

Change starts from within: Recognizing your role in creating change

James E. Luckman and Elizabeth A. Luckman
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“Knowing others is intelligence; knowing yourself is true wisdom. Mastering others is strength; mastering yourself is true power.” -Tao te Ching

Recognizing that change begins internally is fundamental to Transformational Thinking. We are trained to look at situations, identify problems, and create strategies to bring about change. The problem here is that we normally conduct this work believing two unquestioned assumptions; 1) *we* cannot possibly be a part of the problem and 2) *we* can somehow manipulate external factors. First, our very presence (we are management, we are continuous improvement directors, etc.) means that we are a part of the system and therefore will inevitably have an effect on any outcome. If we try to create a change without engaging ourselves in the process, it will not be sustainable. Second, as leaders, we have this false expectation that we can control the people around us and therefore control the situation. Instead, we need to look at our own thinking and behaviors and recognize that others will be influenced by what they observe about us.

This requires us to fundamentally change the way we approach our jobs. Dr. Robert Quinn (author, *Deep Change*) discusses the importance of understanding our unquestioned assumptions in order to enact effective change. **Run this experiment:** attempt to change your perspective. When you go into work, think about your role as part of the whole system as opposed to the hierarchy in which you are formally assigned. Think about your supervisors and your subordinates as elements in a system where we all copy each other, and together, we influence the performance of the system. This experiment will make you stop and challenge

yourself to approach problems from a team perspective, taking all points of view as valuable information needed to solve a systems problem.

This change in perspective should also help you understand why blame undermines our ability to solve problems and make change. When we place blame, we are acting as entities that live outside of the system. Blaming others produces a vacuum, sucking away our power to control the situation. Blaming puts the other person in a defensive position and begins a vicious cycle of defensive reasoning that prevents change, and eventually ruins relationships. The individual cannot be separated from the complete technical and social system and therefore should not be blamed for the system performance. If you and the other party can change the system, you will remove the problem together. This is a sustainable change.

Why is it important for us to change?

People copy people. In his book *Influence Science and Practice*, Dr. Robert Cialdini discusses the concept of social proof. A very simple explanation of this is that when we are in a group of people, we are far more likely to mimic the group's behavior than to act independently. This is especially important for people who hold a leadership role because leaders set examples for behavior in organizations. Through your actions, you can leverage the system that can grow from the capabilities of the organization. **Run this experiment:** Tomorrow, instead of offering your opinion of a real life problem or situation, stay in a questioning mode to find out what the other people know. Ask open ended questions and listen carefully. Observe how others are encouraged by your listening and questioning skills. They often feel greater respect from you. People want to have a clear goal, be challenged to build skills while attaining that goal, and be recognized for their contribution. The leader is responsible for enabling their employees by creating job responsibilities that have these three elements.

Multipliers: How the best leaders make everyone smarter, by Liz Wiseman with Greg McKeown, is a book that emphasizes the impact leaders have on their organization, often without recognizing what they are doing. We all have worked for leaders that can be described as Multipliers – those that can stretch what people have to offer. We also probably had some good stories of the Diminishers – those that will look important while those around them have lost energy and are disengaged. All leaders want to be successful. The Multipliers are able to achieve that success by increasing the energy of the organization, deploying responsibility effectively, and providing the right type of feedback to the people in the system so that people can go beyond their personal limitations. Diminishers often take all the credit, are not great at engagement, and delegate tasks to their people. The skills and capability of their people are not used, causing reduced energy.

Most of us do not like to be told what to do, and we want the freedom to make our own decisions. When we see the clarity of an achievable goal, feel that we are the person responsible to achieve the goal, and use our skills to achieve the goal, we are energized. We need to have challenges and we need to be recognized for our accomplishments.

How will your personal change lead to performance improvements in your organization?

The potential of your organization is far greater than you can ultimately imagine. But you are not going to see that potential because of your current paradigms of leadership. *Change is not a program that you force everyone to believe in. Change is about continuously building your skills and the capabilities of people in your organization.* Sustainable change comes from within the individuals that make up the organization and the interactions they have with the people around them. You create change in your organization by beginning to change your own behavior.

What are the long term expectations from this kind of change?

This process will lead to positive and sustainable change in the organization, in specific business results, and in you. We have seen changes occur in the following ways. At the organizational level, you will see each person in the system moving beyond their self-imposed limitations – and therefore the limitations of the organization. They will respond differently to daily stimuli and solve problems collaboratively. People will begin to take on responsibility for problems outside of their business units. You will notice increased energy in the people and therefore in the organization. And ultimately, the organization will be able to respond more quickly to problems and customer issues. You will develop a learning organization that is able to execute continuous improvement.

You may not be able to understand what has caused the higher performance level. You will see rapid performance improvement in processes and problem solving. You will want to look for small wins because those wins will build on each other to produce sustainable change. You will see PDCA being built into the framework of the organization.

And finally, **you** will feel the change. You will be more relaxed and the system you have enabled will be solving problems for you. You will not have to come into work prepared to fight fires each day. Instead, you will have time to reflect, be strategic, and look at the bigger picture for the development of the business. You will find yourself becoming more curious about what is happening in the organization, and therefore asking more effective open ended questions to drive the learning and continuous improvement process. And you will enhance your relationship with your employees. You will have better communication and a more open and honest relationship built on trust. You will have fun with your work and your people.

What is next?

Challenge yourself over the course of the next month to think about how you can change yourself. What behaviors would you like to see yourself exhibit? Practice them. Select a trusted partner, discuss your intentions, and get some feedback.

In our next article, we will provide scientific explanations of why this is difficult and offer additional concepts on how to change your perspective and your habits. In the meantime, challenge yourself and share your experiences with us!

References

“I cannot live without books.” – Thomas Jefferson

We are avid readers. We would like to share some of the books that have impacted our thinking.

Deep Change – Dr. Robert Quinn

Influence Science and Practice – Dr. Robert Cialdini

Multipliers: How the best leaders make everyone smarter – Liz Wiseman and Greg McKeown

Take Control of Your Life – Dr. Richard Shoup

Tao te Ching – Lao Tzu

The Untethered Soul – Michael Singer