

## KOTTER QUESTIONS HIS OWN TRANSFORMATIONAL PROCESSES!



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In his latest book “Accelerate”, Professor Kotter questions the effectiveness of his original eight-step method. He believes it now slows organisations’ ability to keep up and get ahead in today’s faster changing world.

If you have studied or worked in change management, you will know Dr John P Kotter, the internationally known author on leadership and change.

19 years ago he documented an 8 step method<sup>1</sup> for successfully leading large scale change, which promoted:

1. Establishing a sense of urgency,
2. Creating a guiding coalition
3. Developing a change vision
4. Communicating the vision for buy-in
5. Empowering broad based action
6. Generating short term wins
7. Never letting up and
8. Incorporating changes into the culture.

These steps were designed to function within existing organisational operating structures and processes and were often implemented in rigid sequential ways by small core project teams who, once a change project was complete, would pack them away until another project needed to be implemented.

Tool CLW6.02 in the SSA Collaborative Leadership Programme studies it in detail along with the methodologies of Kanter and Luceke.

However, in his latest book *Accelerate*<sup>2</sup>, Professor Kotter questions the effectiveness of his original eight-step method. He believes it now slows organisations’ ability (and thereby partnership working) to keep up and get ahead in today’s faster changing world.

Whilst traditional structures and processes enable daily operations to be run effectively, they are not suited to the early detection of

<sup>1</sup> Kotter, John P. (1996). *Leading Change*. Harvard Business School Press.

<sup>2</sup> Kotter, John P. (2014). *Accelerate: Building Strategic Agility for a Faster-Moving World*. p. 224.

opportunities/threats or agile enough to quickly formulate and implement strategies to deal with such issues.

Kotter believes businesses (and thereby partnerships they are involved in) now need dual operating systems, one for running daily operations using existing operational processes and the other using a network “volunteer army” of people who deliver both daily operations and have a desire to continually seek out and implement improvement opportunities.

This new dual system expands on Kotter’s original 8 steps in that the whole organisation, or partnership, is encouraged to instinctively work together to sense threats/opportunities and respond to them quickly rather than just small core project teams.

### The key to success involves...

- Senior executives creating a sense of urgency around a single big opportunity, blessing the creation of a “volunteer army” and constantly reinforcing it so that people wake up every morning determined to find some action they can do to move toward that opportunity.
- A guiding coalition (**GC**) is formed involving outstanding leaders/managers, with people invited to apply to be on the GC. The GC ensures all departments (partners) and broad skills are represented, is responsible for deciding which big opportunity initiatives to launch and how best to do so.
- GC members jointly formulate a strategic vision. This should be feasible, easy to communicate, paint a picture of success, show how taking part creates greater purpose to people’s work and include information to help those taking part understand when actions can be taken

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without seeking permission. Senior executive comments on a draft strategic vision is sought and comments treated as valuable input rather than automatically accepted commands.

### The importance of the shared vision

In the *SSATrust & Shared Vision Toolbox*, there is a strong emphasis on the need for a passionate shared vision between partners. The vision must be a magnet for change. Rather than running away from a burning platform, the shared vision must build a burning desire across the organisations and partnership leaders. Kotter also suggests that:

- The vision is communicated organisation/partnership wide (and feedback encouraged) using ways to boost the project going viral (eg set a GC member goal to get buy in from different teams, organise meetings, create support materials, build an information filled intranet portal, videos, blogs and face to face conversations).
- Moving the vision forward, GC members work on individual parts of the strategy whilst delivering their daily operations. They discuss their GC work with frontline staff to seek views and ensure frontline improvements are included in their work. They report progress at main GC meetings.
- The GC celebrates its best short term wins across the organisation to provide proof that the dual operating system is creating real results. The quick wins are obvious, unambiguous and clearly related to the vision.
- The GC also never lets up and continually creates a sense of urgency. If they don't, GC volunteers start focusing on their day work and the traditional hierarchy dominates once more.



John P Kotter  
Professor of  
Leadership,  
Emeritus at  
Harvard Business  
School

- Finally, no strategic initiative is complete until it has been incorporated into day to day activities.

### Changing attitudes for changing times

Is Kotter saying that his original eight-step change management concept was wrong?

The answer is “no”. What he is doing is recognising that the world is changing and he is signalling that we need to change with it.

The good thing about collaborative working - either shared services or collaborative transformation - is that it presents an opportunity to change and update the way things are done now.

It gives permission for us all to build new, better, lower-cost ways of working that are fit for the next five years - and not stuck in the legacy issues of the past five years.

Through his new thinking, Professor Kotter is giving us a new journey map to accelerate our success.

On the following page I have taken Kotter's key points and put them into a checklist.

Why not set them out on a flip chart for discussion with colleagues?

## Applying Kotter’s New Approach To Change Management To Your Collaboration Activities

Questions To Consider In Developing Collaborative Working	Our Approach
<b>How Can We Create A Continual Sense Of Urgency?</b>	
<b>How Do We Build &amp; Maintain A “Guiding Coalition”?</b>	
<b>How Do We Formulate A Strategic Vision &amp; Decide Which Initiatives To Take Forward?</b>	
<b>What Is The Best Way To Communicate Our Vision &amp; Create Buy-In?</b>	
<b>How Do We Move The Vision Forward &amp; Ensure Barriers Are Removed?</b>	
<b>What Is The Best Way To Celebrate Visible, Significant Short Term Wins?</b>	
<b>How Do We Never Let Up &amp; Keep Learning From The New Collaborative Project?</b>	
<b>How Do We Incorporate The Changes Made Into Day To Day Activities Of The New Service?</b>	