Identifying and Cultivating Change Champions While Mitigating Sabotage

---

The Executive Council for Leading Change (ECLC) assembled a roundtable of seasoned executives to dig into the topic of Identifying and Cultivating Change Champions While Mitigating Sabotage

In today's rapidly evolving corporate landscape, the success of change initiatives depend on the ability to both identify and cultivate strong change champions while effectively mitigating resistance to change. Change champions serve as the backbone of any transformation, driving influence and promoting buy-in across all tiers of an organization. However, encountering resistance is sometimes inevitable. This executive brief summarizes findings from a roundtable that highlighted mindsets that pose a threat to change initiatives and provided strategic considerations for selecting the right change champions to ensure more seamless implementation of new initiatives.
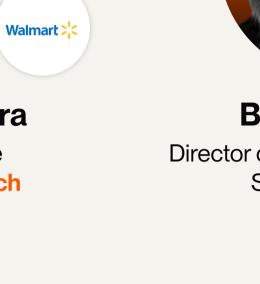
Roundtable Participants

Arkesh Mishra
Head of People
Walmart U.S. Tech

Barbara Roos
Director of Change Management,
Sales Excellence
Intel

Ciprian Porutiu
SVP, Strategic Initiatives
Marsh McLennan

CK Taneja
Senior Vice President
Enterprise Resiliency
Northern Trust Corporation

Francisco Salguero
CIO and Deputy Director for
Plans and Integration
Air Force A1

Iris McQuillan-Grace
Head of Employee Experience
OLIVER Agency

Karlene Joseph
Vice President | Technology Portfolio
Management & Transformation
Change Management
Paramount Global

Nadine Hammer
Sr. Organizational Change Lead |
Product Development, Portfolio,
Strategy and Execution
Genentech

Rachel Stephenson
Chief Transformation Officer
**The City University of New York
(CUNY)**

Rosaline Hester
Global Change Leadership Director,
Marketing Transformation Office
The Coca Cola Company

Sergio Tortora
Senior Transformation Leader
AIG

Key Questions Answered

? How do you **identify and cultivate change champions within your organization**, and what key traits make them effective in driving change?

? Can you **share a specific example where you faced sabotage efforts (intentionally or not) during a change initiative?** How did you identify the sabotage, and what steps did you take to address and mitigate these efforts?

? What **strategies have you found most effective in keeping change champions motivated and engaged,** particularly when they encounter significant resistance or attempts at sabotage from within the organization?

? What are the most valuable **lessons you've learned about balancing the cultivation of change champions** with the mitigation of sabotage/resistance efforts? How have these lessons informed your approach?

4 Mindsets that Threaten Change Initiatives and How to Mitigate Them

The "That's Not Us" Mindset

Large-scale transformations, especially those involving cultural shifts, often grapple with this type of resistance. Employees might cite a lack of precedence in certain changes to wholly reject them. This is where aligning key stakeholders becomes critical. Senior leadership must articulate why this change is imperative and clarify the direction in which the company is headed. A company might need to reinvent certain parts of its business model or culture, to stay competitive and attract the right kind of talent.

The "Let's Not Tell Them That" Mindset

Senior executives often harbor concerns that divulging too much information could backfire against them. They may underestimate how essential it is for employees to have sufficient organizational context to feel secure in their roles. Withholding information can also often lead to rampant rumors which destroys trust in higher management. Therefore, it is essential to develop and agree upon a unified message that provides enough context to the entire workforce.

The "It's Not Good Enough" Mindset

When promoting a new change initiative, it's crucial for senior change leaders (and their change champions) to avoid overselling the proposed solution and to clearly outline the gradual nature of the change. Large-scale initiatives cannot be accomplished overnight, so managing expectations and detailing the anticipated progress is essential. This approach helps prevent the perception of failure when the initiative is still underway and mitigates disappointment of a "slow" timeline.

The "I don't Want to Do That" Mentality

It's inevitable that not every change initiative will be popular across the board, particularly during organizational restructuring or substantial cultural transformations. The key is to allocate time for employees to process and express their emotions. Even at work, people need channels to voice their feelings, especially when they feel a lack of control over their environment.

4 Considerations in Selecting Change Champions

Resiliency

Communicating and implementing change requires a delicate touch. Change leaders need to look for change champions who won't be disheartened if the change isn't initially well-received. They also need to look for workers who are inspired by change but can temper their excitement to then inspire others.

Regionality

When selecting change champions, representation is key. It's important to consider diverse viewpoints from different regions and departments.

Self-driven

Since promoting change initiatives often falls outside regular duties, change champions must be willing to embrace projects beyond their usual responsibilities and step out of their comfort zones.

Ownership

True change champions genuinely feel ownership over change initiatives, irrespective of whether they originally conceived them. They endorse and advocate these ideas as passionately as if they were their own.

3 Common Challenges Faced

Cultural Differences

Different cultures have unique approaches to workplace expression, feedback, and dissent. When seeking feedback on change initiatives, senior change leaders must consider **which channels will lead to more comprehensive feedback** and how to facilitate genuine, open discussion.

Change in Stakeholders

Large-scale change initiatives often span several years, during which key stakeholders may change. It can be challenging to design a change initiative, secure consensus, and then face a **senior leadership change with someone unfamiliar with or opposed to the initiative.**

Negativity or Reality

Change leaders are accustomed to resistance, making it sometimes difficult to **distinguish between naysayers and those with legitimate concerns** about any given initiative. It's essential to understand whether objections stem from general resistance to change or specific issues with the change itself.

4 Notable Quotes from the Roundtable

"

Establishing clear OKRs and tangible measures of success is crucial. This not only boosts the confidence of our change champions but also demonstrates the real value of their efforts in driving transformative initiatives.

CK Taneja
Senior Vice President Enterprise Resiliency
Northern Trust Corporation

"

The key to **rich change initiative feedback** is to find or create forums where the audience feels safe expressing their feedback; some will be comfortable doing so in larger settings, but others will be more at ease in smaller team meetings or one-on-ones.

Barbara Roos
Director of Change Management,
Sales Excellence
Intel

"

It's important to **address resistance to change with curiosity** and to look for insights on how to make communications and adoption more effective.

Rosaline Hester
Global Change Leadership Director,
Marketing Transformation Office
The Coca Cola Company

"

Resistance to change pushes us to **leverage Change Champions to show others the path, help users see the payoff, and walk beside their peers.**

Karlene Joseph
Vice President | Technology Portfolio Management
& Transformation Change Management
Paramount Global

Conclusion

Effectively navigating change within an organization requires more than a well-crafted strategy; it demands the support of committed change champions and a keen awareness of the resistance mindsets that can sabotage these efforts. By identifying and fostering resilient, regionally-diverse, self-driven champions who take ownership of change initiatives, and by understanding common challenges, organizations can enhance their ability to drive sustainable, long-term transformations.

The Executive Council for Leading Change

The Executive Council for Leading Change (ECLC) is a global organization that brings executives together to redefine the landscape of organizational change and transformation. Our council's aim is to advance strategic leadership expertise in the realm of corporate change by connecting visionary leaders. It's a place where leaders responsible for significant change initiatives can collaborate, plan, and create practical solutions for intricate challenges in leading large organizations through major shifts.

In a world where change is constant, we recognize its crucial role in driving business success.

ECLC's mission is to create a community where leaders can excel in guiding their organizations through these dynamic times.

Interested in joining ECLC?

Learn the membership criteria and sign-up here

TIGERHALL

Drive Change from Within
www.tigerhall.com

Learn how Tigerhall offers the knowledge infrastructure necessary for organizations to effectively drive internal change at both speed and scale