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Change Management Struggles in Post-Revolution Egypt
by Rania Al-Maghraby
Commentary

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It's been relatively long, and taking a tragic turn. Economy is collapsing; negative shifts in the common Egyptian character; endless political debates and fights, … People, it's all about *"change management"*.

Change management is one of the most subtle and tough areas. Implementing a new change, in any context, is not an easy task. The main source of difficulty is coming from the human factor; resistance to system and culture changes.

When it comes to change with the scope of a whole administration system, at the level of a high population and big responsibilities territory like Egypt, that change is unsurprisingly an example of the most difficult to manage.

Projection of Change Management Tactics on the Local Landscape

From a management point of view, the following hints and guidelines can be drawn from the change management practices to find a way to rebalance the societal steering wheel:

1. *Purpose and Need for the Change*: We know it already. This is why there has been a revolution in the first place. People are convinced (or at least most of them) that there was a need for change. How? In which direction? Change to what? Nobody really planned that spontaneous, genuine people act of revolution when it happened back in Jan. 2011; the root cause of the implementation struggle lies here. The change has already started and it's unstoppable; it can only be managed and tamed.

2. *Appealing Factor in the Change*: To pull people out of what they have used to do for tens of years is not of any ease. What is for me in it? Where are the benefits? Having already bought into the desire to change, people still however need to buy into the direction to which this change is being taken. The vision is opaque. Worry and uncertainty rates are high regarding what's coming in the future. Nobody is expected to give support to the desired change under these conditions.

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3. *Careful Planning of the Change Implementation:* People lose confidence in leadership when repetitive set-backs occur. The leadership ad hoc acts will only lead to continual loss of trust, which will take long time to rebuild if ever reclaimable. To avoid failures driven by ad hoc actions, planning the change activities on the short and long terms is necessary. Planning needs experience and solicitation of inputs from several sources. The fact that the post-revolution leadership has been lacking experience is inevitable; there has not even been proper handover of the country's leadership responsibilities due to the disturbance followed the revolution. As the famous say goes, "failure to plan is planning to failure".

Action Items (unassigned though!)

Given that the struggles have reached a relatively late stage, the effectiveness of taking action based on these insights may be uncertain. More efforts will need to be addressing conflict management and resolution in addition to change management efforts. Aside from any political bias, whether it's the current leadership or a new leadership, the following action items can help in setting an overall direction for action:

1. <u>Share vision</u>: Let people see and buy into where are we going, to know what they can do to support it. If they are not seeing and sharing the vision, very few will be willing to follow blindly in turbulent times.

2. <u>Plan, plan, and plan</u>: Spend time, long enough time, in planning. Expert judgment must be sought in all fields. Use tools and techniques like brainstorming sessions and planning workshops, and form focus groups to come up with detailed and actionable plans. Keep an eye on monitoring the execution of the developed plans, they will need to be updated, revisited, and adapted again and again endlessly.

3. <u>Expect resistance</u>: The human factor is at the core of change management. Getting people to accept new settings and changing the social and administrative culture is not a straightforward endeavor. There will always be alliance groups protecting their threatened interests, and others who don't want to take the burden of implementing the required change. This is all natural and expected; don't make enemies.

4. <u>Use leadership skills</u>: Communication, motivation, and leading by example, are all hygienic leadership traits. Inspire people to get the collective power of the large population pushing for achieving the plans. People need to be involved in implementing the change to feel ownership of the initiatives and to participate in shaping further actions.

5. <u>Seek Quick Wins</u>: Early achievements, even in small bursts, are very effective in motivating people and earning their trust and support and buying into your plans. Scan your environment for low hanging fruits and readily attainable goals. Celebrate milestone achievements and let people share the success and feel that they contributed to reaching it.

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These are just quick executive highlights of some main points related to managing changes in this context. There are many more other aspects however pertaining to the subject of change management, noting that actual application on the ground will need leadership to use their wisdom and judgment in putting these recommendations in action, in light of the developments of conflicts, the accumulated experience, the societal maturity acquired during the past period, and the treasure of lessons learned that can be put in place to revalidate the trajectory of the change.

Still the common overarching goal is definite and clear: collective prosperity for this land and for us all.

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