

A GUIDE TO
Change I



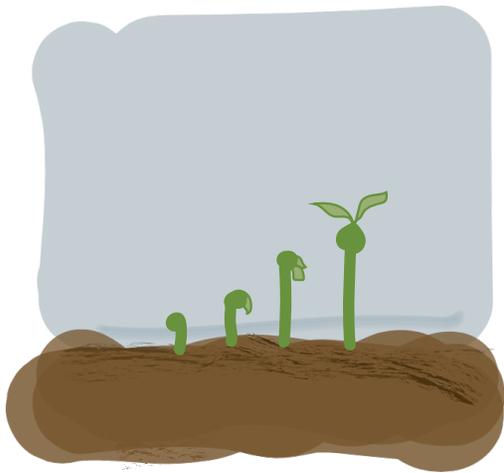


VIM Executive Coaching helps individuals develop the skills and insights to take their careers and life paths to the next level using an introspective, holistic approach to problem solving.

“The Only Thing That Is Constant Is Change.”

~Heraclitus

Change is the only absolute in life. It is occurring every moment and everything is subject to change. Our lives, the communities and societies we live in and the organizations we work for are all affected by waves of change. Some are gradual, while others are abrupt. Some are of our own making, while others are beyond our control. The effects of technology and globalization involve changes of unknown scale and complexity. All of these changes generate stress. Coping with this stress has always been a fundamental issue for human survival and evolution. We are constantly presented with the choice to either move with change or become a victim of it.



The Difference Between Change and Transition

The words change and transition are often used interchangeably. In truth, they are intrinsically linked, but have very separate and different meanings.

Change is external. It is an alteration in the external situation or circumstances, a one-time occurrence. It can be significant, such as the death of a loved one, changing jobs or living arrangements. Oftentimes, it can

happen fast such as the creation of a new management team, downsizing, or a merger or acquisition.

Transition on the other hand, is internal. It is the ongoing, inner psychological process of accepting and working through the change. Transition is most often a slower process of letting go of how things were and embracing how they have become. When we experience major transitions, we need to let go of elements of the past before we can fully accept our new reality. While transition is a natural

and necessary human process, it can be painful and some may choose to deny and avoid it. However, when these feelings aren't processed and expressed, they may become internalized and re-appear as denial, anger or fear. The net result is resistance which slows down or even stops the desired change.

Change can be self-imposed or imposed upon us. Buying a new home is usually a change we impose upon ourselves. Moving into the new home is the change. Learning to let go of the way things were is the transition; dealing with a new route to work, missing our old neighbors and learning to sleep in a new environment. Until we have completely accepted the new and fully let go of the old, we are in transition. The death of a loved one is an example of a change that is imposed upon us. We may become upset, confused and feel powerless to accept the change thrust upon us. We may not be able to move forward because we cannot let go of the past. As we come to accept that the old is no more and that we must embrace the new, we are in transition.

Sometimes transitions are not created by change (or at least not by change we can identify), but by an internal shift in our being. A shift that tells us something is different in the way we feel about certain people, places or things. Sometimes transitions precede change. When we decide to look for a new job, we don't just wake up one morning and make the change. Rather, it is usually an idea that unfolds over time. We may have been unhappy in our job for some time, wanting

more responsibility, a higher salary, a new boss or a new career path. Once we have firmly established the idea, we are ready to make the change.

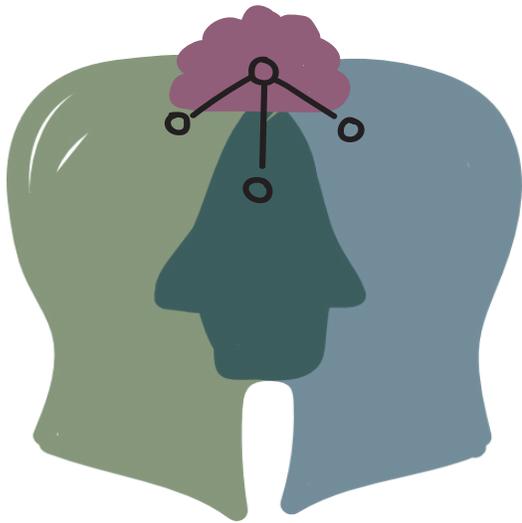


We are constantly living in transition and the only constant in life is change. It is important to honor this energy and support it. Transition periods can be incredibly productive and fulfilling periods of our lives, if we remain present with our thoughts and feelings and let them go.

“The art of life lies in a constant readjustment to our surroundings.”

-Kakuzō Okakura

Cognitive Empathy



Change is often the most necessary and most challenging aspect of being a leader. A leader must quickly assess and appropriately adapt to new challenges. This can be difficult because your team is constantly growing and changing, and even the smallest change can deeply affect your team.

Cognitive empathy involves perceiving and understanding the emotions of another. An effective leader can accurately anticipate how someone will react emotionally and behaviorally in a given set of circumstances and develop an approach that will work best for that individual.

Often, when employees see consultants come marching through the doors, they view them with an equal mix of curiosity, fear and disdain. This is because consultants herald change and the natural reaction is resistance. When circumstances shift away from the familiar and force us into the unknown, our reactions are both psychological and physiological. We feel stress, anxiety and uncertainty, which manifest as resistance.

Rather than simply addressing the symptoms of resistance (complaining, withdrawal, etc), an effort should be made to understand the root cause. When this is discovered, one can truly empathize and help individuals move along the path to change, in a way that engages them.

To effectively lead people through a transition process, it is critical to be aware of where you and others are in the transition process. People experience transition differently because of their personal experience with past changes, how they are affected by the current change and where they lie in the levels of an organization.

In addition, it is vital to honestly and openly communicate all aspects of the change. Presenting a clear plan helps people understand how they can actively participate in helping achieve the desired results. Moreover, when people feel they can safely voice their opinions, perceptions, questions and concerns with leaders who listen and openly accept and value their feedback, this engenders a collaborative approach to problem solving. Providing this support will promote resiliency and creativity in the rapidly changing environment.

Acceptance

“The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change.”

-Carl Rogers

Acceptance is the first step towards change. When we accept what is, meaningful and lasting change can take place. Acceptance is a deep, receptive and honest process that requires we accept something completely, without judgment. It is about clearly and compassionately acknowledging what is, right now.

There are certain things in life that cannot be changed, and some that can be- often only with sustained effort. This recognition is reflected in the Serenity Prayer of Alcoholics Anonymous: “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; the courage to change the things I can; and the wisdom to know the difference.”

Acceptance involves reminding ourselves that whatever is happening now is the result of a very long chain of events. Everything that has happened in the past has worked together to bring us to this present moment. No “one” decision created our present reality. There is a balance between the choices we have made and the choices others have made in creating the present reality. While some situations in life are wrong or unjust, many more situations require us to take responsibility for the role we have played. With recognition and acceptance of the power that we have in creating our present realities, may come a sense of guilt or shame over having made poor decisions in the past. If we deny the role we have played, we are missing a valuable opportunity to learn important lessons.

When we operate from a stance of acceptance and mindfulness, we are able to respond to situations in new ways and free ourselves from old patterns. Once we begin to accept ourselves exactly as we are in the present moment, we open ourselves to change and to honestly looking at what needs to change. This concept seems paradoxical in nature, which is perhaps why there is a tendency to resist, hold on and fight back when we sense that we need to change.

Furthermore, when we accept things as they are, we become aware of reality. When you reach this point of acceptance, you stop resisting what is happening and decide to change it. Only when we come to a place of accepting our current reality, can transformation begin.

Acceptance and Resignation

To accept something is to gracefully and respectfully solve, improve, adapt and see the bright side of a situation. It is truly understanding things as they are. Resignation on the other hand, is to live with this bothersome situation, because we are afraid to initiate change or feel we have no other choice. We simply endure.

When we accept a situation, we choose to take an active role in it. When we resign to a situation, we passively withstand the suffering it brings.

Denial

The more we resist and deny reality, the longer we remain stuck. We must take an honest look at how the choices we have made have brought us to where we are right now. Honest self-reflection can be intimidating, but it is also immensely freeing. When we know the truth, we are able to accept what is and make a decision about what we would like to change.



We only repeat mistakes when we close our eyes, saturated in denial and guilt. We must make a conscious decision to open our eyes to what is and accept it completely. Every present moment is a new opportunity to be fully aware of what is. We have the choice to embrace acceptance or stay in denial.

In Closing

Change often incites resistance, resignation and denial. By practicing empathy for ourselves and others and acceptance of ourselves and others, we can authentically embrace change and ultimately transform ourselves.

In ***Change II***, we will discuss embracing change and driving change.

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A GUIDE TO
Change II





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*On the day you cease to change
you cease to live.”*

~Anthony de Mello

In an age of rapid change, how well a leader embraces shifts in the professional landscape and uses them to enhance the organization's trajectory can be a vital measure of effectiveness. Effective leaders see change not as an obstacle, but as an opportunity for growth. Embracing change keeps us relevant, valuable and at the forefront of the competitive edge. Businesses thrive when they embrace change.

Please consider the following: of the companies listed on the Fortune 500 in 1955, only 61 (12%) remained in 2014. That means 88% of the original companies either went bankrupt, merged or fell from grace due to decreased total revenues. Less than one percent of companies actually make the Fortune 500, which means those that do are the best at what they do. Furthermore, 50 years ago, the life expectancy of a firm in the Fortune 500 was around 75 years. Today, it's less than 15 years and declining. Unfortunately, one of the reasons companies go under isn't because they fail to strive for better, but because they don't ask themselves the right questions and/or are unwilling to implement the solution. As a result, they don't evolve. To sustain competitive advantage is to constantly adapt to change.

An effective leader sees change as an opportunity for innovation and tends to possess the following qualities: awareness, flexibility, adaptability, a positive attitude and diversified knowledge.

Awareness

Awareness involves understanding the need for a change, as well as the nature of the change. Although change is always occurring, when our awareness is scattered, we may fail to see the exact moment when one thing ends and another begins. It is critical to keep our awareness open to what is happening in the present moment, without being pulled away by thinking. With practice, awareness becomes more collected and we begin to see things more clearly.

Resistance can be traced back to a lack of awareness. Studies have found that when companies undergo major change, the number one reason for resistance was lack of awareness of why the change was being made. When people do not understand the reasons for change or do not agree with those reasons, they can create formidable resistance and barriers to change. People need to understand why a change is being made in order to work towards achieving that goal. A potent change leader will communicate the business need and reason for change, as well as what is driving the change, its benefits and the cost of not changing.

Furthermore, it is vital to be aware of and understand our own reaction to change. Leading change by example requires honesty and authenticity. It is important to be clear about our own emotions and thoughts about changes, in order to be straightforward with others.

Flexibility

“Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.”

~George Bernard Shaw

Flexibility is the ability to adapt to change positively and quickly in response to changing situations and environment. It is the ability to keep calm and persist in the face of difficulties, and anticipate and plan ahead, while having alternative options in case things don't go to plan.



Flexibility is characterized by an open attitude. Openness to new ideas, new ways of doing things and openness to the possibility that how things are being done might not be the best way. The opposite of flexibility is rigidity.

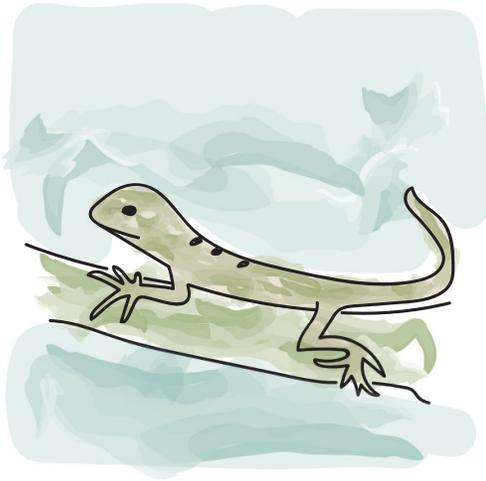
Plans change, employees quit, new hires join the team, budgets are cut and grants are approved. Flexible leaders are able to change their plans to match the reality of the situation and recognize the need to change their course of action at the appropriate times. As a result, they maintain productivity during transition.

Furthermore, flexibility allows one to tap into creative instincts to generate opportunities and find non-traditional ways for business growth. This includes connecting with people of different backgrounds and generations to gain a deeper understanding of perspectives and experiences.

Adaptability

“It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change.”

~Charles Darwin



The modern business landscape challenges leaders to adapt to circumstances, people and technology on a daily basis. Adaptability is the ability to change to fit new circumstances. Adaptable leaders accept change, hone strategies for dealing with the unknown and shift their behavior to accommodate new situations and challenges. This is a crucial skill and an important competency in emotional intelligence.

Adaptable leaders understand that change is inevitable. If people are to attain new skills and make great leaps

forward both personally and professionally, stepping out of a comfort zone and accepting that change is necessary- no matter how uncomfortable it may be.

For the most part, companies don't fail because of changes in the environment, they fail because their leaders are either unwilling or incapable of dealing with change. In fact, companies don't change, people do. Staying competitive in today's environment requires not only the skill and will to adapt to change, but also the foresight to anticipate it.

Many organizations tend to depend heavily on finance and strategic planning departments that revere a five-year planning model. The reality is that long-term roadmaps must be flexible. Today, more than ever, leaders need to be at the forefront of change. In the late '90s, the world was abuzz with dot-com euphoria. In January 2000, the valuation of Yahoo! peaked at \$140 billion. Nearly 15 years later, Yahoo!'s \$28 billion valuation is dwarfed by Google's \$290 billion valuation.

A leader needs to be adaptable and flexible, steering change and responding to change. Adaptable leaders display three types of flexibility which enable them to shift as things change: cognitive flexibility, the ability to use different thinking strategies and mental frameworks; emotional flexibility, the ability to vary one's approach to dealing with emotions and those of others; and dispositional flexibility, the ability to remain optimistic and, at the same time, realistic. Very adaptable people rate high in all three areas.

A Positive Attitude

“When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.”

~Victor Frankl

Regardless of the nature of the challenge, it is important to respond to unforeseen events with optimism. The way we respond to change affects the experience and the results of the change. It is much easier to cope with change if we have a positive attitude to change.

We may not always agree with the circumstances or the details of the change, but we can still choose to adapt to it in a constructive manner. Having a positive orientation towards change involves:

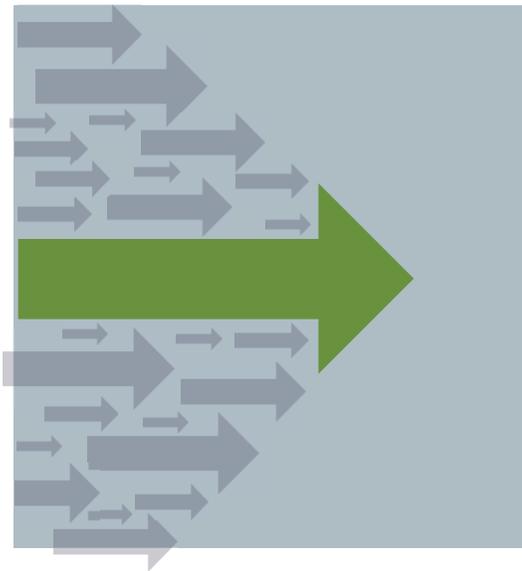
- recognizing that disruptions are a natural response to change
- knowing what we can and cannot control in a given situation
- being innovative and creative while looking for the opportunities that change creates
- recognizing that there are a number of ways to do things
- utilizing all our personal resources and strengths to actively do the best we can

Maintaining a positive attitude can improve performance and outcomes. If we respond positively to change, we can grow as individuals. Organizations that respond positively to change and innovation will also flourish.

Diversified Knowledge

Successful leaders avoid getting stuck in the confines of their industry. By looking at what is going on in other sectors, and seeing what is working and applicable to their own industries, leaders can gain valuable insights and discover new opportunities for growth. In addition, expanded knowledge decreases linear thinking. When you expose yourself to new ideas, you are better able to think outside the box.

Driving Change



Every experience a leader creates, communication they deliver and action they take will either support or undermine the change. In order to effectively drive change, a leader must communicate the need for change and define the results needed from the change, respond to feedback, stimulate curiosity and encourage a supportive culture within the organization.

Communication

Change leaders create organizational experiences that foster ongoing collaboration and communication. These experiences will empower the team and involve

everyone in being accountable for moving the change forward. The leadership must drive the change, ensure alignment and see it through.

It is critical to clearly communicate the big picture. When people are aware of the end goal, they can actively work to achieve that goal. Moreover, it is essential to communicate purposefully. Learn to read others in order to adapt your communication style to suit individual preferences. Some people prefer talking over email, while others prefer face-to-face communication. Noting and adapting to these differences will make people feel valued.

Feedback

During a change, people will scrutinize leadership more than ever. They may be hopeful for change, but they may also look for signs of potential failure. Providing feedback focused on supporting the desired cultural beliefs and outcomes to team members is critical for success. It is also essential that leaders ask for feedback. Feedback will not always be accurate or grounded in reality, but it is the leader's responsibility to ask for it, listen to it and respond to it. Let your team know that their voice is heard and what you are going to do to take action.

Fuel Curiosity

Curiosity arises when there's a gap between what you know and what you need to know to be effective. Moreover, to fuel curiosity is to keep people engaged. In the book *Curious*, the author shares one study where subjects were seated in front of computer screens each divided into a grid of roughly fifty blank squares. When subjects clicked on a new square, a hidden image was revealed. In one group, each square revealed a different animal, while in the other group only a fraction of the same animal was revealed such that once all squares were clicked, one whole animal filled the entire screen. Participants in the first group became complacent after realizing that behind each square would reveal yet another animal, while those in the second group continued clicking because they wanted to see the bigger picture. Knowledge feeds knowledge. When you know more, you want to learn more.

“Creative thinking inspires ideas. Ideas inspire change.”

~Barbara Januszkiewicz

Create Support Systems

Regardless of where you lie within an organization, it is essential to look to mentors, friends, trusted peers, professional colleagues, family members and others to serve as your support system as change approaches. This support will give you the strength and resilience to wholeheartedly embrace the change.

In Closing



Change presents numerous opportunities. It is a potent catalyst for progress. Change helps us adapt to new situations, new environments and new people, making us stronger and more flexible. Every time something changes, we grow and learn new things and discover new insights about different aspects of our life. It pushes us to re-evaluate our life and examine things from a different perspective, often reinforcing our life values. Ultimately, change creates new beginnings. It closes one chapter and opens another, presenting us with new choices for happiness and fulfillment.

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