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This Shakespearian phrase is from *King Henry IV, Part I,* which was written in 1597. It was also used in many Sherlock Holmes novels to indicate that a change has occurred… now is the time, practice is over, and "the game is afoot."

I must confess to first hearing this phrase during a Tribal Council in the 2012 season of the CBS TV show *Survivor.* One of the team members responded, "Jeff, the game is afoot" to a question from the host, which, if answered, would have exposed his strategy.

Strategy is the godfather of change! Once a strategic initiative has been blessed by the senior executive team, it is dispatched to those operational business units responsible for creating and executing the plan. So I would like to propose that this is the time to adopt the idiom… "the game is afoot."

Does using the term "game" minimize the importance of strategic plans? I think not. After all, the word game does have a "tactical" definition: "a procedure or strategy for gaining an end." Most strategic initiatives are, in fact, undertaken for the purpose of "gaining an end," which most certainly requires tactical execution. This is often where the focus of the initiative lies.

The impact of tactical execution may include some serious changes, for example, system changes (e.g., CRM, knowledge management, etc.) mergers, acquisition, reorganization, consolidation, downsizing, outsourcing, etc. These elements are often considered sensitive and kept "secret" for as long possible. This results in some "big bang" experiences for the rank-and-file. Hence "the game is afoot." Keeping the secret is part of the game.

More often than not, secrecy presents a significant challenge because there is a shift in focus of the leaders who are "in the know." This inevitably spurs hearsay, rumors and observations within the rank-and-file. It is within this group that a dialogue begins about what might be happening. So two games are afoot… the tactical team trying to keep things quiet and the rank-and-file making up things to fit their observations. Let's face it: Change management must become part of the "game" because change is taking place with or without sharing impact information with those operational units closest to the change.

The elements of the game include rumor mills that generate unmonitored fodder and result in loss of talent. Those who depart are often the most valuable to the unit. They are the ones with options and leave behind the least competent who thrive on their own game of "so what" and "who cares." Alternately, a game-changing respect for the professionals in your business encourages clear communication and inclusion with regard to what is under way and what is needed to achieve outcomes of the initiative.

Recently, I heard from a manager in the midst of planning a major organizational change. She discussed her deliberate, systematic and routine communication to her team regarding the upcoming project. The fact that the manager is able to adopt this process is not based on a formal organizational change management plan (i.e., it does not need to be complicated). It is due to a leadership style and an overall corporate culture that is inclusive and transparent when it comes to managing growth, promoting a branded experience and focusing on the customer experience as a market and brand game changer.

When the "game is afoot" you must be aware of the impact of how the game will be played, who will need to know what, and when they need to know it. Open communication allows for a more thorough gathering of relevant operational insights and dependencies that must be addressed in the project plan. Obstacles that can derail success must be avoided.

ProSci, a recognized leader in change management research, conducted a study that pointed to the ability of an organization to efficiently and effectively manage changes that a project could bring about in an organization **("The Business Impact of Change Management," Natalie Petouhoff, Ph.D., Tamra Chandler and Beth Montag-Schmaltz, www. goo.gl/jSKOz).** Results showed a project's greatest success factors:

1. Effective and strong executive sponsorship
2. Buy-in from frontline managers and employees
3. Exceptional teams
4. Continuous and targeted communication
5. Planned and organized approach

Consider the above elements if you want the strategic game that is afoot to be a winner. Push, if necessary, for inclusion and assure allocation of time and resources to manage the impact. Gain enthusiasm, engagement and adoption in all business units and fund the communication and training investment required.

Conversely, all too often a very expensive project can be totally derailed by obstacles to success. These were also identified by the ProSci study:

1. Employee resistance at all levels (effectiveness or correctness of the actual business solution was cited only five times in more than 200 responses)
2. Middle-management resistance
3. Poor executive sponsorship
4. Limited time, budget and resources
5. Corporate inertia and politics

Hence, "now is the time, practice is over and "the game is afoot." Even for those between changes, taking on the game theory for work may help to keep eyes open and the mind sharp! Enjoy!!

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