

U6A2- Professional Challenge
MBA9240 Facilitating Change - Professor Manderscheid
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PART 1- Change Theory

“Leadership is a relationship between those who aspire to lead and those who choose to follow.”
from “The Leadership Challenge” by James Kouzes and Barry Posner (2002)

Peter Senge (1994) cites five disciplines a group must master in order to become an organization that is constantly learning, growing and changing. Including the flywheel, Jim Collins (2001) presents seven traits that must be present for firms to achieve greatness. From John Kotter’s (1996) viewpoint, successful organizational change efforts must pass through eight phases. Larry Hirschhorn (2002) takes a three-pronged approach, while Continental’s Greg Brenneman (1998) centered his change efforts around a simple “to-do” list. These are all valid and useful insights, but I have wondered if there a single object around which all of these ideas orbit. In my opinion there is and it is leadership.

Does that mean that a firm can move from good to great with level 5 leadership but no hedgehog concept? (Collins, 2001) No. All elements of success must be present. My only point is that the force of good leadership permeates every phase and every element of any successful change process. In other papers I have put forth the notion that change comes down to a matter of getting people to share a belief. How does that happen? Through leadership. Throughout this exploration of the many aspects of facilitating change, I will try to establish leadership as common thread among the authors’ many fine ideas.

As the course moved along, I came to appreciate how the three primary texts complimented each other. The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook (REF) seems to illustrate a set of best practices for thinking in a group setting. Its perspective is one that looks out from the mind’s eye. Kotter’s eight phases take more of a birds eye view of the change process, a clearly laid-out roadmap complete with directions and hazard warnings. Collins viewpoint is like an X-ray, peering into organizations to reveal what makes them tick or why they don’t. My intention is to draw primarily on Kotter’s eight phases, since change is their sole focus, while using the other texts and articles to reinforce those ideas or provide a wider perspective.

1.1- Basic assumptions of change and the role of the change leader

“The process is terribly painful, the logistics are enormously complex, the organization wants deeply not to change– and the success rate is abysmal.” (Hirschhorn, 2002)

Change is an on-going struggle between the forces of momentum and those of inertia. Players on the inertia team include human nature, which tends to fear the unknown and cling the status quo. There is also the problem of existing organizational structures. Converting a furniture store into an apartment building paints a picture of the extent of physical change that is often required. The other side of organizational structure is the ways that people have come to interact with each other and the relationships that they develop. Change efforts often require departments or individuals to reorganize themselves in ways that reduce their influence or power, which in turn leads to resistance and sabotage. Human barriers to change can be far more subtle than that.

Senge (1994) discusses 'mental models' – the assumptions that people hold that may or may not be congruent with change efforts.

On the side of momentum, a strong leader is both coach and player, guiding the forces of change throughout the long process that starts with urgency and ends with the new culture firmly in place. The leader can harness an outside threat– competition or technological change, for instance– to overcome the natural tendency to not want to change. He or she can muster the authority to force change, then create and preach a new vision that inspires people to action. After that, the forces of momentum must be used to keep inertia at bay. Success breeds success. If people see that the new ideas work, they will continue to follow. If not, they won't. If they think they have finished the job when they haven't, inertia and regression will return like the tide. (Kotter, 1996) If all those obstacles can be overcome, change will win out. The one constant factor that must never sway from the side of momentum is the presence of the change leader. He or she is the engine that keeps change moving. Collins (2001) uses the analogy of a flywheel to represent the momentum of change. Everyone involved helps to push it forward, but they do so because they have been inspired to do so by a good leader.

1.2- Setting the vision

During our interview, Mr. Wise and I spent a good deal of time discussing the importance of vision in GPU's transition to deregulated electric utility. His approach was consistent in almost every way with the recommendations of Kotter. The "Leadership at all Levels" vision included not just a compelling reason to take up the cause of change, but a clear sense of what the outcome would be, along with understandable strategies and tactics to get from here to there. Considering the enormity of the task at hand, the vision was concise and easy to grasp. "Whenever you cannot describe the vision in five minutes or less and get a reaction that signifies both understanding and interest, you are in for trouble." (Kotter, 1996, pg.9)

It was stressed that "communication was the key" and Mr. Wise took every opportunity and used every available channel to constantly preach the message. Also consistent with Kotter were the obstacles that the vision needed to overcome. There was a great deal of complacency, even cynicism among the employees. Long-standing organizational structures, including union labor, initially appeared to be cast in concrete. Whatever the forces aligned against it, a successful vision must inspire others to overcome those forces.

1.3- How change is implemented and measured

Change is implemented by empowered employees coordinating their efforts around a shared belief and understanding of the change vision. I have nothing to add to that other than to comment again on the importance of inspired leadership. At this point, the leader plays a role that is a cross between an offensive guard and a supply sergeant. The forces of inertia will still threaten change. As empowered employees run with the ball, the guard runs along side, shielding them from those who would tackle them. That means backing up employee actions that are in line with the vision and supporting their calls for altering existing structures and practices that are no longer appropriate. The leader is a supply sergeant in that empowered employees are always going to need resources. Teams will come up with great ideas that need funding, authority, materials, space and cooperation. The leader must be in a position to make sure they have what they need.

The matter of measuring the progress of change seems to be different from organization to organization. In the case of Continental Airlines chronicled by Greg Brenneman (1998) their measures included carefully tracking cash and a goal to perform in the top 50% on key Department of Transportation metrics. Nucor measured its success in terms of profit per ton of finished steel and eventually by domestic market share. (Collins, 2001) GPU created a sort of competition between power plants using set goals and handicapped measurements. The important thing to remember is that each time progress can be measured it reinforces the idea that the change effort is working and worth it. It is in this way that the force of momentum for change gradually overtakes the forces of inertia. Collins makes the analogy of the cumulative effect of repeatedly spinning a flywheel. “Good to great comes about by a cumulative process—step by step, action by action, decision by decision, turn by turn of the flywheel— that adds up to sustained and spectacular results.” (Collins, pg. 165)

1.4- Building skills

Once upon a time, I was tasked with delivering a dear five year old friend of mine to his surprise birthday party at the local Burger King. We had the entire indoor play area reserved and let me tell you, it was total pandemonium— kids screaming, running around, climbing through the jungle gym, spilling food, throwing up. Bedlam. Once empowered employees get pumped up and into action, change can be just as chaotic. People’s roles and their relationships with others are different, daily schedules, normal tasks, you name it-- take the normal routine and toss it in a martini shaker.

In my opinion, it is the chaos of change that makes it imperative that people learn new skills that can help them interact and to propel change in their brand new environment. This is where the ideas contained in “The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook”, (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross & Smith, 1994), can be invaluable in making change a success. This text is among the “Recommended Resources” listed at the end of this report. It teaches how to create an organization how to learn by building individual and team skills. An organization that has the skills to learn has the capacity to grow and change. The “five disciplines include Personal Mastery— in which people develop toward their goals and purpose; Mental Models teach ways to reflect and clarify our assumptions about the world. Shared Vision helps groups learn to develop a shared vision of the future. Team Learning helps individuals to join together to make team accomplish beyond their individual abilities. Systems Thinking is a way of thinking about, describing and understanding the forces and interrelationships that shape organizations. Again, leaders must understand the need for building personal and team skills if such learning programs are to be adopted.

1.5- Managing resistance

I am in a constant state of war with the squirrels. It’s one of the joys of living out in the woods. Mainly, I try to protect the bird feeder from them so that it can fulfill its intended purpose. My point in mentioning them is their relentless persistence in trying to undo my efforts. Those working for change may find many entrenched interests ready to pounce at the slightest opportunity to torpedo the vision. “Irrational and political resistance to change never fully dissipates.” (Kotter, 1996, pg.132) Then there are the more benign threats to change— mistakes such as declaring victory too soon at the cost of losing all sense of urgency. (Kotter)

1.6- Steps of change

Referring to his eight steps of change, Kotter (1996) states that “Successful change of any magnitude goes through all eight stages, usually in the sequence shown. Although one normally operates in multiple phases at once, skipping even a single step or getting too far ahead without a solid base almost always creates problems.” I do not disagree, although based on my interview and other readings in the course, I would add that there are also many paths to successful change. I found many parallels between the GPU transformation and Kotter’s eight steps, but not a spot-on match. Yet no one can dispute that it was a stunning success. The same can be said of the examples in “Good to Great” (Collins, 2001), in “Campaigning for Change” (Hirschhorn, 2002) and in Greg Brenneman’s (1998) tale of turning Continental Airlines around. All of Baskin & Robbins 31 flavors of ice cream have a great deal in common, yet each is different in its own right. So it seems to be with change efforts— every situation is unique. (Note: I have read and understand the sequence of steps described by Kotter, Collins, Hirschhorn and others. I thought it more beneficial to expand and comment on them than to simply describe and review them.)

PART 2- Interview Questions and Responses

2.1- Background information

My interview was conducted at 9:30am on Wednesday January 25th with Mr. Robert Wise, the retired CEO of General Public Utilities (GPU), consisting of three entities: GPU Energy (transmission side); GPU Genco (generation side) and the Pennsylvania Electric Company, (Penelec). Mr. Wise headed the company through the mid-to-late 1990's and lead the transition of GPU Genco from being a regulated public utility to a deregulated power producer, generating and selling electricity on the open market. Those efforts were so successful that the market value of the company’s generating assets grew to the point where the decision was made to sell them, which they did at record high prices. Mr. Wise also oversaw that transition. I was working with one of GPU’s media production vendors at the time and was familiar with those events.

Of all the change efforts I have witnessed, GPU’s was by far the most impressive, making Mr. Wise my first choice for the interview. I considered it to be a long-shot, but why not swing for the fences? Through a Google search I learned that Mr. Wise was still a board member of a regional bank for whom I had also done work. Contacts there were kind enough to pass a message along to Mr. Wise and he was kind enough to consent. A copy of that request is in my assignments folder, so I need not describe it further here.

2.2- Interview Q&A

I was curious to see if the GPU change effort included elements beyond those discussed in our texts and articles. For that reason, I began with a series of impromptu questions, allowing Mr. Wise to share his experience from his own perspective, rather than limiting his responses to the context of our readings. In the process of that open discussion, many of my prepared questions were answered. Those that were not were presented in the second part of the interview. Mr. Wise agreed to allow me to tape record our interview for reference purposes. I also took notes. Where my notes and memory are clear, I paraphrased the answers from my notes. Where there was any doubt, I will referred to the tapes.

Q: What resources did you employ in your efforts to decide where to begin?

A: Professor Kotter spoke to the leadership team early in the process. Michael Hammer, author of “The Reengineering Revolution” (1995) was the consultant hired to guide the effort. Mr. Hammer’s methods had much in common with those of Kotter. Hammer’s method focused on changing the company’s approach to, and perception of processes. They seemed to be more objective and a better fit for GPU. Change is different in every company.

Q: There were many constituencies involved in this change: the government, stockholders, upper management, union bargaining units, customers and the many communities the utility served. As you began to form your initial plan, what was your impression of the attitudes of the most critical constituency groups?

A: The employees were already a bit cynical, due to a number of acquisition and mergers.

Q: Some of those groups had the potential to resist change. What were the biggest sources of resistance you faced.

A: You will find, in most organizations, that 20% of the people will embrace change, 60% will need to be coaxed and persuaded and the other 20% will resist change. Enlist members of the willing 20% to help you persuade the 60%. Don’t waste too much time on the foot-draggers in the other 20%. The good guys get rewarded.

Q: Given the potential for resistance, how did you plan to overcome it? How did you create a sense of urgency among groups that had little experience in the competitive arena?

A: Our efforts would not have succeeded, or certainly would not have worked as well as they did were it not for Joe Sanna (union president) and the enlightened leadership in the union. We brought them into the process early and kept the lines of communication open at all times. They had a say, which they appreciated much more than “being treated like mushrooms. They allowed us to have the workplace flexibility we needed to make these changes work. As for urgency we had no choice but to move from hierarchy to a more team-oriented approach. We had to be competitive on the open market. It was change or die. Constantly communicating with people led credence to that sense of urgency.

Q: (Several of my prepared questions about the guiding coalition were answered indirectly during our initial, unscripted discussion. Here is the gist of Mr. Wise’s response):

A: The change effort began with a leadership team, made up of company and union leaders. Since the eventual outcome was to be major changes in organizational structure— an entrepreneurial spirit based on team-work and structured around processes rather than hierarchy, (Mike Hammer’s model)— we left much of the actual work to the Transition Team. The transition team was made up of the best and brightest from all levels of the organization and members could hold any job. (All were part of the willing 20%) They were trained to help design and communicate the whole idea to their peers. They defined how the processes were to be arranged and worked with Mike Hammer on the details. The result was that the people who were really leading the change were people who looked just like everybody else. The ideas didn’t just come from management. People heard about it from all parts of the organization. The messenger was just as likely to be a co-workers than a guy in a suit.

Q: As I understand it, one of the leadership team’s most important functions is to create a vision of the future around which the entire organization could rally. To what degree was that vision

created in a co-creative way? (A comparison with Senge's "telling, selling, testing, consulting" model)

A: At the outset, the organization was a hierarchy without the mechanisms in place to foster co-creation. Plus, there was not time. The leadership created a vision and spread it by way of "selling".

Q: GPU was a large organization with a great deal of diversity—from top management in New Jersey, office workers in Pennsylvania and thousands of union employees manning the power plants. Once a vision was created, how did you communicate the message to such a widely scattered and diverse group?

A: Communication was the most important part of this effort. We held daily briefings, used newsletters, video and any other method we could. We made sure we communicated with everybody in the company. Personal visits and 2-way, face-to-face contact seemed to be the most effective. We tried to be totally open and transparent to everyone all the time. We could not risk losing people's trust.

Q: Was the initial vision designed to be a work in progress? In other words, did you expect that the vision would be shaped and expanded by the rank and file? If so, how?

A: Yes, we did and it was. "Leadership at all Levels" encouraged people to take the lead in their own areas of responsibility to meet the challenge of being profitable. The vision took the shape of all the efforts people made to achieve it.

Q: The theme of the change effort was "Leadership at All Levels". After implementation of the plan had begun, I recall one of the videos we produced featured employees from all areas of the company who exemplified the values of leadership at all levels. I remember a pair of welders at the Conemaugh generating plant speaking with great pride and enthusiasm about a problem they had solved—on their own initiative. How did you create an atmosphere in which people not only believed the vision, but were empowered to take act on the vision?

A: This is one of the areas in which enlightened union leadership came into play. They allowed us to introduce new ways of doing things into the workplace. For instance, in the past those crews had been run by supervisors. The guys would come in and wait for the supervisor to tell them what to do. They didn't need anybody to tell them what to do. They knew what to do. So the role of supervisors became more of giving technical and logistical support to empowered, self-directed teams. Our mantra was, "We want to break down artificial barriers."

Q: In our study of leadership, we have read several authors, (John Kotter among them), who preached the importance of creating short term gains. Why are short term gains important and how did you incorporate them into your plan for change? Follow up: How were rewards and incentives used?

A: (This really wasn't an exact match with Kotter. They did set goals, monitor progress and reward success, but there were not many clearly defined stages of change.)

Q: Looking back, did change at GPU progress in a steady, gradual way, or did it pass through successive stages. In other words, did one set of goals have to be accomplished before the organization could turn its attention to the next level of change? (Consolidating gains, producing more change)

A: Once it started taking hold there was very little back-sliding. To consolidate gains, each plant was given goals according to their capabilities. Every month, each plant could see how they were stacking up against the others and see how far they had come. This created a sense of station pride and competitiveness. Successes were celebrated with recognition and awards.

Q: I know that the generation units were eventually off and the rest of the organization was gobbled up by FirstEnergy of Ohio. But... while the “new” GPU lasted, post-change effort, how well did your new ideas “stick”? Was the culture of the organization permanently changed? If so, how did you ensure that?

A: From what I understand the spirit of the program survived the sales. Everything we told them came true and the culture was fundamentally changed. I’m sure there have been changes, but I know that when Mission Energy bought the Conemaugh plant they did so because of how well it was being run. It makes sense that they would let them continue doing what they were doing.

Q: Again, looking back, did the changes you implemented produce any unintended consequences, (good or bad)? Were there things that you considered before the plan was implemented? How did you anticipate the ways that such fundamental changes might effect the organization?

A: We set very high goals and in the end we were actually surprised that it worked as well as it worked. One big unintended consequence was that the plants became so efficient and profitable that people wanted to buy them. We had hoped that the generating units would just remain a more profitable part of the GPU family, but it became clear that it made more sense to sell them. They brought record prices.

PART 3- Interview Analysis and Learning

3.1- GPU before the change- conditions, mental models, skills of change leader

On the spur of the moment in the middle of our interview, I made the decision to nix a question on my list. At the time, it seemed off the mark. In hindsight, I wish I had kept it. The question was, “ Was this the first time you led a large organizational change or did you have previous experience?” Mr. Wise is obviously a skilled and inspired change leader, but whether that came from previous experience or not I do not know.

The situation at GPU at the outset of the change initiative has been touched on earlier, noting the presence of underlying cynicism of edicts from on high. This is just conjecture on my part, but the mental models of many GPU employees at that time may have been more bureaucratic than entrepreneurial. I am making that assumption since I find it common in organizations that are shielded from competition. This is another manifestation of the natural human tendency to avoid change. Without the danger of the wolf at the door, there is less urgency to be lean, mean and competitive.

3.2- The need for and readiness for change

The employees of GPU Genco really had very little choice in making this massive cultural change. They either had to learn to produce power in a highly competitive environment or the plants would close. In no way, shape or form does this “automatic sense of urgency” diminish the credit that “Leadership at all Levels” deserves. The company could just as easily have

opened a trading floor at headquarters, dictating from on high when, where and by whom there electricity for that day would come– whipping employees into submission if they failed. That would have been a disaster. “Leadership at all Levels” was successful because it was enlightened and in alignment with the best aspects of human nature.

3.3- Were interview responses consistent with learning?

Very much so. As a matter of fact, more than three quarters of my prepared, text-based questions were answered during the informal first part of our interview. However, that does not mean that GPU’s plan matched Kotter, Collins or anyone else in exact detail. It was based on Michael Hammer’s model and, as Mr. Wise pointed out, change is different in every company.

3.4- What helped and hindered the change?

To repeat Mr. Wise’s observations from the interview, the willingness of an enlightened union leadership made the success of the program possible. If their cooperation had been absent the effort would have failed or been diminished. Hindrance came from the stubborn 20% who refused to accept change.

3.5- Would the change leader have done anything differently?

Were there unintended consequences?

Mr. Wise did not mention anything he would have done differently. The plan unfolded so successfully that the increased value of the generating assets led to their (originally unintended) sale.

3.6- How does change theory account for the success of the change?

“Leadership at all Levels” was not a carbon copy of any of the strategies put forth in the texts and articles, yet all the essential elements were there: a sense of urgency, a strong guiding coalition, a compelling vision that was meticulously communicated and so successful that it became embraced by employees and embedded in the culture. Compared with the good to great companies studied by Collins, GPU Genco did not have or take the time to “get the right people on the bus”. They did not have a hedgehog concept, per se, but were able to get an entire organization to focus like a laser on one clear goal: generate electricity on the open market at a profit. “Leadership at all Levels” did force people to confront the brutal facts. By empowering and motivating employees it did create a culture of discipline. Why? Back to the central theme of this paper: Leadership with Level 5 qualities.

3.7- What was the most important learning from interview?

To paraphrase Mr. Wise, “Never underestimate the power of pride and the importance of appreciation and recognition.” Forcing slaves to build a pyramid is management. Persuading and empowering free people to want build a pyramid and to let nothing stand in their way– that’s leadership.

3.8- Was change theory validated based on evidence from interview?

Yes, for a number of reasons. Facilitating change relies on the skillful implementation of many strategies and tactics. Many of those techniques were evident in GPU’s change effort. Beyond technique, however, I see leading change in terms of changing people’s hearts and minds– of

providing people with a worthy goal that they are anxious and proud to strive for, then setting them free and supporting them while they do so.

In the Capella coaching center I keep a copy of the vision statement I wrote during my very first class. In it, I declare my mission from God: To help people find meaning and purpose in their work. I have experience the joy of finding fulfillment in my work and the misery of being “over-managed and under-led.” Change theory is aligned with those human desires and in my opinion, that is why it works.

PART 4- Recommendations for Change Leaders

(Note: These recommendations are my interpretations of leadership ideas from a variety of sources: My interview with Mr. Wise, Kouzes & Posner (2002), Kotter (1996), Collins (2001), and Leider (1997).

- § While it is easy to focus on managing the day-to-day aspects of the business, your role as leader is to look to the future. Look inside, at your organization’s strengths and weaknesses; and outside for opportunities and threats. Outside forces can provide the urgency to drive change. Knowledge of your own organization’s capabilities will guide you in forming a plan for change.
- § Lead as a servant. You are not the King of Siam. Your role is more that of a pastor or rabbi than an army general. The organization and the people in it come first. Listen to them and support their efforts with everything you have. It is good to be humble.
- § Though it is good to be low key on the outside, you must be made of steel on the inside—afraid of no challenge and absolutely determined to achieve the goals you believe in. A white knight may be selfless and chivalrous, but he is also heavily armed, courageous and determined.
- § Never, ever, ever, ever do even the smallest thing that might harm your credibility. If people do not trust you, they will not follow you.
- § Make sure the initial force for change is coming from, and has the full support of the most powerful people in the company. Sweeping change requires the backing of authority.
- § The best situation in which to initiate change is when you can look your colleagues in the eye and convince them that the organization has no choice but to change. Short of that, they must understand the need and feel a sense of urgency, even fear. The natural tendency of most people is to avoid change. Some will come willingly. Some will need to be persuaded and some will drag their feet. Forget about the foot-draggers. Enlist the willing to help you persuade the others.
- § Keep the momentum of desire for change building. You can never preach the vision often enough or through enough channels. Figuratively speaking, write the vision on a placard and carry it with you wherever you go.

- \$ You must set an example. Your every action must be in line with the vision. If you are trying to inspire your colleagues to reduce costs, sell your mahogany desk on ebay and use the proceeds to reward people or to buy office supplies. Then take a cubicle like everybody else.
- \$ Understand that you are a power multiplier, not the sole source of change in the organization. Inspire people with a challenging vision and empower them to find fulfillment in pursuing that vision. They will take care of the rest.
- \$ No sacred cows. If it does not support the vision, it's hamburger.
- \$ Keep an eye and ear out for cries for help. Those trying to push the change will hit obstacles and resistance that you have the power to remove. That includes getting rid of or neutering the foot draggers.
- \$ Given the power to act, you must be cognizant of whether or not employees have the skills and training they need to take on their new responsibilities. It could be new technical skill or traditional education. It could also involve building personal, interpersonal and team building skills. Use mentors, facilitators and outside resources if they are needed.
- \$ Your ultimate goal is to not just be a leader, but to be a leader of leaders– first among equals. Use your change effort as a venue to help people grow professionally and personally. Teach and exemplify the skills of a great leader so that they will spread to every level of the organization. Leaders can and should be found everywhere.
- \$ Make sure that standards and expectations are clear. Those who meet and exceed them should be recognized, rewarded and promoted. “Never underestimate the power of pride and the importance of appreciation and recognition”– Robert Wise.
- \$ Even if you really are doing great things, try to deflect any personal praise to the efforts of those around you. As Harry Truman said, “You can accomplish anything in life, provided that you do not mind who gets the credit.”
- \$ Remember that the good thing about facing your own shortcomings is that– because they are yours– you have the power to act on them. When problems arise, do not be too anxious to place the blame on outside forces. They are often out of your control.
- \$ No matter how daunting the challenge, be sure to give yourself time to have a life. If you think you are needed at the office 24/7 you are not delegating enough. Learn to trust others. Then go have a nice dinner, walk a few miles, spend time with your family. Get lots of rest. Eat your vegetables. Relax. If you are leading well, the place should eventually run fine without you.

§ Take steps to ensure that the positive change you have initiated will continue to move the organization forward after you retire. As time goes by, the key is knowing what has to change and what has to remain the same. The core values and sense of purpose that drives the company must remain constant, while specific goals, strategy and practices must adapt to changing conditions, within those values. (Collins, 2001)

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