CHANGING THE WAY WE CHANGE

Change management skills for leaders are more important in today's environment as executives must strategically address the structural changes that are occurring within and across the business with a new level of thinking. They need to be able to identify where change matters most. The 'permanent white water' of corporate life means executives continually operate outside their comfort zone and push the boundaries of their ability to adapt. Seizing the opportunities that change presents and using them as a source of market advantage, while overcoming any natural resistance to change, is often an executive's greatest challenge. **In fact, research shows 66% of change initiatives fail.**

Our talent consulting and coaching work on change and transition helps executives understand their personal reactions to change; examines how transition occurs; identifies their competing assumptions; unlocks resistance; helps them deal with uncertainty, pressure and stress; evaluates the insights gathered on their change effectiveness; creates a personal and pragmatic action plan; and assists in making change stick.

ACTION LEARNING FACILITATES CHANGE

Insight: Change and transition outcomes are more than hard-metric results. It is also how people get those results. Action learning involves working through real situations, reviewing both the results achieved and then analysing the process by which the results were achieved.
Solution: Action based processes facilitate the change journey as they are based on an insightful adult learning concept: people are more likely to act their way into new thinking, than to think their way into new actions. To be effective there are four essential elements: **Creating an experience that engages** - that 'stretches' and adds real value to the company. **Debriefing the experience** - reviewing from a 'results' and 'process' perspective. **Generalising from results** - understanding not just what happened, but knowing what the results mean for leaders and the company. **Transferring lessons to the future** - applying key learning points in a way that helps participants become better leaders and the company more successful in meeting related challenges.

Insight: While action oriented process can accelerate change and embed sustainable outcomes within the organisation there is still a need to ensure execution and learning are fully supported. The experience of actively wrestling with real business challenges means executives work through complex challenges that test and develop their capabilities.
Solution: Process tools such as debriefings can provide a platform for learning. Other steps to accelerate the implementation of new initiatives include coaching and reflection on process and content issues to translate an idea into reality. Defining the right scope is important: You need to have some boundaries around the issues you are looking at. Like any new initiatives, action learning projects need high-level support to move forward. These projects are typically undertaken in addition to the executive's normal job, so strong sponsorship is essential.

Insight: People do not resist change per se; what they resist is loss.
Solution: Change requires letting go of an old identity. This requires clarity about what has to change, candour about the need for change, and courage to make the change happen. Accountability and ownership means change becomes part of who they are. The people who show most resilience during change and transition have: **Commitment:** they strive to be involved in events rather than feeling isolated. **Control:** they try to control outcomes and shape their perspective rather than lapse into passivity and powerlessness. **Challenge:** they view stressful changes (whether positive or negative) as opportunities for new learning.

The Talent Advisors
growing / capability

TENSION BETWEEN INTENT AND ACTION

Insight: Attitudes to change influence implementation. Some people are inwardly committed to a value or person or group - something that a consciously desired change would harm. They can have one commitment to do what the situation seems to require; and another commitment to a conviction about what will happen if we do.
Solution: Understanding this is a key leadership role of change management. A preference to keep things the way they are does not necessarily mean opposition, as those who do hold a genuine commitment to change, can continue to apply energy to a subconscious 'competing commitment.' What appears to be resistance or inertia is really a personal assumption that keeps people acting in a certain way. Uncovering these assumptions can release the ability to change. People rarely realise they hold these assumptions because, quite simply, they accept them as reality. Often formed long ago and seldom, if ever, critically examined, assumptions are woven into their very fabric. Some powerful coaching questions can uncover the complexities of people's behaviour, guiding them through a productive process so they can cope with the inner conflict that is preventing them from achieving their goals.

Insight: Even successful, high-performance companies with strong reputations for effective change face real conflicts from regional and divisional silos. They work hard on cross-boundary connections.
Solution: Constructive conflict should not be overlooked in change management. Intellectual and interpersonal conflict differ. Conflict is constructive when it enhances intellectual depth, breadth and ingenuity. In high-trust cultures, people debate rigorously, but they also cooperate with each other easily, viewing others as equal partners who readily commit to the best overall outcome. As the team accepts no one person alone has a meaningful answer; they know if the team fails, each member fails. This prevents factions or competitive bias. If divisional power-interests dominate, the behaviors stifle shared outcomes. Executives who excel at change-management leadership are effective cross-divisional contributors and sought-after mentors.

FROM INSIGHTS TO ACTION

Change and transition is not smooth, continuous or incremental, but one punctuated by inflection points. **1.** Skills and mind-sets for new ways of thinking and new ways of working are taught with action oriented processes. **2.** Action learning involves working through real situations, reviewing both the results achieved and then analysing the process by which the results were achieved. **3.** While action based processes can accelerate and embed sustainable outcomes within the organisation there is still a need to ensure execution and learning are fully supported. **4.** People do not resist change per se; what they resist is loss. Change requires letting go of an old identity and taking up a new one. **5.** Powerful coaching questions help unearth and shift 'competing commitments' **6.** High-trust cultures use rigorous debate and constructive conflict for deeper exploration, analysis and learning.

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