

LEADING CHANGE

- BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN IDEAL AND REALITY

When as leaders we have a vision for how things could be there is a tension between our ideal and the reality. To move closer to the ideal means change for us, change for others and change for the organisation. And if the change is going to be life-serving in the sense of moving us closer to our vision **WE NEED TO ASK;**

- What constitutes life-serving change for my Foundation or Trust?
- What prevents life-serving change, what makes life-serving change so difficult?
- How can I become a catalyst for life-serving change?

WHAT CONSTITUTES LIFE-SERVING CHANGE?

The first suggestion is that **life-serving change rarely takes place**. We have perhaps witnessed for ourselves reorganisations, change management programmes, restructuring, quality initiatives and a host of management initiatives where the promised land turned out to be, not milk and honey, but a strangely familiar landscape.

Somehow the **changes are just not sustained**. The old frustrations, emotions reappear perhaps in a new guise with new labels but still that feeling of stuckness.

Management teams often prove very able at analysing a situation, smart at generating solutions and suggestions for change but **in practice little happens**, little changes. Colleagues may agree intellectually and acquiesce to changes but somehow their hearts are not in it and the familiar issues keep appearing.

This is backed up by research into organisational change programmes which reveal an **80% failure** rate.

It may be helpful to introduce a distinction here between two types of change and think in terms of;

- **revolutionary change**

or

- **evolutionary change**

Revolutionary change is what we typically observe - as the word suggests, revolutionary change has a circular, wheel like, repeating nature. Sure things have changed, moved on but in a **deeper sense nothing has changed**. **Once the dust has settled we notice the same patterns, the same unresolved issues, the same emotions.**

Often this sort of change originates **from change for changes sake**. It allows management to tackle superficial issues 'out there' as a way of avoiding deeper problems 'in here'.

And **sometimes** revolutionary change will **happen of its own accord**, despite us even. Because the environment surrounding an organisation changes and consequently changes are forced upon us - sometimes revolutions are forced on an organisation despite efforts to resist change.

So we have revolutionary change sometimes as a result of shallow management thinking sometimes forced upon an organisation by circumstances.

In contrast evolutionary change has a different feel to it - and I use the word feel deliberately. Something new has come into being. **Something new has unfolded**, has been created. Evolutionary change has a sense of something previously unknown coming to be known, something previously unseen becoming seen. There is an aspect of evolutionary change which includes **new perspectives opening up, an expanded awareness** of the way things really are. **And once something is seen, known it is sustained. There is no going back to the way it was**. Once you have seen through something you have seen through it.

And evolutionary change feels different. **Instead of feelings of familiarity there will be feelings of aliveness, perhaps even fear and culminating in feelings of freedom, lightness and joy.**

So that is the definition of life-serving change, or evolutionary change - change that results in feelings of freedom, lightness and joy - that's the test, that's the measure. It cannot be checked with a calculator or a ruler. Of course in time physical results will manifest and these results will be measurable.

We can look to our own experience of changes in organisations. Think of an example of revolutionary change where changes were at a superficial level and the new era seemed

strangely familiar. And think of an example where a reorganisation has resulted in feelings of something greater unfolding. What has been the most common experience?

Summarising what passes as change is usually revolutionary change rather than evolutionary change - evolutionary change is rare.

Evolutionary change is accompanied by a feeling that something bigger has been brought into being. Something has shifted permanently. And this is accompanied by **feelings of fear followed by feelings of freedom, lightness and joy.**

WHAT PREVENTS LIFE-SERVING (EVOLUTIONARY) CHANGE?

Why is evolutionary change so rare?

When a change management programme does not work the blame is quickly laid upon what are often labelled as resistant staff. Whilst this may not be true or fair it does give a clue to the source of, or the blockage to organisational growth. **The source of organisational change is individuals themselves.** After all an organisation is only a collection of individuals acting in relationship to each other.

For **organisations to change** what they are doing and move beyond habits then **individuals themselves have to move beyond habits.** And we know how **hard this can be in practice** - to change even the simplest behaviour.

How many times have we resolved to do something (get up earlier, have a holiday, eat or drink less) only to find our resolve has vanished within a day. How often have we seen clearly a need to alter behaviour only to find the resolve, the emotional commitment is not there? We recognise a change that would be helpful but find our heart is not in it - something stops us.

So the question 'Why is evolutionary change in an organisation so rare?' could be restated as 'Why do individuals resist evolutionary change or growth?'

Why do individuals cling to habits which are clearly no longer helpful to themselves or others? We approach the heart of the matter now.

It is suggested that there are three principle reasons

- **Fixed personality view or habit** - clinging to the belief that there is an aspect of us that is unchanging. 'People never change'. 'I was born this way'. 'I act this way because

of my upbringing'. 'I am genetically programmed to behave in this way'. 'This is the way God made me'.

- **Indecision, doubt, vagueness - deliberate indecision in the face of evidence , refusal to commit ourselves, wavering.** We are not talking here about honest doubt in pursuit of the truth. I am referring to self interested rationalisations which take the form of scepticism.
- **Reliance on Rules and Procedures as ends in themselves or superficiality - hiding behind rules and procedures as a way of avoiding quality, safety or ethical issues.** The tendency to define things and then apply definitions in a literal legalistic way. Attending to the letter rather than the spirit.

These fetters, barriers, hindrances - habit, vagueness and superficiality - will have more meaning when we look at the antidotes.

HOW CAN WE BECOME CATALYSTS FOR EVOLUTIONARY CHANGE?

As Chief Executives we have to start by recognising how much power and influence we have. **We are in a position to make a contribution to life-serving or evolutionary change or to impede it.**

It is **easy to underestimate our power and influence.** Just take a matter as simple as speech. Think of organisational gossip - how quickly it spreads to a few then passed on to many. **Think of your speech as reaching dozens** and consider the difference between inaccurate rumour and helpful accurate observations.

And if we are in positions of responsibility then we have to recognise that we will be taken as a model. **If we embody a free, light, joyful, evolutionary approach** that will communicate more than memos or lectures.

We have **nothing to offer** as leaders of change if **we cannot manage our own evolutionary change.**

So how do we become masters of our change? How do we develop freedom lightness and joy in ourselves? We need to develop, cultivate the antidotes to habit, vagueness and superficiality.

The antidote to habit is creativity.

Creativity is achieved by first **recognising that we have habits which are largely unconscious.** We are creatures of habit but do not have to be bound by them - we are free

to notice them and drop them. This needs intense awareness, reflection, observation, perhaps feedback from trusted friends.

To be truly creative we need to **experience a gap between our feelings which arise and our reactions**. Instead of instinctively pushing away or grasping based on our feelings we need to create a gap where a more creative response can take place. If we dwell in this gap something deeper may emerge which has elegance, or simplicity or a certain beauty, perhaps enhanced truthfulness, authenticity or a previously unexpressed generosity. **This emergence of a more creative response is usually preceded by suffering as we move beyond a habit.**

That means for most of us allowing **more time for reflection**. Experimenting with doing nothing, absolutely nothing, for a few minutes a day. And it means thinking seriously about taking up **an awareness practice such as yoga, tai chi or meditation**. And remembering there is no one path for everyone and different activities will be appropriate for different people.

The antidote to vagueness is commitment

It is vital we commit our self to what we have found to be helpful, effective, good and true.

The Scottish mountaineer W. H. Murray captures this in a piece of his writing;

Until one is committed there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favour all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamt would have come his way. I have learnt a deep respect for Goethe's couplet;

*Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it.
Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.*

The antidote to superficiality is clarity.

And this means not hiding behind the letter to avoid the spirit. **We have perhaps experienced best practice programmes where the net effect was quality seemed to fly out of the window** - where the paperwork, procedures or incentive payments became more important than the original spirit of the initiative - the means had become the end.

Clarity means clear thinking and this is a craft that we have to develop for ourselves with skills such as:

- **cultivating truthful, factually accurate speech**, learning to separate fact from hearsay. Being clear about what we know and do not know
- **basic training in problem solving**, learn to develop problem statements (as distinct from disguised solutions) and acquire techniques for problem solving (inverted problems, force field analysis, sphere of influence)
- **clarity on cause effect sequence**; it is easy to make mistakes in this area eg if city sewers break and plague breaks out understanding that deaths are not caused by doctors (because most people saw a doctor just before they died).
- **Avoid change for change sake**. Recognise existing habits and traditions that work and serve a purpose. Develop an eye for elegance, simplicity, truthfulness and comment on it, point it out and preserve it. Find what's working and do more of it. Find Grantees, Trustees and Beneficiaries who are delighted and ask them why.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- **Recognise that life-serving evolutionary change is rare**. Creative change where something new comes into being is rare and is felt as much as measured. We are up against it and need to set our sights high if we are going to be a catalyst for evolutionary change.
- Organisational change is evolutionary only when individuals learn themselves to be effective at managing their own evolutionary change.

- We cannot force others to evolve, to change - we can only act as a model, set an example in the way we evolve and change our self. If we want to be effective in our management of change we need to be effective in managing our own change and we can make a start now. No need to sit around waiting for a change programme to get involved with start now with our self. Become our own authority on change management - we are carrying the laboratory for experiments around 24 hours a day.
- We need to cultivate creativity, commitment, and clarity on an ongoing basis.
- In practice that means that we need to school ourselves in techniques that aid clarity of thinking and to make a clear commitment to some awareness practice that includes awareness of feelings and emotions - time for reflection, yoga, tai chi, meditation.

As potential managers of change we must make a start in the only place we can start - with ourselves and our own mental states.

And as we embody more creativity, more commitment, more clarity then something truly beautiful can start to emerge both in ourselves and, with time and patience, in the organisations we choose to contribute to.

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