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How [Culture] Change Happens: A Roadmap of What Works

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Alexa Courtney has over 18 years of experience working in the U.S. and globally in South Asia, Africa, and Europe, co-designing strategies with organizations to better adapt and create impact and leading research, assessment, training, and evaluation teams. Alexa's firm, Frontier Design, is a strategy and innovation firm dedicated to solving social, political, and organizational challenges using the tools of design, systems thinking, and data analysis. Since founding Frontier, Alexa has partnered with senior leaders across the U.S. Government and executive teams at large non-profits, family foundations and Fortune 500 companies to build design and innovation practices, frame new strategies and measure impact.

Prior to founding Frontier, Alexa held senior positions in the public and private sectors dedicated to using innovative approaches to tackle complex problems. She led the design, co-creation, and implementation of field research networks in Syria for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) that allowed Syrians to guide donor assistance toward life-saving needs in near real time. She helped pioneer the design and implementation of USAID's evaluation systems in Afghanistan to determine the impact of donor programs on community stability country-wide.

Alexa holds a B.A. in Sociology and International Studies from Yale University and an MSc from the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies in the Political Economy of Violence, Conflict and Development. She is a former Fulbright Scholar, Aspen Ideas Festival Scholar, and Presidential Management Fellow, and a former Term Member of the Council on Foreign Relations. She was honored by DevEx and Chevron Corporation as one of forty international development leaders under forty in Washington, DC, for acting as a change agent within USAID and driving adoption of innovative approaches to prevent vulnerability and conflict.

JESS WILLIAMS | RESEARCH ANALYST

Jess Williams joined Frontier in 2019 where she conducts research and analysis on a wide-range of design and innovation projects for Department of Defense and commercial clients. She built a data architecture for community level research networks in conflict affected, fragile states and has led research on change management and public-private partnerships for sustainable development in West Africa.

Jess has three years of experience as a Naval Intelligence Officer and was awarded for her support to Carrier Air Wing operations in the Pacific. In preparation for these operations, she created and distributed tailored analysis to over 200 individuals and analyzed over 50 analytic products to create comprehensive assessments. Her efforts directly led to informed real-time decisions in the contested waters of the Pacific Ocean.

While studying at the United States Naval Academy, she also completed internships with the Chief of Naval Operations and Office of Naval Intelligence and with several interagency task forces, including at the Department of State.

Jess graduated with distinction from the United States Naval Academy with a B.S. in General Engineering Core Curriculum, and a major in Political Science. She was an honor graduate from her Naval Intelligence Officer Basic Course.

Interviews with Change Leaders

The insights in this paper about how successful culture change happens at scale are informed by the lived experiences of the following courageous leaders and change champions who grappled with and effectively implemented fundamental change within their organizations. We are grateful to each of them for sharing their wisdom and hard-earned lessons with us. We name these individuals where we have permission to do so; others spoke with us on a not-for-attribution basis. In these cases, we've indicated the roles they played instead of their names.

VADM JOHN "JAY" DONNELLY, COMMANDER SUBMARINE FORCES 2007-2010

VADM Donnelly spearheaded the integration of women onto U.S. Navy submarines after the submarine force consistently failed to meet the recruitment quota for officers. He used data to prove the objections to integration were rooted in a hesitancy for change rather than empirical evidence. He leveraged high-ranking change champions and extra training for integrated boats to ensure early, demonstrable success.

He used the same blueprint for success to prohibit smoking onboard submarines. He collected relevant data that supported the change and relied on his Force Master Chief and Chief Petty Officers to take ownership of the initiative. He provided smoking cessation classes, counseling, and anti-smoking medication to both the sailors and their families to help make the behavior change stick. Additionally, he gave boats the ability to develop their own plan to 'put the smoking lamp out' within a certain time frame, encouraging their ownership of the initiative.

DANNY MURPHY, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER OF COMPLIANCE BUREAU, BALTIMORE POLICE DEPARTMENT

Danny Murphy led police reform initiatives and implemented two federal consent decrees in New Orleans and now in Baltimore. His extensive changes required commitment from the top and buy-in from informal leaders throughout the two departments where we worked. In New Orleans, he made significant investments in data-driven frameworks that helped define change and performance standards while frequently assessing performance. He operationalized change and developed a culture of accountability through metrics and transparency.

FORMER DISNEY SENIOR EXECUTIVE

Senior Vice President who worked at Disney for nearly 20 years and reported directly to CEO Bob Iger. He experienced the dramatic culture change driven by Bob Iger, simplified into three core strategic pillars adopted across the Disney companies. The changes increased Disney's adaptive capacity and kept the brand viable and vibrant.

FORMER CEO OF A MOBILE ADVERTISING AND APP MONETIZATION COMPANY

The company had a culture problem which directly impacted its success against competitors. This individual learned and listened for the first 90 days of his tenure as a turn-around CEO, in order to identify critical culture change components. He then set new values with his senior team and ensured every individual within the organization lived and celebrated those values every day. To make change happen quickly, he emphasized strategic alignment, rewarding desired behavior, and transitioned resistors out of the organization.

JOHN HART, GENERAL MANAGER OF THE CLEVELAND INDIANS FROM 1991-2001

John Hart transformed the Cleveland Indians from the team mocked in "Major League" to a two-time World Series contender. Moreover, his emphasis on the intersection of 'old school' baseball managing and talent scouting and quantitative data analytics changed the landscape of the MLB and professional sports writ large. His change was championed by a team of early data scientists and seasoned leaders committed to learning, making decisions differently, and charting a path to a better way to play ball and win. Mr. Hart went on to implement the same changes at other ballclubs across America with similar success. His process laid the foundation of the intersection of sports and analytics memorialized in the movie "Moneyball."

BBVA, SENIOR EXECUTIVES OVERSEEING ENGINEERING AND RETAIL CUSTOMER SOLUTIONS

BBVA is a global financial group that offers banking and non-financial products and services. They completely transformed from an analogue, 1980's style brick and mortar bank to become the leader in digital banking for the 21st century. Over the course of seven years they revolutionized their technology function, reengineered their processes and radically changed their culture to implement their vision for the future.

How [Culture] Change Happens: A Roadmap of What Works

ALEXA COURTNEY / JESS WILLIAMS

ABSTRACT

Change is hard; it humbles us all. Yet, it *is* possible to succeed. This article explores the why, what, who and how of successful change initiatives. Despite wildly different organizational cultures in the U.S. Navy, Walt Disney, Major League Baseball teams, Police Departments, and in the technology and banking sectors, common practices employed by change champions yielded success. This article will demonstrate the importance of messaging change clearly, demonstrating how to live the change, aligning your people's behaviors with new organizational values, using data to make change actionable and your organization accountable and cultivating strategic patience to sustain change initiatives over time. We hope this invited perspective provides confidence among the curious that, despite how difficult undertaking change is – and the many competing perspectives in the marketplace about how to do it well – this roadmap can set you up for success.

> "The only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture."
> –Edgar Schein[1]

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[1] Edgar Schein is a former professor at MIT Sloan School of Management, and distinguished thinker on organizational culture. He is known for his contribution defining what organizational culture is according to three distinct levels.

INTRODUCTION

The bad news: Attempting to change at any scale is hard. Change humbles: whether we seek healthier habits in our personal lives, are charged with implementing new strategies in our organizations, or take part in grass-roots social movements that aspire to create national impact, it eludes most everyone. Seventy percent of change management efforts fail.[2] Up to forty percent of our lives are spent in auto-pilot mode, living and working based on previously formed habits.[3] And yet, a recent Amazon search for change management best practices reveals well over a thousand books by leading academics, management consultants and practitioners such as Dr. John Kotter, Chip and Dan Heath, Edgar Schein, Gary Hamel, Dan Coyle and many others. They offer ways to be successful in change efforts. With myriad resources focused on different flavors of change management, it's overwhelming to discern what works, why and how.

The good news: We can always count on change. In fact, "the only constant in life is change."[4] Given that, we should push ourselves, our organizations, and our communities to become better at it. But what does implementing change actually entail, and how will we know if we succeed?

This paper provides a brief exploration of effective change pathways, based on our interviews with change champions, change management scholars, and our many client projects focused on organizational transformation. We hope this invited perspective provides confidence among the curious that, despite how difficult it is to change and the many competing perspectives about how to do it well, it *is* possible to succeed. We will share key patterns about how change has been realized — for individuals, teams, and organizations at varying levels of scale. By "standing on the shoulders of giants"[5] and heeding the hard-earned insights of change champions, we trust this paper will inform a roadmap for effective organizational change at scale.

[2] Ewenstein, B., Smith, W., & Sologar, A. (2019, February 22). *Changing Change Management*. McKinsey & Company. https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/leadership/changing-change-management#.
[3] Duhigg, C. (2014). *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business*. Random House Trade Paperbacks.
[4] Often attributed to Heraclitus of Ephesus.
[5] Newton, I., & Robert Hooke. *Isaac Newton Letter to Robert Hooke, 1675*.

THE WHY: WHAT IS ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE, AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

"Always start with WHY"[6] –Simon Sinek

The status quo of any organization will remain so unless or until the benefits of disrupting it outweigh the pain of maintaining it. This can happen when there is a complete systems breakdown, when there is proof of a better way to do things, or when requirements are simply no longer being met. Today, the Joint Force is considering how best to effectively integrate information and influence into its activities across the competition-conflict continuum. The Air Force recognizes that "leading with information" represents a significant culture change from its status quo. It is seeking best practices from other institutions that have successfully organized for and implemented large-scale culture change. The expected result of the Air Staff's inquiry is to help military planners, strategists, and analysts lead with information as a core strength of the service. In this way, they may compete more effectively within the rapidly changing information ecosystems in which we are all engaged.

> "CULTURE IS THE ENVIRONMENT CREATED BY THE PRACTICES AND BELIEFS OF PEOPLE WHICH ARE MUTUALLY REINFORCING. BELIEFS CAUSE ACTIONS WHICH CREATE THE ENVIRONMENT; THE ENVIRONMENT BREEDS ACTIONS, WHICH INFORM AND DEVELOP BELIEFS."

Why focus on *culture* change specifically? Because "culture IS the system," as Danny Murphy, a senior official responsible for implementing federally mandated behavior change (via consent decrees) within police departments, recently told us.[7] He observed "culture is the environment created by the practices and beliefs of people which are mutually reinforcing. Beliefs cause actions which create the environment; The environment breeds actions, which inform and develop beliefs. It is something people don't choose; they inhabit it and are expected to adopt it. It often goes unquestioned and feels inert and unchangeable."[8] Therefore, culture change can seem so daunting and may impede leaders from even attempting it. If the scale of change is so ambitious, people won't believe in their own power to intervene and create a different system stronger than the one to be displaced.

Without realizing it, Mr. Murphy informally described one of the most influential models of organizational culture change.[9] In this model, culture is deeper than just "how things are done around here,"[10] though that is an accurate description of surface level change—the observable behaviors and practices. Deep

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[6] Sinek, S. (2011). *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*. Portfolio.

[7] A Consent Decree is a court enforceable agreement to resolve the Department of Justice's findings of a pattern and practice of conduct that violates the law: (https://consentdecree.baltimorecity.gov/). These are put in place in the wake of misconduct by a department and typically take 10 years from initiation to completion to effectively change culture and behaviors, when and where they are implemented effectively.

[8] Interview with authors on January 15, 2021. Danny Murphy has overseen Consent Decree implementation in the New Orleans Police Department and is applying those lessons learned in Baltimore.

[9] Schein, E.H., & Schein, P.A. (2004). *Organizational Culture and Leadership (J-B US non-Franchise Leadership)* (3rd ed.). Jossey-Bass.

[10] Drennan, D. (1992). *Transforming Company Culture: Getting Your Company from Where You Are Now to Where You Want to Be*. McGraw-Hill.

culture change happens beyond the surface, it transforms values and social norms, which are influenced by beliefs and assumptions.

While change at scale can be daunting, change champions shared principles that enabled them to effectively implement sustained transformations across different industries and organizational cultures. The principles described in the following sections were shared by all of these change champions, informing a roadmap to overcome barriers and help create lasting change.

The stories of effective culture change referenced here are among some of the most difficult use cases imaginable: integrating the first women officers into a historically all-male submarine force; prohibiting smoking on submarines; breaking "the blue wall of silence" within police departments that degrade public trust and stymy federally mandated reforms; protecting creativity while realigning some of the world's most recognizable global brands (such as Disney and Pixar) to new strategic principles; transforming "frat boy"[11] cultures within tech firms into respectful models celebrated for their success; and a banking institution's transformation from bricks and mortar to a globally respected digital brand.

For each of these uses cases, the senior officers and executives responsible for leading these profound change initiatives shared their hard-earned lessons and insights directly with us. We share here the common patterns of the why, what, who and how of these transformations and hope they inspire an actionable roadmap for the Joint Force.

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[11] Interview with authors on January 13, 2021. Interviewee is the former CEO of a mobile advertising and app monetization company.

THE WHY & WHAT OF CULTURE CHANGE

"Transparency on the 'why' builds integrity and trust in the changes"
–Former Disney Senior Executive

"How do you make the need for change understandable and digestible? ...You have to
explain why the reforms are good for you—on both a personal and organizational level—the why
is the key point" –Danny Murphy

Clearly and consistently communicate the organizational why & what so it's relatable,
inclusive and in people's interest.

In every use case, what the change was and why it was necessary for the organization to undertake was clearly, consistently and continuously communicated to everyone. Walt Disney's CEO, Bob Iger, had three simple priorities - product, technology and international expansion; the former commander of U.S. submarine forces, Vice Admiral John "Jay" Donnelly focused on operational excellence, professional development of people, and modernization and recapitalization of the force; and the New Orleans' Police Department had a simple recipe to become a data-driven and managed force - define, measure and respond.

> "IGER WAS TRANSPARENT THAT THESE PRIORITIES WEREN'T UP FOR
> DEBATE, BUT HE WOULD GO TO GREAT LENGTHS TO HELP PEOPLE
> UNDERSTAND HOW THEY FIT INTO THESE CATEGORIES."

A former Senior Vice President at the Walt Disney Corporation, who reported directly to CEO Bob Iger, remembered his CEO's three priorities after more than a decade after leaving the organization. Bob Iger consistently shared the three priority areas for Disney's future success: 1) Product, 2) Technology and 3) International expansion. When Iger first rolled these out, the senior executive thought they were "super simple… almost too basic"[12] but over time, he was impressed by how consistently they were reinforced and how all the businesses could be aligned to these priorities. "Iger was transparent that these priorities weren't up for debate, but he would go to great lengths to help people understand how they fit into these categories."[13] When employees would ask to add priorities such as people or innovation, Iger held steadfast: "It's only these three, it can't be four or five priorities. We have to keep it simple."[14] The Senior Vice President noted, "Bob was always transparent about why those three pillars mattered and let it be known it wasn't up for debate. But he wouldn't whack you over the head with that. He was open and just very matter of fact about it."[15] One reason Iger and his executives kept the priorities so simple was to help ensure they couldn't get diluted or misunderstood as word travelled top-to-bottom and throughout the Disney companies. "After a couple of years, everyone was echoing these priorities. ESPN even re-

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[12] Interview with authors on January 13, 2021. Interviewee is a former Disney Senior Vice President.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.

organized according to these priorities. ESPN used to not even know why they were part of Disney and then they reorganized around the three!"[16]

Vice Admiral John "Jay" Donnelly also had clear priorities for the U.S. submarine forces, which he communicated consistently and clearly. "When I took command as COMSUBFOR, I established three focus areas to align our efforts and improve our submarine force: *operational excellence, the professional development of our people, and the modernization and recapitalization of our force*. We've made significant progress in each area. I'll probably best be known as the guy who introduced women to the submarine force and banned smoking."[17]

VADM Donnelly framed the reasons for these major changes pragmatically and in the mutual interests of the Navy and all those under his command. He articulated the utilitarian reason to hire women as submariners: the service was missing their recruiting targets and needed high caliber individuals who could embody the cerebral values of a submariner. Integrating women was the only way to maintain the quality of the submarine officer corps, given the increasing shortage of male recruits. To eliminate smoking on submarines, he proved it was a health concern for the crew and emphasized, "though everyone had a personal right to smoke, you also have the right not to be exposed to the harmful effects of secondhand smoke."[18] He authored an executive communication to the force stating this and regularly reinforced his visions for change at twice annual force commanders' conferences.

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[16] Interview with authors on January 13, 2021. Interviewee is a former Disney Senior Vice President.
[17] Copeland, K. (2010, November 10). *Sub Force has a New Boss*. The Florida Times-Union.
https://www.jacksonville.com/article/20101110/NEWS/801241597.
[18] Interview with authors on January 14, 2021. Interviewee is Vice Admiral John Donnelly, former Commander, Submarine Forces.

In New Orleans, the police department was issued a federal consent decree to make systemic changes to the force after high profile incidents after the Hurricane Katrina crises. "Consent decrees say you have to achieve these outcomes. They give a general blueprint for where you have to go, but you really have to think through *how* to operationalize it. What changes will be the most transformative? What is most wanted?"[19] Mr. Murphy, who oversaw implementation in New Orleans and is doing the same in Baltimore emphasized, "you have to explain why the reforms are good. You have to win the hearts and minds; you can't just say: do this."[20] Consent decrees are lengthy documents with a lot of jargon. "It's really important to make it simple, but it's really hard to make it simple."[21] To simplify the consent decree and make it actionable, Mr. Murphy broke each requirement into paragraphs and assigned it to the specific police units who would be responsible for the change, helping make it understandable and digestible for officers. He then asked them, "when will you comply?" Their answers were recorded and tracked, transparently, in a dashboard to help catalyze momentum and accountability.

THE TAKEAWAY:

Clearly, consistently, and simply explain the *why* of your change initiative. Transparent messaging about what and why the change is needed builds an environment of trust that is more likely to garner buy-in across levels of an organization. '*The why*' should be supported by data that makes the case for change in ways that are relatable to those responsible for implementation and in their interest. This is the crucial first step to make the abstract idea of change concrete so it can be effectively operationalized.

'The why' motivating change must be appropriately and thoroughly messaged.

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[19] Interview with authors on January 15, 2021. Interviewee is Danny Murphy, a Police Department Consent Decree Implementor.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.

THE WHO OF CULTURE CHANGE

> "The change has to come from the top: if the very top leadership aren't sharing the same clear, simple message you leave people to interpret and dilute the strategic importance of the changes and they will be short lived" –Former Disney Senior Executive

> "You need buy-in from the top, but you also need informal leaders at the bottom levels who 'get it' and want to be part of the change" –Danny Murphy

The commitment to change must start at the top, but change champions have to be cultivated according to their formal & informal influence within the organization. Networked leaders who are widely respected will be your best Ambassadors for change.

For Disney, the U.S. Navy, and the Baltimore and New Orleans Police Departments, the commitment to change came from the highest levels of leadership. By leveraging positional authority and influence at every level, leaders generated support for their change initiatives throughout the organizational hierarchy. In each use case, sustained successful change depended on leaders who had a lived experience and understanding of the organizational culture who enrolled other change champions to support and scale it.

CEO Bob Iger transformed the workplace culture at Disney after Michael Eisner left. Those who know Bob and worked with him praise his integrity, approachability, learning mindset and his humility. He expertly leveraged his personal expertise and personality with his positional authority to reshape the culture: "Disney's culture was drastically different when I started versus when I left. Part of it is who [Bob] is—he is charming and impressive—but he was the *right* person because of his approach. He paid attention and he cared. It became about his team."[22] He garnered support because he had an intimate understanding of his organization and could authentically talk about *how* people fit into the transformation. While Bob Iger was deeply respected for his approach and his personal expertise, he recognized in order to sustain change he needed to cultivate a team of formal and informal leaders who also embodied the values of the change he was creating.

A pyramid approach to culture change worked well within the Navy for both integrating women into the submarine force and implementing the smoking prohibition. VADM Donnelly pitched retired three and four stars first on the pragmatic reason female submarine officers needed to be integrated because he knew, "If I can win this crowd over, it will be downhill from there… Such an influential crowd will help quell any outcries."[23] It also required cultivating the environment for change to make it successful, which he did by personally selecting the initial boats based on the personalities of their Commanding Officers. The Navy recognized even if they pushed the change from the top, success depended on ownership at the operational and tactical levels of leadership. To ban smoking on submarines, he appealed to the biggest group of smokers, Chief Petty Officers, after his Force Master Chief helped him appreciate that successful change at scale depended on their agreement, adherence, and advocacy.

As John Hart sought to transform the Cleveland Indians into a world class ballclub, he realized the constraints he faced required a novel approach to rebuilding. Without the resources and reputation of

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[22] Interview with authors on January 13, 2021. Interviewee is a former Disney Senior Executive.
[23] Interview with authors on January 14, 2021. Interviewee is Vice Admiral John Donnelly, former Commander, Submarine Forces.

other teams, Mr. Hart innovated with tools and approaches never before seen in Major League baseball - new data and analytics to inform talent assessment and recruitment. Recognizing his skills lie in old school scouting and "knowing it when I see it,"[24] he built a front office for the Cleveland Indians that prioritized cognitive diversity and vastly different ways of thinking and working. It became a joint venture of learning and teaching: in this case, the "ivy league data wizards" and "white-haired wisdom" came together to pave the way to the World Championships.[25] Humility about his strengths and limitations as a leader informed this novel approach, "A leader shouldn't be both, but they have to recognize their own shortcomings and leverage the expertise of others to fill the gaps and maintain a competitive advantage."[26] Mr. Hart and his team leaned in to this culture change years ahead of other organizations by training both sides of the 'brain': "Real-world decisions require both analytics and intuition. I would train my analytics guys on the 'intangibles' while being a sponge for their data."[27] Creating an environment committed to humble learning enabled the organization to radically change decision making processes, integrating analytics with the honed "gut" feel of seasoned baseball scouts.

"IDENTIFY AND LIFT UP THE OFFICERS WHO CAN HELP CHANGE MINDS AND WHO SUPPORT CHANGE."

At both the New Orleans and Baltimore Police Departments, consent decree implementers realized to make reforms stick, trusted leaders in the Departments had to speak out because "the blue code of silence hurts us all. Real loyalty to the force is doing the hard thing–stepping up and speaking up."[28] In both cities, significant reforms required the support of informal leaders and subordinates with influence. The police departments formalized lower-level ownership of reform through programs such as the Ethical Policing is Courageous (EPIC) program, a "peer intervention program that trains officers across all ranks to intervene in problematic situations to prevent misconduct and mistakes." [29] To make reforms organic to Baltimore and not perceived as a cut-and-paste effort from New Orleans, leadership "had to identify and lift the officers who can help change minds and who support change."[30]

THE TAKEAWAY:

Change has to be envisioned and lived at the highest echelon of leadership within your organization for it to feel authentic, credible and doable for everyone. Informal and influential leaders who believe in the change should demonstrate and communicate how they are living it every day.

Messaged change must also be demonstrated and lived by formal and informal leaders at all levels.

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[24] Interview with authors on January 25, 2021. Interviewee is John Hart, the former General Manager of the Cleveland Indians.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Interview with authors on January 15, 2021. Interviewee is Danny Murphy, a Police Department Consent Decree Implementor.
[29] Ethical Policing is Courageous (EPIC) is a peer intervention program that trains officers across all ranks to intervene in potentially problematic situations to prevent misconduct and mistakes (https://epic.baltimorepolice.org/epic).
[30] Interview with authors on January 15, 2021. Interviewee is Danny Murphy, a Police Department Consent Decree Implementor.

THE HOW TOS OF CULTURE CHANGE

"Strategic alignment is critical, then you have to stick with your new set of beliefs and values or else it's just another thing that will come and go with a change in leadership"
–Former Senior Disney Executive

"We have to use data to tangibly illustrate the advantage of the change; it is the only way to compel people to change the way they've always done things" –VADM John Donnelly

"We dug a hole for decades. We can't get out of it overnight. Change is rigorous and slow but it helps us get to 'better'"—Danny Murphy

There is no culture change without alignment between beliefs, values, and behaviors. Values have to be lived, championed, and rewarded at every level of the organization.

Culture change at scale is difficult in bureaucracies; If everyone is responsible for change, nobody is held accountable. The sense of responsibility and ownership can become too diffuse to make any change stick. Encouragingly, we heard many examples of overcoming the pathology of bureaucracies and the systemic barriers to change that are often deeply entrenched. In these examples, powerful alignment between values, behaviors, procedures, and rewards made change possible.

In a mobile advertising and app monetization technology firm, the turnaround CEO knew that the culture needed a reboot, which would require inculcating new values at the firm. "When I arrived, it was a total mess, a lot like a frat house. I knew we needed to set new values and be clear about them."[31] After 90 days of listening and observing "how things are done around here," the new CEO presented his ideas in an all hands meeting: "It wasn't rocket science. I just stated what we were trying to do. After that, we changed people and values. I got rid of half of the senior leaders and over 30% of the staff. Then, I worked with my remaining senior team to name our values and communicate them throughout the organization."[32] To help make the new values "lived", the senior team issued awards for behavior that represented those values in action. Colleagues nominated each other for the awards. "They were looking out for and noticing behaviors. And by rewarding it, we gave people an opportunity to rally around something and to recognize that what and how we do things matters."[33]

"IF YOU KEEP INDIVIDUALS WHO AREN'T ALIGNED AND DON'T LIVE THOSE VALUES, YOU LOSE THE RESPECT OF THE WORKFORCE. GOOD PEOPLE WILL LEAVE IF THEY THINK YOU TOLERATE BAD PEOPLE."

Change resistors, individuals who are not aligned with the strategy and values of an organization, can poison the culture. Multiple senior leaders in government and the private sector reflected the same sentiment, "if you keep individuals who aren't aligned and don't live those values, you lose the respect of the workforce. Good people will leave if they think you tolerate bad people."[34] This can be hard,

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[31] Interview with authors on January 13, 2021. Interviewee is the former CEO of a mobile advertising and app monetization company.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.

especially if people are brilliant and have technical value to contribute. "However, if someone is smart and talented but not aligned–meaning, a little too focused on their own agenda and not the organization's–you have to move them out."[35] In every use case, interview and client project, we have observed the benefits of transitioning people who are not aligning with the strategy, culture and behaviors of the organization. We have also seen the toxic effects of letting destructive behavior persist: even modest change initiatives ultimately fail.

In some police forces, new values and behaviors dictated by the consent decrees, became institutionalized through rewards and the redesign of incentives to encourage desired reform. If a culture of misconduct persists and has become grave enough to warrant the Department of Justice imposing a consent decree on the department, it's because officers "like it that way, have learned to live with it, or it's the only thing they know."[36] In New Orleans, they changed the promotional processes to filter out those who weren't living the new values and rewarded those who were. Previously, career advancement happened based on "who you know, not what you know… resulting in the wrong people in the wrong positions for the wrong reasons."[37] Post consent decree, a new policy was established and implemented. Before this there weren't applications or interview processes. Now, job openings are published repeatedly and the scoring system for promotion is transparent and monitored.

In other police departments that haven't enjoyed the progress of the NOPD or the early signs of improvement in Baltimore, implementing the consent decrees is fatally flawed. "Some departments will choose leadership with no expertise or experience overseeing implementation. Then, that person isn't empowered, isn't given any resources, and has no visibility across the force. This has every sign that, culturally, you don't care about this change and it will be doomed to fail."[38] Conversely, in NOLA and Baltimore, the promotional, management and reward systems are all reimagined and designed around the new values, redefining what good policing is and seeking to operationalize it every day.

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[35] Interview with authors on January 13, 2021. Interviewee is the former CEO of a mobile advertising and app monetization company.
[36] Interview with authors on January 15, 2021. Interviewee is a Police Department Consent Decree Implementor.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.

However, alignment doesn't always mean an individual is a champion, or even proponent of the changes. John Hart's experience creating a data driven baseball culture showcases this: "[the manager] had no interest in analytics but the players would run through walls for him, so we had to find creative ways to still get data into the system. We decided to surround him with coaches who understood data and young players who would embrace it."[39] You cannot tolerate individuals who actively oppose change efforts, "I would never hire someone who was anti-data. [The manager] was open to it but it was out of his realm and comfort zone. He wanted all the tools that could help him win the game, data included."[40]

Creating alignment requires turnover as change leaders re-assign or transition resistors. However, this can create a more sustainable foundation for change at scale. For example, in police departments that are effectively implementing their consent decrees, "the only people left are the people who embrace the changes, learned to live with them, or the 'new' system is the only thing they know."[41]

THE TAKEAWAY:

Strategic alignment is fundamental for sustained success. Values have to be operationalized and celebrated across your organization and mutually reinforce the desired behaviors and new requirements. No matter how talented, individuals who refuse to buy-in, must be transitioned or reassigned. If they remain resistors and are not aligned, change initiatives will fail and the organizational culture will suffer.

To succeed, values, behaviors, procedures and rewards must be effectively aligned.

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[39] Interview with authors on January 25, 2021. Interviewee is John Hart, the former General Manager of the Cleveland Indians.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Interview with authors on January 15, 2021. Interviewee is Danny Murphy, a Police Department Consent Decree Implementor.

Data and concrete evidence are essential to success. Data makes change tangible, actionable and informs a culture of accountability.

In the radical transformation of a brick-and-mortar bank to a global digital brand, BBVA executives shared, "many people use an outdated definition of accountability which is: who is to blame when it doesn't work? The better definition is: who is going to work together to solve the problem? This definition makes the team accountable for results and inspires them to take responsibility."[42] This perspective on responsibility and accountability requires data and information to understand the baseline before change is pursued over time. With objective and widely accessible data that tracks progress over time, accountability can become a team sport.

Data is not bad or good, it's neutral. However, if its purpose and utilization is not carefully managed and messaged, data collection against organizational metrics can feel punitive for many. In world-class organizations that have implemented successful large scale or continuous change, such as BBVA bank, metrics are viewed as information that drives action in the present, informs root cause analyses, and suggests opportunities for process or product improvement in the future. At their best, metrics trigger curiosity, learning and action. At their worst, they can point fingers, spark blame or punish people. Conversely, in Baltimore, after the consent decree was implemented in the wake of the death of Freddy Grey the sentiment was one of finger pointing. "The findings about the decree are at the systems level. It indicts the system that people have been working within for a long time, not an individual person. But it can feel personal.'"[43]

However, in New Orleans and increasingly now in Baltimore, those responsible for implementing the consent decrees have institutionalized a culture of data-driven decision making and evidenced informed accountability. In the New Orleans Police Department, this transformation follows many of the best practices we flag in this paper:

- Secure support from leadership

- Invest in upgrading relevant systems and data-driven tools

- Define specific change and performance standards to assess progress against

- Clearly visualize the change over time by incorporating data and performance into regular management meetings, and

- Embed data-driven management within a broader culture of accountability, which includes robust public transparency, monitoring and engagement.[44]

When consent decree implementation works well, as many have observed it has in New Orleans and are optimistic about Baltimore's future progress, "it creates new systems that create better actions that produce a better culture. Agreeing to this new culture requires re-aligning according to [new] incentives and redefining what is good policing. Not through a fluffy policy or mission statement but [through] discernable actions and corrective actions."[45]

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[42] Interview with authors on June 30, 2020. Interviewees are senior executives who oversee engineering and retail customer solutions for BBVA.
[43] Interview with authors on January 15, 2021. Interviewee is Danny Murphy, a Police Department Consent Decree Implementor.
[44] The Honorable Susie Morgan, Danny Murphy, Benjamin Horwitz, "Police Reform Through Data-Driven Management" *Police Quarterly*. 2017; Vol 20, Issue 3: 275-294. doi:10.1177/1098611117709785
[45] Interview with authors on January 15, 2021. Interviewee is Danny Murphy, a Police Department Consent Decree Implementor.

Data transparency can have a constructive impact on organizations. For example, while implementing the consent decrees in New Orleans and Baltimore, senior leaders used dashboards to monitor weekly progress of all police units against established metrics. The dashboard illustrated responsible units' compliance with each paragraph requirement of the decree. Monthly, a member of that unit would report out in management meetings how they were progressing against the requirements. This benchmarking had another indirect influence, healthy competition among the units to beat each other's compliance and improve progress. "Our audits [dashboards] were precise, actionable and put in the heart of our management meetings, where operations folks could observe and help direct. This showed that we cared about the data and were using it. It changed it from an 'us vs them' conversation to 'this is who we are and what we care about.'"[46]

It also sparked healthy competition when female officers were first integrated into the submarine force. VADM Donnelly observed an unintended and positive result, "women were so impressive that it raised the bar for everyone. This competition enhanced performance professional development."[47]

Data patterns also informed how VADM Donnelly pursued both the smoking ban and integrating women. Starting each change effort, he convened an internal group to flag all the reasons these ambitious change initiatives might be resisted or fail. For women's integration, the group flagged differences in physical capabilities, female health issues, and privacy concerns. In each case, he and his group of trusted change champions mined the data to pre-empt these concerns and develop evidence informed counter arguments. Sometimes, this early risk planning informed how the change was implemented, such as mandating active duty corpsmen to get an extra two weeks of OBGYN training before deploying. As VADM Donnelly briefed the details of the plan up the chain through the Chief of Naval Operations, the Secretary of the Navy and, eventually, the Secretary of Defense, his why, who and how was well rehearsed.

[46] Interview with authors on January 15, 2021. Interviewee is Danny Murphy, a Police Department Consent Decree Implementor.
[47] Interview with authors on January 14, 2021. Interviewee is Vice Admiral John Donnelly, former Commander, Submarine Forces.

As VADM Donnelly embarked on implementing the smoking ban on submarines, he first collected data to bolster his reasons this was an important change for the health of the crews. All sailors — smokers and non-smokers alike — were urine tested across the force to assess baseline levels of metabolite from nicotine. The results were shocking–if you were a non-smoking Sailor serving on a submarine who assumed the current filtration and ventilation systems were absorbing the second-hand smoke, you were wrong. The baseline tests proved that exposure was high and roughly equivalent to sitting in a bar for eight hours with everyone smoking all around you. He then followed a similar change roadmap: define the change pragmatically and in the interest of the Navy and its sailors (second hand smoke is deadly); he co-opted the biggest group of smokers to be his change champions (Chief Petty Officers, with help to frame the message of ownership from his Force Master Chief); he set a one year timeline for the change to take effect and allowed each submarine to adhere at their own pace within the year; he also helped shrink the daunting enormity of the change for dedicated smokers (he offered free smoking cessation classes and counseling to anyone who wanted them, in addition to the sailor's spouses and families).

THE TAKEAWAY:

Data is required to drive successful transformation in your organization. It signals a better way of doing things, can create healthy competition toward progress, pre-empt arguments against change by informing conversations about risk and be used to hold the organization and its people accountable.

Change has to be signaled through data and progress made visible; Data about the proposed destination or the organizational journey to realize it makes the change actionable.

Have patience for the long-term transformation, but create short-term feedback loops to assess progress. Seek demonstratable progress, not perfection.

"IT TOOK A LOT OF FOUNDATIONAL WORK TO EVEN IMAGINE WHAT BETTER LOOKED LIKE."

Specific timelines for culture change will vary. In our interviews on police department reform and major changes within the submarine force, it took at least two years to put the foundations for change in place (new data systems, training for new ways of working, etc). In New Orleans, the NOPD was assessed as the "worst PD in the country when [they] started."[48] NOPD leadership faced backlash, pushback, and public condemnation from the police unions and other high-profile officials for taking the first steps to implement change following the consent decrees. "It took a lot of foundational work to even imagine what better looked like. Once we were dedicated and had the foundation in place, the changes accelerated greatly over the following three years. But then it takes longer to institutionalize the culture and sustain the changes."[49] Meanwhile, weekly and monthly reviews of unit level changes, visualized in easy to digest scorecards, made progress visible, helping create patience for the long-term reforms. Ultimately, this patience and commitment to the process helped even the most reluctant stakeholders overcome their resistance because they could see signals of progress over time and, ultimately, came to appreciate the benefits of the changes.

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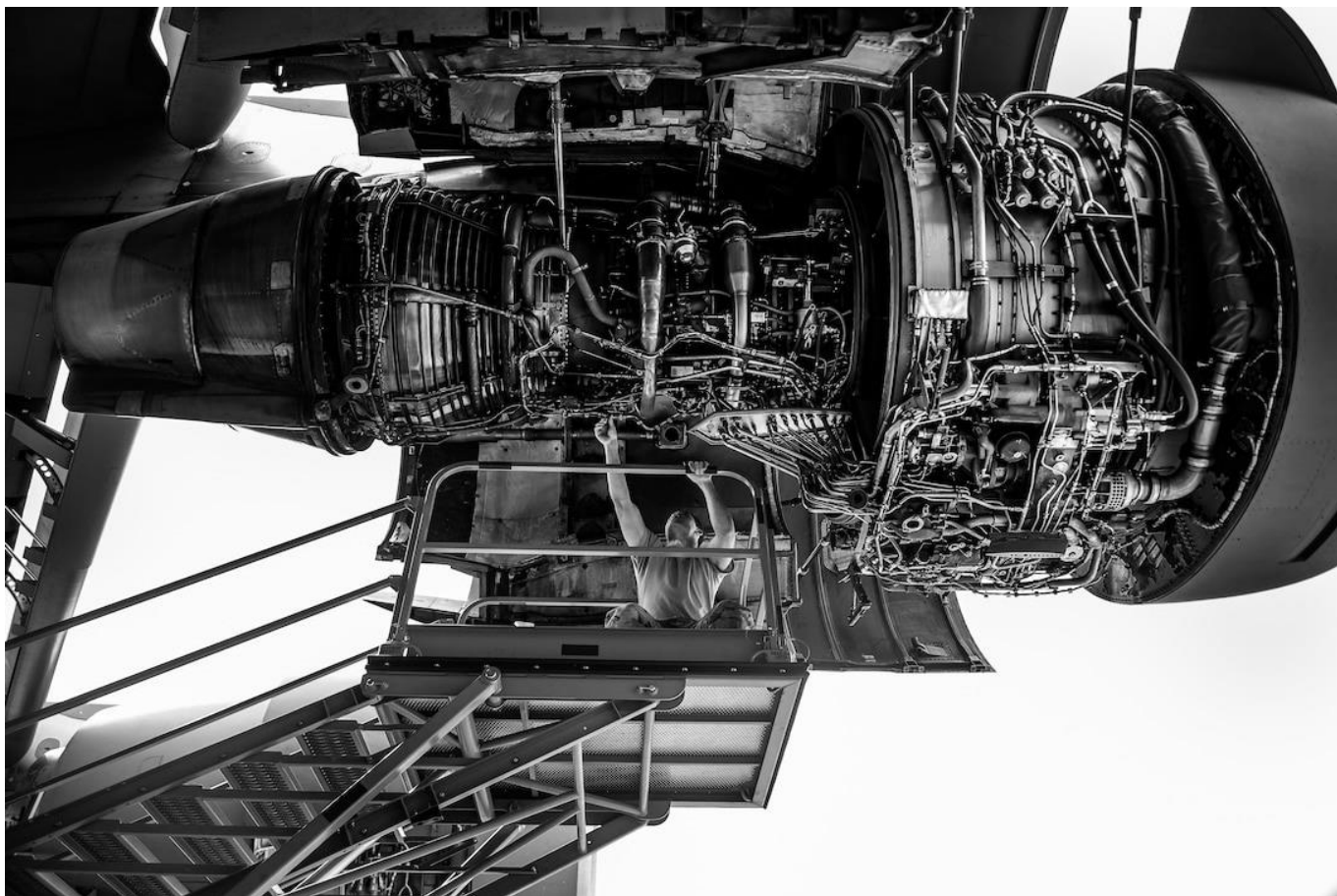
[48] Interview with authors on January 15, 2021. Interviewee is Danny Murphy, a Police Department Consent Decree Implementor.
[49] Ibid.

With the first wave of integration of women on submarines, VADM Donnelly and his team hand selected the boats to demonstrate an early success, based on their deployment schedules and the personalities of the Commanding Officer. "We picked two boats on each coast. I knew who would be supportive and who wouldn't and we didn't want to fail right out of the gate."[50] Those submarines and their crews received intensive training, and the Commanding Officers each had one-on-one sessions with VADM Donnelly to reinforce that they were hand-picked. Further, he mined the patterns of integrating women into other institutions such as the Naval Academy and the surface Navy. For example, through these use cases, he and his team discovered how important clustering the women together would be. Previous institutional integrations surfaced cautions about creating "super minorities and the important 20% rule to create camaraderie, support and success."[51] As a result, in the first wave there were never less than three women at a time on the submarines. "We also pulled female supply officers from the surface Navy over to serve as 'big sisters to mentor female ensigns.'"[52] Here again, data from other use cases informed VADM Donnelly's change blueprint and set the conditions for success. Ten years later, enlisted women are now being integrated in the force based on the success of these changes across the officer corps a decade earlier.

THE TAKEAWAY:

Be realistic about long change timeframes and have strategic patience. Shorter term feedback loops that illuminate progress can help cultivate that patience. Calibrated expectations combined with good metrics updated regularly will measure change before it is widely felt.

Change is implemented and sustained over time. It can take two to ten years, depending on the aspirations and scale of change. Shorter term signals of progress can serve as rewards for change champions to help stoke their commitment and patience.

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[50] Interview with authors on January 14, 2021. Interviewee is Vice Admiral John Donnelly, former Commander, Submarine Forces
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.

"There has always been change and resistance to change, that is a given, but if things
will be better because of it, you have to go for it. You can't go in blindly or naively.
You have to understand what it will entail—the good, the bad, and the ugly—and then
plan for it" –John Hart

"You have to expect antibodies to change because change is hard for everyone.
But the needs of the Navy overrode personal or institutional objections so we found a way"
–VADM John Donnelly

Recommendations for Change

Change-at-scale doesn't just happen. It takes a dedicated group of leaders with a simple strategic message, one people can align around and action, backed by data and a culture of accountability. But, before any of that, change initiatives require champions with a courageous mindset, a focus on the human dynamics, and a plan. John Hart reminded us, "you have to have a plan and truly believe in it. You need people in place who can implement it and aren't afraid. Break down how you are going to do it, how you are going to appeal to, align, and inspire your people, how you can use data and experience to become more efficient. At the end of it, it's about the people. I can get up as the leader and say all the right things, but there has to be a number of people who are empowered who are going to implement what it is you want to do."[53]

When we asked VADM Donnelly how we would pursue culture change within the Air Force to mainstream leading with information, he suggested his successful blueprints for change could apply. He emphasized data must be at the center of implementation. He enumerated the following, "I would use data to illustrate the advantage of the change they are seeking to implement. The plans they develop will be better and more effective if they can show proof. For example, *'here are the benefits to going this way,'* to compel people to change the way they've always done things. Show the potential benefits of the change while anticipating the counter arguments and how they'd mitigate those. Break those down one by one with a team who helps brainstorm all the risks and possibilities together. *What's required for success?* Then, create a pilot demonstration of that change."[54]

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[53] Interview with authors on January 25, 2021. Interviewee is John Hart, the former General Manager of the Cleveland Indians.
[54] Interview with authors on January 14, 2021. Interviewee is Vice Admiral John Donnelly, former Commander, Submarine Forces.

CONCLUSION

Your roadmap to successful change at scale may have unexpected turns, round-a-bouts, or even U turns, but the following principles will set your organization up for success, as they did for the many change champions we interviewed for this article.

MESSAGE ••▶ DEMONSTRATE ••▶ ALIGN ••▶ ACTION ••▶ SUSTAIN

Message your 'why' from the top clearly, consistently and in relatable ways. Use data to support your why and illustrate the urgency or importance of the change. Tangible evidence can help your organization understand what "right" looks like, how to demonstrate it and live it every day.

Align your people and their behaviors with values and processes that are mutually reinforcing. Alignment requires buy-in and ownership at every level and people have to understand how they can participate in the change constructively. Personnel changes are required if individuals will not align so your workforce understands you are committed to these values and your intended change.

Data and metrics make change actionable and visible. Transparent and widely shared data contributes to a culture of accountability to implement change, align with it, even rally around it.

Sustained change requires strategic patience for the long haul. Regularly illuminating progress will help stoke that patience and signal when and where you need to intervene. Well-designed accountability metrics measure incremental progress but manage expectations that change horizons are often long.