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Striving for a culture of innovation and collaboration is easy to write as an objective, but in practice, across a multi-entity organisation like government, it's challenging. Organisational change is hard because people don't like uncertainty. Most change initiatives take longer and cost more money than leaders expect.

Brian Halligan, CEO of digital marketing specialist HubSpot, said of organisational culture: "Modern humans have radically changed the way they work and the way they live. Companies need to change the way they manage and lead to match the way that modern humans actually work and live."

Culture already exists

Acknowledging that a culture already exists in your organisation is key, according to conscious leadership expert, Ian Hatton, founder of Totally Morpheus. "Whether you want to grow, enhance, shift or formalise it, it's critical to elicit involvement and a sense of ownership from within the organisation by hearing the voices of the individuals. Although the vision for the culture is likely to be guided by top management, it only becomes the culture when everyone in the organisation lives it."

Organisational change journey

Organisational change is an iterative process that needs ongoing attention to sustain itself until it is a living reality within the organisation, says Ian Hatton of Totally Morpheus. There are a number of steps on the journey:

1. Senior leaders become aware of a need for change.
2. They flesh out basic ideas, perhaps consulting externally and internally, as needed.
3. Change champions are identified and equipped to collaborate in a non-hierarchical, cross-departmental team.
4. The change champions give a voice to individuals across the organisation to guide the change and its implementation.
5. Training, facilitation and other support are tailored to the needs expressed in different parts of the organisation.
6. A feedback loop informs further implementation and realisation of the culture change.

Leaders have to begin by figuring out what it is they want to do, says Colin J Browne, organisational culture and employee engagement expert, and founder of Happy Sandpit. "Purpose is galvanising. With that, you work on your strategy, because culture and strategy are always interlinked. Once you know how you want to impact the world, you

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are in a position to decide who you need to be and how you need to act as a collection of people."

There are many examples of successful culture change. Tom Boardman's turnaround of Nedbank between 2004 and 2007 was entirely about redefining leadership and how it would impact the organisation. Lou Gerstner's success at IBM from 1993 to 1996 was another famous one. Steve Jobs' return to Apple in 1997 and Satya Nadella taking over Microsoft in 2014 were also critical moments for both of those businesses – it had less to do with products, and much more to do with a radical change of mindset.

Serving citizens

But public-sector organisations aren't created to maximise shareholder wealth. Rather, they're charged with serving citizens. Effective and efficient execution of their mission is what taxpayers pay for. That makes change in this sector even more challenging because accountability is often lacking.

Hatton says it's impossible to impose an organisational culture.

Leaders must avoid the trap of thinking that organisational change follows from simply announcing the change. Effective cultural change is more subtle and organic, involving the individuals across

the organisation. And over time, without support and reinforcement, attempted cultural change will collapse. In the public sector, the same fundamental principles of organisational culture change apply. Traditionally, a command-and-control leadership style has set the tone.

"Forceful leadership means that when public sector organisations attempt to open discussion about change, employees are reluctant to participate," says Hatton. "For this reason, change champions – can be instrumental in establishing effective, change in public sector organisations.

"Evidence shows that what does work is identifying culture champions from across all departments and levels of the organisation. Collaborating in a non-hierarchical, cross-departmental team, these culture champions begin to model and support what the culture means in each department and at each level. They also humanise the cultural change and open up dialogue in both directions to allow voices across the organisation to be heard."

Browne agrees: "The willingness to extend trust, a taste for adult conversations, the de-emphasis of hierarchy, respect for two-way communication and an obsession with values – focus on these and make sure leaders are first and foremost people."



Ian Hatton, Totally Morpheus

Organisational behaviour – creating a culture