Great change leaders focus on people and process
(Centre for Creative Leadership Report)

Successful change is one of the biggest problems that modern organizations face. In our fast-changing world, the strategic imperative to change is often clear: Without doing things differently, our company is unlikely to succeed, or last.

But change-management research has demonstrated time after time that organizational change initiatives fail more often than they succeed, despite the resources put into creating change management processes.

We know that effective leadership is essential to successful change. But we wanted to understand the differences in leadership between successful and unsuccessful change efforts. That's why we recently conducted a study where we asked 275 senior executives to reflect on successful and unsuccessful change efforts they'd led.

Our goal was to characterize "change-capable leadership," define the key leadership competencies necessary for change, and better understand leadership behaviours that could contribute to change failures.

The executives we surveyed were all participants in our **Leadership at the Peak** program, which targets executives with more than 15 years of management experience, responsibility for 500 or more people, and decision-making authority as members of top management teams. All of them were seasoned leaders. Our study, the full results of which are available in our white paper, revealed 9 critical leadership competencies of successful change efforts. The 9 change competencies can be further divided into 3 main categories — what we call "the 3 C's of change," leading the process, and leading people.

The 3 C's of Change Leadership

Researchers found that 3 skills provide the necessary connection between the process part of change and the people part of change. These 3 C's unite effective change leadership:

1. Communicate.   Unsuccessful leaders tended to focus on the "what" behind the change. Successful leaders communicated the "what" *and* the "why." Leaders who explained the purpose of the change and connected it to the organization's values or explained the benefits created stronger buy-in and urgency for the change.

2. Collaborate.   Bringing people together to plan and execute change is critical. Successful leaders worked across boundaries, encouraged employees to break out of their silos, and refused to tolerate unhealthy competition. They also included employees in decision-making early on, strengthening their commitment to change. Unsuccessful change leaders failed to engage employees early and often in the change process.

3. Commit.   Successful leaders made sure their own beliefs and behaviors supported change, too. Change is difficult, but leaders who negotiated it successfully were resilient and persistent, and willing to step outside their comfort zone. They also devoted more of their own time to the change effort and focused on the big picture. Unsuccessful leaders failed to adapt to challenges, expressed negativity, and were impatient with a lack of results.