimes criminally) liable for illegal dismissals.

The “HQ centricity” bias and “planned change” paradigm tap into the same issues that led practitioners and theorists to develop “generative change” OD alternatives such as Dialogic OD (Bushe, 2013; Bushe et al., 2015).

On the playing field of global change initiatives, HQ centricity translates into implementation of global, uniform programs at the unnecessary sacrifice of local

In many cases, working with a simple triage process may help project participants (HQ and regional) to combine the best of both worlds. Triage in emergency and battlefield medicine was developed to improve the efficient allocation and use of limited resources and to improve outcomes (e.g., overall lives saved or maximum battle readiness of troops) (Iserson & Moskop, 2007; Moskop & Iserson, 2007; Robertson-Steel, 2006). The triage process in its simplest form includes a quick initial assessment and sorting into categories, whereby resources can be directed to the category in which spending those

refined to further optimize towards the identified underlying values. Thirdly, some (common) values are contradictory to triage and must be surrendered to optimize outcomes and use of resources. In medical triage, contradictory values include (patient) autonomy, the physician’s fidelity to the best interest of an individual patient, and ownership of resources: the patient does not get to decide, the physician regularly needs to decide against the interest of one patient for the benefit of another, and the resource owner does not have control over how resources are allocated and used.

In the same way, using triage in global initiatives can entail the surrender of some commonly held values, including, for the OD practitioner, some part of the OD values we mentioned in the first paragraph of this article. Or on the other hand, the prerogative of HQ to set the direction in a global initiative may need to be surrendered. For example, what part of the project should be categorized as “must be global” should not be dictated simply by HQ standards. A simple and often-recurring example is the double-byte enabling of databases in global systems. While alphabet characters can be stored in a database file using a single byte code, Chinese and Japanese characters require a combination of two bytes to properly distinguish each of the thousands of characters in those languages. This will only work correctly if the database is programmed to recognize pairs of bytes as a unit instead of just single bytes. In the adaptation of global systems, Japanese and Chinese developers have often been ignored on the importance of this double-byte enabling, or have failed to make themselves clear on the importance of this small issue. The result is often pushing through a global system, then seeing it fail in practice, and then having to go back as far as it takes to fix the issue, often having to re-do other steps along the way.

Sometimes, an issue exists locally as a high priority roadblock whereas globally, it is considered out of scope for the change initiative. For example, a local HR team might need to set up a legally required time tracking system before it can meaningfully engage in rolling out a global HR

The need to achieve global efficiency through uniform systems and practices is often a driver of global change initiatives and restructuring. From that perspective, any variation or diversity undermines the objectives of the project. On the other hand, fully Generative (Dialogic) OD practices may not lead to satisfactory results from the perspective of the project initiators or owners. We believe a pure dichotomy does not work well.

optimization and agility, and often with unnecessary extra local implementation efforts and cost.

How can we avoid this pitfall? First, we propose remaining aware of this issue. For some, it may help to label the initiative differently and to “earn” the designation Global by developing plans to proactively ensure equal partnership and participation from counterparts in all regions. Considering a project Global may be better defined by determining whether certain measures of inclusion are achieved *in the eyes of the regional participants*.

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resources will lead to the greatest improvement in overall outcome. Its principles can be applied to other organizational challenges with limited resources. We propose to see the Global–Local divide as a continuum: some systems, practices, and processes benefit from being uniform and standardized worldwide, whereas other issues, systems and practices really require local adaptation. The process of sorting through which is which can be considerably simplified by recognizing a third category in the middle: issues and items that could be global but *perhaps* should be localized. If global and local counterparts do a triage to sort different issues into these three categories (“must be global,” “must be localized,” or “something in between”), this can create space for easier dialog and actual participation by regions in global change initiatives.

Several insights for OD initiatives can be drawn from medical triage. Firstly, absence of triage leads to less optimal outcomes. Secondly, triage systems can be

process and system. In fact, global systems and processes often fail at lowest common denominator criteria, because not enough consideration and space has been reserved for local issues that are required to be addressed in one or other specific region. Rather than supporting common tasks across all regions, a system can then become an obstacle that needs to be worked around in one of the regions. In the case of the time tracking example, local HR resources ended up tied up in manual data entry work to meet the legal requirements, because the global system did not accommodate this function and process. So, the standardized global process and system led to massive *inefficiencies* on a local scale.

So, the point of having these three categories is not to place certain topics outside of discussion. It is actually to facilitate discussion on all topics, and to create space for listening and understanding rather than having a debate whether and why something should be left or right, globally uniform, or locally customized.

Applying this three-category practice may seem deceptively simple and trivial. We encourage change leaders to do it wherever possible. The exercise is impossible to do in any meaningful way without substantial dialog and participation with each regional participant. If any of the categories is empty, more discussion, more active listening, and more critical review of issues and topics is likely needed, to avoid being on a path that lacks genuine global-local collaboration.

Theme/Pitfall 3: Underestimating or Overestimating Cultural Otherness

While the first two themes effectively advocate for awareness of self and other, sensitivity towards diversity and efforts for meaningful collaboration, this third theme folds back on these issues. Be aware that diversity in culture, regulatory environment, and other local dynamics can subsequently lead to inertia and paralysis from underestimating or overestimating cultural Otherness. For this reason, we are careful to avoid cultural stereotypes, and we have

not emphasized the specific regional cultures in case examples discussed so far. Generally, we are hesitant to refer to comparative cultural characteristics such as the well-known work by Hofstede (Hofstede, 1980, 1991, 2001).

Rather, the work of Edward Said can be insightful for global change leaders as Said carefully exposes the hidden tendencies that lead to Orientalism, that is, the tendency in Western culture to emphasize the Otherness (and implicitly, the inferiority) of oriental cultures (Said, 1979, 1993). This tendency to emphasize Otherness

The regional leader can become the focal point of attacks, cajoling, pleas, and requests from all sides and may face issues of trust, manipulation, undermining, railroading, and other forms of breakdown in collaboration. Self-differentiated leadership skills will be an important foundation for navigating these challenges. The ability and desire to understand others' experience while staying true to self (self-awareness and effective use of self in relationships) provide the change leader a basis for grounding themselves while collaborating with all parties involved to successfully implement change initiatives.

of different cultures (or ethnic or otherwise distinct social groups) can be found in non-Western cultures as well, and likewise it is possible to identify instances whereby those subjected to "Othering" exploit this bias in the Westerner in a pattern described as Reverse Orientalism (Faure, 1995). So, while it is unproductive (and far too common) for Western (or other HQ) managers to perceive colleagues in different regions from a neo-colonial, "they're just dumb natives" perspective, it is equally unproductive if regional colleagues can respond to a change initiative by saying, "Oh, but we are a pious and harmonious culture, we couldn't possibly make that kind of change." Real life anecdotes for these issues abound, such as the story of a secretary who had to work for a boss who treated local staff "like uneducated monkeys who need teaching and proper education." Or

the scenarios we have seen where senior management is indecisive and fails to maintain professional standards in regional offices for fear of insulting local staff. Neither case works nor demonstrates meaningful engagement with or insight in Other cultures and people.

More in-depth discussion of these types of issues can be found in (Zoet, 2018). Knowing or finding productive ways around these issues can be challenging. Getting past these dynamics can require sufficient local knowledge and experience to discern biases and core points in the

narratives we and others apply to dialogs. This might mean working with international managers or facilitators who have substantial experience in the region.

Avoiding the temptation to fall into stereotyping is helpful, as is grounding, pursuing authenticity, and effective use of self. Likewise, not being satisfied with the enduring silence and "lack of participation" of a regional counterpart is a helpful approach as long as it is not combined with blaming or just holding that person responsible for their silence. Edgar Schein's approach of Humble Inquiry is often productive for overcoming distortions of Otherness (or other variants of jumping to conclusions or not understanding others) (Schein, 2013).

We are also exploring the effectiveness of working with Gervase Bushe's Clear Leadership methodology (Bushe, 2011) in

some Asian cultures, and this looks promising not only for addressing organizational silo thinking and disjointed meaning-making between different parts of organizations as in the original focus of this work, but also for getting past the types of “Othering” and cross-cultural misconceptions described under this theme.

The In-Between: Change Leaders Caught in the Middle

Before moving to the last two themes, we want to take a moment to recognize that regional leaders who act as change agents can find themselves caught in the middle. People in both global HQ and the regional office may see the regional (change) leader as their representative, or, conversely, as ‘agent of the other side’ and often even as both simultaneously. The regional leader can become the focal point of attacks, cajoling, pleas, and requests from all sides and may face issues of trust, manipulation, undermining, railroading, and other forms of breakdown in collaboration. Self-differentiated leadership skills (Bushe, 2011, pp. 80–81) will be an important foundation for navigating these challenges. The ability and desire to understand others’ experience while staying true to self (self-awareness and effective use of self in relationships) provide the change leader a basis for grounding themselves while collaborating with all parties involved to successfully implement change initiatives. Critically, this includes actively managing upwards and building senior leaders’ trust in the self-differentiated approach taken.

The second and third listed pitfalls (not really developing global–local collaboration, and miscalculating cultural Otherness) are complicating factors, as is the situational nature of each change initiative: some changes are “house on fire,” must-do for the survival of the business, or they are for some other reason non-negotiable, urgent, or hard to align with long term beneficial factors such as the OD values we mentioned in the first paragraph of this article. Indeed, with some change initiatives it may be difficult to align with (or better, avoid) any of the five pitfalls we address in this text. Change leaders, particularly

those in the middle, have an important role to help all parties in the change process be aware of these challenges and to create the space to approach these challenges consciously and deliberately. For those in global oversight roles, it is imperative to balance driving change with a respect for the complexity of the situation, astuteness towards the challenge for and efforts required of the change leaders under them, and their own self-differentiated approach. At the simplest level this means the most senior leaders should ask themselves “Am I helping the change, or am I creating more confusion, chaos, and distrust?”

Theme/Pitfall 4: Change Fatigue

This pitfall is important to present but should not require extensive explanation. After decades of Headquarter-driven change initiatives (at least each time global senior management changes), regional and local employees are often just tired of change and too numbed to respond to yet another change project.

While they may thank (or blame) the cumulative impact of their predecessors’ programs for this, many change leaders will need to acknowledge and deal with this reality. In OD work in Asia, over the past ten years we increasingly need to work with trauma, unprocessed thoughts, feelings, and experiences from the last change program, before we can even engage in the current initiative.

Avoiding this pitfall starts with baseline awareness of the situation, especially if young, dynamic go-getters are part of a global change team, it may require some coaching and channeling of the energy and enthusiasm of team members that are not fatigued. If someone is fatigued, it is not the time to tell them to run a marathon. Instead, it can be important to help people to find space to take care of themselves, and support to become grounded in who they are and how they think about their situation. This can include nurturing regional colleagues in developing their use of self. The end objective includes helping people to get to a place where *they* can define change as a positive thing. This may be

done through tapping into their personal experiences of difficult but positive change, and connecting this to the current organizational change initiative. For more on these techniques, see the work of Angela L.M. Stopper, and UC Berkeley’s Change Management Toolkit (Sarran et al., 2019).

Theme/Pitfall 5: Introducing Advanced Models Too Fast, with Too Many Assumptions and Expectations that Everyone will Happily Receive the Change and Jump on Board.

Getting into new concepts and exploring advanced OD philosophies can be exciting and enriching, but can also be overwhelming and hard to envision in people’s historic work and style. Change agents come often from a background of extensive exploration of the models and possibilities, and may unwittingly overwhelm their regional partners and counterparts, and furthermore whack them with a sense of judgment toward any failure to quickly adapt the new philosophy/model.

Time pressure, financial, and other resource constraints are often driving factors behind costly oversimplifications in the mental modeling we apply, consciously or unaware, to large transformation initiatives. Daniel Kahnemann’s work illuminates human thinking and modeling tendencies and constraints well, and his work has direct bearing on how we approach framing and modeling change initiatives (Kahneman, 2011).

Overwhelming regional partners with advanced global change programs can elicit local responses such as “This is beyond imagination,” “We have not seen it,” (as unimaginable as if someone tries to explain a steam engine to a person from a prehistoric culture), “For so long, we’ve worked under one HR (or Sales, or engineering etc) model, one leader’s direction of how to do it. I don’t even know how this (model) works, how to even make sense of it. Meanwhile, there are fires to put out and just now, a legal issue popped up so I need to go deal with that, sorry.”

The antidote to this pitfall is for change leaders and OD practitioners to come back down to earth, to value and

develop our paradigms and frameworks but to remain connected to the practical, day-to-day realities people deal with while they try to make change happen.

This involves being aware of the potential pitfalls in global change initiatives, whether it is the five themes we have touched on in this article or other potential pitfalls in global change projects that OD practitioners and change leaders may encounter. Without addressing these base issues, Organizational Development ideas run the risk of becoming just fluff or shallow, out of touch lofty thinking. If we remain reflective, aware, open to input, and connected to on-the-ground realities, we will have a good shot at helping positive change happen in organizations.

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