

## The wide gap between reality and policy

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The Lokpal movement failed to navigate through a complex political system in an attempt to put in place an ideal piece of legislation. —AM. FARUQUI

The gap between idealised states visualised through strategies framed by policy makers, and the reality on the ground is a challenge facing all human collective endeavours (organisations, companies, or even countries). While strategy deals with the 'what', implementation plans deal with the 'how'. However, there is another gap between the 'how' and the real manifestation of strategy. This is the 'who' gap — the one between a notional implementation plan, and the actual people who will drive change on the ground. This gap, which one could refer to as the actualisation gap, may have many dimensions, some of which are outlined below. Addressing these may help bridge the last mile between intellectually robust strategic plans and the actual manifestation of desired changes.

### TOP-DOWN SOLUTIONS

The biggest critique of change initiatives is that solutions are created top-down. Much like financial capital is owned at the top, intellectual capital, too, is viewed as a preserve of the upper echelons of the organisation. However, any solution to an organisational problem has two levels — the first is a theoretical construct, and second, the contextualisation of that construct within the organisational reality. In the latter level, co-creation of solutions with the affected parties is a very critical component of successful change programs. Not only does it lead to the creation of robust solutions, it also unleashes the creative energies of the people affected by change. This itself may lead to better results, since the person creating the idea is also the person manifesting its value in the real world. As an aside, this, incidentally, also addresses the Marxist argument that when mere components of work are done by people, it strips the worker of dignity and fulfilment.

### IGNORING POLITICAL STRUCTURES

A second related gap is that solutions fail to recognise that it is a 'human engine' that will actually drive the change process. This engine consists of a complex interplay of interpersonal equations, hierarchical dynamics, personal ambitions, varying competence levels, and political forces.

Poorly navigating a change program through complicated human structures is often a major breaking point for the acceptance of new change. One interesting example is the Lokpal movement, which failed in its attempt to navigate what its activists believed to be an ideal piece of legislation, through a complex political system.

Human beings change their behaviours only when there is a true change in belief internally. Thus, each change at the level of an organisation, is, in reality, a series of changes in the internal belief systems of its members. Without this 'realisation', the quality of motivation created towards change will always be subpar. The creation of an inspired collective of change creators will necessarily require such an individualised inner transformation. The role of policy makers here is to create the conditions for such inner dialogue, by presenting compelling narratives of why a particular change is required. At the larger level of societies and countries, the literature and ideology produced by leaders, and their communication of these narratives play this role of creating individual transformations. At the level of smaller organisations, a similar effort is needed.

### PAY-OFF ASYMMETRY

Often, change agendas tend to visualise disproportionate gains for a small set of people (for instance owners, management, shareholders) and ignore the creation of proportionate payoffs for people who are expected to 'live' the change. This creates the perception of an exploitative environment, which is a sure recipe for failure. Thus, 'proportionate' payoffs need to be created at every level of the collective, which address multiple dimensions — financial, recognition needs, fulfilment needs and others. In fact,

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it may sometimes be valuable to test any change program against the payoffs it creates for all levels of the organisation, and all stakeholders. If sufficient payoffs are not created in all dimensions, it may be worthwhile to even drop the idea.

If the mere creation of intellectually sound ideal solutions were sufficient, scientists would be ruling the world. It's the added complexity of humanising these solutions that is the crucial challenge holding back our best intentions from their realisation. A deep appreciation of the human processes through which solutions need to navigate to become realities is, thus, critical to truly bridge the 'actualisation gap'.

(The author is a corporate strategy professional..)

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