

## HOW WE CHANGE



Applying principles of thought, which can only be expressed by individuals, can ease the process of changing a collective enterprise.

Conventional wisdom asserts that change is difficult, so difficult that some would call it almost impossible. Working from this assumption, leaders assemble massive change programs characterized by slogans, incentives, meetings, consultants, investments, and managers, sometimes to accomplish even the most modest shift in direction. No doubt, each of us has either been party to one of these agendas or been its target.

Needless to say, when we see one of these juggernauts taking shape, we grow skeptical. Their accomplishments generally fall far short of their original promise, and often, within a few years time, little, if any, evidence remains of their impact. Quite rightly we label them "fire drills" or "programs du jour."

Perhaps we are placing far too much emphasis on change and not appreciating the fact that changing is something we do virtually every waking moment. For example, how many times have you changed your mind today, decided to turn left at the light instead of right, have tea instead coffee, close the refrigerator door before eating that leftover, or turn off the computer without checking email?

Why should our behavior in organizational life be any different? Obviously, it isn't. Maybe this is why we assume that effecting change within an institution is so big a challenge. For how can we affect the direction of a large institution, department, or work group if everyone is changing his or her mind all the time? By our own personal understanding.

The unifying principle common to every living human is: "Thought is a divine gift through which we create our reality." Another way of saying this is that 1) every human being thinks, 2) these thoughts look real to us, that is we experience our thoughts as feelings on which we may choose to take action, and 3) all of us continually produce fresh or new thoughts.

As I am going to bed, the thought, "Hey, there is that leftover chocolate cake in the fridge," evokes a feeling of hunger that prompts an action of going downstairs, which may invoke the thought, "But that's not good for my diet." Thus, in the course of just a few minutes I may change my mind from going to bed, to having a late night snack, to going back to bed without it, or not!

Buddha pointed out this aspect of the human condition with profound simplicity, "We are what we think; with our thoughts we create the world." We are not compelled to blindly act on every thought. We have been given the power of free will, expressed as

a choice that enables each of us to create our lives as we wish.

But these very gifts can be our greatest weakness. When we lack the strength to change our minds, we can become embedded in the past, trapped by our old beliefs and assumptions. You've probably experienced the chilling effect of phrases like, "That will never work here," "We've tried that before," or even "I like the way things are now" and seen how such phrases can cause promising new ideas to wither, no matter how much enthusiasm they initially engender.

Those of us who are keenly aware of the nature of thought and understand its principles realize that negativity like this has no power. We can regard it as just another thought, one we can choose to pay attention to or not.

It takes no special education, intelligence, or training to grasp what I'm saying. It is the utter simplicity of realizing, "Yes, I knew that." Children can be its most obvious teachers. Have you ever wondered how a two-year-old can be throwing the most red-faced, rage-filled tantrum on the floor of the grocery store one minute and a minute later is a laughing, loving youngster? Yep, they had a new thought and chose to act on those feelings rather than stay with the old.

The fact is that all of us as children had a profound understanding of the underlying nature of thought. It was so obvious that it did not require any conceptualization, verbalization, or explanation! We just knew it. But right now in most societies, we've lost our grasp of the principle of thought. We don't speak about it, acknowledge it, or reflect on it. Hence, many of us are confused by the way we actually live our lives and have little understanding about the way the world actually works.

Consequently, accomplishing organizational change looks very difficult because it appears that the only way to achieve it is by imposing a new order on others. This flies in the face of what we instinctively know to be true, that the shape of our lives is determined by the inner experience of thoughts that are brought to life through feelings that, in turn, engender our actions. The game of life as expressed is actually an inner one created by our unique separate realities.

What makes organizational or institutional change interesting is the fact that we are working within the framework of a "collective" consciousness. After all, we created these structures to accomplish work that is beyond the capabilities of an individual or a handful of people. So how do we apply principles of thought, which can only be expressed individually, to changing a collective enterprise?

First, we ask people to look in a new direction, armed now with questions, not answers. Astute students of thought recognize that groups have a remarkable ability to arrive at fresh insights that lead to new directions and solve the most intractable problems. They know that questions serve as the catalyst, that the leader's job is to frame the right query to stimulate everyone's thoughts.

Have you ever seen someone stop a group in its track by a single well-aimed question? It is like changing a railroad switch; instantaneously the conversation heads down a

new track and one person's thought stimulates someone else's.

The flaw in the traditional approach is that it focuses on telling or selling a set of answers. Yet, no matter how "correct" these answers may seem, this approach can never create the inner commitment that comes from "thinking things through for yourself."

Next, we emphasize the positive. We look at life optimistically and use this optimism as a guiding light that leads to happy outcomes, compared with pessimism, which leads to darkness and despair. Negative thoughts produce negative feelings that inevitably lead to negative behavior, the cause of human hopelessness.

Fear, worry, anxiety, and anger provoke self-inflicted wounds. Compassion, love, and kindness not only heal these afflictions but also create a climate where any thought is okay. Change depends on creativity, and creativity is most abundant when people acknowledge that thought could be used in an infinite number of ways, in other words, when people feel safe in expressing whatever occurs to them at the moment.

Finally, we dream big dreams, knowing that hope and faith will lead us to them even though, at the outset, the means may not be obvious. Our thoughts come from a bottomless well of inspiration and energy that is beyond our personal knowledge and experience.

Have you ever been overwhelmed by a flash of insight so powerful and profound that you accepted it without question? This is the power of thought coming directly to your mind from the spiritual universe where there are no boundaries or limitations. How different this is from the commonplace change agenda! So often these plans are cobbled together from assumptions, beliefs, and constraints that look real to the framers but hold hardly any power over those who see the nature of thought.

"Nothing endures but change," said Heraclitus, the ancient Greek philosopher. This must be so since our thoughts continually change. If you don't believe me, just try to hold onto the same thought; impossible, no? So, to stop making institutional change so awkward and difficult, let's re-orient our thinking about change so that it is in concert with the way our minds actually work. It takes only a moment to grasp the true nature of thought. I think you'll be surprised, gratified, and overjoyed with the results.

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