

# Networking and Organizational Change

*Informal networks can help transform public healthcare.*

While transforming organizations, resistance to change is common. Kurt Lewin describes how difficult it is to bring in change in the desired direction. He explains several ways to overcome resistance to change. Julie Battilana and Casciaro, associate professors at Harvard Business School say that networking is crucial in transforming workplaces.

UK's National Health Service (NHS), a large government run institution could easily bring more than 100 changes through the efforts of just a clinical manager. The secrets behind the success story are:

- Informal networks of the change agents
- Disconnected groups bridged by people
- Change agents being close to 'fence-sitters'

This is true for many other organizations too.

It is clear that the role of change-agents is very important in bringing change. It is essential to know the techniques they use.

**Informal connections:** In every organization along with formal authority co-exists informal connections, which plays a vital role. Research shows that it is not necessary to be on top positions, more than that it is necessary to have good networking relations with influential people.

John, a change agent in NHS encountered a lot of resistance when he wanted to set up a nurse-led pre-operative assessment service. But, Carol, a well-respected nurse, and on whom many colleagues relied, could assist John in bringing the change.

Similarly, Gustaf, a senior equity partner at a U.S. Law firm, was trying to create client-file partner system, but he could not get support from the lawyers in the firm. But his associate Penny could quickly succeed because of her influential informal networks. Many colleagues respected her and sought her advice on many occasions.

In both the cases, Carol and Penny could initiate changes because of the networks they had.

- **Types of networks:** Cohesive networks are those in which people are connected to the change agent and also interconnected with one another. In bridging networks people are not connected to each other except to the change agent. A cohesive network works well when the changes are not divergent, where dramatic changes are not required. Because of the trust and mutual support the members accept the changes. But a bridging network works well in non-divergent changes, where dramatic changes are required and the existing norms are replaced. So, the types of networks influence the types of changes.
- **Types of people:** We find three types of people- endorsers (who are positive about the change), resisters (who oppose the change) and fence-sitters (who think about the pros as well cons of change). Being close to endorsers does not make any impact in divergent and non-divergent changes because, for them issue is important than the closeness of the change agent. But closeness is important with fence-sitters because they can go either way. Change agents must closely watch resisters and infer their attitudes. Keeping resisters away works well if the change agent is determined and confident about the result of change. Influencing fence-sitters, help in bringing change. They are like 'cats on the wall', who may jump any side, any time.

Networking, no doubt plays an important role in transforming organizations. More than formal authority, though important, informal networks are significant. Change agents need to consider types of networks, types of people and types of changes while bringing change.

**Informal organizations** exist within the organization. An informal organization is a network of personal and social relationships, which is formed by the ad-hoc and random collection of employees who come together in an informal environment and share common interests, ideas and opinions. They perpetuate the cultural and social values that the group holds dear.

*Source: Battilana, Julie, and Tiziana Casciaro, "The Network Secrets of Great Change Agents",*

*Harvard Business Review, July–August 2013, pp 62–68*

*Available online at: <http://hbr.org/2013/07/the-network-secrets-of-great-change-agents/ar/pr>*