

John Kotter's Change Model

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As leaders, our response to organizational change often predicts the success of the change and others' response to it. Changes in your organization require both leadership and management skills.

In his book *Leading Change* (1996), John Kotter outlined an eight-stage process for organizational change. The change model described below reflects the leadership skills you'll need to guide change. Effective management is necessary, too. Read the summary of each stage of the change model below.

Establish a Sense of Urgency

Establishing a sense of urgency is crucial to gaining needed cooperation for organizational change. Strategies to raise the urgency level in victim service organizations include—

- Creating a case study of a crisis exposing organizational weaknesses.
- Set productivity and customer satisfaction targets so high that they can't be reached by conducting business as usual and hold staff accountable.
- Share data about customer satisfaction and performance with all staff.
- Have staff regularly communicate with dissatisfied customers.
- Use straight talk when discussing the need for change.
- Look to the future following successful change, highlighting opportunities and rewards.

Create a Guiding Coalition

Because major change is so difficult to accomplish, a powerful force is required to sustain the process. Often, no one individual is capable of leading the change effort. A strong guiding coalition is always needed—one with the right composition, level of trust, and shared objectives. Strategies to create a guiding coalition in victim service organizations include—

- Ensure key players are on board, especially first-line supervisors.
- Ensure various points of view and expertise are represented to address change tasks.
- Ensure group members have credibility with other staff.
- Ensure the coalition has proven leaders to guide the process.

Develop a Vision and Strategy

A vision is critical to the change process and generally serves three purposes: clarifies the desired direction, motivates people to take action, and coordinates the action. Kotter provides five characteristics of an effective vision: It is imaginable, desirable, feasible, flexible, and communicable. Strategies for creating an effective change vision in victim service organizations include—

- Begin with a first draft, often from the leader, reflecting dreams and real needs.
- The guiding coalition (or even a larger group of stakeholders/customers) refines and models the change vision.

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- Ensure that both the “head” and the “heart” are involved in the process.
- Give adequate time for the vision to evolve.
- Align the final product with Kotter’s five characteristics of an effective vision.

Communicate the Vision

The real power of an effective vision is realized when most people involved in the change process have a common understanding of the change goals and direction. Strategies for communicating the change vision in victim service organizations include—

- Keep the vision simple.
- Use multiple communication forums (meetings, memos, posters, newsletters, one-to-one communication).
- Repeat the vision messages over and over again.
- Lead the change by example – be the change you hope to see.
- Address inconsistencies with the vision.
- Listen to staff for what’s working and what’s not.

Empower Staff

At this stage of a change process, it’s important to empower staff by taking action to remove as many barriers to implementing the change vision as possible. The four areas for potential barriers lie in organizational structures, staff skills, systems, and supervisors. Strategies to empower staff to affect change in victim service organizations include—

- Communicate the effective vision.
- Make structures compatible with the vision. Assess whether the current organizational structure will support change efforts, remove structural silos that undermine teamwork, and streamline decisionmaking functions.
- Provide staff with the training they need to make the change.
- Align information and personnel systems to the vision.
- Deal with supervisors who undermine the change effort.

Generate Short-Term Wins

Identification and communication of short-term accomplishments are critical to the sustainability of the change effort. Strategies to generate short-term wins in victim service organizations include—

- Identify timely short-term performance objectives that are unambiguous and clearly related to the change effort.
- Make sure the wins are visible to staff and others.
- Reward staff “change agents.”
- Use short-term wins to generate momentum for future actions.

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Consolidate Gains and Produce More Change

Kotter stresses a cardinal rule of organizational change: Whenever you let up before the job is done, critical momentum can be lost, and regression may follow. The rule is, "Don't stop until the job is done." Strategies to consolidate gains and produce more change in victim service organizations include—

- Use the success of short-term wins to target additional change steps.
- Bring more staff to the change team.
- Maintain clarity of the shared vision and keep urgency up.
- Share leadership with lower-level staff for change steps/projects.
- Provide "change agents," the tools, support, and independence (i.e., remove interdependent barriers) to move the change process forward.

Anchor New Approaches in the Culture

When new practices made in a change effort are not compatible with the organizational culture, they will be vulnerable to regression. Kotter asserts that culture changes only after you have successfully altered staff actions, you have demonstrated that new actions produce some positive change in performance, and that staff see the connection between new actions and performance improvement. Strategies to anchor new approaches in the culture of victim service organizations include—

- Remember that culture change comes last—not first.
- Focus on results—make it clear that they are due to new practices and are superior to the old.
- Talk it up with staff—help staff to recognize the validity of new practices.
- Change key people if they are barriers to culture change.
- Make promotion processes compatible with new practices.

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In his later book, *The Heart of Change* (2002), Kotter added an important component to change. People are less likely to change themselves and others based solely on data and analysis and more likely to change based on compelling experiences.

Bottom line: Feelings often trump thinking.

This insight certainly supports the change in victims' rights and services in the United States in the past 30 years. The power of the personal story is often the catalyst for change, more so than statistics, data, and analysis. Feelings and emotions often trump thinking and logic.