

COHESION – THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE PROSPEROUS

by

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Approved by:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Caryn M. Stanley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial "C".

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ABSTRACT

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Moving an organization toward change is a challenging process. There has been much research centered around ways an organization can best equip themselves to handle these changes. Some have argued that efforts should be stretched beyond just focusing on an individual's response to change or the organizational dynamics of the particular conglomerate. Forgotten, lies the cohesion factor among those groups that make up the organization. Despite limited studies on the cohesion of groups within organizations and how they effect change, research has outlined many positive results in maintaining a tight knit working environment. However, if not managed appropriately, group cohesion has reared a negative effect on organizational progress.

Considering the factors outlined in research literature and noted personal experiences, the conclusion offers that effective leadership has shown to be the factor in whether or not group cohesiveness will enhance or hinder an organization's movement toward change.

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Group Dynamics in an Organization

The focus of my graduate seminar paper will be on managing of group dynamics. Griffin (2017), notes early on in his text that managing group dynamics is a major component of leadership. Because the topic of managing group dynamics covers a vast array of components and information, I have decided to narrow the focus of this writing to group cohesiveness. Griffin (2017), defines group cohesiveness as the extent to which a group is committed to staying together. Particularly, I would like to cover the forces and actions that lend to creating and maintaining cohesiveness (attraction to the group, resistance to leaving the group, and motivation to remain a member of the group) before, during, and after organizational change. This focus will allow a better look into whether or not cohesiveness in an organization can help or hinder progress when dealing with change.

Breaking this down even further, Prentice et al. (as cited in Vatamanescu et al., 2014), says in their research, common identity and common bond are two concepts rooted in the social psychological research of voluntary real-world groups. These two concepts outline the structure of how groups get their make-up and different components, which affect the success of the group. The difference between identity and bond relies on people's distinct reasons for being in a group – either they admire the social group as a whole, developing an identity-based attachment, or they admire individuals in the group, developing bond-based attachment (noted by Back, 1951 as cited in Vatamanescu et al., 2014). Either way, both of these attachments can lend to the successful change within an organization and overall work satisfaction through group cohesiveness.

Although cohesiveness within a group seems to play a big role in the success of an organization and can affect how change is executed, there have been arguments that say group (or team) cohesiveness does not have a positive effect on an organization and in some cases can compromise the organizations success. My research has been guided around whether or not this is true. I have also taken it further to attempt to figure out if the organization and leadership itself, plays a role in whether or not group cohesiveness matters after implementing efforts which focus on attraction to the group, resistance to leaving the group, and motivation to remain a member of the group. Finding myself in a working environment which has me questioning the group cohesiveness and how it may be affecting the positive or negative outcomes of the organizations, has propelled me to learn more about this topic. In addition to the research of this topic will also be my perspective based on my own work/life experiences and the material covered in this writing.

Cohesiveness – The Relation to Group dynamics

When discussing the concept of Group Dynamics and how it has an overarching relation to team cohesiveness, it is important to understand how the breakdown can be looked at when considering an individual and a whole team. Markova and Perry (2014), say that historically group cohesion is studied as a core variable to describe interactions in small groups and is usually conceptualized as a unitary construct. There are many definitions that attempt to define cohesion (or cohesiveness for that matter). Most definitions conceptually reflect the original idea that cohesion reflects “the total field forces which act on members to remain in the group” (Markova and Perry 2014). Although you can see the trend leaning towards these concepts of cohesion, Markova and Perry (2014) also break this idea down and outline the following: “researchers have also argued that cohesion is conceptually different at the individual and group

levels. At the individual level, we define individual perceptions of cohesion as the notion of attraction to a group. At the group level, we define aggregate group cohesion as the members' shared perception of closeness and unity. Although aggregate group cohesion is conceptually and methodologically dependent on the individual perceptions of cohesion, the two are not fully overlapping as group level cohesion is achieved only when there is a level of agreement among the group members". Looking further into the concept, they basically determined that the individual component of team cohesiveness was linked to team functioning. Whereas the cohesion from a group level was more likely to be relevant to the level of membership amongst the team as a whole.

Forces Affecting Cohesiveness

When people first join a team or start employment at their organization, they are faced with the challenge of establishing new relationships and building cohesion. In order for them to build the cohesion among their teammates or workgroups they start to put themselves out there in order to make connections. Luo (2015) explains a process where several factors will determine the extent to which one member will like his/her teammates, much like the way two strangers attract to each other. He notes three key factors at this initial stage have been identified in the social psychological research of interpersonal attraction, these are, psychological similarity, shared social activities, and reciprocal liking (Delamater and Meyers outlined in Luo, 2015). Through this set of filters, attraction and liking develops between two people. Just as two people may then decide to take their relationship to a different level, team members may decide to strengthen their commitment to the group and move on to the further development stage. At this stage, another set of filters will be enacted, including more and deeper self-disclosure, trust in teammates, and interdependence among members for gratifications and reinforcements.

Through these filters, cohesion develops and strengthens (Luo, 2015). With the strength of the team operating on all cylinders, the bond that is created with that employee or team member is hard to break. Arguably, this bond can lead to many positive outputs from the team that can positively affect the organization.

Taking this a bit further, a similar perspective could be observed in a study done by (Schultz, Sjøvold, & André, 2017). In the study they addressed whether or not certain formalization training could improve both group and organizational level innovativeness. This study was interesting in that it looked into the effectiveness of how a working group's level of excitement can enhance an innovative environment. The outcome of this research offers a look into a similar topic of gaining group cohesion for the betterment of proposed change. Formalization training is a bureaucratic way of getting decisions passed on by leadership to effect change throughout an organization. Schultz et al (2017) study addressed that although older studies of formalization training proved ineffective in establishing openness within working groups, when those bureaucratic systems start to include their employees in the process it can prove beneficial. This is a testament to the dichotomy that leadership has to balance between formalized decision making and getting their people involved to gain positive cohesion which can effect change.

The most important outcome from this study showed that innovation or innovative thinking could actually be taught by means of formalization. Contrary to formalization theory, formal innovation training had a positive relationship to both group and organizational level innovativeness. Additionally, the study showed the impact that a group of engaged or enthusiastic employees can have on the organization (Schultz, Sjøvold, & André, 2017). What was even more fascinating, among the two control groups, the group participating in the study

had a positive effect on the group that chose not to participate when changes were put into play. In the end, knowing how the people in your organization react to tasks that require solid group dynamics, a manager or leader who observes these conditions will be able to predetermine the likelihood of success of an innovative initiative. This can be done merely by looking at the group climate which will shed light onto their innovative readiness for change (Schultz, Sjøvold, & André, 2017).

This study is a great example of when cohesiveness can be a positive factor while an organization is moving toward change. If you can get influential members of an organization to come together, you may also be able to get the outlying folks to come on board for reasons outlined in the aforementioned forces and actions that create and maintain cohesiveness. For example, in the Schultz et al (2017) study, the non-participating group could still have a strong attraction to the others in the organization, they may be resistant to separating from those other members, or they may just be motivated to remain a member of the group. That connectedness and cohesiveness can drive change.

The forces effecting progress with team cohesion do not always come easy however. There are variables which can make it difficult to build cohesion or at a minimum, slow the process. Some of the difficulties come with whether or not an individual is making face-to-face contact with the rest of the group or is tasked with team building virtually (or even over teleconference). Luo (2015) says for example people working together via email, compared to live interaction, are less inhibited in conveying hostile comments and making more negative remarks to one another. They are also less likely to conform to one another's opinions, have more trouble reaching a consensus, and coordinating their efforts. In the article studies showed that the virtual groups had worse task performance, took more time to complete tasks, and had

lower group member satisfaction. Whereas those that experienced shared activities and direct interactions were catalyst for meaningful human relationships both within and between social groups which people belong to (Luo, 2015). Overall, the creation of spaces where people can interact in person is a breeding ground for tighter team cohesion than the alternative.

Workplace Cohesion

Now that we have touched on the forces affecting the effectiveness of cohesion, and some of the ideal environments to better breed cohesion, it is important to take a hard look at the advantages and disadvantages to cohesive groups. Although many argue there are major benefits for an organization when there is a strong team cohesion, others say the strong team cohesion can hinder organizational success.

Advantages to Cohesiveness

Gleason (2018) says studies of group cohesiveness generally conclude that cohesiveness can contribute to increased productivity because members of cohesive groups experience lower levels of stress, have lower rates of absenteeism, have lower turnover rates, experience greater job satisfaction and have more consistent individual productivity outcomes within the group. All of this starts happening when an individual has a strong desire to stay in a group, sometimes building friendships and relationships with fellow group members, resulting in the resistance for those individuals to separate themselves. Luo (2015) breaks this down further into two types of group cohesion, “social cohesion” and “task cohesion”. The advantages of social cohesion he says, is members stay in the group because they desire to be around and interact with one another which leads to a more positive working environment. Whereas task cohesion is when a group remains together primarily because they are heavily involved with the group’s tasks. He says when the members find the task intrinsically rewarding and valuable the cohesion will be greater.

Studying the advantages of group cohesion, whether it is more socially focused or tasked focused, it is clear that the greater the cohesion, the more interaction will be had. In my experience, the more interaction (especially positive interactions) you have, the more communicating that happens. Without communication it is difficult to get anything done at all. The higher the level of cohesion, the more likely the group is building those positive relationships which result in positive communication. Luo (2015), notes that interaction among members in highly cohesive groups is usually friendlier, more cooperative, and entails more attempts to reach agreements and to improve coordination. This is because members of highly cohesive groups care about belonging to the group and want their group to perform well, so they exercise more influence on one another to bring about coordination and consensus in the group. The preponderance of evidence in group research indicates that cohesion tends to increase the productivity and performance of groups (Luo, 2015). Another caveat to the advantages of cohesion in an organization is when a team with high cohesion adopts a norm for high productivity which creates a better synergy of its members' efforts. According to Beal et al. (as cited in Luo, 2015) this can have a positive correlation with job performance in work groups.

The friendship factor is another driver in the advantages to cohesiveness. In the event an individual becomes so connected with the group and friendships develop, there is a strong correlation to a positive working environment. Tse and Dasborough (outlined in Luo, 2015) say in the work context, liking is not prerequisite to work effectively towards task completion, but workplace friendships can foster opportunities for developing social rapport and positive team dynamism. With friendships there is a level of trust established, likely more so than with someone you are not friends with. This level of trust creates a deeper level of mutuality among team members and they become increasingly reliant on teammates for getting work done, as well

as for gratifying their social psychological needs outside of work, such as friendship and leisure/hobby pursuits. In the team context, this further development stage is completed when strong team cohesion is perceived and desired among team members (Luo, 2015).

Disadvantages to Cohesiveness

With the good, there always comes the bad. Researches have argued there are levels of cohesiveness which can be a detriment to an organization. MacDonald (n.d.) says while cohesive groups offer advantages in terms of social support for group members, they also present disadvantages for the employer. Like outlined above when discussing the effects of group norms, MacDonald goes on to note that members of cohesive groups tend to follow group norms. “Group norms are the explicit and implicit rules that govern the values, actions and behavior of group members. Some norms enable the group to function more effectively, such as encouraging everyone to participate in decision-making or good timekeeping. However, low performance norms can be detrimental to group productivity. For example, in a cohesive group, members will be reluctant to put in extra effort to meet a deadline if the norm is to work at a steady pace” (MacDonald, n.d.).

One can find situations scattered throughout research where team cohesion has failed an organization. For example, (Gleason, 2018) explained that while the advantages of group cohesiveness generally outweigh the disadvantages, cohesive groups can also go dramatically off the rails, sometimes relatively quickly, with outcomes ranging from unsatisfactory to disastrous. He continues by explaining that “extremist political groups, for example, arise from and depend upon a sense that its members have insights and understandings that others do not. This shapes their sense of identity. Members' allegiance to these groups can outweigh even the otherwise universal desire to live rather than die. Members' sense of mission can have outcomes as cruel

and disastrous as the destruction of the twin towers on 9/11. Most unsatisfactory outcomes rising from group cohesiveness are far less extreme, of course, and generally have easily identified and mundane causes such as group allegiance to unsatisfactory leaders, unrealistic or inadequate goals, alienation from other groups and individuals, excessive competitiveness with others outside the group and attenuation of critical judgments within the group that are necessary for course correction” (Gleason, 2018).

Another negative outlook can be the way cohesion can be played in order to make a corrupt company successful. In this regard, although cohesion is strong, the outcome of that cohesion is facilitating wrongdoing by a company with corrupt intentions. For example, Campbell and Goritz (2014) say that employees facilitate corruption in collaboration with their colleagues for the benefit of the organization as a whole. Those employees who are engaging in active corrupt behavior, plan and implement corrupt transactions, uphold corrupt relationships and cover traces to protect their organizations. Although the corrupt organizations themselves encourage their employees to engage in corruption, ultimately these employees achieve advantages for their organizations in an illicit manner (Campbell and Goritz, 2014).

In this case, Campbell and Goritz (2014) note that while managers perceive corrupt organizational culture in terms of high-performance values, results orientation and security needs, employees perceive corrupt organizational culture in terms of rationalization strategies, team values, and group norms. In a sense, once an employee bonds with their work group and organization, especially when that organization is corrupt, it is hard for them to step away and do the right thing because they will lose that strong cohesion they have built. If the employee has already established a relationship with groups and individuals in their organization, and they have a change of heart in regard to the corruption in the organization, if they try and remove

themselves from the corrupt situation they may be perceived as a whistle blower or someone who is against the group or organization. “Work groups use social influence strategies to introduce and reinforce colleagues to facilitate corruption, such as with gradual introduction to the corruption” (Campbell and Goritz, 2014). As the individual is building the cohesion within the group, the group is building the individual into the image of corruption.

There is also the play on friendship and highly cohesive groups when it comes to studying the disadvantages of group cohesiveness. MacDonald (n.d.), explains that when highly cohesive groups make decisions, they run the risk of groupthink. “Groupthink occurs when group members are reluctant to express dissenting opinions to avoid causing disharmony within a cohesive group. Opinions held by the majority or by key group members are regarded as unanimous and alternative views are discouraged. Overly cohesive groups are suspicious of contradictory opinions expressed by outsiders. Information from outsiders that contradicts the group's opinion may even be hidden by group members. Groupthink can lead to poor or irrational decisions” (MacDonald, n.d.). Taking the friendship piece, a step further, Palmquist (2015) believes that employees who concentrate too much on establishing and maintaining social ties begin to spend more time trading emails about the big game than finding the lowest-priced travel package for a client. Likewise, innovation often requires a butting of heads, and teammates who have grown too chummy with one another may be less likely to challenge the status quo.

Finally, perhaps one of the biggest arguments on the side of the disadvantages to team cohesion is its effect on change in an organization. MacDonald (n.d.) say members of cohesive groups rely heavily on each other and resist external ideas and input. This can lead to isolation and a feeling of superiority over others in the organizations. As a result, cohesive groups find it difficult to change their values, actions or behaviors, particularly when the change is driven by

external forces. Even if an individual member of the group becomes convinced of the need for change, he may find it difficult to put into practice due to the strength of the group dynamic (MacDonald, n.d.).

Leadership and Cohesion

“There are no bad teams, only bad leaders” (Willink & Babin, 2015). Given the information laid out in the advantages and disadvantages to team cohesion, it is important to acknowledge the effect the leader has over to the group. Although it is a challenging position, the leader will influence how the cohesion of a team is built but will also have to direct the movement of the team to ensure it performs to enhance the organization.

A Leader’s Effect on Employee/Team Cohesion

Taghian et al (2015) said effectiveness of managerial actions is, therefore, dependent on how well managers understand stakeholders' interests and influence and how appropriately they respond to them. The leader therefore is acting like a captain of a ship and has to steer appropriately given the challenges brought on by the employees and teams. Challenges will be ever present and, in my opinion, change would not exist without challenges. Therefore, strong leaders are paramount in building positive cohesion among their employees and teams.

One of the challenges a leader faces is balancing their participation within the team as they try to build cohesion but not overstep their boundaries which would impede the team’s success within the organizations. Having the ability as a leader to be seen as a facilitator for the team rather than someone who is just primarily giving orders would likely be a huge benefit. Markova and Perry (2014), explain that team members may feel that their access to power in the team is hindered. In experimental conditions, Erez et al. (as explained in Markova & Perry, 2014) found that teams that rely on naturally emerging leaders, in comparison to teams that

rotate leaders, have lower level of voice, cooperation, and performance. They concluded that there might be some cost associated with leader emergence. Solansky (as cited in Markova & Perry, 2014), found that teams with shared leadership as opposed to those with a single leader had emotional and cognitive advantages. Markova and Perry (2014) also say the emergence of one team member as a leader may change the perception of equal influence of each team member over team decisions. Unfortunately, teams within an organization may not always have the luxury of picking who falls into that leadership role and will have to work with what the organization has in place.

A big piece of good leadership behavior is how to appropriately handle change, among other things, within an organization that has teams or groups. Gilley (as cited in Hayes, 2014), studied subordinates' perceptions of effective leader behavior and identified, in order of importance, three factors related to support for change—the leader's ability to motivate others, communicate effectively and build cohesive teams. According to Case and Maner (2014), Leaders can promote positive, trusting relationships among their subordinates by enhancing communication and promoting close, interpersonal interactions. By encouraging those processes, leaders can ultimately enhance group performance. So how does a leader do this? According to Markova and Perry (2014), the emergent leader can influence emotions in a team by being attentive to followers' emotions. With that a leader's mood influences the moods of other members (potentially effecting positive team cohesion). They say “when the leader is in a positive mood, the team is likely to exhibit more coordination and exert less effort. In this way, team level outcomes may be affected by the character of the emergent leader” (Markova &

Perry, 2014). With the positive attitudes and the ability to communicate amongst the team during collaborations for change, the organization should have a stronger chance for successful changes.

“On any team, in any organization, all responsibility for success and failure rests with the leader. The leader must own everything in his or her world. There is no one else to blame. The leader must acknowledge mistakes and admit failures, take ownership of them, and develop a plan to win” (Willink and Babin, 2015). This would include how managing your team or groups cohesion can lead to the success of the organization.

Organization and Cohesion

With a good leader managing a motivated and cohesive team, it would be unlikely for much to stand in the way of making their actions a success. However, without the overall support from the actual organization the leadership and team function would eventually go nowhere. The success of a cohesive team drives an organizations success, but if there is unhappiness with the working environment created by the organization a cohesive team could show resistance to the overall goal of the organization. Markova and Perry (2014) explained that all work teams are embedded in organizations, serve a purpose, and consist of employees pursuing their own interests. Saavedra and Dyne (as cited in Markova & Perry, 2014) suggest that work groups must answer to “three masters”: the organization, the team, and individual members. The first master, the organization, is concerned with the team’s performance and a team’s performance is related to its structural and relational characteristics.

An Organizations Effect on Employee/Team Cohesion

In my opinion, the structural and relational characteristics could relate to what type of an environment the employee or their team comes to work in every day. Therefore, it becomes the

organizations obligation to help enhance that working environment for those individuals and their team. Han et al. (2016) said it is commonly accepted that an individual's behavior that determines others' levels of trust on that individual is not only dependent solely on the characteristics of the individual but also on the organizational setting in which the individual operates. They go on to say this is because human behavior is guided by social rules that are particular to an organizational setting. This means that an organization can stimulate interpersonal trust among its members by purposefully changing its setting. They suggested that creating a fun work environment could be one effective way to promote interpersonal trust in work relations (Han et al., 2016).

With the idea of creating a fun working environment for your employees to enhance team cohesiveness, an organization capitalize on the positive attitudes swimming around the workspace. Han et al. (2016), said that "workplace fun activities exist along a continuum as to how much they are directly related with work. This indicates that the organization can put some fun elements into the work sphere by "any means" to make "any work" enjoyable. In fact, articles from popular presses have referred to workplace fun as taking your work seriously but not necessarily taking yourself seriously. That is, you can work seriously, but it can be done in a playful, enjoyable manner." They go on to say a small but growing body of empirical research has revealed that when employees have fun at work, they tend to have higher job satisfaction, affective organizational commitment, task performance, work engagement and organizational citizenship behavior, lower turnover intentions, emotional exhaustion and emotional dissonance (Han et al., 2016).

Therefore, with this evidence, it is important to monitor the level of satisfaction among its employees. Mariconda & Lurati (2015) explained, it is important to understand not only the

interactions between an organization and a single stakeholder group but also the interactions among stakeholders. An Organizations understanding of the environment the teams (stakeholders) want to be in, will likely end up increasing the team cohesiveness which could result in enhanced work production.

Building a Cohesive Team

Now that we have looked at the forces leading to a cohesive team, we can see how leadership and an organization can influence team cohesiveness. Researchers have been able to identify components used to construct solid team cohesion. The following outlines what researchers feel would both enhance and hinder the construction of team cohesion.

Building Don'ts

In attempt to create cohesive teams, the onus will likely fall on a leader. As previously mentioned, how that leader is established is sometimes determined by the group or by the organization. How the implementation of the leader and how the leader asserts himself or herself will create the foundation for a cohesive team to evolve. A big part of this success, is again, how communication is handled among the organization, leader, and team. Markova and Perry (2014) say less information sharing compromises opportunities for employees to learn and grow professionally. Resentment can also impact an individual's well-being. With the emergence of a leader, relations in a team will change and new dynamics will be created. In this situation, some members may perceive their position in the team as inferior, which will adversely affect their sense of well-being (Markova & Perry, 2014).

Carrying this further with the leader concept, an organization and perhaps the group/team, needs to be wary of how the leader ends up emerging and what their agenda is.

Case and Maner (2014), note that it may be the case that not all leaders are inclined to enhance cooperation and social cohesion among group members, and some might even try to undermine those positive group processes. They suggest that, even if it means undermining the cooperative fabric within the group, some leaders may suppress positive relationships among subordinates if doing so enables them to protect their own power within the hierarchy. If a team identifies one of their members, for example the individual they have appointed as the leader, as going down this path, the outcome could be detrimental. Denis et al. (as cited in Hayes, 2014) say changes in credibility directly or indirectly affect the capacity of an individual or leadership group to act in the future. Increased credibility widens the scope for action. Reduced credibility diminishes it and may lead to leader turnover. The leader turnover, however, may only happen if the organization is truly invested in the team's feedback, or the team determines their leader situation.

Making sure there are platforms for teams to express the listed concerns will be key to avoiding those elements which prevent the creation of team cohesion and group dynamics. However, blocking negative feedback can inhibit organizational learning, because it affects the ability of managers to detect and correct the causes of poor performance (Hayes, 2014). Ensuring your teams have the feeling they can speak freely will prevent those feelings from being cooped up.

Another consideration managers may want to entertain when trying to bring a team or group together is creating a position centered around cultural brokerage. This helps create an environment where an organization's diversity can have a huge impact on the overall direction the company heads. If done correctly, positive outcomes for an organization could be dramatic. Culturally diverse teams, research shows, can help deliver better outcomes in today's

organizations says Jang (2018). She says this is largely a good thing: Diverse teams have the potential to be more creative because of the breadth of information, ideas, and perspectives that members can bring to the table. Because there is a plethora of perspectives and ideas that come from a diverse group, if a leader does not figure out a way to create a cohesive bond, it can have a negative effect on change. If employees all have differing opinions and beliefs, there could be a me-versus-them mentality that would waste the assets an organization has within their walls.

Jang (2018) says that cultural brokerage is a key factor that allows multicultural teams to capitalize on the benefits of diversity while mitigating the pitfalls. Jang (2018) defines the idea of cultural brokerage as the act of facilitating interactions across parties from different cultural backgrounds and says that teams were significantly more creative when they had one or more members who acted as a cultural broker. Cultural brokers are typically members who have relatively more multicultural experience than others do and who act as a bridge between monocultural teammates.

In her research, Jang (2018) suggests that it is not enough to simply bring together people from different cultures and expect them to produce creative outcomes. This is important to understand for managers whose main focus is to have a diverse and equitable organization at the surface level. If leaders cannot understand how to bring that diverse organization together, there will be struggle in establishing cohesion and creating change. Therefore, when a cultural broker type position is being considered, a leader needs to understand that a formal appointment does not guarantee that person will be effective; instead, organizations should take care to create the conditions that can allow cultural brokerage to emerge (Jang, 2018). Establishing positions of cultural brokerage should be something organizations involve all their people in before bringing

on those positions. Creating that buy-in with your employees will set selected individuals up for success and allow for a better working atmosphere in tackling change.

Building Do's

The creation of team cohesion is not easy all of the time. Sometimes people struggle with taking that first step in meeting others or maybe the organization hasn't created the proper space for cohesion to thrive. However, researches have considered the foundation which can breed cohesion. As Vatamanescu et al. (2014) points out, it is very likely for individuals to identify with a group if it consists of a well-defined repertoire of common attributes, purposes, goals, homogeneity among members, and obvious distinctions from the out-groups. If those individuals are given direction and something to work for by the organization or the leader, their chances of task cohesion, as mentioned before, can blossom. Markova and Perry (2014) add to this and say when members believe in the team ability to succeed, they are more likely to participate, engage in the team tasks, and view the team as crucial for their professional advancement. Positive expectations about team task capabilities will boost the team spirit and improve cohesion in the team.

However, Markova and Perry (2014) finalized their study with the following: "The quality of team interactions determines the extent to which members can gain from belonging to a team. Individuals have more positive experiences in more cohesive groups. Members of cohesive teams report less job stress and higher job satisfaction; they are willing to share more information and have more intense collaboration". Vinokur- Kaplan (as cited in Markova & Perry, 2014) found that collaboration positively affects the perceptions of well-being of members in support groups. High quality relationships among group members create a sense of belonging and support. "Moreover, members of cohesive teams interact more actively and learn from the

input of each other, and information exchange allows the team to enact decision-making strategies beneficial to individual learning. Thus, group cohesion can facilitate participation in the team, individual learning, and positive relations. Taken together, these positive results can enhance the well-being of individual team members” (Markova and Perry, 2014)

Perhaps my favorite study which can enhance the creation of a cohesive team was summarized by Han et al. (2016) when they touched on the following: “Moreover, humor in communication creates an open atmosphere by awakening positive emotions that promote listening, understanding, acceptance of messages and freer responses. In fact, HR managers from various industries indicated that having a fun work environment tended to promote communication among employees and enhance feelings of group cohesion. This may be because sharing fun is already a form of communication that leads to further communication, a feeling of connectedness and, thus, a sense of cohesion at the group level.” In my experience, adding humor to many situations creates positive interactions and collaborations. However, ensuring you understand your audience is key to incorporating humor, as some groups see things differently.

Managing Group Dynamics and Overcoming Conflict

Whether you are at the lowest level in an organization or the President, it is inevitable you will deal with conflict. This is no different when considering teams within your organization. "Rather than eliminating conflict, the goal is to better manage the conflict that inevitably comes with the open exchange of ideas." (Conflict Dynamics Profile, 2018). As noted in Griffin (2017), conflict is a disagreement through which two or more parties perceive a threat to their interests, needs, or concerns. In order to enhance conflict resolution a manager should consider getting the team, in its entirety be involved. Sternad and Schwarz-Musch (as

documented by Lefley, 2018) found that lower levels of conflict were reported when decisions were made in groups rather than by one individual decider (Lefley, 2018).

Although not all conflict is negative, and many times can lead to positive collaboration and learning, the focus here is to avoid negative conflict because its detriment to team cohesion. Brockman observed (as in Lefley, 2018), from a study within the construction industry, that interpersonal conflict resulted in negative emotions – anger, anxiety, frustration, and stress. From there, Zhang and Huo (as outlined in the Lefley, 2018) argue that negative emotions can have dysfunctional effects on individuals (and as a result a team) performance. Finally, Tanveer et al. (explained in Lefley, 2018) say negative conflict is characterized by personal/relationship conflict: a disagreement between team players that is characterized by anger, hostility, frustration, distrust, power struggles, tension, friction, and animosity. Understanding this gives way to the importance of the afore mentioned platform to team collaboration and the ability to identify bad leaders and negative organizational workspace.

Again, creating trust will be a key factor among those you are working through conflict with. Han et al. (2016) summarize this and say “when people trust others, they are less likely to ascribe sinister motives to others regarding different views and opinions. Rather, they are more likely to focus on the difference itself without taking it personally, and, thus, less affective reactions, if any, would be triggered. Therefore, between trusting parties, different views and opinions would mean mere differences that are not to generate disagreements or frictions (i.e. conflicts) but rather to induce constructive discussions and advanced solutions or a consensus.”

Overall, the key to turning conflict positive is the involvement of people. “Team participation—even from the most junior personnel—is critical in developing bold, innovative solutions to problem sets. Giving the frontline troops ownership of even a small piece of the

plan gives them buy-in, helps them understand the reasons behind the plan, and better enables them to believe in the mission, which translates to far more effective implementation and execution on the ground” (Willink and Babin, 2015). Despite that being a military reference, the concepts of leading and managing people are closely aligned. Using your people to turn bad conflict in to good conflict will help you manage your group dynamics and succeed in building and supporting cohesive teams.

Connecting Cohesiveness to Change Management

The aforementioned literature highlight ways a change agent can effectively navigate the change process. The idea of change management is how organizations prepare, support, and help individuals move toward successful organizational change. The simplistic view of change management sounds easy enough however, the change management process is where the rubber hits the road when creating group cohesion is positively or negatively applied. Throughout John Hayes’ book “The Theory And Practice of Change Management” (Hayes, 2014), the change management process is dissected and acknowledges that an organization must do the following: recognize the need for change and start the process, diagnose what needs to be changed and formulate a vision of a preferred future state, start planning, implement the change and review the progress, and ultimately sustain the change.

What the research in this writing suggests in regard to cohesiveness and effecting change, is that successful management of the change management process stems from the effectiveness of the organization’s leadership. We have looked at how cohesiveness can direct an organization one way or the other in whether or not it can successfully endure change. If cohesion among groups within an organization is created, it may not always fair well for the organization as a whole. However, when the cohesive creation has come from the leadership level and is carried

throughout the entire organization, the change management process will likely have a more successful outcome. Leadership creating that cohesiveness within their organization circles back to the whole idea of change management in this section. The leader is assisting their organization in facilitating the preparation, support, and help, their employees need to make that change management process thrive. When group cohesiveness is conducted appropriately by the right leader or agent within an organization, the literature shows that each element of the change management process will have a better chance for success. The overall outcome will likely be enhanced for the organization as it moves through impending change.

Conclusion

Throughout this research I have been taken through a myriad of perspectives on Group Dynamics and more specifically the overarching factors that affect team cohesion. Not only have I been able to identify the positive effects team cohesion can have on an organization, but also those issues with team cohesion which can negatively affect an organization. Initially, when starting this research, I thought this writing would be very heavy on the positive side of team cohesion. However, my reading guided me through several perspectives which argued against team cohesion being positive. With that said, digging deeper and looking at the overall perspective of the journals and articles I collected, several of them started by saying something similar to Gleason (2018) Disadvantages of Group Cohesiveness, “While the advantages of group cohesiveness generally outweigh the disadvantages...” This perspective has led me to believe the concept is much greater than whether or not team cohesion is good or bad. The bigger picture in my research suggests rather, that the effectiveness of team cohesion is predicated by the team’s leader(s) and their organization.

The environment created for a team to operate in and how the leader of the team handles the team, in my opinion, are the key factors in achieving the desired organizational behavior. If you have an organization which facilitates a positive, upbeat working environment, and has goals and objectives people can easily buy in to, it will likely be a place individuals and teams want to be a part of. At the same time, if leadership encourages strong collaboration among the team, this can lead everyone to feeling involved and can build relationships. Where the team cohesion can start to negatively affect the organization is when they separate themselves from leadership and show signs of group think that does not align with the organization or leadership. However, through proper conflict management many of these issues can be handled in a positive way.

My overall opinion is through good leadership, a positive working environment (THE GOOD), and proper conflict resolution (dealing with THE BAD), one will be led to the positive team cohesion and impenetrable group dynamic any organization would desire (THE PROSPEROUS). Leader application of the ideas of promoting positive cohesion within the organization will complement the change management process and likely lead to success.

Commentary

The contents of this research paper have allowed me to gain a greater perspective into some of my beliefs that stem from life experiences. These experiences have included growing up in sports, being a member of the military, being a Husband and Father, and working in law enforcement. Each of these life components have created environments where cohesion has been put to the test. Although these outcomes, and how I feel about them, are merely my opinion as to whether they were positive and negative, they have provided guidance into how I carry myself through any organization I have been involved. Like many people out there, it is common to

take what works and apply it to new situations. If those situations produce failure or some sort of negative outcome, you can adjust the way you operate and tailor future situations appropriately.

Thinking of this research and how it can apply to organizational change, is what we really want to be able to assess so we can better understand what levels of cohesion can work for organizations when faced with change. Often times organizational change research or models are centered around an individual's response to change from the leadership role down to the lowest employee on the totem pole. Additionally, the focus may be on the organizational dynamics of change. Forgotten, lies the cohesion factor among the groups of the organizations. These groups and the way they interact inside an organization will likely have a great effect on the prosperity of that organization.

Hayes (2014, pg. 91) acknowledges that it is not unusual to discover that some people have a greater readiness for change than others do. This has implications for deciding where to initiate the change effort. When faced with the possibility of alternative starting points, the change agent might decide to start working with those who appear to be the most receptive to change and have the confidence and motivation to engage in the change process. Hayes goes on to say that, early successes in some parts of the organization can inspire others to get involved (Hayes, 2014 pg. 91). I have seen this play out in each one of my life situations that I previously listed. In both my military organization and the police departments I have worked in, change is something that happens regularly. However, in the military, many troops have been resistant to change leading toward the evolution of the military. This has been observed as processes and procedures changing in a police department setting. Often times I have found that the individuals who are resistant to that change are the older generation. To combat this, getting the

newer troops or officers on board with the direction the given organization is going can snowball into compliance from those resistant. In addition, I have found that if there is good team or group cohesion already established, it makes for an easier buy-in from those resistant to change. The attraction to the group as a whole, the resistance of wanting to leave the group, and the motivation to remain a member of a group that has good cohesion can be a strong influencer in moving your organization forward.

I think it is important to note that positively utilizing the cohesion of the team or group in an organization will fall heavily on the leader or the change agent. Hayes (2014, pg. 92) says when managers are acting as change agents, they need to be able to communicate, offer leadership, work with teams, confront, negotiate, motivate, and manage relationships with others. If I was ineffective in communicating with my squad, for example in the military, it took much longer to execute tasks. Identifying your team's strengths and weaknesses can help you understand how to better make those communications with the team that can enhance your organizations ability to make changes. This will allow you to serve your people better and will in-turn provide you with a more productive force to work with.

Constant work in building positive team cohesion will be required if you are going to be an effective leader. In my experience, issues that were left unattended would quickly escalate into some sort of conflict, which would hinder the process in effecting change. A good leader should be able to identify when a process is starting to derail and needs to jump into action to get it back on track. These conflicts should be addressed as a group immediately to solidify the cohesiveness of the group. This can be done in several different ways once the obstacles or "blocks" are identified. Proctor (2019, pg. 27) says when participants engage in creative group problem-solving sessions that involve brainstorming or synectics, sharing experiences in the

group can help build confidence, lessen the risk of making mistakes as individuals and overcome any value prejudices we may have. He goes on to say that by sharing a problem with someone else we can appreciate how others might view the same problem and how they might gain insights into the problem. These may be perspectives that our perceptual bias causes us to overlook (Proctor, 2019 pg. 27). This concept is constantly at play as we navigate life even outside of our organizations. Whether it is helping a family member glean knowledge from a past experience you have had or working through game problems faced as a team in a sporting event, the ability to share the problem-solving process will increase the trust and connectedness with those individuals. Ultimately, I have found that by doing this, the problem or conflict is much more manageable because you have others involved to assist you in the navigation process.

Having experienced negative situations alongside your team or co-workers can also have a positive effect. Cohesiveness has grown within working groups and teams that I have been involved with in the past when we had to endure hardships within the organization. A simple example of this was Marine Corps Boot Camp. All 60 members of Platoon 3043 had to experience some of the hardest conditions an introductory military training could throw at you. In most cases we were all recent graduates of our high schools and for many of us this was our first time away from home. The rigors of boot camp and the ability of the Drill Instructors to break you down to nothing were experienced by every single one of us. Each one of those challenges were done together. If one person failed, everybody failed or at least paid the price. This process was meant to build you into the Marine the Marine Corps wanted you to be instead of what you wanted to be. Having experienced these conflicts together and coming out on the other end with the Eagle, Globe, and Anchor in tow, gave way to a cohesive group who felt they could accomplish anything no matter the circumstance. The sense of belonging gained in that

moment to our newfound organization was something I have wished I could duplicate in other situations following my time in the Marine Corps. The problem-solving ability and the willingness to work together regardless of the task was unmatched compared to many of my other life experiences. This was a prime example of what great leadership, who is willing to take all the appropriate steps in communication and group involvement, can do for an organization. Communication, trust, friendship, and loyalty were at the forefront of that experience and the combination led to success.

Alternatively, to the boot camp story, I have been involved in a situation within a police department where the comradery and friendships were strong but the outcomes for the organization were negative. In the situation I am referencing within the police department, one would think that a high level of cohesion would lead to a harmonious experience when change is needed. However, this was not the case. Because the friendship level was high throughout the command structure from the Chief down to one of the lowest ranking patrol officers, I believe this eventually caused dysfunction when decisions had to be made. The Chief did not want to cause conflict and jeopardize friendships and therefore overlooked situations where there should have been more accountability. Soon, the Chief had little control over the varying situations related to staff within his own department. When the Chief requested something be done, the request was often answered with a joke or the task was not completed at all. The environment started to become toxic and eventually there was divide created among the officers, which included the supervisors. Soon there were incidents taking place that had the potential to compromise how we served our community. There was not any accountability and those responsible for the turmoil had zero consequences. Fortunately, for the department, the Chief retired just in time for the rebuilding process to begin. Watching the situation unfold and seeing

how ineffective a poorly run department was completely on the brink of implosion, was extremely eye opening.

Continuing with the same story from the police department, it was as equally eye-opening being part of the process in turning the organization around. Much damage had been done and the department's reputation was tarnished among neighboring departments. A new Chief took the reins and met each challenge head on. His ability to balance the dichotomy that came with work relationships and off-work friendships started the department in the right direction. He made his intentions very clear and gave everyone a clean slate from wherever they had been. He based this decision on the fact that most of the officers were acting the way they were because of the leadership, or lack there-of, that they had received prior to his arrival. He said to me, how can I blame any of the officers when they never had the appropriate guidance from their supervisors. He also said, how can I blame the supervisors when they had no support from the former Chief. Once he voiced his intentions to the entire department, he made it his priority to get each member involved in the change process. The involvement created the needed buy-in and soon changes started to happen. Those who continued to falter were held accountable for their actions. There was appropriate use of decentralized command. He also was very proactive in showing support of his officers whenever the community had made blanket statements about the department. His ability to address the community's concerns and weed out false accusations showed the officers that, although each department member would be held accountable for their mistakes, they would also be supported during public conversations.

The police department example displays how group cohesion can have both a positive and negative effect on an organization while change is needed. Again, this example highlights the importance of the change agent as a leader like those I have outlined in my research. Haas

and Mortensen (2016) acknowledge many of the aspects we saw unfold during the transition from our old Chief to the new Chief. They pointed out J. Richard Hackman's research that said what matters most to collaboration is not the personalities, attitudes, or behavioral styles of team members. Instead, what teams need to thrive are certain enabling conditions which are a compelling direction, a strong structure, and a supportive context. Haas and Mortensen (2016) added a fourth condition of having a shared mindset. Each one of these were absent with the former Chief but imperative to the success of the new Chief.

I think it is important to acknowledge each of the conditions further to drive home the effectiveness of the department's new leader and show how components of this process were active in my real-life experience. The first enabling condition Haas and Mortensen talk about is having a compelling direction. They say that the foundation of every great team is a direction that energizes, orients, and engages its members (Haas and Mortensen, 2016). Teams cannot be inspired if they do not know what they are working toward and do not have explicit goals. When the new Chief came on board, he immediately gave a general message to the department and outlined his expectations. From there, he asked each member of the department to complete a SWOT (Strength-Weakness-Opportunities-Threats) Analysis. When the department members understood that the SWOT Analysis was being used as a personal and professional development tool, it became clearer that the Chief cared for their ability to be successful. Once this was completed, he had a one-on-one meeting with each member to unpack the analysis and get to know the direction they were wanting to take their career. Once each member had their meeting with the Chief, the department came together as a whole in a meeting where goals were set and the intended direction of the department was established. Each change became a goal for the entire department to work toward and each person had been involved in outlining them.

The second condition Haas and Mortensen (2016) talk about is strong structure. They say that teams also need the right mix and number of members, optimally designed tasks and processes, and norms that discourage destructive behavior and promote positive dynamics. The department was small, and we only had a budget that would support 15 total officers. However, through the SWOT Analysis we were able to better understand the untapped knowledge that we already had within our department. This understanding along with making efforts to hire a diverse and equitable workforce allowed us to start gaining varying knowledge, perspectives, and views. Having a department that had a mix of race, gender, and age opened up a multitude of experiences that could be shared throughout. Eventually tasks were assigned based on experience, prior knowledge, and the opportunities for members to learn new things. With all of this came the accountability component and the support that was needed for the command staff to do their job as supervisors. That ability helped mitigate the destructive behavior that was once commonplace within the department.

With the Chief having the back of the command staff to keep the officers accountable, the third enabling condition Haas and Mortensen speak about, was put into play. Supportive context enables team effectiveness. Haas and Mortensen (2016) say this includes maintaining a reward system that reinforces good performance, an information system that provides access to the data needed for the work, and an educational system that offers training, and last – but not least – securing the material resources required to do the job, such as funding and technological assistance. Much of this mentality to support each other was outlined in the initial department meetings. This was important because it gave the officers the ability to voice their opinions on what needed to change and ways we could go about doing so. These conversations spawned ideas on what the best resources would be to help implement change and evaluate what processes

were currently working and did not need to be changed. The feeling among the officers was a feeling of support and in-turn increased the level of cohesion.

As things started to fall into place within the department and the newness of the Chief started to wear off in the department, the Chief along with the leadership team helped keep that supportive fire lit. If an officer did something that warranted kudos at any level, the Command Staff was quick to make sure the officer or officers were recognized. The recognition, depending on the action, came in ways that were formal where a ribbon or medal was presented, or informally where a message was passed along via social media outlets and over department email. This enhanced the change environment because the police officers were not only being held accountable for mistakes but were more-so being recognized for their positive achievements.

In addition to establishing an appropriate reward system, the Chief gave the power and support to the Command Staff to hold their officers accountable. If the officer made a mistake, in most cases it was handled at the lowest level with their immediate supervisor. If there were any issues of disrespect to that immediate supervisors' way of handling the situation, a letter of reprimand would be placed in the officer's folder. In two cases I can recall, officers jumped their immediate supervisor in the chain of command and after review by the Chief, the situations were turned over to the immediate supervisor to take appropriate action. As well as the Chief was received, he was also a no-nonsense figure who realized the value of the chain of command and how important it was to let the supervisors establish relationships and accountability procedures with their subordinates. Initially there was a learning curve but after a few examples were made of those with their own agenda, officers learned to follow suit and trust the process.

Finally, the officers were given support with the emphasis on training and equipment needed to effectively learn and carry out their roles as police officers. It should be noted, that officers learn the majority of their skills through on the job experiences and through training. Some calls for service do not happen frequently but are very serious interactions an officer could be involved with. Having the appropriate training and the tools to handle those calls can achieve a level of comfort for the officers that help them feel supported. Those same tools and training can assist with the needed change from a community's perspective as well. With comfort in your ability to carry out your job within the community, brings a level of confidence and professionalism. When a community desires to have police officers better support them, they do not want an officer who cannot control and operate in the chaotic seen they call them to. Through the sharing of needs and information from the community, the Command Staff was able to better equip the officers with the knowledge and equipment to better succeed. Although there is no team that ever gets everything it wants, leaders can head off a lot of problems by taking the time to get essential pieces in place from the start (Haas and Mortensen, 2016). With the cohesion that had been created in the department, the officers understood the efforts that were being put into getting them the needed resources, even if it did not happen immediately.

Lastly, Haas and Mortensen talk about the enabling condition of a shared mindset. I think this is a very important component that increases the chance to effect change in an organization. We are seeing the importance of this condition even more so during our current climate, which has many people working virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Even in the police department I am currently employed with, there is a mix of individuals who are working from home and those officers who are required to be on the street conducting patrol. Haas and Mortensen (2016) acknowledge that establishing the first three conditions will pave the way for a

team's success, but say research indicates that today's teams need something more. Distance and diversity, as well as digital communication and changing memberships, make them especially prone to the problems of "us versus them" thinking and incomplete information. Having a cohesive team or department can help combat situations like this in the event we have to move away from a traditional work environment. Having a good foundation, which is put in place by both the Chief and the rest of the department, will help develop that shared mindset among team members. Leadership can do all of this by fostering a common identity and common understanding among the entire department. Though I think this may be slightly easier to accomplish in a police department setting compared to a working environment that has workspace for employees in remote locations, it still needs to be considered to help mitigate any disconnect among team members.

According to Haas and Mortensen (2016), in the past teams typically consisted of a stable set of fairly homogenous members who worked face-to-face and tended to have a similar mindset. However, that is no longer the case, and teams now often perceive themselves not as one cohesive group but as several smaller subgroups, which can lead to lumping people into categories. We also are inclined to view our own subgroup – whether it is our function, or unit, our region, or our culture – more positively than others, and that habit often creates tension and hinders collaboration (Haas and Mortensen, 2016). This is certainly another example of how a cohesive team can be bad for an organization if the transition to different working environments are on the horizon. With that said, this type of situation was experienced even when there were no department members working remotely. Like explained before, prior to our old Chief leaving, the us versus them mentality started to grow which caused the division in the department. The negative cohesion of the second and third shift officers and supervisor were

being pitted against officers and supervisors on first shift. Figuring out ways to keep members engaged during the transition and once people have settled into their routines will be key.

Fortunately, technology has allowed for several alternative ways to communicate beyond just email and text message. Overall, keeping your people engaged with a similar mindset would likely prevent the creation of tension and encourage collaboration.

Once an organization is able to collectively come together and establish their mission and vision toward change, the process does not stop there. Proper cohesion and the ability to carry out change has to be fluid and monitored. You have to be able to understand or analyze whether or not your efforts in change are working. Appropriate to this part of the discussion are three criteria I feel suit a proper evaluation of effectiveness. The cohesion of your team and their effectiveness can be evaluated by team output, collaborative ability, and members' individual development (Haas and Mortensen, 2016). This is why it is so important to build a foundation with your people whether you are inheriting a new team or taking your current team toward new change. Like what we did when the new Chief arrived, we were able to dial into what goals we wanted as a department. We then took it a step further by understanding what goals the officers had and what goals the department wanted for the officers as well. This allowed for an evaluation component that could assess each officers output and their individual development. This assessment was carried out through bi-annual performance evaluations where the officer's goals were re-introduced from what they listed at the beginning, to where they had come. Getting the officer involved in the performance evaluation process and acknowledging the goals they had listed let that officer hold themselves accountable instead of just their supervisor providing feedback. Both the supervisor's observations and the officer's observations of themselves allowed for a great experience in the evaluation process, which eventually led to

ideas of how changes had prospered. When needed, realignment to an officer's initial goals were put into practice to better serve the direction of the department. However, usually the evaluation led to additional goals being created to enhance the effectiveness of the officer and the way the department was headed.

The officer's abilities to collaborate would also come to light during these sessions. If the officer was not meeting their goals or the goals of the department, it became clear that they had not done their part in collaboration with other folks within the department. Again, the Command Staff did a fine job in providing information and resources to the officers but if the officer was unwilling to get clarification or help when they needed it, parts of the process would fail. This was an added bonus of the evaluation process because it made it apparent who utilized their colleagues and the information they were provided, and who did not. Haas and Mortensen (2016) say for ongoing monitoring, they recommend a simple and quick temperature check: every few months, rate your team on each of the four enabling conditions and on the three criteria of team effectiveness. They go on to say you should look in particular at the lowest-scored condition and the lowest-scored effectiveness criteria and consider how they are connected. The results will show where your team is on track and where problems may be brewing.

Collectively, the evaluations of each officer would factor into what the department observed as progress and what were observed as deficiencies. The Chief's evaluation of each supervisor's ability to lead was additionally as useful in determining the effectiveness of the department. Like we mentioned earlier in the research, Willink and Babin (2015), say that "there are no bad teams, only bad leaders". Taking ownership and accountability of yourself, as a supervisor, in my opinion, is key to the success of your subordinates. So, if there was a

breakdown in production that was observed in an officer's evaluation, there needs to be time taken to reflect on your efforts as a supervisor.

The bottom line is that the importance of good cohesion among the supervisors, officers, and the rest of the department are key because they are all inter-connected. The same, I would suspect, goes for any other organizational framework. Without each element operating on all four cylinders, you will likely find a deficiency in your organization. Whether there are deficiencies in your subordinate group, or your supervisory team, or at the level of Chief as presented in my example, each can have a drastic effect on organizational progress in a change environment. Which, in my opinion, means that in order for organizational change to happen effectively, you must promote positive cohesion throughout as an organization's leader.

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