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Leading and Managing in Times of Change

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"Change is the only constant." "Change or die." There are so many clichés, quotes, and articles on change that the very word itself can bring up a sense of profound weariness. Think about it. How do you feel when someone says, "We're going to make some changes around here?" For many people, the first reaction will be some version of: "What's wrong?", "We messed up", "Our work wasn't up to par. We must have failed." There is a very predictable human reaction we all have when we hear about impending change, even in those of us who are most eager to explore and implement the "new." That reaction is based on a need for validation. The very prospect of the need for change implies an invalidation of the past.

We therefore become defensive, and feel the need to protect our work, and more importantly, ourselves. As one can imagine, this automatic reaction quickly sets us up to avoid risk and the potential for failure. It also stifles innovation and satisfaction. It's ironic, as what helps us navigate change successfully are the very attributes that are squashed by fear and risk-avoidance: Creativity, innovation, and the willingness to discover.

I.
THE IMPORTANCE OF KNOWING HOW TO LEAD

Some changes are forced on us by circumstances; the economy craters, and suddenly funding dries up. Others through policy change, leading to jobs that suddenly become redundant. Some changes are driven internally, in an effort to become more efficient and do more with less, or to do things in new ways. New technology can force change on us.

During periods of large-scale change, there are uncommon challenges. People are preoccupied with how the change will affect them personally, and so may be distracted or confused. A staggering number of critical decisions must be made by newly formed teams of people who do not know or trust each other. There is a tendency to delay important but politically sensitive decisions. There may be an extended period of uncertainty and anxiety between the announcement of the initiative and the actual change process. Up-in-the-air budgets, plans and organization charts can add to the dismay, making it difficult to make decisions.

On top of all that, there is the emotional impact of change. A cycle of grief occurs for many employees as they confront the loss of "their" organization as they knew it to be. In the late 1960s, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross did seminal work in the stages of grief that terminally ill patients go through, culminating in the book "On Death and Dying" in 1969. In this book, she lays out the five stages of grief: denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and finally acceptance. While Kubler-Ross's work was with the terminally ill, it is clear that other major life changes, in addition to physical death, bring with them the same five stages of grief.

It is important to remember that during times of significant change, people may not experience the stages of grief sequentially, nor do they necessarily pass through each stage only once. Also, there is no prescribed time limit for any stage; people will pass through their emotions in their own time. Leading through change requires the compassion to notice where you are, the empathy to appreciate where others are, and the resilience to honor the past, stand in the future and be responsible for what is happening in the present.

II.
THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN CHANGE

Leadership and management both have a role to play in executing and integrating change. Management is about stewardship. Good managers bring predictability, reliability, and certainty to organizational processes and outcomes. The "no surprises" edict heard in many places is really a management philosophy. Management honors the current reality as well as knowledge gathered in the past, and works by continuously improving processes and products. However, the major pitfall to being too "management-centric" during a major change effort is that the pull for stability and predictability can overpower any new possibility from ever gaining a foothold in the system. It creates a kind of invisible barrier to speculating, piloting, or testing new ideas. Often, the only way you can bring about a new idea is to hide your efforts in a form of "skunk works" until there is enough evidence of workability to reveal the idea to the organization at large. By then the typical response is, "Why wasn't I consulted? We had something to contribute that would have made this a much bigger opportunity or success."

Most of us are trained to be good managers, in our educational system and on the job. We are rewarded for keeping the wheels greased and squeak-free, and the train running on time. When we are managing, we want to assure our bosses, customers, and shareholders that the right amount of the right product will be delivered at the right time to the right customers, for example. We want to know with certainty that our paychecks will have the right amount of money, and be delivered on the right day. Which is not to imply that this is easy; obviously, good management can be a complex and intricate challenge.

Leadership, on the other hand, is about creating something new. It is about innovation, breakthroughs, and discovery, all of which require a disruption in the status quo. While managers are working hard to bring efficiency and effectiveness to business processes and products, leaders are pointing the way to new directions, opening up new possibilities and generally annoying those who value reliability and certainty. Leadership challenges the current modus operandi. While Management might say, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it," Leadership might say, "If it ain't broke, break it and start anew."

HOW TO RECOGNIZE WHEN YOU AND OTHERS MAY BE IN THE CYCLE

- **DENIAL:** "I'll believe it when I see it." "This won't affect me, my group."
- **ANGER:** "How could they do this?" "Didn't they know this would happen months/years ago?"
- **BARGAINING:** "If I were willing to do X, would the company give me Y?"
- **DEPRESSION:** "I don't see how this will work." "There's no place for me in this picture."
- **ACCEPTANCE:** "I can see how this will work." "I can't believe we didn't do this years ago."

> **How did it happen that the role of the human element in change has become devalued?**

Leadership focuses on the future and the possibility it holds. The job of leadership is to be a visionary, to look ahead and to see implications and meaning that may be distinct from what we have learned in the past and what we know in the present. There can also be pitfalls to being too "leadership-centric" during a major change effort. When the future vision is not balanced with a healthy respect for the status quo, a level of organizational resistance and resignation can quickly set in. "This sounds like another flavour of the month. If we wait it out it will fade away like the last one…" Ignoring or dismissing this reaction can be dangerous during systemic change efforts.

Our experience in many large-scale change initiatives has shown us that people have a natural preference for leadership or management. It is important to be aware of our personal preferences, and to make sure that both leadership and management are provided throughout the change initiative. We can all develop ourselves to provide both roles as needed, but a failure to recognize and align leadership and management preferences leads to missteps in execution, unnecessary work, and confusion.

Both leadership and management are essential roles in organizational systems. We do not mean to imply that a person is born to be either a leader or a manager, or that one role is better or more important than the other. We realize that it may seem more glamorous or important to be a leader than a manager, but without the manager to bring it to fruition, none of the leader's grand ideas is worth anything. And it is possible for us to learn to provide both leadership and management. But first, we need to learn to distinguish them, and see when each is required.

How did it happen that the role of the human element in change has become devalued? The Model T was first produced in 1908. It is generally regarded as the first affordable automobile, the car that opened travel to the common middle-class person. Henry Ford revolutionized manufacturing that year by making mass-produced cars that had interchangeable parts, allowing one part to work in different models. This allowed for assembly line production instead of individual hand-crafting. In 1911, Frederick Taylor, a mechanical engineer who sought to improve industrial efficiency, extended this view to people. He wrote in his Principles of Scientific Management, "In the past, the man has been first; in the future, the system must be first." Taylor has become known as the father of "scientific management." Almost 100 years later, this "common wisdom" continues to be applied, and organizations operate as if people are interchangeable parts. We know that executives who embark on large-scale change do not really think that people are interchangeable; they know better than that. However, when taking a critical look at how change is conducted, it certainly seems that this view prevails. It is present in the assumption that people will fall into line once the anatomy is changed.

III.
THE MISSING LINK: INTEGRATION

So how do the seemingly disparate roles of leader and manager, visionary and steward, learn to work together? There is a missing link, a third role that has to be provided but is indistinct for most organizations. This role, which we call Integration, focuses on the translation of future possibilities into grounded present day realities. This role bridges the seeming dichotomy between the views of the visionary and the steward. When one works from the vantage point of "integration", one learns to work with continuity and stability on one hand, and new horizons and change on the other. This requires the ability for synthesist thinking, or the ability to entertain what may seem like opposing perspectives as equally valid, and the patience and trust that a resolution will emerge that can address both horns of the dilemma.[1] It creates the room for experimentation and making mistakes, the willingness to get into motion before completely figuring out the "how", discarding what does not work, and building on what shows promise. Integration is the work of bridge-building.

All three of these roles are vital for a productive change effort. It takes a high level of craftsmanship to integrate a new possibility or future (Leadership), while honoring and maintaining the stability of what was provided in the past (Management), and thoughtfully engaging with the here and now (Integration). In our experience, there is no reliable recipe for approaching the integration of change. There are supporting tools and processes, but ultimately, what seems to be required is a bit of messiness: Trying things, seeing what works from the available literature and toolkits, and then inventing what is needed to make it work in the specific change situation at hand.

The most challenging part of integration is that it always requires invention. There is never a perfect fit between what has worked before and what will work in the present situation. Every change situation is unique. We keep looking for a "plug and play", off-the-shelf solution for managing or integrating change, but this is never possible because of the nature of change itself. What has gone before, inevitably changes what happens next, so there is never an identical past or a repeated future. We are dealing with the organizational equivalent of the time-space continuum, where everything is in motion all of the time, yet the only engagement point we have is in the "now."

What does this have to do with one's role as a leader? We firmly believe that leadership can be developed at all levels. Leadership is a function that is required within most organizational roles, not a title. It is not related to the hierarchy of the organization. Leadership and management are both functions required in virtually all roles at all organizational levels. For that matter, integration is also a required function within most roles. It is not sufficient to redraw the organizational chart, introduce new disciplines, add technology, or change the strategy. In order to generate buy-in (also called enrollment, or engaging people's heart as well as their mind), it is critical to co-create meaning with them. This is the role of leadership. To engender commitment, not just compliance, people have to be able to see how their work fits into and forwards the new strategy. Said in another way, people need to see how they are part

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of a new future or possibility. Perhaps a leader's most important task is to capture people's self-interest in the context of the change being made, to be able to answer the question, "Why and how is this going to be good for me?"

The scary part of integration is that it also brings with it the need for a very personal journey. In order to integrate significant change efforts, individual leaders must attend to their own internal integration, their own growth and development. When we are leading and managing change, we need to be able to access all the wisdom in the organization and in ourselves. Leading a change effort will likely bring you face to face with your own limitations, your relationship to risk and (quite likely), failure. As good managers, we've been trained to think things through, looking for rational actions and well thought-out plans. However, most individuals reach a level in their careers at which approaching their challenges only through the lens of "knowledge" becomes woefully insufficient. When you are causing change, you cannot possibly know enough to foresee all of the inevitable issues and breakdowns that lie ahead.

So, if "knowing" is not sufficient, what else do we have to draw upon? What other reserves are available? Luckily, we have multiple sources of intelligence, not just our thinking. Yes, we do have to bring our knowledge and information to the table, but we should not forget or ignore our sense or instincts about things, and our feelings about what is happening, what is needed and wanted. By trusting our gut instincts and listening to our heart as well as thinking clearly, we can be more aware of what will work and what peo-

ple need. Integrating all the dimensions of our intelligence, learning to see and sense as well as know, allow us to be more present and aware, which in turn enables us to be more effective, and more able to provide what is missing.

Learning to lead means committing yourself to an on-going journey of waking up and staying awake, in the sense of cultivating your awareness of yourself and the world around you. This is what we mean by "generativity", being able to generate your own leadership, and that of others, by becoming fully human, self-aware and aware of others, able to access all dimensions of your intelligences while helping others access their own.

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