

# **Enabling managers and supervisors to be excellent change leaders**

by

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## Executive overview

The purpose of this paper is to share the success we had with a new way of working with major changes in organizations. Our approach was to deliberately *integrate leadership development and change management* in the conduction of an actual organizational change.

The objective was to engage supervisors and managers in change management activities to ensure business results while also focusing on the development of leadership competencies with the overall aim of making them excellent change leaders.

We have found this approach a very useful way to create both motivation and meaning for the leaders involved and to ensure change results for the organization. The approach gave us both long-term qualitative and short-term specific *results e.g.*:

- We measured a high level of satisfaction with the change process with both managers and employees.
- We built up specific change competencies and generic leadership competencies in the management group.
- We built up general change competence in the organization to benefit future change projects.
- We realized benefits from the business case proved by measuring a row of relevant KPI's.

To reach these results the following activities were important *levers*:

- We integrated a *strategy* for involving and developing the supervisors and managers into the Change Management strategy.
- We invented a new valuable tool: An "*Inspiration Packet*" to enhance the effectiveness of the change management effort of the leaders.
- We offered a variety of training courses, network groups and coaching

to stimulate the *leadership development*.

- We held regular *manager seminars* engaging the leaders in working together on relevant themes corresponding with the current state of the project.
- We facilitated workshops about the *new job roles* with both managers and employees giving them the opportunity to discuss and influence the final roles.
- We conducted regular *web surveys* throughout the change process to follow the managers and the employees closely. We engaged the leaders in setting goals for the next survey and planning the activities necessary to get there.

## Background

The paper is mainly based on cases from two projects:

- A five-year project in a Danish insurance company: "New Vision for the Claims Department". The changes were thorough and included organization, employees, processes and technology (development of a new claim system). App. 45 managers were involved.
- A global outsourcing project in a Danish life science company. App. 25 managers were involved.

The term "leader" will be used in the following to refer to managers and supervisors who held direct responsibility for people going through organizational changes. "Leader" as a terminology is used not just to simplify but also to emphasize the role as change leaders.

## Change philosophy

An underlying thesis for the way we work with change management is that *the responsibility for implementing organizational change lies with the managers and supervisors*. Consultants, project managers and project members can facilitate the

process, but you will only get sustainable business results, if the line managers take responsibility.

Working with change in an operating organization is a huge challenge. The leaders are often selected to the job because they are good at conducting the daily operation, they usually get rewarded for the results of the operation and they are rooted in an operation mind-set. We wanted the leaders not only to be great operational leaders but also to be excellent change leaders.

We have found *integrating leadership development and change management* a very useful way to create both motivation and meaning for the leaders involved and to ensure change results for the organization.

We took on a systemic view<sup>i</sup> on change that implies that both people development and organizational results happen in relations. Working together on implementing changes is a perfect learning opportunity. The change project was the “disturbance<sup>ii</sup> needed” to stimulate new thinking and demanded the leaders to be actively involved in the learning process.

In a change process the leaders go through a psychological transition<sup>iii</sup> saying goodbye to the past, exploring possibilities and realizing a new way of working. In the middle of this transition organizational and personal development possibilities go hand-in-hand. The synergy of bringing the leaders together in a frame where development and change are stimulated and supported creates tremendous results for both people and organization.

### **Change Management Strategy**

For both projects we integrated a specific strategy for involvement, development and support of the leaders in the overall Change Management Strategy. Hence we described a row of activities in the Change Management plan to help fulfill the strategy.

We especially found the following activities to be strong levers:

- Regular **Inspiration Packets** – a new tool that was developed to support the leaders in implementing the changes in their own department / with their own employees.
- **Leadership development** activities integrated into the change management process. Training, networking and coaching.
- Regular **seminars and workshops** for all leaders during the change process.
- Regular **temperature surveys**. Engaging the leaders in setting goals for employee’s attitudes and competence level.
- Involving the leaders in planning and doing various **communication activities**.
- A facilitated **process for development of the new job roles**. Involving the leaders (and later on employees) in “role workshops”.

In the following we will describe these activities further.

### **What we did**

#### **Inspiration Packets**

We invented a completely new concept called Inspiration Packets. An Inspiration Packet consisted of materials with the aim of supporting a leader in the conduction of change management activities with his or her own employees.

Because of the packets the leaders didn’t have to start from scratch each time but could draw on other people’s experiences. We emphasized that the packets were meant as a helping tool and not as the one and only truth. It was required that the leaders made changes to the material to make the packet fit the specific need of their own team.

A typical packet was sent by email to the leaders and consisted of:

- **Key messages** related to the current state of the project.
- **Agenda** for a group meeting/workshop.

- Power point **presentations** the leader could use with his or her employees at the group meeting.
- Suggestion of **exercises**, debate questions etc.
- **Facilitation guide** to the managers with ideas on how to facilitate an exiting and involving workshop process.



Figure: Inspiration Packet (illustration from a workshop)

### Leadership development

The Inspiration Packets were formulated to provide support for the leaders; in addition we also focused on the development of leadership competencies specifically change management competencies. A variety of training courses, networking and coaching were offered to stimulate this development.

The training courses had different topics. We conducted courses in Change Management introducing the leaders to the concepts and tools of Change Management. It was important that the leaders understood how going through a change process impacted their employees and of course also themselves. It gave the leaders a common language to discuss change management challenges and support each other. Finally they were supplied with specific change tools. We also conducted courses in coaching, cultural differences and other relevant subjects.

We established small networking groups among the managers to stimulate the support

of each other. Through these group meetings the leaders could come up with the actual challenges and learn from each other.

On top of that we gave them the opportunity to consult a coach. After some time we found that there were barriers towards using the coach. One of the reasons was prioritizing the time for it and another reason was pride about being able to handle their own stuff. We then took on a new strategy and the coach began to be more proactive. That gave us very good results since most of the leaders were happy about the visits from the coach and they had a lot of things they wanted to talk with the coach about, when she first was present.

### Manager seminars

Change gets successful when people draw in the same direction and a synergism is created from many people with different competencies.

In the five-year project in the Danish Insurance company we gathered all the leaders on a two-day seminar every half-year. During every seminar we had a theme, which corresponded to the current state of the project. For example the first seminar was about the Vision. The objective was to ensure a common picture, ownership of the Vision and that every good idea would be considered.

Other themes were the business case for the project, new job roles, activities and scope of the change, new processes and the new IT-system.

### Temperature surveys

Throughout the change process we conducted yearly web surveys to follow the managers and the employees closely. The first surveys were focused on knowledge of and attitude to the changes. Later on we supplemented with questions referring to behavior to see if people actually did change the way they worked.

The results of each survey were discussed on a manager seminar where the leaders set specific goals for the upcoming results of the next survey. Together we planned the

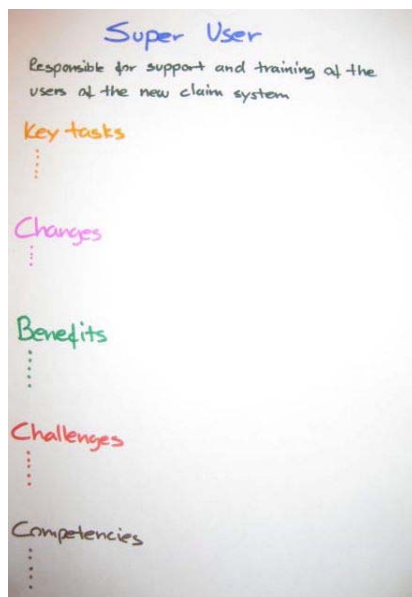
necessary change management activities to reach the goals.

Communication activities were central and the leaders were engaged in the communication planning and conduction.

### New job roles

As an example of how we integrated the different efforts we will describe how we worked with the new job roles.

First we facilitated a workshop with top management to set the frame for the future job roles. Input to the workshop came among other sources from the analysis of the new processes.



*The figure shows an example of a poster for the role Super User (before it was filled out on the workshop)*

Then we facilitated a special process about the new roles in one of the manager seminars with leaders from all levels. We prepared 12 posters, one for each key role in the division. Each poster contained the name of the role, a short description, key tasks, competencies required, important changes and expected attitudes. There was empty writing space on each poster. The leaders were divided into

small groups and asked to walk around in the room, discuss the content of the posters on the wall and write their comments and suggestions directly on the poster. Afterwards people sat down and the facilitator walked from poster to poster, read the comments out loud and facilitated a discussion ending up in a common view of how the new roles were supposed to be.

We found this process to be a useful tool for creating management ownership on the new roles. Further on it was the foundation of the following introduction of the roles to the employees where we conducted a similar process.

### The results

The results of the way we worked with change - integrating leadership development and change management - could be divided into general qualitative results and specific measureable results.

As far as the qualitative results go we reached a high level of satisfaction with the change process with both managers and employees. Retention of leaders and employees are important since recruiting is expensive and motivated employees are also more productive, which is to be seen on the bottom-line.

We furthermore succeeded to build up both specific change competencies and generic leadership competencies in the management group. Looking forward to future change projects the organization is far better prepared having built change competence into the organization.

Based on the business case we defined a wide range of KPI's referring to every specific area of change. It will be too comprehensive to go through all of these but two different examples are level of customer satisfaction and numbers of telephone calls handled. Most of the KPI's were proved to be highly satisfactory by the end of the project.

Of course one could claim that all of these results are influenced by a lot of different factors. Compared to our experiences with other change projects, we are nevertheless sure to conclude that this approach, and especially the responsibility the leaders took on becoming real change leaders, was a crucial factor for the results.

## ***The author***

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**Acquiro** is a Danish management consultancy company specialized in facilitation of development processes for people and organizations.

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<sup>ii</sup> Due to systemic learning theory an “adequate disturbance” is the foundation for learning.

<sup>iii</sup> See William Bridges: “Managing Transitions”, 1995.

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<sup>i</sup> System thinking: see Humberto Maturana and Gregory Bateson