My Biggest Failure

Adrian Kosmaczewski

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Although not my preferred genre, there's a few business books I've read that I reread a few times, and I keep recommending them again and again. "Leading Change" by John Kotter is one of those.

Yet, unfortunately I read it too late. I cannot count with two hands the number of times I made the mistake of not following one or many of the points suggested by this book.

In one particular occasion, however, I remember missing each and every one of the 8 steps for leading change. All of them. At once. One of my biggest business failures, ever.

To make a long story short, I took over a team developing a system which was way over budget and way behind schedule. So I clumsily (and, as it turned out, without any political support from "above") ordered a sweeping change to the complete software development process in the organization, missing all of Kotter's steps, one by one.

1. To begin with, I did not create **a sense of urgency** in the team. Our CEO was worried about the money we were spending and the late time-to-market of our product, but it turns out, they were the only person who was actually worried. Most of the company was actually fine with the current state of affairs. Hence, when my proposal for change came, it was properly dismissed.
2. I had no **guiding coalition** behind me. My CEO was the non-confrontational type, and did not support me in my plan for change.
3. I had skipped the step of actually preparing a **strategic vision** for my initiative, hence those attacking my idea could easily dissolve it in a sea of fear, uncertainty, and doubt.
4. I did not enlist a **volunteer army**; heck, I didn't even get to this point. But even those who could have supported my initiative (namely, the development team) got sidelined by angry middle managers.
5. I could not get to the point of **removing barriers**; I could not even remove the ones that were blocking me from performing.
6. There were no **short-term** wins to my strategy; which meant that any positive feedback would have taken too long to be taken into account.

7. The whole thing didn't even take off, so let's not even talk about **sustaining any acceleration**. Well, yes, the only acceleration was my departure from the organization.
8. And needless to say, there was no **institution of change**. As I said, I left.

I read Kotter's book one year after the event. It was a revelation, helping me realize all of the mistakes I made in that occasion.

Developers and software engineers tend to belittle and dismiss the work performed by middle and higher managers in organizations. This experience made me realize how complicated, how complex, and how difficult it is to drive change in an organization. No wonder so many companies go bankrupt.

I also learnt how thick your skin must be when you're in a position to perform change; how much faith you have to have in yourself (to begin with) and your team. In my case, well; I lacked all of the above. No wonder I failed.