

Challenge #19

How do you activate the right understanding of roles?

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The nut to crack

Change Leadership is not owned

In a transformation process where the path is not always clear upfront and matters tend to shift along the way, confusion often ensues about **who is leading the change**. This results in change leadership not being owned and potential frustration or conflicts arise about roles. How do you maintain a **clear division of roles**, how do you **stay in your own role** and make sure others do the same.

The solution

The Change Leader leads, the Enabler enables

I see transformation journeys derail in practice because ownership for the organisational transformation has not been assigned in the right place or is not perceived.

When an organisational transformation becomes the daily responsibility of every leader it becomes even more important **to clarify the roles for each and everyone involved in a straightforward manner**.

You can basically categorise change leadership into **two core roles**. The role of change leader and the role of change enabler.

The change leader is the one who leads the change using their heart and mind, by giving direction, initiating the dialogues, and taking the decisions. This would typically be the role with the main final responsibility for the business results.

The change enabler is the one who orchestrates and coordinates the transformation process. This role is typically filled by strategy, HR, finance or IT business partners, program or project managers, change managers or consultants hired in a temporary capacity.

To be thorough, sometimes people switch role from one moment to the next. Imagine an IT director for example. He plays the change enabler role while guiding the business during the implementation of digital solutions, but he also plays the change leader role in managing his own department.



Lead change by head and heart through **vision, purpose, inspiration, 2-way dialogue** and **key decision making**

e.g. sponsor



Orchestrate the change process to happen, including the **hard and soft** side and **what and how** of change

e.g. project leader

To practice it helps to make people experience these roles in workshops. I ask them to wear the cap that most accurately represents the nature of the role they are playing in the transformation. By doing so, it instantly becomes clear that some individuals are wearing the wrong hat or are confused about the role they play or do not see a role at all for themselves. Clarifying this early on in the transformation has huge benefits.

As a **change leader** you typically have several core responsibilities:

- You select and appoint the team leading the transformation and guide them through the planning and implementation
- You set the course through vision, inspiration, and a compelling change story
- You set the principles and the framework and take the decisions on the design of the change interventions and solutions
- You have the tough conversations and make sure people display the changed behaviour
- You coach change leaders who report to you and support them in effectively fulfilling their role

As a **change enabler** you typically have these responsibilities:

- You teach the team how to use change management methodologies and techniques to plan and implement transformation and innovation effectively
- You help design and implement organisational transformation solutions
- You identify obstacles, put them on the agenda and make sure action is being taken
- You coach change leaders to manage the transformation

In reality you will find **many names for different transformation roles**. These can vary from sponsor to change agent to ambassador to change manager and to transformation director. These roles are often assigned to a selective number of people.

The disadvantage of assigning a specific organisational transformation role to a limited number of people is that **a significant part of the leaders and enablers don't feel they have a role to play too**. For example, when you assign a change manager to a project, the line manager of the department the project takes place in is often unaware he has to play an equally if not more important part as change leader. Or if you assign a sponsor, it is often unclear to the manager reporting to the sponsor that he plays an equally important role in driving the change at his own hierarchical level.

In addition, **the terminology can be confusing**. A title can be puzzling when someone who heads up the transformation program is named transformation director but who essentially plays the role of change enabler towards the business. The responsibility for the realisation of the business results of the program lie with the line organisation, not with the transformation director. But the title suggests otherwise, typically resulting in a passive stance with the real change leaders, like the business unit directors.

Differentiating between the change leaders and the change enablers does not stop you assigning specific roles to a select number of people, naming them sponsor for example, as long as everyone is **clear on their own role** and that this role consciousness is felt deeply in the organisation.

Change leadership is the combination of these two roles. This can mean that the change leader can take over certain tasks of the change enabler at some point and vice versa, because it can be necessary if you don't want to drop the ball. That's fine, as long as the balance is not lost and you are both clear on who is playing which role.

By having the people involved uncover early on in the process whether the role of change leader or enabler is best suited to them and whether it corresponds with their actual activities **you create clarity**. The real case example in this chapter will illustrate this.



Determine and share the necessity and expectations for the transformation **Tick the box**

Determine and communicate the necessity of the transformation.	
Clarify what success looks like.	
Create precise expectations of the future by linking the transformation to clear-cut achievement indicators .	
Clarify how this transformation relates to the business strategy of the organisation.	
Hold the team accountable for the results and check this periodically.	

Provide active support during the transformation

Provide the right team members, budgets and means to achieve success.	
Provide access to experts where necessary	
Be present during the critical moments like the kick off, special events or trainings.	
Partake frequently in status and update meetings to encourage the motivation and energy of the team.	
Make the critical decisions on time and based on clear previously agreed upon design principles .	
Stay accessible for the team.	

Build a coalition of those who are willing

Guide important stakeholders through their individual change curve from initial awareness to adopting to role modelling	
Actively deal with resistance from managers and external stakeholders.	
Have one-to-ones with line managers.	
Provide support in the development and safeguarding the Non Negotiable rules, the rules which can't be broken.	
Provide support from the top, by bringing senior and top level managers along for the journey.	

Communicate with employees and team members

Communicate the necessity, the risks of not transforming, and the expected outcome.	
Find ways to stimulate bottom up communication (face to face feedback, questions, suggestions).	
Be available for keynotes and special events to promote and stimulate change	
Communicate frequently about the transformation using multiple communication channels.	
Coach other change leaders and enablers on how to execute their change leadership roles.	

Support-Tool: Change Leadership Check List

If you would like to go into more detail on whether the tasks and responsibilities corresponding to change leadership are being executed the check list can help.

After that it is up to the change leaders and enablers to agree on who does what. The assumption being, that any agreement is valid as long as it's clear to both and it's in line with the design principles that the change leader leads the transformation with heart and mind by setting the course, having the conversations and taking the decisions and the change enabler orchestrates and coordinates the transformation processes.



Real life example

Activate the right role understanding

Niek is the program manager of a large Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system implementation. The responsible business leaders say the ERP implementation is important, but their actions suggest otherwise. They delay critical actions and cancel meetings. Niek knows from experience that if this behaviour continues the 'go live' in two months will be unsuccessful. How can he break this pattern?

Niek asks the CFO, one of the sponsors of the ERP implementation, to invite the business leaders for a two-hour meeting. During this meeting Niek regales them with two stories: one of a failed ERP implementation which led to discontinuity in the business and one of a successful implementation that went live effortlessly and led to the system being properly implemented and desired benefits monetised. He describes in detail the differences between the two cases.

In the negative case, the leaders resisted the new system from the beginning. Consequently, the local team was understaffed, and the project was deprioritised compared to other local business initiatives. The central program office was at the helm. During the design phase of the ERP template and during the pre-implementation, red signals were either not given or not received. This resulted in a disastrous 'go live' where 3 months later, customers were still not receiving their scheduled deliveries at the agreed time, they suffered millions worth of damage and the stress levels led to multiple burn outs of individuals involved. In the positive case the business leaders tied their own success to a successful implementation, they installed a strong local team who ran a detailed project and milestone planning. The central program team worked

together with the local team on an equal level as colleagues. Everyone was on the ball during the design phase and conflicts were handled constructively based on clear design principles and a tightly directed decision making process. They then proceeded to test and run simulations with the understanding that the project could only proceed to the next phase after sign-off by the local business leaders. This led to a delay of two months twice, because the facts showed that the organisation was not ready to work with the new system. Subsequently, the actual 'go live' went effortlessly and they had freed up enough manpower after 'go live' to take maximum advantage of the full potential the implemented ERP system provided.

The CFO asked the leaders present which case resembled theirs the most. It became painfully obvious that they were heading for failure and some of them admitted as much. Then the CFO introduced the two roles and asked them to reflect on their change leader role and compare it to what they were leaving up to their program team. The mismatch was clearly felt here too, and it became apparent that the change leaders were not in the change leaders seat causing the supporting program team to compensate by taking over tasks and responsibilities.

Building role consciousness and providing insight into the consequences of continuing along this path proved to be sufficient to generate a breakthrough; change leaders went back to behaving like change leaders and conditions which were missing were put in place. As a result, fortunately, the eventual 'go live' went without a hitch.



Tip for the
change leader

A common misconception is that you lead a transformation alongside your regular job. As soon as leaders realise you don't lead transformation alongside your job but that it actually is your job, activating change leadership on all organisational levels becomes an easier task. Therefore you should start with this mental first step if it causes obstructive thoughts.

If you are structurally spending more time enabling the transformation then the leader spends on leading it, it's probably an indication that you are taking on tasks that belong with the change leader.



Tip for the
change enabler

Conclusion

Clear role insight is an important condition for success:

Failed transformation journeys are mostly caused by an **insufficient sense of ownership and leadership** in all levels of the organisation. This is triggered by inadequate **role consciousness or role misunderstandings** by the important players in the transformation journey. By having those involved discover whether the role of change lead and enabler is best suited to them and corresponds with how they are behaving in practice together, they will see if they are in the right seat and not in someone else's. By combining this insight with an understanding of if you portray a role successfully or unsuccessfully directly influences the transformation, you activate the desired behaviour.



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