

Using Personality Type to Navigate Organisational Transitions

William Bridges, in his book, *Managing Transitions*, writes that it isn't change that does you in, it's the transitions. He states that change is situational but that transition is psychological; a three phase process that people go through as they internalize and come to terms with the new situations they find themselves in. He also says that getting people through the transition is essential if change programmes are to work.

When leading a change programme, one of the first steps a facilitator can take is to design the process of change or transition, around a metaphor. Metaphors are like myths and stories that provide meaning and help people understand their own experiences.

One can use popular culture to describe change, especially in the context of well known stories or movies. The Hero's Journey is one way of describing the process of transition. Luke Skywalker the young hero of the Star Wars saga, begins life as a simple farm boy. But when the evil Empire kills his Uncle and Aunt, he embarks on a journey to ultimately save the galaxy. The personal trail he embarks on from farm boy on Tatooine to Jedi Knight embodies the idea of transition.

Some other examples that can be used are The American Pioneers journey across the landscape of the American continent. The pioneers made a transition from living in the cities of the Eastern Seaboard to the wide open plains of the Midwest. Similarly in the Australian and New Zealand context, we can examine the metaphor of the Immigrants' journey across the sea to live on a new continent.

In the context of this transition, one can examine what the immigrants were forced to leave behind; familiar surroundings, friends and family, the trappings of civilization. In the course of the transition, many of them brought what was familiar with them, in order to make the transition easier; cattle, foxes and rabbits and some of the crops that they had grown in their countries of origin. Upon arriving in their new home, quite often the reality of their situation was very different from what they had expected. The crops did not take to the new lands; rabbits thrived and became pests. Whatever the circumstances are, whether in moving to a new land or moving to a new situation or process or reality in an organisation, for many people, change is not easy because it means giving up the old comfortable ways. It also means adapting to new ways of living. It may sometimes result in the denial of the new possibilities that come with change. It may result in anger against the drivers of change in that organisation.

An understanding of Personality Type is very important in understanding that individuals respond differently to organisational change. Some are excited and

stimulated by it; some are fearful and cautious and some feel overwhelmed, depressed and demotivated. Understanding what individuals of different personality types want during the transition can help leaders tailor change programmes to suit individual needs.

There are different lenses that a facilitator can apply to gain an understanding of the needs of different types. One can look at each of the individual preferences to determine the basic needs of individual types during change. Introverts, for example, need time alone to reflect on what is going on while Extraverts need something to do; a sense of involvement. Sensing types want real data and a need to know why the change is occurring while Intuitive types are happy with a general plan to mentally play around with. Thinking types want the logic behind the changes while Feeling types want recognition of the impact on people. Judging types want defined outcomes while Perceiving types want an open ended approach with room to change.

One can also apply the quadrants of the Type Table, looking at where individuals get their source of energy and the sorts of information that they trust; the first two letters of the type preferences. Team leaders and managers can then use this understanding to tailor the change messages that they deliver. One will need to demonstrate to an 'IS' for example, that the change can make a tangible, lasting difference in her work whereas one would need to emphasise the possibilities for creativity to an 'IN'. A team leader would need to show an 'ES' how it can make his work easier and more efficient while showing an 'EN' how it can make her work pioneering and fresh!

One may also apply the Function Pairs lens and the Dynamics lens to help understand and manage change.

In taking a team through a transition, one would also need to understand the impact that change is having on different levels of the organisation; the managers, the employees and the organisation itself. One needs to consider the issues arising from the impact of change. The following questions may be asked:

1. To whom should I be loyal?
2. Does the organisation have the expertise to make the changes?
3. What are the hidden agendas and the sacred cows?
4. What are the new norms?
5. Am I just a cog in the wheel and should I even bother? Does any of this make a difference?

Uncertainty, skepticism, suspicion and anger are only some of the emotions and behaviours that team leaders will have to deal with.

To allow for some positivity during the transition, managers can focus on what really motivates individuals during change and how they might be able to re-energise their teams. Motivation to work stems from many factors of personal and social experiences and Type can be a factor identifying the likely motivators for different people. Also, it's useful to note that when change programmes lack these motivators, people resist change!

Finally when a change programme has been embedded and the transition has taken place, it is important to help individuals articulate their own sense of the new world of work. What are the realities of the present situation? What do they need to leave behind and what new identities do they need to forge to survive and thrive in the new reality?

When senior leaders and managers acknowledge that individuals of different personality types need different strategies and motivators to progress during a major organisational transition, that transition will most likely be less painful. When an organisation uses the toolkit of personality type to identify ways in which it can plan ahead to give everyone the best opportunity to get what they need and therefore to bring their creativity and energy to organisational change, that organisation is likely to come through change more smoothly and successfully.

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