

## Streamlining Progress

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Change, like speed, is a scalar whereas progress, like velocity, is a vector. Where scalars lack direction, progress is change with direction. People fear change but love progress.

This concept of “directed change” is critical to business improvement and success. Changes must align with the direction in which a business intends to go. Too many changes can be disruptive. Streamlining progress is about making a few, high leverage changes to start a company on a journey from where they are to where they want to be.

The statement “start a journey from where you are to where you want to be” defines three of four key parameters for managing directed change. The fourth is resistance to change, which also must be managed. Management consultant Richard Beckhard put these four factors into the form of a change equation.

In Beckhard’s change equation, change, represented by “C”, is made up of three factors multiplied together. If any one of the factors is missing, that is if a zero is in the equation, there is no change because zero multiplied by anything is zero. Beckhard’s factors are:

- “a” dissatisfaction with the current state,
- “b” the desired future state,
- “c” the critical first steps of our journey.

He defines change as:

**$C = a.b.c > R$  where R is resistance to change.**

The product of a, b, and c must be greater than the resistance or change is prevented from occurring. This is so simple and so clear. It is brilliant!

Streamlining progress is about understanding your current situation, knowing where you are disadvantaged or vulnerable and feeling uncomfortable with where you are. It is about knowing where you want to be and being excited by an articulated, compelling vision of how things can be. It is also about identifying a few (two or three, not more) high leverage things that you can and should do to get the journey started. And it is about telling people how things are, where you are going and how you are taking steps to get there. Communicate so that their fears don’t lead to resistance. Guide them so they feel and see the progress. It is starting a journey from where you are to where you want to be and telling people about it.

Think about it; every successful change initiative you have been associated with fits Beckhard’s equation. It works on everything from transforming major corporations to changing a light bulb.

Streamlining is about getting rid of complexity and keeping focused on things that matter and make a difference. Where do you start? Start at the beginning.

Start by understanding where you are. If your business is to make any progress, you need to have an accurate understanding of where you are. Benchmarking, customer surveys and business process analysis are useful approaches to getting grounded. They provide information about your competitive position, cost structure and performance relative to others. If you are comfortable with where you are, you won’t change. If you don’t know where you are and are still comfortable, you could be in serious trouble.

Define and communicate what you want to be. Get a compelling vision of what you want the future to hold for you. Benchmarking and analysis will give you good insight as to what you are up against by today’s standards. Add stretch to those findings to compensate for the fact that your competitors aren’t standing still.

Take the critical first step. Wait a minute — you already have. You have already started the journey with the benchmarking, the analysis and by defining a clear and compelling future state. With that done, what are the next two or three high leverage things you must do to add momentum to the change effort? Don’t try to fix everything and don’t try to map out a comprehensive plan. A comprehensive plan that itemizes everything from start to finish is a waste of time and it’s boring. Many things will change along your journey because of unpredictable events. Don’t take the fun out of progress by getting lost in minutiae.

Now tell everyone that matters and remember everyone matters. Shout it from the rooftops! Get people engaged! Make them feel they are part of something special and great because they are!

Streamlining progress is about getting you to where you want to be faster.

**The light bulb change scenario**

<b>Dissatisfaction:</b> (current state)	It’s dark
<b>Desired:</b> (future state)	It’s light
<b>Critical first steps:</b>	Get a light bulb
<b>Resistance to change:</b>	“We don’t have any light bulbs”
<b>Communication</b> (dealing with resistance)	“There are lots in the cupboard”

**Let there be light!**

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