



Knowledge citizens as change leaders and leaders of change

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It is change, continuing change, inevitable change that is the dominant factor in society today. No sensible decision can be made any longer without taking into account not only the world as it is but also the world as it will be (Isaac Asimov – Russian born author).

Introduction

New technology, market changes, customer expectations, competitor activities, government legislation, political values and economic cycles, culture, structure and power are all leading causes of change. However, change is often seen as disruptive and intrusive, something which upsets the balance. Very rarely is change seen as an opportunity to learn new things and, more important, to learn about ourselves.

However, the characteristics of knowledge citizenship place knowledge citizens ahead of the pack as they embrace ongoing change through life learning, collaboration and sharing, and self-mastery. The question is, how can knowledge citizens, particularly knowledge practitioners, fulfil the role of change leader and leader of change?

Our responsibility to change

Management and business textbooks tend to argue that 'change is now one of the most pressing issues facing organizations, their managers and their employees', so much so that management gurus such as Tom Peters have argued that it is no longer enough to speak of organizational change but rather of 'perpetual organizational revolution' (Huczynski and Buchanan quoted in Tyler 2005).

People both fear and seek change, and this presents both risk and opportunity. It is endemic and can be added to the other two certainties in life – taxes and death (Quirke 1995 quoted in Kitchen and Daly 2002). Change can take on many forms; it can be planned or unplanned, incremental or radical, and recurrent or unprecedented. The challenge for today is not so much to plan for change but to learn to live with it, anticipate it and, where possible, to capitalize on it. Change means changing the nature of things.

Drucker (2000) cautions us that for the first time people have choices and for the first time they will have to manage themselves, a phenomenon for which society is totally unprepared. To succeed in this new world, we will have to learn, first, who we are. Few people, even highly successful people, can or have asked themselves the questions: 'Do you know what you're good at? Do you know what you need to learn so that you get the full benefit of your strengths?'

Change 'management' as we know it

Change management practitioners have identified several factors that impede change, which include lack of credibility, secrecy, lack of skills, lack of resources, lack of discipline, lack of strategy, oversimplification, people who are reluctant to change and power and politics.

Beer *et al.* (2007) hold that most change programmes do not work because they are guided by a theory of change that is fundamentally flawed. The common belief is that the place to begin is with the knowledge and attitudes of individuals. Changes in attitudes will lead to changes in individual behaviour and this, repeated by many people, will result in organizational change. However, individual behaviour is powerfully shaped by the organizational roles that people play. The most effective way to change behaviour is to put people into a new organizational context that imposes new roles, responsibilities and relationships on them.

Detailed methods and tools for bringing about change are widespread. The legitimacy of methods and tools is generally based on a belief in the effectiveness of their direct application in the change process. However, there is a belief that it is the personal skills and experiences of the change leaders, rather than the methods, that provide value in the change process (Werr, Stjernberg and Docherty 1997).

Today the riskiest of all strategies is inaction, however the failure rate for management programmes that are intended to implement change can run as high as 70% (Kitchen and Daly 2002). Gilsdorf, quoted in Kitchen and Daly, contends that many mistakes in change management programmes are linked with breakdowns in communication.

Change leaders

The most effective way to manage change successfully is to lead it. One cannot manage change. One can only be ahead of it. A change leader sees change as an opportunity. A change leader looks for change, knows how to find the right changes and knows how to make them effective both inside and outside the organization.

All leadership starts with self-mastery – you cannot lead others until you can lead yourself. Mahatama Ghandi said: 'Be the change you wish to see in the world.' To truly lead and make a difference in the world, you must always start with yourself (Sanborn 2006). An effective leader knows that the ultimate task of leadership is to create human energies and human vision (Drucker 2001).

Sanborn (2006) makes a very relevant point on leading change by stating: 'You don't need a title to be a leader in life and a title won't make you a leader.' Everyone has an opportunity to lead everyday despite his or her position at work, in his or her family or in the community. This offers exciting opportunities for knowledge citizens, who often are not in positions of 'official leadership' but who are likely to demonstrate the following characteristics, which Sanborn identifies as leadership traits:

- Believing you can positively shape your life and career
- Leading through having relationships with people as opposed to having control over people
- Collaborating rather than controlling
- Persuading others to contribute rather than ordering them to do so
- Getting others to follow out of respect and commitment rather than fear and compliance.

People who act as leaders, whether they have a title or not, in some measure serve as merchants of hope. This does not mean that they try to gloss over the difficulties with which they are being faced, but rather that they deal with them. People who lead show us that the greatest satisfaction often comes from meeting challenges head on. They have the ability to focus on what is right and overcome what is wrong (Sanborn 2006).

Being a change leader is about you as an individual, as you will have to become a role model of what you are seeking to create. This will require change and the willingness to learn is a crucial mindset for culture. For things to change, first an individual must change. You will need to take responsibility for others' responses to you rather than blaming them for their lack of vision. You, personally, need to be moving faster than anyone else down this path. At the very least, you need to be working on yourself equally as hard as you are working on everyone else. Walking the talk requires that you change your behaviour at all times not just when you are on your best behaviour. The only way to do this is to change those mind sets that exert themselves when you are not concentrating and others see you revert to type. When you change your feelings, values, beliefs and level of self-awareness, the behaviour change at the DO level is automatic, because the force that sat behind it has changed (Taylor 2006).

Leading change

Using change methods appropriately is incumbent on a change leader. Being clear about your true intentions and acting with integrity in carrying out those intentions is not only ethical but also fundamental to success. These change methods ask people to open their hearts and to get involved. No less can be expected of a change leader (Holman *et al.* 2007).

In the early phases of a change process, it is important to define your role in order to create a climate for change, where after the lessons of both successes and failures can be extended. Specifying general directions in which to move without insisting on specific solutions is an effective first step (Holman *et al.* 2007).

Taylor (2005) speaks of five techniques to use to change a mindset when you are change ready (Table 1). These may apply equally to a knowledge citizen seeking to become a better change leader:

Table 1 Five techniques to use to change a mindset when you are change ready

Area of focus	Type of technique
Changing rational intellectual beliefs	Exposure to alternative rational data and arguments
Changing less rational beliefs and responses with an emotional underpinning	Increasing emotional intelligence through self-analysis, feedback, coaching and therapy
Becoming more values driven and changing your value hierarchy	Increasing self-confidence and listening to intuition through coaching and thoughtfulness
Changing your feelings	Increasing positive motivation through trust, relationship and meaning
Changing your level of awareness	Opportunities for and practice for self-reflection

Conclusion

Change is not just about how people act, it is how they think as well, and remedies will not work unless the change leaders can re-engineer the most crucial element of all – themselves. Knowledge citizens, by virtue of their citizenship characteristics, are able to be pivotal change leaders who can both anticipate the future and lead change.

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