This Change Leadership overview is intended for use by School/Unit leaders and managers across Harvard, in partnership with their CWD and HR colleagues. The toolkit was designed in response to demand for a practical, usable resource to help lead, navigate and unleash the power of change across Harvard. The primary source document for this toolkit is John Kotter’s Eight Accelerators for Leading Change, as well as the Five Principles he later articulated for leading change by leveraging both dimensions of what he called an organization’s dual operating system—the formal hierarchy and the informal network.

NOTE: While this toolkit was designed to support proactive, large-scale, opportunity-driven change initiatives, you may find that many of the suggestions, questions and principles it contains are equally relevant to the more responsive, crisis-driven change efforts made necessary by the COVID pandemic.

See Addendum for tips on leading change in a remote operating environment.

1. **Many people driving important change, and from every part of the organization, not just the usual few appointees.** The work starts here – you need a fundamentally different way to gather information, make decisions and implement decisions. You need additional people, with their own way of looking at the world and good working relationships.

2. **A “get–to” mindset, not a “have–to” one.** Again, tapping insider talent is key, you do not have to hire new people. If people feel they have the privilege of working on an initiative that will significantly impact the success of the organization, they will volunteer to be part of that shared purpose.

3. **Action that is head and heart driven, not just head driven.** In addition to the business case of numbers and data, it is imperative to appeal to feelings and the opportunity to contribute to a cause bigger than oneself. Engaging the heart is equally as important as engaging the head.

4. **More leadership, not just more management.** The network requires leadership. “The game is about vision, opportunity, agility, inspired action, passion, innovation, and celebration – not just project management, budget reviews, reporting relationships, compensation, and accountability to a plan.”
5. **An inseparable partnership between the hierarchy and the network, not just an enhanced hierarchy.** The two systems (hierarchy and network) work as one “with a constant flow of information and activity between them”. It succeeds as a result of role modeling from the top of the hierarchy and education.

**ANALYZE THE ORGANIZATION AND ITS NEED FOR CHANGE**

Dan Cohen, author of *The Heart of Change Field Guide*, suggests four considerations for determining an organization’s readiness for a change effort. The following information will help you to assess your organization’s environment regarding issues and concerns.

- **Take the organizational temperature.** This step is as much a “buy-in” and communication step as an opportunity to obtain data. When you ask people for input and they respond, and they begin to feel like they have a part in the process.
- **Identify opportunities for, and barriers, to success.** Cultural, organizational, and political barriers all need to be uncovered and dealt with early in the change process.
- **Talk to people at all levels in the organization.** Front line supervisors and their direct reports often understand the real problems and needs because they are closer to the customer and because their job requires them to see what is happening at the working level of the organization.
- **Expect pushback.** It is human nature to resist change. Begin to determine who, when, where, and why early. A realistic picture of what to expect helps you plan ahead and be able to deal with the resistance more effectively.

**ACCELERATOR 1: Create a sense of urgency around a Big opportunity**

“The First Accelerator is all about creating and maintaining a strong sense of urgency, among as many people as possible, around a Big Opportunity an organization is facing. Building a dual system starts here…Urgency, in the sense used here. Is not just about this week’s problems but about the strategic threats and possibilities flying at you faster and faster.”

There are many ways to help employees see the compelling reasons for change. Several of the ideas initiated by Kotter and many others for establishing urgency can be found in his books.
• Identify the root cause for attitudes.
• Encourage the workforce to share their concerns.
• Open lines of communication at all levels.
• Communicate integrity by encouraging constructive criticism.
• Address difficult issues in meetings.
• Celebrate successes to help focus on future challenges; you want to use what you learned to be prepared for the next concerns or challenges.
• Use complaints to determine solutions.
• Invite ideas and suggestions for improvement.

ACCELERATOR 2: Build and Evolve a Guiding Coalition

“The second Accelerator leverages off a greatly heightened and aligned sense of urgency to build the core of the network structure, then later help it evolve into a stronger and more sophisticated form. This guiding coalition of people from across the organization deeply feels the urgency. These are individuals from all silos and levels who want to help you take on strategic challenges. They are the people who want to lead, to be change agents, and to help others do the same. This core group has the drive, the intellectual and emotional commitment, the connections, the skills, and the information to be an effective sun in your dynamic new solar system.”

The task here is to assemble a group with shared commitment and enough power and relationship capital to lead the change effort. They will work as a team outside the normal hierarchy. The below checklist will help ensure your coalition is set up for success.

• List the mindset, skills, and experience you need members of your guiding coalition to have. Consider the diversity of the group e.g. age, sex, race, ethnicity, grade level, etc.
• List the connections you need members of your guiding coalition to have.
• List the known change agents in your department/School who are and could be passionate about the change.
• Given the above skills, connections and change agents, list potential members of your guiding coalition.
ACCELERATOR 3: Form a change Vision and Strategic Initiatives

“The third Accelerator has the guiding coalition clarify a vision that fits a big strategic opportunity and select strategic initiatives that can move you with speed and agility towards the vision. [The initiatives the network decides to work on] will be those that the individuals in the guiding coalition have great passion to work on. These will always be activities that the organization’s executive committee agrees make great sense. But these will be initiatives which a management driven hierarchy is ill equipped to handle well enough or fast enough by itself.”

Change researcher and consultant William Bridges’ 4-P framework offers a number of questions to ask yourself and your colleagues as you begin to draft your change plan and associated communication and engagement strategy:

- **Purpose**: Why are we doing this? Why did we have to leave the old ways behind? What is the problem? What are we trying to accomplish with all this? If people have a clear sense of purpose, they can endure far more confusion than they could otherwise.

- **Picture**: What is the outcome going to be like? How is it going to work and what is it going to feel like? Giving people a picture of what you are trying to create is the vision needed to keep them going. Without it, they are not sure that there is any clear destination. If there is no clear picture, now is the time to create one.

- **Plan**: But the destination alone is not enough. Unless people can see a path that leads there, they are not going to have much confidence that they (or the organization) are going to make it. If, however, people have a step by step plan, their confidence returns. The plan holds out the promise not only of an end but the means to reach that end.

- **Part**: Confidence is essential, but to get people started you must give them a role to play. Their commitment to making this change work will depend on their making it their change; it will depend on their getting involved; it will depend on whether they have a meaningful part to play in the plan.
ACCELERATOR 4: Enlist a Volunteer Team

“In the fourth Accelerator, the guiding coalition, and others who wish to help, communicate information about the change vision and the strategic initiatives to the organization in ways that lead large numbers of people to buy into the whole flow of action. Done well, this process results in many individuals wanting to help, either with some specific initiative or just in general. This Accelerator starts to pull, as if by gravity, the planets and moons into the new network system.”

Review these roles and think about whom to recruit for your volunteer team, and also your broader engagement and communication plan for the change initiative.

Senior Leaders

- Communicate the organization’s business strategy
- Address broad-based employee concerns to increase visibility into the rationale behind change
- Model adaptability to change through actions and words to build trust
- Provide regular updates and pertinent information to employees

Human Resources

- Partner with internal communications, public relations, and other stakeholders to coordinate the messages of executives and managers to ensure consistency
- Provide resources and guidelines for managers, including describing the role of managers to support retention efforts

Managers

- Communicate key information to employees
- Address employee concerns on a personal level and through one-on-one conversations
- Identify and retain key employees
- Engage employees
- Share employee concerns about the change to senior managers and/or HR
Employees

- Understand how the change will affect their day-to-day job, co-workers, and the organization
- Provide input in addition to understanding how the change will impact their work.

ACCELERATOR 5: Enable Action by Removing Barriers

“In the fifth Accelerator, everyone helping on the network side…works swiftly to achieve initiatives and find new ones that are strategically relevant. People talk, think, invent, and test, all in the spirit of an agile and swift entrepreneurial start-up. Much of the action here has to do with identifying and removing barriers which slow or stop strategically important activity. Within a dual system, and unlike in a start-up, this process guides people to pay close attention to their hierarchy: to what is being done there (to avoid overlap of effort), to what has been done there (to avoid plowing old ground), and to the hierarchy’s operational goals and incremental strategic initiatives (to maintain alignment). Smart actions, based on good information from all silos and levels, are taken with heightened speed.”

Establish a team operating norm that, in addition to supporting what is already in place for success, makes clear that the removal of barriers and obstacles is a key part of the Guiding Coalition’s work. Barriers and obstacles should be made visible and addressed as soon as possible. Common barriers:

- Mindset: People don’t believe change is possible.
- Systems: Formal structures (e.g., information sharing, performance management) make it difficult to act.
- Bosses: Key players discourage employees from behaving differently.

ACCELERATOR 6: Generate and Celebrate Short Term Wins

“The sixth Accelerator is about everyone on the network side helping to create an ongoing flow of strategically relevant wins, both big and very small. Action here also ensures that the wins are as visible as possible to the entire organization and that they are celebrated, even if only in small ways. These wins, and their celebration, carry great psychological power and play a crucial role in building and sustaining a dual system. They give credibility to the new structure. This credibility
in turn promotes more and more cooperation within the overall organization. These wins draw out respect, understanding, and eventually complete cooperation from the most control-oriented managers, who themselves have no desire to be network-side volunteers.”

We need to create short-term wins that are:

- Visible – Everyone can see for themselves that the result is real, not just hype.
- Unambiguous – There can be no argument over whether or not it’s a win.
- Relevant – It’s clearly related to the change effort.
- Celebrated – This ratchets up the level of urgency and engagement.

ACCCELERATOR 7: Sustain Acceleration

“Accelerator 7 keeps the entire system moving despite a general human tendency to let up after a win or two…Here, with relentless energy focused forward on new opportunities and challenges, we find a motor which helps all the other Accelerators keep going as needed, like spark plugs and cylinders in a car’s engine. It is the opposite of a one-and-done approach and mindset.”

Change is constant and the dual operating system provides the mechanism by which acceleration of meaningful initiatives is sustained. Build in processes to continually scan the horizon for new opportunities and challenges.

ACCCELERATOR 8: Institute Change

“Accelerator 8 helps institutionalize wins, integrating them into the hierarchy’s processes, systems, procedures, and behavior – in effect, helping to infuse the changes into the culture of the organization. When this happens with more and more changes, there is a cumulative effect. After a few years, such action drives the whole dual operating system approach into an organization’s very DNA.”

Integrating the network’s wins into the hierarchy’s processes, systems and behaviors is the final and ongoing iteration of the work.
Suggested Articles:

- *Decoding Resistance to Change*, by Jeffrey D. Ford and Laurie W. Ford
- *The Real Reason People Won't Change*, by Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey
- *Choosing Strategies for Change*, by John P. Kotter and Leonard A. Schlesinger
- *Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail* by John Kotter
- *A Survival Guide for Leaders* by Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky
- *Leadership in a (Permanent) Crisis*, by Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky

ADDENDUM — Tips for leading large scale in a remote operating environment

- Consider in advance the blend of asynchronous and synchronous mechanisms you’ll use for communicating with and engaging with guiding coalition members and stakeholders throughout the change process. Asynchronously, you might collect stakeholder feedback via a survey or by email; you might create a change newsletter and/or establish a change website where frequently asked questions can be answered; you might create a Teams site that becomes the hub for the guiding coalition’s documentation. On the other hand, you will likely want to use synchronous tools—video and phone conferences—to hold meetings, make decisions, conduct focus groups, or engage in one-on-one interviews and critical conversations with your most important stakeholders.

- Meet frequently with guiding coalition members to sustain momentum. For all video meetings, whether with the guiding coalition or with stakeholder groups of any size, optimize the productivity of these sessions by sending an agenda in advance and using pre-work whenever possible. As with any meeting, better prepared participants will be more engaged participants. This is even more important when meeting remotely.

- When meeting in person by video, the quality of discussions and decision-making may benefit from smaller numbers of participants and shorter, more frequent meetings, well informed by data gathered asynchronously and viewed in advance.
• Include among the members of your guiding coalition a project manager who can take primary responsibility for managing change roadmap documentation in an online platform such as Microsoft Teams. This person should be proficient in using the selected document management platform. Adopt clear protocols for maintaining shared documents through the thoughtful use of administration and editing rights, naming conventions, folder management and version control. Ensure that your project manager has full authority to oversee adherence to these protocols.

• For video conference meetings, Designate an official note taker. Consider having your project manager, or another technically savvy assistant, serve as the moderator, attending to the chat function and managing any technical aspects of using the platform for a well-structured and productive session.

• In iterative meetings of the guiding coalition and/or other stakeholder groups, explore how the various features of your video platform, or complementary tools, can enable creative approaches to collaboratively advance the work rather than just sharing information. Shared screens, breakout rooms, polling, real-time white board, and even the simple group chat feature provide many options for conducting a lively online interaction that produces great results.

• Take care to leave the documentation site in good order as a resource for future change efforts.