

CULTURE CHANGE - ENGAGING HEARTS AND MINDS

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INTRODUCTION

Why are we as humans so fascinated by change? Is it because it either unites or divides us in equal measures? Or is it because the prospect of change often ignites a strong range of emotions from terror to elation and everything in between?

For many, changes particularly within society or organisations, mean individuals feel they have limited input or control. Change is one of those essential elements that we need to understand and master if we are to survive. Change is a constant flowing life force that affects everyone, every minute of every day. We can embrace it and thrive; it is all a matter of choice.

Block (1968) later included in a published study in 1980 the concept of ego-resiliency after documenting the lives of 100 young adults over more than 30 years. Participants of the study demonstrated personal traits based on three sets of beliefs that:

1. We can find a meaningful purpose in life
2. We can influence one's surroundings and the outcome of events, and
3. Positive and negative experiences will lead to learning and growth.

Young adults that held the three key sets of beliefs were better able to adapt flexibly to different circumstances and succeed in the midst of challenge and change.

Every day, we are subject to hundreds of subtle changes to climate, language, physiological, psychological, diet, fashion trends, lifestyle, opportunities, technology, attitudes, judicial, organisational and educational. Over the years, the speed of change has increased. This is due to increased knowledge and our pace of development globally has accelerated immensely, to the point where it threatens to overwhelm political leaders, according to Brown (1996).

Burke (1997) wrote an "Alternative view of Change", which explored how history progresses due to the synergistic interactions of past events and innovations. Burke also posed the question about what happens when the rate of change and innovation is too much for the average person to handle and what it means for individual power, liberty and privacy. Accelerated change is perceived to be at an increase in rate because of technological advances, which suggests faster and more profound change in the future, which may or may not be accompanied by equally profound social and cultural change.

Depending on our personality and belief systems, some of us thrive on change, flow with it and take advantage of new situations. Some of us try to reduce, and resist the impact of change, and some do both on a regular basis; it is all part of the four emotional states described by the Kubler-Ross in the Grief Model (1969).

Organisational change costs a significant amount of time and money and can often have a very negative and polarising effect on individuals and teams. Organisational change is often challenging and does not always achieve its results, because organisations lack knowledge of how to fully engage individuals and teams. Change should deliver positive outcomes for both the organisation and individuals, rather than one being at the cost of the other.

WHAT IS CHANGE ALL ABOUT?

If we as individuals and organisations are forced to change to survive and create the best opportunity for change, then we really need to understand, what change is and how it comes about. Change in whatever form is like evolution, it is a series of minor and varying events that over time lead to a permanent state of being. A famous quote by Darwin (1908) is: *"It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change"* as cited North & Varvakis, 2016, p. v.

So much has been written about change, but it still baffles and overwhelms many of us. One of the most interesting books on change is the parable written by Dr Spencer Johnson called *Who Moved My Cheese?* (1998). His book is a wonderful analogy written about change; why it occurs, and why we need to view change as an essential part of life for survival. It also highlights the importance of organisations and individuals being able to anticipate when change is needed. The ability to anticipate change is the key to experiencing a level of control over change. This anticipation also gives the strongest opportunity for adaptation, necessary for ongoing success and development.

Where the hearts and minds of people are engaged and invested in change, incredible and long-term change can be achieved. A good example of this commitment occurred in Iceland between 2009 and 2011. The financial crisis led to protests known as the "Pots and Pans Revolution". There had been regular protests since 2008. Hörður Torfason staged a one-man protest in 2008, and invited others to speak. Following that he organised a rally every Saturday. In January 2009 the protests intensified with thousands of people turning up outside Parliament with their pots and pans. It was the largest protest in Icelandic history, and it later led to the resignation of the Government (Gunnar, 2016). Hörður Torfason spoke at Otago Polytechnic in 2018 about 'the peaceful revolution' he led in 2009 and his book on the subject is called 'Bylting' (Revolution). What happened in Iceland was about using passion and individual leadership to inspire collective action that led to a wholesale change in government and society.

It is often the case that societal change outstrips both regulatory and legislative change and sometimes these two take too long to catch up. The pace of change is critical as it can lead to tension, conflict and failure.

IMPACT OF CHANGE ON INDIVIDUALS

Change is constant in our professional and private lives. One of the key reasons why major change projects fail is because organisations fail to consider the human and personal impact of it. Many people are initially hesitant about change, even when it occurs within their personal lives. As humans, we are naturally cautious and resistant to change according to Smollen (2009).

There is a distinct difference between the change event and the emotional transition that occurs. Organisational change often creates a sense of fear of loss, which often leads to employees experiencing four emotional states according to the Kubler-Ross Grief Model (1969):

1. Denial – The first emotional state is denial that change is occurring and fear of that impending change. It creates an almost shock reaction where people are paralysed to act and ignore the potential changes facing them.
2. Resistance – This is often the second emotional reaction to change and can take several forms including actively opposing the change. It is important that organisations understand that forcing compliance to change may increase resistance. Individuals need to feel listened to and for their views to be considered, before resistance starts to dissipate.
3. Exploration – This is the third emotional state where individuals really explore what the change is all about, the impact and issues for them, the opportunities and options. There may be a negative reaction to change, but if issues are addressed, trust is built up resulting in a more positive reaction to the transformation.
4. Commitment – This is the final emotional state which is reached when obstacles have been removed and there is an emotional commitment to successfully implementing change due to the involvement of those affected.

The secret to change for us all is to focus our energy not on fighting the old but on building the new. Organisations can take several steps to help people navigate emotional transition through change and build a new future:

Cobb (n.d) outlined that ongoing communication particularly helps staff to understand why the change is necessary and how they might be affected as these steps explain:

- Acknowledge personal loss and gain – To help employees adjust to change it is important that organisations really acknowledge and support them to deal with personal loss from the change as well as what they might gain.
- Anticipate concerns – Think ahead and develop some frequently asked questions. Listen and address any additional issues not already covered. Reassure people that you care about the impact change has on them.
- Communicate – hold personal meetings with groups to communicate what is going to happen before it does and take time to explain the 'why'.
- Encourage involvement and feedback – really give an individual a mechanism to voice their concerns, get involved in the process and give their feedback.
- Provide updates – keep communicating what is happening now and what may have changed since the feedback was received.
- Sell the benefits of change to them – some of which include:
 - Improved communication and collaboration opportunities
 - Increased positive opportunities for growth and development of staff
 - An improvement in the working environment and efficiency of the workplace.

ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE

To be able to understand organisational change we also need to appreciate how and why organisations change. We live in an era of rapid change in technology and knowledge. Organisations particularly need to adapt, meet new opportunities, diversify, and morph into something else, more quickly than ever. In some industries, there is a need to achieve this at light speed, just to survive.

There are different models of change but one that provides three clear stages of change is Lewin's Three-Step Change Model (1951), as explored by Cummings (2015), and still has a relevance today. The three stages are:

- Unfreezing
- Moving
- Refreezing

Kotter (1996) Harvard University used Lewin's model to create his eight-step model of:

1. Establish the sense of urgency and compelling reasons for change to unfreeze the organisation.
2. Create a cross functional group to unfreeze the organisation and lead the change.
3. Develop the vision and strategy for unfreezing and moving the change forward.
4. Communicate the vision and strategy to all staff to start the movement.
5. Eliminate the barriers to change, take risk and solve problems to allow the organisation to move.
6. Create a plan to achieve some short-term wins and help the organisation pick up movement.
7. Consolidate on changes and continue other changes until it cascades throughout the organisation to achieve a refreeze.
8. Reinforce and refreeze the changes by highlighting connections between behaviour change and success Cummings (2015).

The different components of an organisation include:

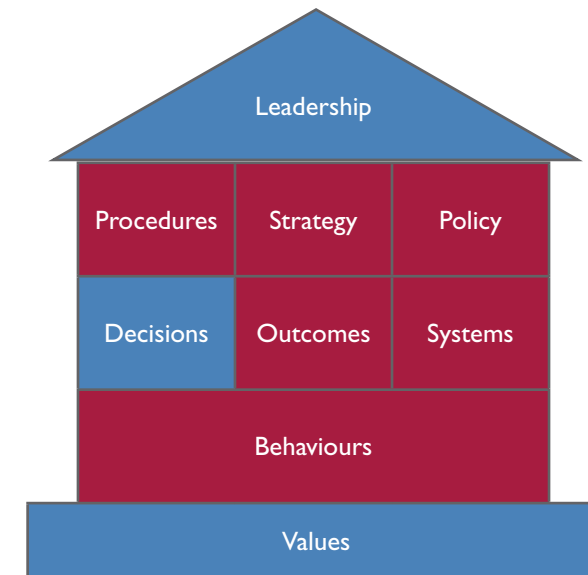


Figure 1. Foundation and building blocks of an organization (adapted from Taylor, 2005)

To succeed organisations, need to effect change in all these elements and take the lead from the foundation of values and organisational culture.

ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE CHANGE AND VALUES

Culture is about the messages sent through via our:

- Behaviours – the behaviour of others
- Symbols – events, actions and decisions that attribute meaning
- Systems – mechanisms for managing people and tasks (Taylor, 2005).

Values refer to what we as individuals, groups and organisations hold as our key principles. Our values guide decision-making, attitudes, behaviour and actions. Examples of values outlined by Taylor (2005) are:

- Accountability/Integrity
- Caring
- Compassion/Empathy
- Respect

- Passion/Enthusiasm
- Diversity
- Teamwork
- Quality
- Pride

WHY IS CULTURE CHANGE IMPORTANT?

For any organisation that truly wants to survive and succeed, the culture of an organisation cannot be ignored. A positive culture removes many stressful elements at work and turns strategy into action.

Repositioning the culture of an organisation is important for several reasons:

- It helps organisations respond faster to customer and market demands
- It increases both staff and customer satisfaction
- It better aligns strategic vision and organisational culture with behaviours exhibited by staff
- Improves the overall effectiveness of the organisation
- It leads to improved employee engagement, productivity and performance
- Creates opportunity for developing best practice in all aspects of the business
- It increases the organisation's market share
- Improves financial performance and return on investment (Expedite, n.d.).

If organisations decide not to actively work on their culture, it is very much like playing poker and your organisation's future is in the hands of fate rather than design. If we want to change the culture of an organisation, we first need to understand behaviour then how to change it, if we are to be successful. The journey of culture change starts with engaging the hearts and minds of staff to shift behaviour.

There are many theories and models that explain behaviour change, the most well-known are:

- Learning theories by Skinner (1977)
- Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986)
- Theory of reasoned action (Ajzen, 1980)
- Trans-theoretical model (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983)

Research by Bandura (1977) has identified one of the key elements of these theories is self-efficacy, which is the individual's impression of their own ability to perform a demanding or challenging task, such as run a marathon or finish a project. This 'impression' state is built on factors such as:

- The individual's prior success in the same or related tasks,
- The individual's current psychological state,
- The degree to which persuasion can change the individual's impression of their ability.

Self-efficacy can predict the amount of effort an individual will put in to initiating and maintaining behavioural change, and holds the key to cultural change.

With regard to learning theories, Skinner (1977) states that complex behaviour is learned through gradual modification of simpler behaviours. This includes the imitation of behaviour demonstrated by others (role-models), reinforcement of preferred behaviours and rewarding individuals when they demonstrate the desired behaviour. Each simple behaviour is established through imitation and subsequent reinforcement, which is why positive leadership role models that reward positive behaviour are essential for successful culture development.

Social and cognitive theories have been linked to self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986) focusing on what an individual thinks about their behaviour patterns, which in turn impacts on the environment in which they work. In other words, an individual's environment affects not only the individual's personal characteristics but their behaviour as well. Consequently, the individual's behaviour impacts on their environment, the workplace culture, and the way a person thinks and feels about their environment. Therefore, if an organisation can encourage its employees to display positive behaviours, they are more likely to feel better about the organisation and create a more positive workplace culture.

Ajzen's (1980) theory of reasoned action highlights that individuals consider consequences and society's reaction to their behaviour before performing it. It is important to conclude from this theory, that personal attitude and social pressure influences behaviour and consequently has the potential to drive a change in behaviour.

The Trans-theoretical model, developed by Prochaska and DiClemente (1983) found there are five stages of behaviour change before the transition to the new behaviour is permanent:

- Pre-contemplation – the individual begins to identify the issue or need for change,
- Contemplation – the individual begins to think more specifically about changing a certain behaviour and the rationale for doing that,
- Preparation – the individual begins to plan their behaviour change,
- Action – the individual begins to demonstrate the new behaviour more often.
- Maintenance – success of the new behaviour begins to take hold and the new behaviour is displayed more often and becomes routine.

Personal issues and environmental changes can impact on behaviour and throw the individual back to earlier stages of the change process.

Fogg (2009) provided a definition of the motivating factors for behavioural change, which includes:

- **Pleasure and pain** – Emotional responses drive behaviour: People will avoid behaviour/actions that result in pain and repeat behaviour that causes them satisfaction or pleasure.
- **Hope and fear** – If an individual is hopeful, the behaviour is more likely to be repeated. If they are fearful the behaviour is more likely to cease.
- **Social acceptance or rejection** - This is one of the strongest drivers of change. In general, the frequency of a certain behaviour is increased where social acceptance is the result. Behaviour is less likely to be repeated or avoided when it leads to social rejection.

Understanding theory behind behaviour change is critical to being able to formulate successful models and actions for changing the culture of an organisation.

HOW CAN YOU CHANGE YOUR ORGANISATION'S CULTURE?

Organisational culture change is not out of reach and can be achieved by any organisation, if they continue to follow some basic principles. However, organisations may need to accept that as a consequence of change, operational norms of the business may also need to change. Those leading the change may also need to accept they will need to change their own behaviour first.

The most successful sustainable change is not something that happens overnight but is achieved over time. Eventually, this will achieve a positive effect on the organisation's culture, decision making, levels of employee engagement, employee retention, customer experience, cost effectiveness and profitability.

If you want culture change to be successful, then you need to focus on having clear boundaries for behaviour and manage issues that arise in a respectful and proactive manner. This attention to boundaries will ensure that your culture is inspired by positive behaviour rather than negative and destructive behaviours.

Organisations also need to have a comprehensive plan that includes the following key elements of organisational culture change should be:

1. **Vision** - Start by identifying the vision of what the culture should look like. Ensure this is part of your organisation's ongoing strategy. What should your organisation feel like on the inside and how should it look from the outside? Your plan for culture change should include something that can be delivered easily and there is movement towards the desired culture over time.
2. **Values** - Establish the key organisation values and the behaviours that deliver on the vision. These are the building blocks of your culture.
3. **Behaviours** - Create the catalyst for change by engaging the hearts and minds of staff in both identifying and describing the values that are important. Move on to establishing behavioural norms for each value.

Ensure that employees are involved in creating the description of the desired behaviours. Identify key change champions who will encourage and lead behaviour change.

4. **Communication** - Develop a communication plan that involves different channels of communication, sharing progress, seeking regular feedback and sharing successes and stories. Communication needs to be personalised, if it is going to influence the required behaviour change. It also needs to highlight the work and success of some of the change heroes.
5. **Leaders** - All change champions and leaders need to be engaged as role models of the desired behaviours. They need to be tasked with mentoring, coaching, developing skills and influencing others.
6. **Manage boundaries** - Be prepared to address behaviours and actions of those staff that are toxic, hostile and non-compliant with the organisation's vision and values. Should behavioural boundaries be breached you will need to have a simple, fair and respectful way to manage this breach. Encourage staff to speak up and address behaviour that does not fit with the vision. Ignoring behaviour inconsistent with the values will only dilute your culture and it may develop characteristics that are not part of the vision.
7. **Openness** - Acknowledge and address criticism to the change, do this in an open, confident and transparent way. Avoid making excuses and/or defending your position. Instead focus on everyone working together to identify what needs to be done to implement the change in the best way.
8. **Alignment** - Align the systems, policies and processes so they encourage the desired behaviour and decisions to fit with the organisation's values.
9. **Evaluate** - Regularly review your decision making to ensure that each decision supports the desired organisational culture. Also, examine and review your culture to ensure it matches the vision and take steps to get it back on course if required.
10. **Bring in new blood** - Recruit and retain new employees that share your organisation's values.
11. **Reward** - Take time to reward and recognise employees for desired behaviour. Publicise and celebrate change successes along the way.
12. **Reinforcement** - Use training, workshops, meetings and other activities to consistently reinforce the values, expected behaviours and vision for the culture (Taylor, 2005).

A SUCCESS STORY

Over the last few years, Air New Zealand has focused on an internal culture change, which has culminated in them officially receiving the Rainbow Tick Accreditation. To achieve this accolade, Air New Zealand had to meet a robust set of criteria that deems them a safe, welcoming and inclusive organisation for people of diverse gender identity and sexual orientation.

Air New Zealand adopted a Diversity and Inclusion Strategy in 2013 and since then has undergone a culture change involving staff to ensure that everyone in all communities are accepted and can thrive. McKinsey (2015) identified that the level of ethnic diversity within an organisation increased their financial effectiveness and their market share. Creating a diverse workforce that is representative of our society, underpins success in a business.

Air New Zealand developed a Pride Network run by employees that achieved great changes to attitudes by doing several things:

- Advocating for the installation of gender-neutral bathrooms.
- Creating ways for staff to identify in a gender-neutral way in the Human Resources systems.
- Setting up leader workshops to crack open bias and prejudice.
- Running successful events to promote the change in culture.
- Being involved in the Auckland, Wellington and Vancouver Pride Parades.

Like many other airlines, Air New Zealand was rather traditional and had a 'gung-ho' attitude about stereotypes. It was no mean feat to break down the biased attitudes. Culture change activities involved employees at all levels and created a wave of change across the organisation. Adopting culture change has delivered huge benefits for employees, contractors and customers. Air New Zealand is still working on its culture change process which aims at fostering a safe, respectful, transparent and welcoming workplace for their 12,000 employees. They continue to work on embedding this change, but they have achieved so much already.

CONCLUSION

Regardless of the type of organisation you work in or the type of change you want to make, the key is to set out a plan to engage the hearts and minds of your staff. Change needs to be slow, steady and inclusive; it needs to focus on encouraging behaviours in your staff that are aligned to your values. Don't give up if things go wrong, review and adjust your change until the desired state is achieved.

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