

THE NEED FOR CHANGE AT A GLANCE

✚ **Honesty can't eliminate action.**

Recognizing the challenges of change does not excuse the need for it.

✚ **Waiting too long can spell "defeat."**

Delaying needed changes in an organization will only ensure greater problems at the most inopportune time.

✚ **Progress should be made incrementally.**

Nothing will improve unless you set intentional goals, and a seasoned project manager understands how to keep everyone on task.

The Elasticity of Change: How to Endure and Maximize Transition in Your Organization

by Heather M. Thompson

In August 2014, Stanford University's Advanced Project Management program offered "Change is Hard, but Here are Some 'Not-So-Easy' Steps That Can Help You Succeed", a webinar that targeted organizational leaders across industries to assist them in implementing lasting, positive change within their organization. Tim Wasserman, Bob Sutton and Paul Marca led an eye-opening discussion that proved why continuous learning is business is essential for success.

An all-too-common statement:

"Change is difficult. It takes a long time."

Why must it be eliminated from a department's vocabulary?

- When people say this, they don't do anything. It's dangerous to have difficulty as a sole focus, which then becomes a detractor.
- People will often do what's required at the last minute. Using "crutches" like this in your organization will only cripple development.

To motivate participants, a story was shared about a management executive at a large telecommunications company. He observed that they needed cultural change. What was the bigger problem? He stated that "it (change) takes 5 years; we can't bring ourselves to start. That's problematic thinking.

Suggestions:

- Start making a little progress daily.
- If you keep saying 'change is hard', tomorrow - the time you view as when things will improve - never comes.
- Make incremental steps towards getting better.
- Great project managers always know what you (staff, teams, etc.) should be working towards daily.
- If somebody has a goal, it's the PM's job to make progress.

COUNTING THE COST, AVOIDING THE WAR

✦ **Learn the art of “wise waiting.”**

Every answer to a problem won't be immediate.

✦ **Build a diversified think tank.**

Some of the greatest assets within a company are its overlooked employees. You need “eyes” on multiple levels to address and assess what needs to stay or go.

✦ **Reflection can be a leader and an assistant.**

When you, your team or department faces a problem, allow patience coupled with directed thought and intentional downtime to work together for the greater good.

*A change in mindset for immediate use: “Don't just do something. **STAND THERE!**”*

In Western culture, we admire those who take initiative, and our greatest respect is reserved for those who do so immediately when a problem arises. However, a suggestion made by Wasserman during this seminar was to **stop running from task to task without direction.** Reflection and listening are important.

Pixar, the world-renowned animation company, is a famous example of using time wisely vs. using a “beat the clock” mentality to start building their empire. How so? It took 20 years before they actually made a movie.

The companies that scale faster and more effectively tend to know when to hit the brakes, but why should they do this?

1. Some things can only happen so quickly. Don't grow faster than necessary.
2. When you're in a cognitive mind shift, the best thing to do is stop and reflect.

Wasserman gave an example of unnamed American executive. During a time of fluctuation and needing to make more effective changes within his company, he spoke to the top 200 employees and asked three simple questions:

What is wrong?

What is right?

What would you do if you were me?



SHIFT YOUR FOCUS,
REACH YOUR GOALS

✚ **Blend the short and long-term.**

Both the present and future must be considered when you are setting goals. One is not more important than the other.

✚ **Moment of truth:** have you considered whether your team/organization focuses more on the immediate, the distant, or both?

✚ **We're all too familiar with "the analysis of paralysis."** Analyzing something more than necessary will surely kill it, including creativity. Be willing to invite new processes and ideals into your company.

A prerequisite for success is blending short-term goals and long-term goals together for optimal achievement.

We focus too much on one or the other:

- Short-term goals, which are based on what's needed right now
- Long-term goals, which are based on broad-based fantasy

The key is how you bring both short-term and long term together.

When Apple stores were just being built, Steve Jobs fired an associate who bought really cheap bags for the customers to place their purchases in. As a result, Jobs fired her, and he bought bags of better quality instead. His argument: "Those bags were like grocery store bags. We sell expensive items. When you leave, you should feel good about what you bought." The associate's short-term thinking with a focus on saving money clashed with Steve's idea to bring better short-term and long-term needs together: creating full-scale quality and customer service that served the customers immediately, but also contributed to repeat clientele who would notice the attention to detail.

Stop over-thinking!

If you want to maximize creativity, get rid of the dangerous cycle of assessing every single thought, process, failure, etc. Organizations have to get off of autopilot. If you don't, you will do things just as everyone else has always done it.

THE PROCESS OF MOVING FORWARD

🚧 Find an example, apply their strategies.

Rather than recreating the wheel, find a company's solid example of internal improvement and tailor it to fit your own company.

🚧 Show your employees that change = calculated baby steps.

Times of transition are often disliked because they upset one's homeostasis. Develop a firm plan that introduces change in increments and adhere to them.

🚧 Someone has to lead.

The lack of understanding that hierarchy – not dictatorship – is crucial can be a downfall. Defined, respected roles are key.

How Adobe achieved breakthrough

About 2 years ago, Adobe ended Yearly Performance Evaluations, which was their staff ranking system. Donna Morris joined the company as head of Human Resources and found the following:

1. It took 80,000 person hours to do these evaluations
2. Each year after the ranking, the employee satisfaction scores would plummet.
3. The best people would tend to leave.

THE SOLUTION: Morris and others got rid of the evaluations, and-

1. They had employee check-ins instead which focused on giving people constant feedback on career goals and finding out how they are feeling interpersonally.
2. They monitored managers more closely.
3. They took the forms away from managers to insist they look their employees in the eyes when evaluating them.

THE RESULTS: Two years later, costs are down, the worst people in the organization are leaving at a higher rate, and several people who weren't well-suited for the managerial roles they held have left those positions.

The notion of "all change, all the time" is too overwhelming and creates stagnation, almost paralysis. Making changing in incremental "bites" allows people the adjustment periods that they need.

So, what about hierarchy in a company?

Hierarchy is important. For example, the CEO should not be coding! All roles within a company should be defined. Its purpose is not to add friction or superiority.


Non-bureaucratic organizations have people who are always focused on knocking out the friction in the system.


Too much hierarchy is bad, but we must recognize that as organizations get larger, issues can drive you crazy. You WILL need structure.

THE PROCESS OF MOVING FORWARD, PART II

Aspiration must meet action.

Corruption in any form can affect your staff in many forms. Be the leader who stops negativity at its onset and sets a company-wide precedent.

 **Address problems as they are, not only as we prefer them to be.** While an eye on the past and future is critical in leading change, people respect when you don't "gloss over" major concerns.

 **Balance your optimism.** People want a "beautiful truth", one that blends the ills and the ideals of a circumstance. Avoid leaning too heavily in one direction.

Going from bad to great

The best leaders - especially with building & sustaining great teams - give bad employees warnings faster and they have higher performing teams where the members have greater cohesion and admire their boss more.

Positive aspirations are good. However, if you're trying to spread something good, bad things are so distracting and overwhelming that if you don't clear them out of the way, there's little hope of spreading any good.

With organizational change, it's great to have aspirations, but you must "fix the plumbing" so the system actually works.

Embrace the mess

People who try to affect change do so in a schizophrenic manner. Instead, you need to realize change will be *messy*.

We need to muddle forward and do the best we can, knowing that, eventually, the fog will clear.

When you talk about organizational change, don't make things cleaner than they are. Address them accurately. You have to deal with the uncertainty.

How do you do this?

- If you are leading change, **talk about the past and the future as much as you can, and talk about the present as little as possible.**
- Too much optimism gets you in trouble, and too little of it kills motivation when you're in a difficult situation or transition period.
- Disney's research staff says that average visitors are the least happy when they're there, but they are the happiest planning the visit and when they're reflecting on it afterwards.

Onward: the best direction

If you focus on "now, now, now", when you talk about the past and getting through old obstacles that were cleared, it makes people remember what they've done well. Talking about the future is when it's easiest to get people excited.

**Pixar & Apple have the same philosophy:
"When do you release something? When it's *ready*."**

In conclusion, we often joke that we live in a "microwave society" where urgency rules our habits. That same urgency, unfortunately, can drive company leadership to make good decisions into future markers for downfall if projects are initiated without enough directions and large-scale planning lacks effectiveness. The best truly can be yet to come if we are willing to methodically introduce change to keep people motivated and pushing forward.