

The Authentic Change Journey – purpose and people led, with authenticity at its heart to unlock success

The Current Dilemma

Generally, when we think about organisational change, we think about a process, even if subconsciously and mostly, we think about a change process led from the top down. This is normally either a change process initiated by a new company strategy or a new leadership team, or a necessity due to a tactical response to external influences. Often, as leaders, we don't stop to think of the inherent change challenge facing us as human beings, who are naturally resistant to change. Of course, we need to have a purpose driving the change because a change without a purpose makes absolutely no sense, like a football team without a coach. From my experience, as a Chief Financial Officer leading Human Resources, Strategy and Cultural Change, I know how challenging it is to introduce a new modern working environment, including the launch of new corporate values, creating an integrative culture and relocating three diverse businesses to a new campus, all within one large project. However, at the time, I thought it would be easy to convince the leaders of the benefits of this project. I did not anticipate the surprising response that followed.

The Inherent Change Challenge

Many people do not like change. Even the most adaptable of the species sometimes have negative reactions to change. Even if the outcomes are positive for some people, they simply don't embrace the process of change. In this situation, we can only move forward with everyone's buy in for a successful change journey when we analyse these negative reactions to find their source. In my earlier example, it took me six months to reach inside what I now term 'the can of worms' to find the core issue. Although we made articulate arguments for the change, conducted numerous briefings and communicated in different ways; several leaders were still reticent. The process of convincing them of the benefits of a new modern working environment was extremely slow. This was despite pointing out the various positive aspects for them as individuals and their teams. I was surprised to realise that many of the leaders didn't embrace the change because they were scared of losing control or looking bad. I learnt that it is best to tip out 'the can of worms' to clearly understand the underlying fears and negative thoughts in the minds of leaders.

We can challenge the traditional thinking process and create a new paradigm, where authenticity at the core of a change journey, can be the differentiator; putting people and the human elements at the heart of the change to unlock its success. Discussing the fears around the change with enough emotional safety,

which allows people to openly share, can effectively accelerate the change journey through a softer approach. We can be more effective by showing a bit of humanity and recognising people's fears as fact, instead of simply burying it or getting impatient with the people who don't get it fast enough. Or instead, in a worst-case scenario we can leave them behind and by so doing, drive them to become disengaged, disgruntled employees who, in time will impact the bottom line for instance, through mistakes, poor attitude or increased sick days. Then adversely we blame them, when in fact, we never spent the time focusing on the human aspect because it is too soft, or we don't really understand, or we are afraid of it. Unfortunately, many strategic or organisational change processes fail, costing organisations wasted profit and time by ignoring or not acknowledging the fears that might exist around the change. However, some fears may be helpful and can point to an adjustment required in the journey of change or an adaptation of the strategy. Traditionally, we are driving these processes top down and therefore, it might be too late in the process to amend or adjust, setting the course for failure from the start.

Prerequisite for Authentic Change Leading Authentically

People need a basis of trust and emotional safety to be able to openly discuss their fears. This requires an organisational culture that celebrates authenticity and diversity. It also requires leaders who live and lead authentically: people

who are real; can be trusted; and unconditionally respect difference. This is a place where fears can be acknowledged without judgement, where true diversity of thought is cultivated and appreciated, allowing true inclusion to follow.

Authentic Change: People, Purpose, Connectedness and Collaboration

The authentic change journey is about two dimensions, consciousness or awareness and connectedness. It focuses on the individual and their context within a team. Authentic change always starts by clarifying the 'Why' and 'What' questions. Why are we doing it and what is the purpose? However, the focus of authentic change is, more importantly, on the human dimension of purpose and dealing with any underlying fears. It is about creating an awareness and sense of purpose for individuals and must include clarity about their role in the change journey. For example, how they/their teams contribute to the success (reaching the destination); where they fit in; and what is in it for them, including what future opportunities are created or which risks are averted?

A deep assessment of why the change might be perceived negatively is invaluable at an early stage of the journey. This includes finding the reasons for any underlying fears, e.g. a loss of control, a strategic direction not fully understood or a leader who no longer knows what is expected of him or her. In a worst case, it can be a leader not believing in the strategy, but being too afraid

to share this opinion for fear of damaging their career progression. Helping individuals to understand and respect these fears, acknowledging that they are not alone, will be helpful to the change process.

Common fears experienced during organisational change can be:

- losing control;
- not knowing how to lead in a new environment;
- the unknown and what will be expected of an individual; or
- that a new strategy will fail and inadvertently cause individual exposure.

To be truly authentic the change journey must also focus on connectedness; a collective and collaborative approach with the shared motto, 'we are all in it together'. Individual leaders move away from controlling the process, competing and minimising individual exposure and instead form a deeper connection with other people, understanding that everyone is part of the same journey. Leaders give more attention to all the different perspectives on an individual level and thus build a culture of authentic change at an organisational level. Instead of convincing everyone about the change from the top down, leaders engage with people and get them to feel that they are at the heart of the journey. Connectedness also has the ability to bond the leaders, building on each other's strengths (early adopters) and complementing each other's weaknesses (laggers) throughout the journey. *'You and I are in the change*

process together. We might feel differently about it. However, what can we achieve together?’

This is a powerful way to create authentic advocates and change champions for successful change; people who are able to convince other people. This journey highlights the opportunities to be gained from peer-to-peer learning from the outset. Focusing on collaboration around the challenges to be faced by the individuals involved can help to overcome their underlying fears and enthuse and inspire other people in the team, creating purpose and meaning for everyone. On the flip-side, fearful leaders subconsciously transport negativity about the change to their teams.

The authentic change journey is not simply a change programme about the elements or facts of the change but is about the human beings involved. It focuses on how they are feeling and uses this knowledge to positively impact the change and drive it more efficiently in an engaging and empowering way for all involved.

POWER Emerges Through Authentic Change

The Authenticity POWER Model© as defined in *“The Authenticity Dilemma Resolved®”* provides the guiding elements for an individual’s personal authentic change process. Authenticity is gained through self-awareness, understanding

the core, connected relationships and purpose driven collaboration. POWER is an acronym for **P**resence, **O**vercoming fear, **W**hole integrated being, **E**ffortless flow and **R**esonance. The valuable benefits created by using this model are listed below.

Leaders have more **P**resence or confidence - through a better understanding of the purpose behind the change and how they relate to and feel about it.

Overcoming fear - leaders have the opportunity to learn from other people, overcoming their own fears and embracing the positivity of the frontrunners in the process.

The **W**hole integrated approach focusses on the human being in the process, the elements of change and the overall purpose; both individually and collectively.

Effortless flow – individuals flow through the various elements of the change curve with greater clarity and ease because they understand their feelings and fears and know they are not alone.

Leaders **R**esonate with what the organisation needs to achieve, their purpose and where they fit into the change journey, allowing them to positively impact and influence other people in the organisation.

Conclusion

Authentic change is a journey, not a sprint. When we can deal with change in a more humane way, allowing people to be their authentic selves, to share their fears and help alleviate fears in a more constructive way, it will lead to more efficient organisational change and provide new meaning to true partnership between organisations and their people. Then, perhaps more strategies can be implemented successfully as opposed to being '*eaten by culture for breakfast*' as Peter Drucker states.

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