

# Change Is All Around You: How Can You Tame It?

To get a handle on change, you need to look at it in a new way.

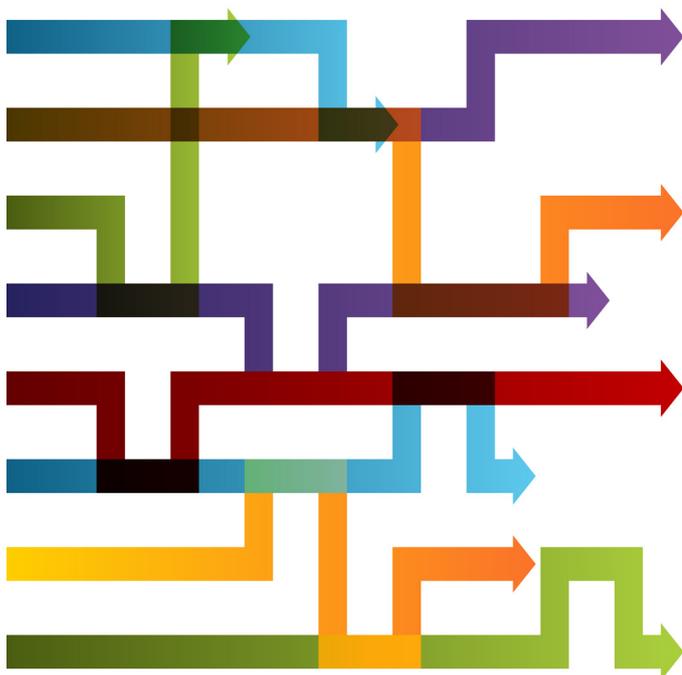
*By Tom Somodi*

**M**ost people agree that an organization's ability to change is critical to its long-term survival. To this end, the literature is full of theories, methodologies, recommendations, and analysis on how to structure an organization to obtain successful change. Lean operating techniques, continuous improvement philosophies, and employee empowerment strategies are a small sampling. Yet, we still hear about organizations that made all these structural accommodations and still failed to achieve the desired results.

The reality is that if we want to see advancement in this arena, a major paradigm shift needs to occur regarding the dynamics of change and organizational structure. The best place to begin is by leveraging concepts found in change science.

## Step 1: Develop & Communicate a Proper Perspective of Change

One of the first things change science tells us is that change is constantly occurring around us. It's important for everyone from the board of directors to individuals in frontline positions to recognize this fact.



Every time a donor is solicited, an e-mail sent, a product produced, or an invoice generated, a change has occurred. Therefore, an organization is continuously inundated with change. If the organization has managed to survive, this change has, on the whole, been successful.

So, Step 1 is for everyone to stop thinking of change as specific efforts or events. Instead, people must recognize that they're already successfully dealing with a stream of change at every level in the organization.

## Step 2: Develop an Organization-Wide Understanding of Responsibility

So how does an organization manage all this continuously occurring change? The answer is simple – delegation of responsibility. From the person who answers the phone to the manager who resolves a conflict, responsibility for these changes has been delegated.

The concept of employee empowerment automatically exists as soon as people are given responsibility for managing and controlling the changes that have been assigned to them. What's often lacking is recognition that, through the assignment of responsibility, all employees are already masters at managing and executing change.

## Step 3: Recognize & Communicate Two Categories of Change

Since organizations are already managing a continuous flow of change, why all the discussion about how organizations struggle with change? The answer lies in the fact that organizations have allowed the lines of responsibility between day-to-day operational change and strategic change to get blurred. Even more worrisome, the interrelationship between operational change and strategic change has become disconnected. That's why it's so important to understand the differences between these two types of change:

**Strategic change** is in response to internal opportunities for improvement and external influences that can threaten the organization.

**Operational change** focuses on the short-term expected and unexpected change that needs to be executed to support customers. Operational change is based on strategic change

“All employees are already masters at managing change.”

that has occurred within the organization on a historical basis.

All those in your organization must understand that operational change and strategic change are equally important. No matter which type of change they're involved with at the moment, they mustn't forget the value of the other category of change. The organization as a whole must do two things continuously:

**Execute operational change to support customers** in the here and now.

**Keep an eye on strategic change so that the organization will survive** into the future.

### Step 4: Adjust Responsibility to Support Change

Assuming your organization is successful in Steps 1 through 3, you can still face challenges if there isn't a clear delineation of responsibility for operational and strategic change. The following guidelines will help:

**Drive responsibility** for day-to-day operational change as far down the organizational pyramid as possible. Ideally, the more operational change that can be controlled at the administrative and production levels of the organization, the better. These are the people closest to the operational change, and they have the greatest ability to address opportunities and issues that may arise.

**Clearly indicate** (through appraisals, compensation, and so on) that the primary responsibility over strategic change is from the lowest management levels on up to the executive and board level. There will always be operational change that requires involvement at the higher levels of management. Even a major customer contract could easily require signoff by the CEO. However, it should be clear that the main responsibility for management should be related to accomplishing strategic change. For example, the allocation of focus related to strategic versus operational change might look something like Table 1.

**Be sure that workers at the ground operational level** know the differences between operational and strategic change. They should understand that it's management's responsibility to focus on strategic change with an objective of long-term improvement. Be sure there's a communication loop that supports the delineation of responsibility. This includes communication of the whys behind strategic change to those responsible for operational change. It also includes feedback communication to those responsible for

TABLE 1: ALLOCATION OF FOCUS BETWEEN STRATEGIC & OPERATIONAL CHANGE

	Strategic Change	Operational Change
<b>Board of Directors</b>	100%	0%
<b>Chief Executives</b>	90%	10%
<b>VPs</b>	85%	15%
<b>Directors</b>	75%	25%
<b>Managers</b>	60%	40%
<b>Admin &amp; Production</b>	5%	95%

strategic change regarding opportunities for improvements that might exist.

Once you follow these steps, you'll find that successful change isn't as mysterious and elusive as it seems at first glance. The real challenge lies in executing the paradigm shift that requires a clear understanding by everyone in the organization that change is already occurring constantly within the organization and that a new delineation of responsibility between strategic and operational change is required. 

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## Structure Your Organization for Change

For more on creating a structure that supports successful change, see these articles at NonprofitWorld.org:

**The Promise and Pitfalls of Organizational Change** (Vol. 28, No. 4)

**When It's Time for a Turnaround** (Vol. 26, No. 2)

**How to Improve the Process of Change: The Sanctuary Model** (Vol. 28, No. 6)

**Taking Action to Manage Change** (Vol. 29, No. 1)

**Transforming Your Organization from the Inside Out** (Vol. 25, No. 4)

**Match Your Change Strategy to Your Organization's Maturity** (Vol. 21, No. 5)

**Planning for Leadership Succession** (Vol. 22, No. 4)

**Adapt to Change to Survive** (Vol. 24, No. 2)