

Informal Coalitions

Mastering the Hidden Dynamics of Organizational Change

Chris Rodgers

Chapter Summaries

Preface

Highlights the high failure rate of organizational change programs. Sets out the background to, and origins of, the informal coalitions perspective. Identifies some of the key features that distinguish *Informal Coalitions* from other books that repackage the more conventional approaches to organizational change. Outlines the broad structure of the book and how readers can get the best out of it.

Chapter 1 – Mapping the Territory

Develops a sensemaking framework, the Change Map, which sets out four basic views of how change happens in organizations and shows how these interrelate within a specific organizational context.

Explores the spectrum of conventional views on how change happens in organizations. Introduces the notion of informal coalitions and integrates this into the Change Map. Highlights the benefits and drawbacks of each of the change modes. Identifies the outcomes that might be expected in pursuing the various approaches. Describes the generic leadership and facilitation roles relevant to each mode. Introduces four key aspects of organizational dynamics that are fundamental to the change process. Spells out the assumptions implicit in the conventional, rational view of change.

Chapter 2 – The Underlying Dynamics of Change

Illuminates the critical role played by the messy, informal and a-rational dynamics of organizational change, and sets out a new change-leadership agenda based on these.

Introduces the notion of relationship dynamics, and identifies the implications of these for organizational change. Explains and explores the shadow-side dynamics of organizations. Shows how managers are, at one and the same time, both 'in control' of their organizations and 'not in control' of them. Discusses organizations as networks of self-organizing conversations. Illustrates how *all* change originates through informal coalitional activity. Clarifies the assumptions that support this a-rational view of change. Rehabilitates talk, power and politics, and organizational paradox as central aspects of change leadership. Outlines the elements of the resulting change-leadership agenda.

Chapter 3 – Reframing Communication

Explains why the focus of leadership communication needs to move beyond formal, structured message passing. Emphasizes the central roles played by informal conversations and everyday interactions in the crucial sensemaking and relationship-building aspects of change leadership.

Introduces the Leadership Communication Grid. Recaps briefly on the formal and structured processes that conventionally dominate leadership communication during organizational change. Recognizes and explores the use of participative workshops and structured dialogue sessions, which managers sometimes adopt to introduce more informality and openness into their relationships with staff. Emphasizes and explores the importance of engaging with the everyday conversations that take place constantly in all organizations (and through which informal coalitions primarily form). Within this, puts more flesh on the importance of seeing 'talk' as a leader's primary *action* tool. Completes the exploration of the Grid by introducing the communication impact of leaders as role models (which is explored more fully in Chapter 4). Suggests that role modeling - at its best - can be thought of as the elusive 'X-Factor' in organizational communication.

Chapter 4 – Thinking Culturally

Presents organizational culture as the active process of shared sensemaking, rather than as a static 'thing' that can be designed, built and communicated to others by managers. Explores the role-modeling implications of viewing organizational culture in this way.

Challenges the business benefit of much of the work carried out by the 'culture-change industry'. Identifies limitations in the popular view of culture, which sees it as a separate component of organization that can be designed and built by managers as part of a structured change program. Explores the implications of viewing culture instead as the *active process* of shared sensemaking. Highlights how underlying assumptions are formed; and the critical importance of these in channeling sensemaking discussions and influencing outcomes. Revisits the notion of 'organizations as networks of conversations' from a cultural perspective. Exposes some of the popular management myths that obscure understanding in this area. Sees leaders as cultural symbols; and introduces the Moments of Leadership Truth framework, as a basis for more effective leadership action.

Chapter 5 – Acting Politically

Addresses head-on the critical importance of power and political processes in effecting organizational change and transforming performance. Explains how managers can act politically, with integrity and in organizationally enhancing ways.

Challenges the conventional view of organizational politics as 'playing dirty'. Introduces the informal coalitions perspective of politics as an essential and potentially beneficial dimension of organizational leadership. Explains the underlying political dynamics of all organizations (structural, personal and inter-personal). Discusses the notion of an individual's personal frame of reference, through which they view their organization and decide how to act. Discusses the political process – revisiting the idea of 'organizations as networks of conversations' from a political perspective. Looks at the nature of power in organizations and how this impacts upon organizational dynamics. Uses the Change Map to identify the options for political action. Explores the phases of political action, and identifies practical strategies to deal with these.

Chapter 6 – Building Coalitions

Identifies and explores the key task of building informal coalitions of support for new ideas and specific change interventions. In doing so, it addresses the psychological and emotional impact of change on people, as well as dealing with its intellectual and physical dimensions.

Explores the nature of coalitions and maps the coalition-building task. Introduces generic coalition-building strategies associated with "issue coalitions" (to change the organization's agendas and policies) and "action coalitions" (to implement desired changes 'on the ground'). Outlines the purpose and nature of the day-to-day conversations required at each stage of the coalition-building process. Walks through the process of moving staff through resistance to engagement, by managing the transition process well and facilitating emotional release. Highlights the potential pitfalls to avoid in positively perceived change.

Chapter 7 – Embracing Paradox

Discusses ways of dealing with the inherently paradoxical nature of organizations, both strategically and as part of day-to-day organizational experience.

Identifies three categories of paradox in organizations: the "leadership paradox," "performance paradoxes" and "organizational paradoxes." Discusses why dealing effectively with paradox is not commonplace in organizations. Explains why embracing paradox is important to organizational change and performance. Introduces a general strategy and practical 'toolkit' for embracing the paradoxes included in the three categories outlined earlier.

Chapter 8 – Providing Vision

Shifts attention away from developing ‘a Vision’ and communicating it to the organization. Argues that managers need to focus instead on providing vision through their everyday engagement with people. In contrast to the conventional, step-wise approaches to change, includes ‘providing vision’ as the final element of the change-leadership agenda rather than as the first step in a regimented change process.

Exposes the limitations of the conventional view of vision as a desired end-state – a Vision with a capital ‘V’. Introduces the informal coalitions perspective of vision as something that is provided through everyday conversations and interactions. Identifies and explores six elements of an agenda for providing vision on a day-to-day basis, namely helping people to: gain perspective; realize their purpose; self-manage their processes; exploit possibilities; unlock their potential; and ignite their passion. Summarizes the overall challenge as one of helping people to achieve the organizational equivalent of ‘20:20 vision’, in the way that they view the organization, carry out their roles and manage their relationships.

Postscript

Briefly underlines the point that this new change-leadership agenda is not about leaders doing more things. It is about them doing things differently.

Uses one paragraph per agenda item. Explains that the informal coalitions approach is about leaders thinking and acting differently *in doing what they are already committed to do*. Bases this on their newly acquired awareness of the hidden, messy and informal dynamics of organizations. States that this new agenda is not an additional imposition on ‘the day job’; it is the day job – the everyday job!