

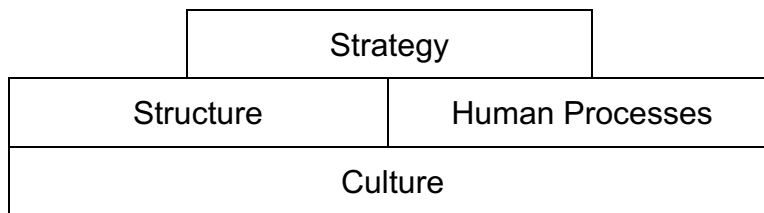
Strategic Organizational Change

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Strategic Organizational Change is a how-to book written primarily to students looking to become organizational consultants. Based heavily on theory, Dr. Beitler provides a model for what he describes as “a systemic strategy-driven approach to organizational change” (Beitler, 2006, p. 5). He begins by providing the three “roots” of organizational change theory and explains how they are disjointed and do not work together, stating he brings them together to work effectively in a “systematic practice model”. (Beitler, 2006, p. 6) Dr. Beitler also describes his model, as seen below, as quite simple, having “refined it over many years” (Beitler, 2006, p. 6).



According to the diagram, the overall strategy of the organization is directly supported by its structure, human processes, and culture. “If a well-crafted, well-communicated organizational strategic plan is in place, then it is possible to make changes in the other three areas that result in dramatic improvement in organizational effectiveness” (Beitler, 2006, p. 6).

From there, he delves into the foundations of practice for organizational change, presenting ten concepts that support Practice Theory which eventually lead to effective practice (p. 11). Of the ten concepts, Dr. Beitler chose Kurt Lewin’s “Action Research Model” as a basic framework and combined it with the practice theory “The Process Consultation Model” that Edward Schein developed from Lewin’s model. These two models provide the detailed practice guidelines for Dr. Beitler’s Strategic Organizational Change model (p. 23).

The Action Research Model is composed of six steps: data gathering, data feedback, diagnosis, action planning, action taking/interventions, and finally evaluating (p. 24). Dr. Beitler devotes the rest of the book to breaking each step down into its working parts and explaining how to put each step into practice. Drawing from Lewin, he stresses the importance that the key starting points for the relationship of the organizational consultant and the client that hires him is that the client must own the problem, be willing to work as equal partners, know the culture of his organization and be ready to “buy-in” to what the consultant offers (p. 26).

Prior to breaking out each step of his model, Dr. Beitler presents a chapter specifically on leading versus facilitating change. The chapter is actually meant for the consultant, but a key point he presents that every manager and leader should know is this: “Leading change without knowledge of the change process itself typically leads to failure of the change effort” (Beitler, 2006, p. 39). Though he was advising the consultant on how to be ready to advise/educate senior management on how to effectively lead change, it emphasized that a leader should always be involved with the overall processes going on below him and be actively involved with a consultant rather than expecting the consultant to show-up and do all the work for him.

The next two chapters are step-by-step details for the consultant on how to work through the first three steps of the Action Research Model. Dr. Beitler provides time-proven methods for collecting data of such items as the conflicts, communication patterns, and culture of the organization (using questionnaires, interviews, observations, etc.) and how to determine which is best depending on the organization itself and its subgroups of employees. From here, he presents more techniques of how to evaluate the data, provide feedback to the client, and then describes “The Action Planning Step”, which consists of determining which type of intervention to use. This is the first real difficult step for the consultant, as Dr. Beitler admits there are numerous

interventions that have been tried and proven and the consultant must be able to tailor an intervention to the unique problem diagnosed (p. 84). This appears to be a step that can only be refined through years of practice and the ability to make a thorough diagnosis of the organizational problem as he states, "... (if) the consultant make an improper diagnosis, the entire intervention effort will ultimately fail" (Beitler, 2006, p. 83).

It is in the middle of the data-gathering chapter that Dr. Beitler throws in what are the key parts of any organization. They are the six organizational processes of: 1) strategic planning/goal setting, 2) leadership, 3) decision making/problem solving, 4) communication patterns, 5) conflict management, and 6) organizational learning. Dr. Beitler mentions these as "critical for an organization to meet its financial objectives and maintain a satisfied workforce" and he weaves these ideas throughout the rest of the book (Beitler, 2006, p. 64).

The next six chapters are completely devoted to organizational change interventions in all four areas of Dr. Beitler's model (strategic, structure, culture and human processes). It is in the chapter of "Strategic Planning Interventions" that Dr. Beitler goes against his own advice. Whereas earlier in the book he states an organization should have a strategy prior to the consultant's arrival, here he emphasizes, "the most important target for change is the strategic plan at the organizational level" (Beitler, 2006, p. 89).

He goes on to say, "attempting to change the organization's structure, culture, or human processes without aligning them to a well-crafted strategic plan will be frustrating (and, ultimately fruitless)" (Beitler, 2006, p. 89). This is also confusing, as he states elsewhere that it is not the job of the consultant to change culture of the workplace. Naming his method for changing a strategy "The Beitler Approach", Dr. Beitler does nothing more than use ten basic steps borrowed from other researchers to guide the consultant (p. 100). His only really useful

piece of advice for the consultant is “to not move forward in changing the structure, culture, or human processes until a well-crafted and well-communicated strategic plan is in place” (Beitler, 2006, p. 104).

From here, Dr. Beitler presents four chapters on how to change the structure, culture and human processes of an organization, suggesting items such as team building, job rotation cross training and conflict management. None of his ideas are new and he fills page after page with old ideas and the theories. He does include as a final chapter on interventions for management development, with activities such as coaching/mentoring, career planning, and cross-cultural training. The goal is for managers to become effective leaders and align their efforts with the organization’s goals and strategic plan (p. 168).

Dr. Beitler wraps up his writing with a chapter on basic ideas of how an organization can implement Organizational Learning. Organizational Learning is deemed “critical for survival” and the idea is to set-up a method for employees to continue to advance in their training to keep the organization competitive (Beitler, 2006, p. 171). The book concludes with the future of organizational change and how imperative it is for the organizational consultant to have his work evaluated by his client to provide effective feedback.

Author Credentials

Dr. Michael Beitler’s personal website, www.mikebeitler.com, states that he holds degrees in human resource development, applied psychology, finance and management and is currently teaching Organizational Change, Management Assessment & Development, and Organizational Learning in the MBA program of The Bryan School of Business at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro. He has also served as a Visiting Professor of Management at the University of Mannheim’s School of Business. His website identifies him as “an author, speaker,

and consultant sought after for his expertise in business, politics, and economics” and states the book here analyzed is “required reading in MBA programs worldwide”. Dr. Beitler has a weekly internet-radio talk show, *Free Markets*, which “gives listeners insights from leading thinkers into today’s political and economic issues”. He lost the 2012 Republican Primary for North Carolina Secretary of State and has authored two other books: “Strategic Organizational Learning” and “Rational Individualism”.

Strength of Evidence

Throughout the text, Dr. Beitler fills chapter after chapter with the theories of previous organizational scientists. He summarizes some of their work as a basis for how he developed his own model and references others to provide examples for the organizational consultant to conduct their own work. Not knowing a single author or having heard of any of the theories he presented, it is difficult to determine if any of them have proven successful or are considered valid in the business world.

As for personal success, Dr. Beitler provides absolutely no evidence of how well his model has worked in the real world. In the first chapter, he provides a brief history of his work experience and alludes to what inspired him to begin working on his model, but there are no examples of any organizations that implemented his teachings or how he refined them. Dr. Beitler’s system appears to be completely academic in nature, based on the success and/or failure of those who have gone before him. Additionally, not a single review published in the beginning of the second edition mention actually *using* the book or Dr. Beitler in making a change to their own organizations.

Applicability

Even though Dr. Beitler begins his first chapter stating that he is writing to consultants, manager, and students whom are involved in organizational change efforts, in reality, the book is aimed almost exclusively at those looking to become organizational consultants. Unless the organization the reader works for is in need of organizational change, the book presents little relevance to personal leadership. It is an o.k. reference at best of what to expect should one ever need to hire a consultant, but it's only real applications for a leader are the sections on strategy, conflict management, and team-building. Since I will be working as a Family Nurse Practitioner in a Department of Defense medical clinic in the near future, I can expect to encounter restructuring of the organization at some point in my work setting, most likely more than once.

All organizations must have a mission statement in place to guide them and a strategy on how to get there. If they don't, then neither the managers nor the employees will ever know what they are working for. Dr. Beitler recommends that this be the first step of the consultant: to make sure the organization has a solid mission statement and supporting strategy in place of how to get to their goal. Without a strategy, the organization becomes "a ship without a rudder" (Beitler, 2006, p. 90).

Additionally, all workplaces will have conflict at some point. We tend to think of conflict as negative, when in fact it can be extremely beneficial to an organization's success. The difference of opinions between people helps to facilitate new thought processes and ideas and can keep the organization from going too far down a road that will eventually lead to failure. If everyone kept their thoughts to themselves, even if they knew something was wrong, then they could soon find themselves out of a job when the organization fails! Dr. Beitler therefore describes conflict management correctly: the ability to *manage* conflict, not *eliminate* it (p. 149).

Team building is always a good exercise as it creates opportunities for employees to interact with others they may never have the chance to work alongside and to share new ideas. Team building is a way for many to step outside of their comfort zones and learn from each other. Additionally, it creates new ways of handling future problems and creates an atmosphere in which employees feel more freedom to talk to one another, which helps to lessen future conflicts. If employees have worked together successfully on a team-building exercise, then they know they can do the same when real problems arise within the organization.

References

Beitler, M.A. (2006). *Strategic organizational change: A practitioner's guide for managers and consultants*. Greensboro, North Carolina: Practitioner Press International.