

Building the capacity for organisational change

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Change is often referred to as the constant in our present age, particularly in education — but too often it's something we like to watch from afar, preferring that it affects someone else. And yet, the reality is that few of us are ever immune from the impact of change. So, why is it that we find change difficult to embrace? Building our capacity for change, and doing the same for the learners in our care, ought to be a priority for anyone living in this fast-paced, 'exponentially-changing' world.



This is even more important when we consider the challenge of bringing about change in the organisations we work for or in. Changing an organisation can be like trying to turn a whale: until we think of it more as a school of small fish — when one turns so do the others, so the whole school changes in a more agile way than the large whale might!

Having spent some time with various individuals and professional groups on this matter, here are five tips that I think provide a useful checklist to consider when thinking about how well you're building your organisation's capacity for change.

1. BE INFORMED

Being caught by surprise can be the biggest challenge to embracing change. It's always better if we've had our 'eyes on the horizon' and understand the environment we're a part of, so that when change does occur, we have a frame of reference to help make sense of it all. Some questions to ask here include:

- What are you reading? Are you exposing yourself to multiple perspectives?
- What conferences do you attend? Are they only relating to what you do in your work?
- Who do you discuss this with? Do they challenge your ideas if they don't agree?
- What PLD programmes do you participate in?

- Are you involved in a personal/professional learning network (PLN)
- What is your personal inquiry? What guides your process?
- How do you act on new ideas?

2. UNDERSTAND THE CULTURE THAT EXISTS

The culture of an organisation defines “how things happen” here, and understanding what that culture is will assist you in recognising where the enablers and roadblocks to change may be. Some questions to guide you here are:

- What drives the way your organisation operates? Who ‘owns’ the learning there?
- Does everyone demonstrate leadership – teachers, students, parents, community
- Is transparency, trust, devolved responsibility evident?
- Is there an appetite for risk, and acceptance of failure as a part of the process?
- Do you devote time to building relationships and valuing ideas and input?
- How do you celebrate and recognise achievements and successes as they happen?

3. DEVELOP LEADERSHIP CAPABILITIES AMONG ALL INVOLVED

Change is everyone’s responsibility — not just ‘those at the top’. For real change to occur, everyone must take ownership of what is being changed, and be prepared to be a part of the change process. This works best when everyone in the organisation is recognised for the leadership capabilities they bring. Some questions to reflect on here are:

- How are the strategic decisions made in your organisation? Who has the final say?
- Do learners and teachers have agency in their work?
- How do you recognise and value the particular talents and skills of individuals?
- How do you foster the emergence of new thinking and leadership?
- Does everyone demonstrate leadership — teachers, students, parents, community?
- Do learners and teachers have agency in their work?
- Do you devote time to building relationships and valuing ideas and input?

4. DEVELOP STRATEGIES FOR COPING

Ultimately, organisational change requires a commitment to action, and action requires that we have strategies that can be used to guide the activity of everyone involved. There is a plethora of advice on strategies for change that you can easily access on the web or in a bookstore, but some worth considering are:

- How do you accommodate risk and accept failure as a part of learning?
- Is there evidence of a “Fail fast, fix fast” mindset?
- Is professional inquiry and personal reflection an integral part of organisational learning?
- What frameworks have you adopted that provide common insights and the basis of a shared language of change?
- Is there a regular celebration of what has been achieved?

5. DON'T DO IT ALONE

Organisational change is not an individual endeavour! A characteristic of our modern age is the emphasis on collaboration; on partnership; on being ‘networked’. To bring about meaningful, sustained change we need each other, and to understand it is a corporate endeavour, where everyone’s voice must count, and everyone’s actions matter. Some questions to ask here are:

- Is there an emphasis on “We” not “Me” in your organisation?
- Are staff and students required to work regularly as teams?
- Is learning and teaching happening cross curricular using integrated approaches?
- Is collaboration the norm?
- Do you understand how ecologies operate? Are you operating as part of a “network”?
- Are you prepared to give a little? Don’t sweat the small stuff!

This is not an exhaustive list, but a starting point for some personal reflection and for conversations you may wish to have with others in your own organisation. While the questions are primarily posed to challenge the thinking of organisational leaders, there is plenty in here for those who have other roles.

Listen to Derek Wenmoth discussing these ideas:

Building capacity for change from [CORE Education Digital Media](#) on [Vimeo](#).

https://vimeo.com/?embedded=true&source=vimeo_logo&owner=11142973

If you’d like to know more about how you can build the capacity for change in your organisation we have a number of consultants at CORE who are specialists in this area and can work with you to find solutions that work for you and your context. Please contact us.

You may also find it valuable to attend [Tēnei te Tira Hou | Culture of Change](#), the pre-conference day at our ULearn event, from 10-12 October

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