

Sharpen the tools you already have— Communication and Time Management

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*Finally Right
the First Time*

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THE INCREASING PACE OF CHANGE

BY DARRIN WIKOFF, CMRP

Studies performed by Julia Balogun and Veronica Hope Hailey, as reported in their book *Exploring Strategic Change*, indicate that around 70% of change programs fail to deliver at the pace required for the business. As a Maintenance and Reliability Professional, there will come a time when you are asked to lead the organization, or a portion of the organization, through a significant change. Maybe your efforts will be focused on bringing Operations into the reliability strategy, or implementing a formal work management process in order to improve the effectiveness and cost efficiency of Maintenance. Your leadership skills may be called on to navigate a significant management system change, such as implementing a new Computerized Maintenance Management System (CMMS) or even performing accreditation of an asset management standard. In any case, Senior Management will expect the change to be swift in order to ensure the optimum return on their investment.



Lewin's Freeze Phases



Kurt Lewin 1943

Up until the economic downturn in late 2008, the pace of change was primarily determined by the internal desires of the organization to improve performance and align standards of practice with published benchmarks. Drivers for change prior to 2008, such as cost reduction or increasing capacity, demanded little sense of urgency. The speed at which changes were made ranged from 12 months to five years. Today, however, the pace of change is no longer determined by the organization; it is instead driven by external pressures and the need to survive. Instead of focusing on continuous improvement, companies desire rapid improvement to position their business beyond the destructive reach of global economic influences. Many organizations engaged in multi-year improvement initiatives prior to 2009 who thought they were developing a competitive advantage quickly realized that their pace of change was insufficient to withstand the effects of Wall Street. Grasping at straws, the surviving organizations turned their attention to rapid improvement tactics, demanding change in a single fiscal quarter. Today, the platform for change is urgency no matter how uncomfortable it may be.

Historically, change within your organization may not have been expeditious. Given the new environment, how can you accelerate the pace of change? There are over 9000 online references that speak to the importance of managing the “speed of change” in order to maximize the potential returns of your organization’s improvement initiative. However, no one is talking about the pace at which change must occur. It seems that most experts are assuming, or

at least they are implying, that behavioral and cultural change is not expeditious. This is a popular topic amongst change management professionals, and everyone agrees that a critical key to success is being proactive in accelerating the time it takes stakeholders and employees to adopt the notion of change.

Most change leaders believe and practice “Lewin’s Freeze Phases”, a model developed in the early 20th century by Kurt Lewin, a German-American psychologist who has been revered as one of the modern pioneers of social, organizational, and applied psychology and founded many of the modern principles used in social psychology today. The “Freeze Phases” found in Lewin’s change model represent periods of time within the change initiative in which people must become comfortable with 1) letting go of the old way of doing business, 2) complying with new practices, and 3) reinforcing the new practices day-to-day. Experts commonly refer to the separation of phases as “soak time”, and insist that it is a necessary part of transitioning the culture from current to desired state. Unfortunately, as you may have experienced in the past, the application of Lewin’s model has led change leaders to believe that “change takes time”, so much so that many professionals are reluctant to press the pace of change for fear of sparking unmanageable amounts of resistance.

Despite the increasing pace of change, Lewin’s model still serves as the fundamental framework for creating change within your organization. With the addition of “appreciative inquiry”, proactive change leaders are finding new avenues to

“unfreeze” and create change within the working environment more quickly. Lewin said this about people and the working environment: “People like the safety, comfort and feeling of control within their environment. Recognize that they derive a strong sense of identity from their environment.” Unlike past applications of Lewin’s model that focused heavily on creating an emotional response by pointing out how bad things are, appreciative inquiry examines what within the business is working well. This comes from studies pertaining to how the human brain responds to positive and negative stimulus. Pointing out someone’s weaknesses or gaps causes synapses in the brain that forces our logic and rationalizing receptors into overdrive, often resulting in disagreement, confrontation, and ultimately resistance. Contrarily, creating opportunities for people to reflect on positive experiences, or what is working well, causes right brain synapses to fire, which enables creativity and innovation. Practitioners of appreciative inquiry use the period of unfreeze to focus people on doing more of the positive and letting go of the not so positive.

Creating Change Within the Environment

In Lewin’s article “Frontiers in Group Dynamics”, he expressed that a significant effort may be required to unfreeze them [employees] and get them to change. You have likely heard the saying “it’s easier to throw stones” since you were in grammar school, and this could not be more true today with regards to creating change within the working environment. It is

easy for leaders to identify and focus on the gaps; however, modern organizational psychology teaches us that we need to make a significant effort towards pointing out the strengths within the organization in order to create the most effective response to change. As leaders, we must find opportunities to inquire as to what is working well and what people would like to see more of. For example, in less than proactive maintenance organizations, craft people go to extraordinary lengths to accomplish the work required to maintain the facility. Their efforts, although believed to be necessary, leave them frustrated more times than not. In these types of organizations, I find that each craft person has a job that they remember going smoothly, in which all of the correct parts were provided, the machine was available as agreed, and the work was completed without a hitch. Talking with these people, they all agree that this is the way it should be every time and express that they would like to see more of it. Isn't that the result of

proper planning and scheduling? We could beat them up about how inefficient they are in an effort to explain why planning is necessary, which will more than likely get a response that is less than favorable. On the other hand, we could focus on the positives within these experiences and work collaboratively to find solutions that harness what went well. This is appreciative inquiry and it enables leaders and employees to build a common understanding of the future state, which breeds buy in and engagement for the change. Instead of investing time and energy in trying to build awareness and understanding around the reasons why things are not going well, you accelerate the pace for change by building acceptance of the future state.

Supporting Individual Change

The second phase of Lewin's model focuses on supporting change until the desired state (e.g. behaviors) is achieved. Unfortunately, most articles referencing

Lewin's work tend to lean towards auditing as a form of support. This is misleading and certainly inconsistent with today's pace of change. Auditing is a reactive and less than timely way to drive the change process. Instead, change leaders must find opportunities for people to take immediate action. For example, if during the unfreeze phase, people related to experiences when repetitive problems were permanently resolved, then leadership should provide training in root cause analysis, set expectations pertaining to resolving problems, and provide the management systems to enable corrective action. Leadership alignment and foresight around how new competencies will be deployed is paramount. It is important to have expectations of the future defined and supported by leadership as a collective unit. Performance management systems should be aligned with future expectations, and coaching must be available to swiftly build proficiency of new practices. People need to feel they have the ability to change



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without constraints in order to build their identity in the new working environment. Management's commitment to change should lean towards enabling and supporting action.

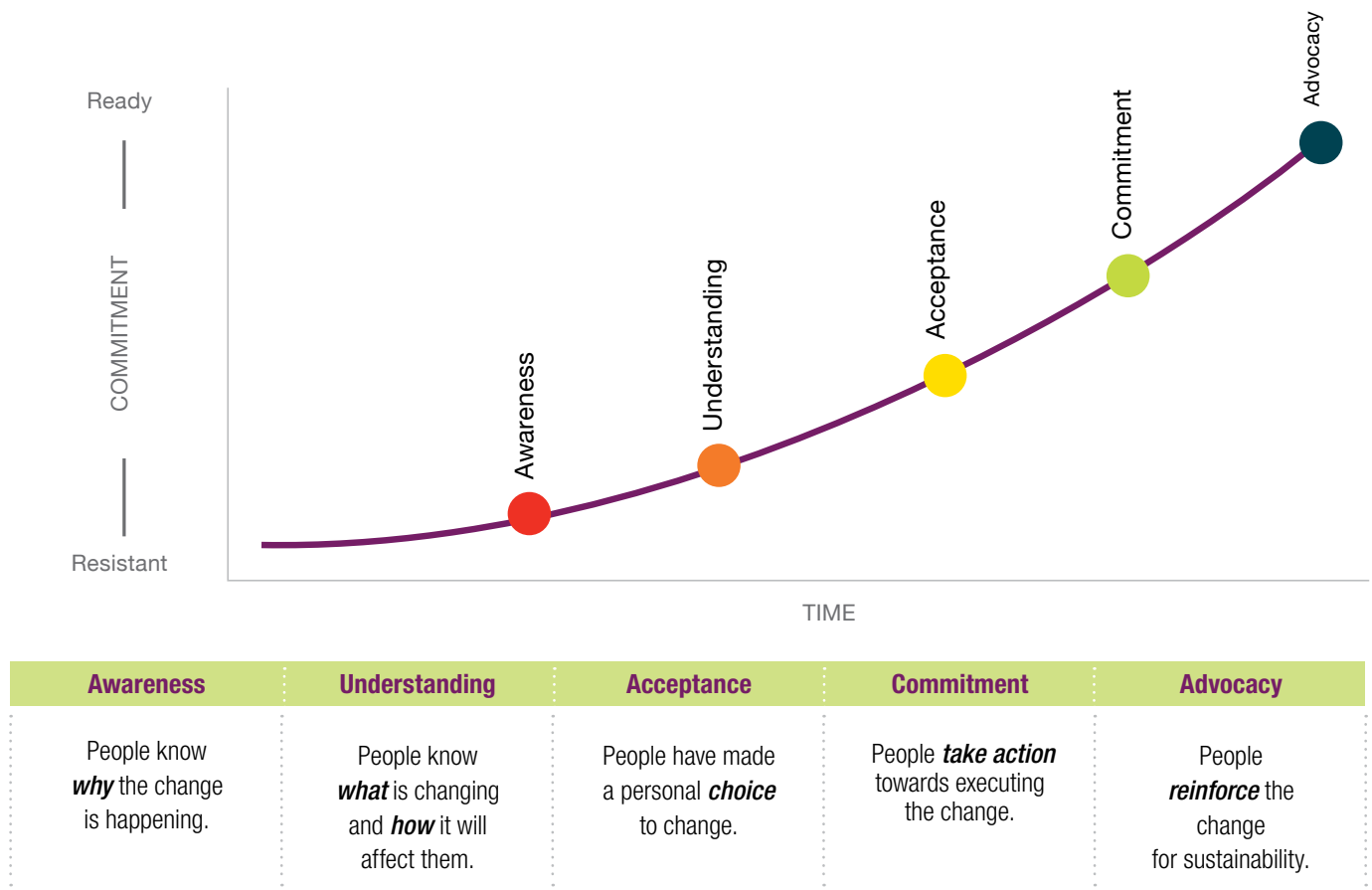
Reinforcing the Change

When your 16 year old son or daughter learns how to drive, and he or she is given authorization to drive by obtaining a license, how do you, as the parent, reinforce good driving habits (e.g. behaviors)? We remind them of the LAW! Obey posted speed limits, it is the LAW. Make sure you come to a complete stop at intersections, it is the LAW. Always wear your seatbelt, it is the LAW. Reinforcing, or "refreezing", the change is no different; we remind people of the law. Some change leaders refer to the law of the change as "business rules". In reality, much like the rules of the road, we are reinforcing shared beliefs that have been derived in order to keep us safe, consistent, and

aligned with the expectations of others. When anchoring the change within your organization rules should be defined that each stakeholder and employee can refer to in order to hold themselves and others accountable. This is a bit of a paradigm shift with regards to the phrase "reinforcing system". In the past, reinforcing systems were meant to be nothing more than metrics and performance incentives as methods of maintaining ones desire to uphold the change. However, looking back at Lewin's teachings, we have to keep in mind that individuals seek to control their environment, not be controlled by it. We created discomfort during the change (i.e. unfreezing) by removing their ability to control things; so, in turn, we then need to put control back in their hands to refreeze the environment. Business rules provide the ability for people to regain control. One example relative to planning and scheduling is "no work will be scheduled until the parts are kitted". Seems simple,

doesn't it? This example provides a rule that Planners, Supervisors, and others can follow within work management practices. They can refer back to the rule when someone breaks the law and tries to fit in a job that is not properly planned and ready for execution, thus preventing potential inefficiencies, wasted expenses, and frustrations from the past. These rules, in effect, become the process. Just like driving a car, we know we have to stop at a red light and we can go at a green light. There is no process telling us to do so. It is the law and we follow it. Consistent with this same analogy, reinforcing the change also requires consequences of not following the rules. Although change management jail does not exist, it should be clear what the consequences or risks are if the rules are violated. This is where daily management boards, non-standard work and corrective action reporting, and performance evaluations and performance incentives play a role as reinforcing systems.

The Engagement Curve



The pace of change today is significantly shorter and, as a result, leadership must influence people to adapt to change more rapidly. To do so, the utilization of change models, like that of Lewin, must be aligned with the increasing pace of change. Paradigms amongst change and business leaders must adapt to the current market environment in order to more quickly realize the benefits of change and ensure survival of the organization. What once took years to achieve, now must be accomplished in months. Finding a way to influence change in your environment is the first step. Do not be lackadaisical by only looking for gaps; focus on the positive experiences of the organization in order to inspire innovation. Lewin once said, "it [change] usually requires intervention", and today I believe he would say "positive intervention". Do not wait; get the pace of change moving by focusing on what is working well. ☒



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