



What is transformation, what isn't, and why does this distinction matter? A practitioner's view

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Objective: A learning conversation



- Outline:
 - Who am I, and what do I know about transformation?
 - What is transformation?
 - What isn't transformation?
 - Why does this distinction matter?
 - What can organizations do about it?

Who am I and what do I know about transformation?



- Assistant Deputy Minister, Infrastructure and Environment at the Department of National Defence from 2007 to 2013
- Responsible, with the support of an incredible team and the engagement of vital partners, for conceiving and launching the transformation of the Defence infrastructure business

What my experience suggests:



- Routine change, or continuous improvement, and transformation are different
- Organizations need to be good at continuous improvement to achieve excellence, but transformation is harder and requires a higher level of capacity and commitment at all levels to succeed

What is transformation?



- How is transformation different than change management?
 - Transformation requires a deeper and broader level of organizational capacity and commitment at every level;
- What kind of path does transformation take?
 - More of an adaptive, spiral process, whereas continuous improvement - by definition - is more controlled and therefore should be more linear;
- How manageable are the risks?
 - There are risks in every project, but in transformation the scope and complexity require a higher level of attention to integration and synchronization

What isn't transformation?



- What are sources of routine change?
 - Incremental changes in policy or programs
 - Continuous improvement, audit and evaluation
 - Changes in technology or business process
 - And more...
- Why can routine changes be controlled and managed in a way that transformation cannot?
 - Scope, scale, risk, complexity, uncertainty...

Why does the distinction matter?



- What are the risks of treating a routine change situation as a “transformation”?
- What are the risks of treating a transformation as a routine change situation?
 - Impact on organizational health and performance
 - Impact on levels of uncertainty for employees
 - Effect on engagement and workplace health
 - Impact on allocation of resources, including leadership time and engagement
 - Impacts on organizational reputation and external relationships

What can organizations do about it?



- There are benefits for organizations that build their capacity for continuous improvement and recognize it
 - Partners like Excellence Canada can help with this, through the application of rigorous standards
 - <https://www.excellence.ca/en/home/>
- Transformation goes beyond continuous improvement and requires a deeper, broader more holistic and dynamic response
 - Organizations can deepen the capacity of their leaders through leadership development
 - Many organizations engage professional services for assistance
 - The Canada School of Public Service has a growing practice in the field of enabling change and innovation, including transformation



My experience suggests that:

- We need to recognize the difference between routine change and transformation,
- We have to align leadership and resources to enable transformation, and
- Organizations need to move forward with a clear vision and an adaptable plan

For more information:



- About my action-research project on *Leading Transformation*:
 - See my blog at:
 - GCconnex:
<http://gconnex.gc.ca/blog/view/15435429/diriger-la-transformation-dans-la-fonction-publique-du-canada-%E2%80%93-pouvons-nous-faire-encore-mieux-leading-transformation-in-the-canadian-public-service-%E2%80%93-can-we-do-it-better>
 - CSPS-Learn:
<https://learn-apprendre.csps-efpc.gc.ca/application/en/content/leading-transformation-canadian-public-service-can-we-do-it-better>
- About the Public Servant-in-Residence Program through the Canada School of Public Service:
 - <http://www.csps-efpc.gc.ca/forlearners/coursesandprograms/programs/publicservant-in-residenceprogram/index-eng.aspx>
- About the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs at UOttawa
 - See: <http://socialsciences.uottawa.ca/api>

