Moving Your Organization Ahead
by Kevin Scheid

We are often asked the question, "What should I do to improve our staff engagement?" Culture change is a difficult task to achieve for any leader. Leaders we work with to help transform their organizational culture are surprised how hard they have to work to see real improvements. Our previous article in this series dealt with the initial aspect of organizational change, or unfreezing your organization. We highlighted Kotter's (1997) eight steps to organizational change to established these steps as a guideline for an examination of the process. The eight steps include:

1. *Create a sense of urgency.*
2. *Create a powerful coalition.*
3. *Create a vision.*
4. *Communicate the vision.*
5. *Empower the people.*
6. *Achieve quick victories.*
7. *Consolidate the positive changes.*
8. *Institutionalize the changes.*

In addressing the first two steps we discussed the importance of leaders recognizing the need for change to be proactive and ahead of the changing environment instead of reactive. Once urgency for change is established, the leader must then have a coalition of supporters for the change. Individuals with affective commitment, those who deeply believe in the mission of the organization and

"Kotters Eight Steps of Change"
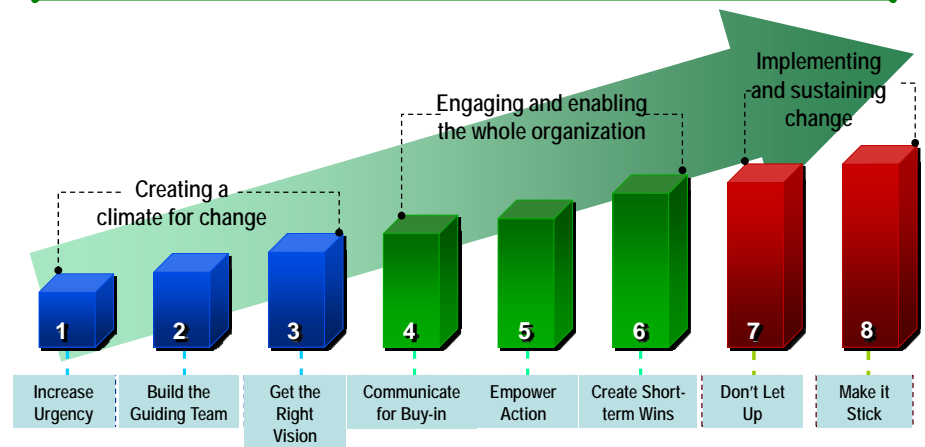
[5] Kotter, John P. and Cohen, Dan S. The Heart of Change. Boston: Harvard Business School Press

who will more readily commit to an organizational change, are generally the people you want to have in your coalition of supporters. On the other hand, people with average commitment levels will likely commit only if they believe their job is at stake. Understanding the level of staff commitment will assist in selecting the right people for the coalition of change who will be able to influence other employees.

Moving the organization ahead. This article will discuss 'moving your organization', which occurs after the process of unfreezing and before institutionalizing the change. Moving the organization includes items three through five on Kotter's (1997) list. However, it is important to keep in

mind that these eight steps overlap each other considerably and much of the effort should be completed concurrently. For instance, creating a sense of urgency and a powerful coalition of supporters cannot be done before there is some level of consensus on the direction and vision for the organization. So, leadership must begin the development of a vision before steps one and two are completed. Finally, we will compare the results of the BCWI survey results with Kotter's steps to examine employee perceptions of change in Christian organizations in the context of this model.

The intent is not to provide an in depth examination of each step since each step such as creating a vision or

empowering the workers are major organizational study areas with massive research already behind them. Rather, the intent is to provide a discussion of how these major components such as visioning, communication and empowerment fit with and create organizational change.

Creating a Vision

Creating a vision, or direction, for your organization provides a visual roadmap showing the way to change. According to Wheatly (2003), senior managers report that nearly 75% of all change processes do not yield the expected results. Having the right roadmap for change will help an organization end up where they desire. Without a vision there is a tendency to skip over the process of transitioning people and jump right to institutionalizing the change through fiat. A vision is a key ingredient in helping people transition through the change. Bridges (2003) illustrates some of the difficulties in transitioning people by addressing the needs of people during a change. People need to know why there is a need to change, how to deal with letting go of the old system, how to live with ambiguity and complexity during the transition period and how

to become engaged with the new system. Clawson (2007) has a similar approach to addressing the transition of people during organizational change. People in transition have definite needs explained by Clawson as:

> "Four Ps" of change: purpose (derived presumably from some felt pain), picture, plan, and part. They represent, in essence, a manager's view of Beer's equation: If people don't see a purpose for the change, if they don't see where they're trying to go, if they don't see a plan for how to get there, and if they don't see a part that they can play in the plan, they're not likely to participate in the change effort— and it will flounder and/or founder (Clawson 285).

Developing a vision is the first critical step in addressing many of these issues and in transitioning people through a change. A vision answers the question of where the organization is headed, helps people understand why the change is needed then lays the groundwork for developing individual roles to

accomplish the change.

Starting the Visioning Process with the Truth

One of the many roles of a leader is to identify and articulate the truth of the present situation. The leaders' assessment of truth must be somewhat congruent with the belief of people in the organization. It is unlikely that everyone will agree with all aspects of a leader's assessment, but it must be fairly close to a consensus view of the organization if the vision and a new direction are to be accepted (Clawson, 2007). Once consensus on the present status of the organization is established, agreement on a path to improvement can proceed. Without agreement on the present situation, it is unlikely that agreement will develop as to a path forward. An excellent way to discover and agree on the truth of the present situation is to complete a Best Christian Workplaces Survey of all employees. This survey will provide quantified and qualified data from which to summarize a true assessment of the organization's present situation. Since it comes directly from the employees, a leader does not need to guess at the truth of the present situation, only to understand the issues.

Focus

Once the urgency for change and the truth of the present situation is established, the focus of the change can be determined. Yukl (2006) posits that there are three general focuses of change efforts: *strategic change, structural change and culture change*. Strategic change has to do with the direction of an organization and clearly identifies the customers and products along with organizational goals and mission. Structural change involves changing roles and processes within an organization while a cultural change deals with behaviors and culture.

Each area of focus would need different information and expertise to develop an appropriate vision and the nature of the resulting vision would coincide with the focus area. A strategic change would need demographic and environmental information with the expertise of a strategic thinker. A structural change may need some analysis from an organizational development expert along with some possible efficiency measures to address changes in roles. A cultural vision would require information from the workers in the organization such as an employee survey.

In addition to the focus, the scope of the vision should be commensurate with what needs to be achieved. Creating an all-encompassing vision for an isolated improvement or limited vision for a far reaching problem would likely not work.

Alternatives for Creating Vision

Once the area of focus for the vision is determined and the information and expertise identified, the process for developing a vision should be adopted. According to Yukl (2006) there are three different approaches which would determine the process – authoritarian, charismatic or consensus. The authoritarian or charismatic is rarely effective with modern workers except in certain situations. For instance, the authoritarian approach is appropriate if the leader is the top technical expert in the organization which is most common in low skilled industries. The charismatic approach can be appropriate in a crisis situation with a leader who has truly charismatic abilities. In addition to a crisis situation according to Yukl, the charismatic approach works best with groups who are less educated. Moreover, the charismatic approach can be powerful but it is fraught with potential problems and the leader must have all of the charismatic abilities not just oratory skill. The most common and effective method of developing a vision in most situations is the process of consensus or collaboration. Consensus in visioning takes on a myriad of forms but must end with a vision which is consistent with the values, hopes and ideals of the people in the organization (Yukl, Nanus 2003).

Finding a consensus vision is generally more difficult with increased diversity of values. If the values of people in an organization are too diverse or too confused, there may be a need to revisit them until a set of shared values can be accurately articulated. In an organization with shared values, finding the right vision can be a process of word smithing and less a process of gaining consensus on substantive issues. There are various methods of gaining consensus for a vision including focus groups and appreciative inquiry. Whatever method is used, people must believe they were heard, understood and their ideas were considered. People must also believe this is an honest process in order to have trust in the leadership and commit to the vision.

Communicating the Vision

Once a vision is developed, it must be communicated to the employees to mobilize the organization. According to Nanus (2003) a vision which is poorly communicated or implemented will fail. Werr, Stjernberg, T. and Docherty, P. (1997) provide a good checklist in communicating the vision:

- Articulate a clear and appealing vision.
- Explain how the vision can be attained.
- Act confident and optimistic.
- Express confidence in followers.
- Use dramatic, symbolic actions to emphasize key values.
- Lead by example.

As with many communication issues, the words used can be less important than the actions observed of the leaders. You can see from this list that at least half of the steps are behaviors of the leaders as opposed to words. If the workforce is already resistant to change, then workers will quickly notice any hesitation or lack of commitment of the leader and increase their resistance.

Achieving the Vision

Part of communicating a vision lies in communicating the plan for achieving the vision. Creating a clear plan helps people understand the tasks involved in accomplishing the vision and provides a more detailed definition of the goals. The plan reduces possible confusion or disagreement on how to reach the desired vision state while helping people understand how the vision is

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possible. With a compelling vision and no general or detailed plan, people will quickly become frustrated and give up on the vision. Any efforts to achieve the vision will likely end up with confusion, misdirection and conflict if a clear plan is not in place.

Empower your People.

After creating a plan, people need to know their part in the plan. This management process is very important as it starts to assign responsibility which empowers the workers. If assigning roles is skipped over, then responsibility for achieving the vision will remain with the leadership and employees may be left powerless to achieve the vision. Also, assigning roles may reveal some issues or problems with the general plan which can be worked out before it becomes a crisis. Employees may believe additional work is being dumped on them; the new work may be confusing or seem insurmountable. A fair division of labor is needed and leadership should take on more than their share to ensure people do not perceive a lack of commitment from leadership.

In developing the detailed plan for organizational change, there are four general roles people can play according to Clawson (2007). These four organizational roles in change include:

1) Change leader - initiates the change process

2) Change agent - senior staff or a consultant who causes change to begin

3) Change manager - manages the day to day change needed

4) Change model - an employee who exemplified the change effort

Although most leaders believe they empower their staff, BCWI research shows employees do not agree completely with this statement.

Chart 1 shows the difference in attitude towards empowerment issues in Christian organizations. The range of scores is 1-5 on a five point Likert scale ranging from 1- strongly disagree to 5- strongly agree.
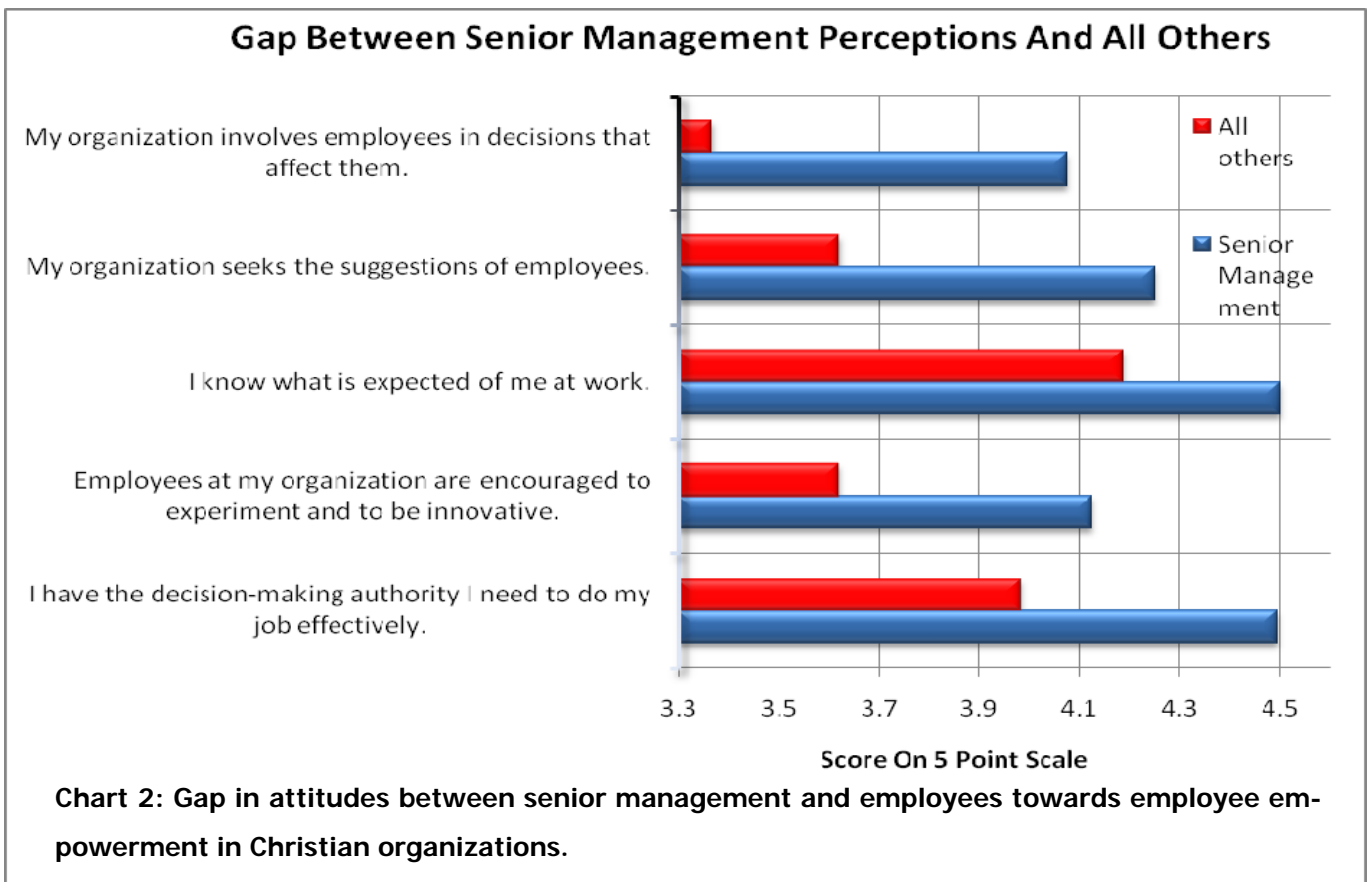
If leadership believes they are empowering employees to achieve a change while employees believe they are not empowered, then the change effort is at risk of failure. Leadership will treat the workforce as if they are empowered and rely on them to willingly go through the difficult change process. However, a workforce that is not empowered is likely to be less engaged in their work and less committed to the change. Therefore, it may be wise for leadership to address the issue of empowerment before they engage on a change effort to ensure they know the perception of the workers. A survey may be a good way to determine if there is empowerment before attempting a major organizational change.

Change in Christian Organizations
Research data from several years of Best Christian Workplaces surveys provides some insight into the change process in Christian organizations and supports the change theory discussed above. To better understand Christian workers and their attitude towards change, survey results from 2007 through 2010 were examined. 16 organizations were identified with persistent improvements through the period. The progression of scores in the 16 organizations was examined to identify the individual questions with the most improvement. Improving trends on questions indicate areas of cultural change which could be the result of change or cause the change

Chart 2: Gap in attitudes between senior management and employees towards employee empowerment in Christian organizations.

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in an organizational transition. Chart 2 displays the question number, the survey question and the numerical increase average on a five point Likert scale of the 16 improving organization over the four years of surveys.

A closer examination of the 10 questions in the chart shows a relationship between the survey results of improving organizations and the change theory discussed above. Starting with greatest improvement for changing organizations, question 50, "My organization's management explains the reasons behind major decisions", we can see how this attribute in management bears on all the steps in the process. First it helps the visioning process with increased visibility of the decision process, it keeps the decision makers honest and truthful as the decisions are subject to scrutiny and it shows the organizational values in action. Explaining the reasons for decisions is also part of the communications involved in change, it gives people a partial view of the plan and the information makes people feel empowered. The area addressed by this question may represent the singly most important area for management to focus on during organizational change. Of course one area would not work in isolation and the other questions with significant change are
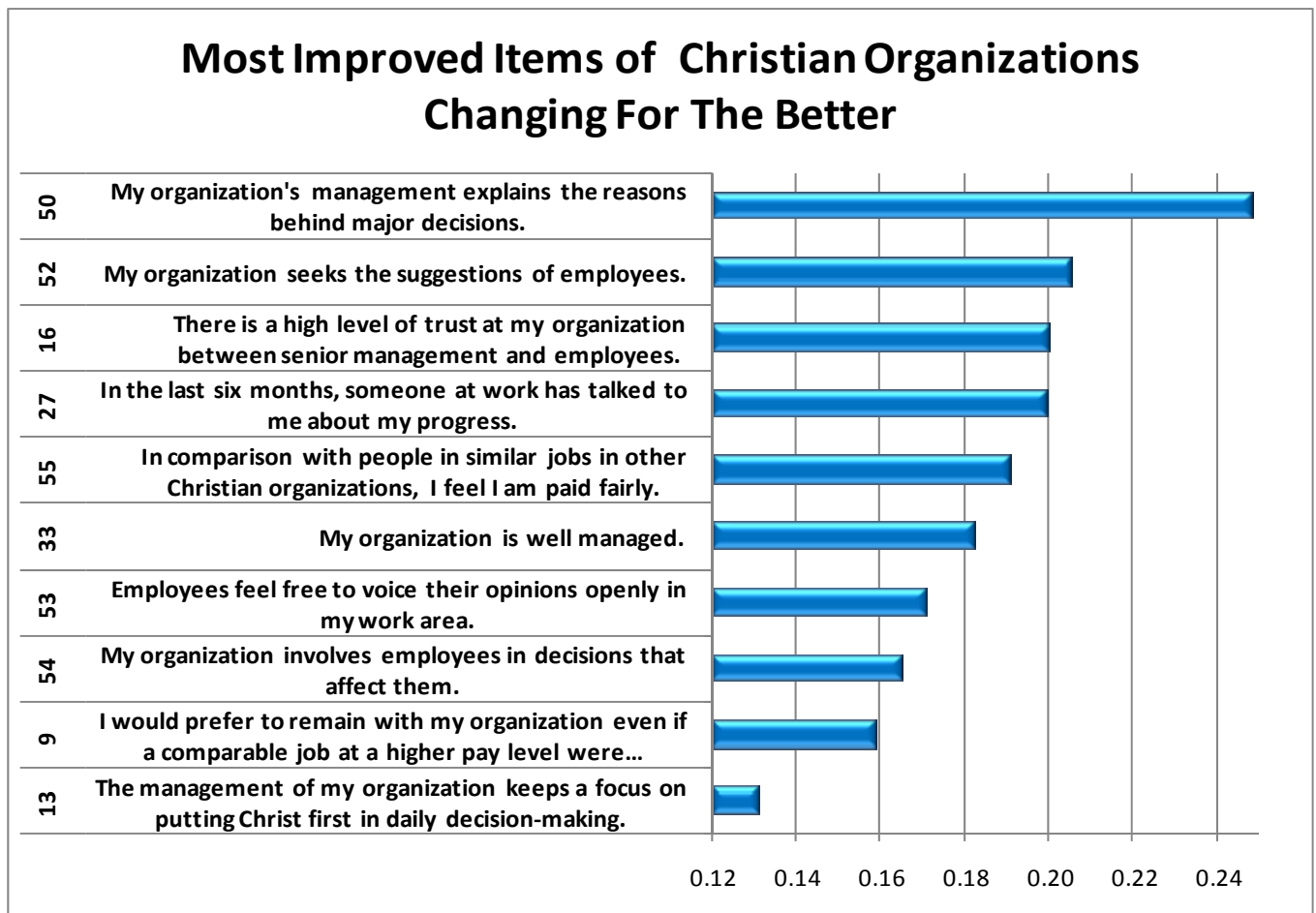
Most Improved Items of Christian Organizations Changing For The Better

	Question	
50	My organization's management explains the reasons behind major decisions.	
52	My organization seeks the suggestions of employees.	
16	There is a high level of trust at my organization between senior management and employees.	
27	In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.	
55	In comparison with people in similar jobs in other Christian organizations, I feel I am paid fairly.	
33	My organization is well managed.	
53	Employees feel free to voice their opinions openly in my work area.	
54	My organization involves employees in decisions that affect them.	
9	I would prefer to remain with my organization even if a comparable job at a higher pay level were…	
13	The management of my organization keeps a focus on putting Christ first in daily decision-making.	

0.12 0.14 0.16 0.18 0.20 0.22 0.24

Chart 2: Questions with the greatest improvement in positively changing organizations.

likely closely integrated with each other.

The second and third questions may illustrate this integration between the questions. Question 52, "My organization seeks the suggestions of employees" shows another aspect of communications by listening to the employees. Asking for ideas is also consistent with consensus building, for as ideas are taken from more people it is likely to create consensus and at the same time it is empowering people. However, neither of these first two questions would be meaningful without the integration of trust as illustrated by the third question, number 16, "There is a high level of trust at my organization between senior management and employees". Without trust people will not believe reasons given for major decisions and they would not believe that management is sincerely seeking their suggestions.

Question 27, "In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress" relates to communications between employees and management along with monitoring the progress on the plan. If an organization is in a process of change and the people are involved in

that change, then they would need to be part of the plan to accomplish the change. As part of the plan, employees would need feedback on their progress which is reflected by the results of question 27, "In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress". The ability to competently manage a plan is captured in questions 55, "In comparison with people in similar jobs in other Christian organizations, I feel I am paid fairly" and 33, "My organization is well managed". Although the connection with organizational change may not be intuitive, both questions provide a foundation for executing a plan. For a successful organizational change, good management is needed as well as the trust garnered when people are paid fairly.

The next question, 53, "Employees feel free to voice their opinions openly in my work area" shows the value of truth in the change process. If people feel free to express their opinion, employees will perceive that management is interested in their opinion and interested in the truth. Thus, management is more likely to start with the truth and hear the truth through the change process. Listening to the opinions of

employees would also enhance communications as would question 54 "My organization involves employees in decisions that affect them". Question 54 empowers people by giving them a say in areas important to them. This will additionally build commitment as indicated by question 9 "I would prefer to remain with my organization even if a comparable job at a higher pay level were available in another organization". For more information on the need for employee commitment during change, please refer to our previous article, "Unfreeze Your Organization".

Finally, question 13, "The management of my organization keeps a focus on putting Christ first in daily decision-making" aligns with the importance of shared values during a change process. Sharing the values of putting Christ first helps clarify the direction of the organization and likely brings agreement as to the need for change.

In conclusion, the employee survey results from the last four years of the Best Christian Workplaces survey support the steps in the process for organizational change. Starting with the truth, creating a shared vision,

clear communications and developing a plan which engages an empowered workforce in the transition are all key elements in moving an organization from where it is now to a better place in the future.

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