

Transforming Relationships for Organizational Change

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Organizations in virtually every industry are facing pressures to do more with less. Whether these pressures come from customers, supply chain partners, policy makers, or regulators, organizations are compelled to provide better, higher quality outcomes, more rapidly, and at a lower cost. As always when facing performance pressures, there are critical choices to be made. Will we pursue low road strategies that rely primarily on the reduction of wages and the degradation of working conditions? Or will we instead pursue high road strategies that produce better outcomes for a broader range of stakeholders?

One thing is clear. High road approaches to high performance are fundamentally relational, powered by the development of high quality connections across a wide range of stakeholders. But as we know from experience, relationships emerge in ways that are not entirely predictable. Relationships among relatively large numbers of people are difficult to change in an intentional way, and even more difficult to sustain in an intentional way. Given this, how can organizations move beyond the bureaucratic legacy we have inherited to achieve a high performing relational alternative, and keep it alive and well over time?

I propose a Relational Model of Organizational Change that combines three types of interventions. There is a need for *relational interventions* to disrupt and transform existing relational patterns. These relational transformations are best carried out in the context of *work process interventions* to ensure that the newly formed relationships are embedded in the work itself, not disconnected from it. Finally, *structural interventions* are needed to support and sustain these new relationship patterns over time, replacing traditional bureaucratic structures that serve to undermine these new relationship patterns by embedding the new relationship patterns into roles.

Though these three types of interventions are relatively common, they are often treated as competing rather than complementary. As a result they are rarely combined in an intentional way to create and sustain positive change. I will conclude by sharing two cases that exemplify this approach to change.

Relational Model of Organizational Change

