

# Themes in the Literature of Change

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A number of themes unite recent books on the topic of change: leadership requirements, individual responsibility, the soft (or affective) aspects of change, and responses to change. The books discussed below range from the reflective to the prescriptive and have varying value to people engaged in the work of organizational transformation and evolution.

## Communicating for Change

In *Communicating for Change: Connecting the Workplace with the Marketplace* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996), author Roger D'Aprix focuses on the need for alignment between the customer's demands and the changes that occur in the workplace. His assumption is that today's organizations have a need for change to the degree that their customers have altered their demands for services and/or products. His book revolves around communication within and outside an organization in order to both initiate dynamic and necessary change and to manage it.

Addressing the nature of individual responsibility at all levels and tying this to the nature of a communication system that can support work to meet customer demand is the strength of D'Aprix's book. Its focus on the corporate environment does not interfere with its usefulness to other environments. In exploring reactive communication, which he believes is the most prevalent form of communication within organizations, he looks at the action/reaction/action cycle that kills morale, openness, and optimism in many organizations.

News about a reorganization conveyed by a leader via a memo is a good example of reactive communication. The language is carefully crafted and the memo scheduled to be delivered at a particular time. This type of communication results in a reaction on the part of the people to whom it is directed. They then act (resist, rebel, deny, etc.) and the leader reacts and so on...in an indefinite downward behavioral spiral. This reactive loop prevents the organization from "organizing" itself to achieve optimal results. In addition, reactive communication diffuses responsibility - in other words, reactive communication creates a "closed" system, rather than an open one in which all members of the organization take responsibility.

D'Aprix then examines strategic communication as central to management systems where concentrating on clarity and understanding - rather than on swiftness of communication - is key to an effective internal communication system. Customer demand and profiling must be clearly articulated for communication to be effective internally and externally and to allow for appropriate action.

An important part of the book deals with aligning individual efforts with organizational goals. D'Aprix uses a simple model to elucidate empowerment, moving through six areas: job responsibilities; performance feedback; individual needs; work unit objectives/results; vision/mission/values; and empowerment. The questions he asks in each of these six areas point repeatedly to personal responsibility. His is a refreshingly clear-eyed view, and it may prove useful in explaining the concepts to those for whom empowerment has become an overused and meaningless buzzword.

Finally, D'Aprix looks at four leadership communication roles: myth teller, motivator, tone setter, and what he terms "keeper of the human climate." He provides us with an interesting parallel by using Gresham's Law of economic theory, which is basically "bad money drives out good money," as a model for a corresponding communication theory: "bad communication drives out good communication" - a

deftly simple and observable concept.

### The Human Side of Change

Timothy J. Galpin approaches change by a slightly different avenue in *The Human Side of Change: A Practical Guide to Reorganization Redesign* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996). His opening emphasis on the use of teams to accomplish effective organizational change sets the tone for the remainder of the book. He describes the importance of leveraging the combined energies and talents of groups of people. He also describes how to engage these teams in thinking about change. After examining different teams and their roles, he moves to a discussion of open, two-way communication strategy versus the "grapevine." In the second section of this book, the author addresses what it takes to implement and sustain change, particularly at the "grassroots" level.

Galpin works with the soft side of change throughout this book (as the title suggests). Early on, he presents us with a change management model that explains the key "soft side characteristics" of stages in the change process. According to him, much organizational energy has been spent getting a grip on change through technical, economic, and operational means. While this has been important, he argues, it is now critical that we turn our attention to the human element involved.

In spite of the emphasis on the use of teams at the beginning of this book, there seems to be a strong sense of assumed hierarchical control. Galpin spends a fair amount of time on the leader's role as coach and feedback provider. He is concerned with large-scale organizational change initiated at the top levels of the organization, e.g., reorganization. This volume will be helpful to new leaders and to organizations working with teams and/or implementing sweeping organizational change.

### Breaking Free

David M. Noer is a consultant and honorary senior fellow at the Center for Creative Leadership. In his new book, *Breaking Free: A Prescription for Personal and Organizational Change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), Noer gives us a model of how different people/organizations respond to change. He calls this the "R Factor." The four types in his model are: the overwhelmed, the entrenched, the BSers, and the learners.

Predictably, he believes individuals and organizations need to adopt "the learner" response to change. In the first half of *Breaking Free*, Noer, with the help of case studies, describes these four types, not only from the perspective of the type being discussed, but also from the perspective of people working with that individual type.

In the second half, Noer applies these four types to how organizations respond to change. It is in this second half, and particularly in the last section "Learning to Learn," that Noer is most compelling. Here he brings together different learning theories. Interestingly, one of the most effective passages in the book is his "yin-yang dance of freedom," in which he provides advice to employee and employer (yin and yang) about managing the changing psychological contract between them.

The benefit of this book is his straightforward discussion of co-dependent and victim mentalities in organizations. In his view, individuals in organizations that display a learning response do not see change as happening to them so much as they see it as an opportunity to create what they wish to create. Noer's categorization may be perceived as a bit pat and there are unfortunate self-indulgent characteristics in his writing. However, there is important information embedded in the case studies and in the way he addresses leadership requirements for changing organizations. The book has several helpful appendices that serve as background to the model Noer has chosen.

## Deep Change

One of this year's most provocative and important books - *Deep Change: Discovering the Leader Within* by Robert Quinn (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996) - also addresses the individual and the organization. The author is accustomed to exploring the competing values that exist in organizations; see his book *Beyond Rational Management* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991). Competing values, he says, affect the ways we structure our organizations, deploy human energies, and manage information and newness.

In *Deep Change*, Quinn tackles the territory of change with new vigor. The intent of this book is to guide the reader into a personal exploration of deep change. It is intensely passionate and speaks from the heart, but is unstintingly tough. Quinn employs the textbook technique of putting questions at the end of each chapter. However, these are not questions to test the reader on how much she/he has learned in the preceding chapter. Rather they serve as launchers for the reflective process. Each question segment is divided into two sets: those to ask oneself personally, and those to think about in relation to one's organization. This is a very powerful technique for those who have the discipline to use the sections as intended.

Quinn's basic theory is that we have two choices in life, both personally and organizationally. We can choose slow death or we can choose deep change. The characteristics of slow death are more common than many of us would like to believe, says Quinn. Characteristics he has identified are: the pervasiveness of opting not to make deep changes; a violation of trust whereby leaders and other members of the organization "know" when change is needed and choose a path that creates "undiscussables" within the organization; lost hope and credibility in leadership and the ensuing thirst for a real vision; and burnout, a well-documented behavior in organizations that debilitates not only the individual, but also the entire organization.

Individuals and organizations can confront slow death three different ways: "peace and pay," which describes going to work, doing the minimum, collecting a paycheck, and going home - this is a common response to heightened stress levels in the workplace; "active exit," in which individuals facing a dying organization take care of themselves and seek to leave the organization; and "deep change," which describes a personal and organizational commitment to fight the stasis which organizations naturally tend toward.

The author believes that deep change is necessary for any forward motion to occur - not just to initiate change or to "cope" with change - but to choose direction and alter our intent and assumptions to move toward that direction. The acute observations in this book make the choice between slow death and deep change undeniable. Quinn's examples show us unequivocally that the choice is demanded of us as individuals and of our organizations if we are to build living, vital enterprises. He emphasizes personal responsibility to a much greater degree than the other books mentioned above. Personal choices are tied to organizational choices in a compelling way, covering fear of change, integrity of leadership, resistance, the competing roles that cause tension in ourselves and in our organizations, and the ongoing transformational cycle that we and the organizations we build continually work through.

One of the year's most thought-provoking books in the field of leadership and organizational development, *Deep Change* expands the themes of personal responsibility, competing values, and the desire for momentum in both individuals and in organizations.



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