Leadership Strategies for Change – Week 4 Assignment

Step 3: Create a Vision

Things are really moving along well now. You have the problem identified, you know what change you want, the people around you are fired up and ready to work, and you have a solid team assembled. Are we done yet? No! Your team is ready and they have sound guidance from you on how to facilitate the rest of the group to help make this change happen. But does everyone really know what the end game is? It’s your job to be sure they can really ‘see’ your vision. The more concrete, descriptive, and specific you can be in painting everyone a picture of your end result, the more successful you will be in getting everyone on the team working toward exactly the same end goal.

**Specific questions or items to address:**

Read Step 3 “Get the Vision Right”. First, review the feedback you’re your instructor on Part 3. Use any new information you gained from the discussion and feedback from your instructor to revise and improve Part 3 of your project.

Next, compile Part 4 of your project, explaining in as much detail as possible, your vision for the change you desire. Be sure to paint a vivid picture that helps your team see, feel, and envision the change you desire. Include a description of how the situation is different, what outsiders may have to say about what they see when they look at the change you have created, what your team and employees are seeing and feeling after the change is completed, and what relevant indexes you can use to measure and quantify the change. You may find that content at the end of the chapter, entitled “What Works”, “What Does Not Work” and “Stories to Remember” helpful in reviewing the key points of what to do and not do when creating your vision. Be sure your paper touches on the key elements of each as they pertain to your organization.

Be sure to include at least three scholarly references to support your assertions written in your own words. Do not copy word for word from the course text or any other sources. Your submission this week is Part 4 of the final project.

**The requirements below must be met for your paper to be accepted and graded:**

·         Write between 1,000 – 1,500 words (approximately 4 – 6 pages) using Microsoft Word in APA style.

·         Use font size 12 and 1” margins.

·         Include cover page and reference page.

·         At least 80% of your paper must be original content/writing.

·         No more than 20% of your content/information may come from references.

·         Use an appropriate number of references to support your position, and defend your arguments. The following are examples of primary and secondary sources that may be used, and non-credible and opinion based sources that may not be used.

Primary sources such as, government websites ([United States Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics](http://www.bls.gov/), [United States Census Bureau](http://www.census.gov/), [The World Bank](http://www.worldbank.org/), etc.), peer reviewed and scholarly journals in EBSCOhost (Online Library) and [Google Scholar](https://scholar.google.com/).

Secondary and credible sources such as, [CNN Money](http://money.cnn.com/), [The Wall Street Journal](http://www.wsj.com/), trade journals, and publications in EBSCOhost (Online Library).

Non-credible and opinion based sources such as, Wikis, Yahoo Answers, eHow, blogs, etc. should not be used.

**Step 3**

**Get the Vision Right**

In successful large-scale change, a well-functioning guiding team answers the questions required to produce a clear sense of direction. What change is needed? What is our vision of the new organization? What should not be altered? What is the best way to make the vision a reality? What change strategies are unacceptably dangerous? Good answers to these questions position an organization to leap into a better future.

Far too often, guiding teams either set no clear direction or embrace visions that are not sensible. The consequences can be catastrophic for organizations and painful for employees—just ask anyone who has suffered through a useless fad forced on them from above.

**Visions and Strategies versus Plans and Budgets**

One reason that smart people create no or poor direction for change is because they have been taught that “charting the future” means planning and budgeting. Truth is, when pursuing large-scale change, the best planning exercise is never sufficient. Something very different is essential.

**Painting Pictures of the Future**

**From Charles Berry**

In 1994, we knew we were on the brink of having to redefine what we wanted to be as a business. Major structural changes were starting to happen within our industry due to deregulation—opening up our marketplace to competitors and ending our protection from being acquired by other firms. Deregulation and liberalization of the UK market meant, firstly, overseas competition was coming in and, secondly, there was a chance for us to start expanding overseas through acquisition.

Everyone had their own opinion of what we needed to do, and they didn’t all agree. Some people felt we should become a diversified conglomerate, maybe like a Hanson, the largest UK conglomerate. Others felt we should be an engineering company, where we would effectively become contractors, building and maintaining water, gas, and electricity networks. Still others believed we needed to move further into telecommunications and Internet services.

Our CEO at the time had tried to wrestle with this. He had sent a memo to the heads of our major divisions asking them for their views and asking them to suggest our options for the future. It was a very orthodox planning process. The division heads responded. All their ideas and suggestions were pulled together by somebody in our head office and they, of course, ran all the numbers for each of the suggestions. What landed back on the desk of the division heads was a very dry report with a ton of financial information—yards and yards of spreadsheet analysis on debt/equity ratios, share price, performance indices—the sort of stuff that sends most people to sleep very quickly! A year later people were still discussing the report, generally starting the conversation with “What was figure 3.4 all about?” This would be followed by an exciting discussion of figure 3.4. No real agreement could be reached. People just didn’t have a good sense of what the options were and what they would mean for us.

An “orthodox planning exercise,” as you find it in most organizations, is designed for incremental change. Typically, everyone involved knows their business in some detail. It doesn’t take much to imagine options that are a little different one way or the other. Planning and budgeting forces you to think through the details. It allows you to say “Given what we know, a 5.3 percent revenue growth target is sensible. To achieve that goal, asking Fred to head the X project over the next quarter is a good idea. The Y project will logically be required, and its short-term costs in the coming fiscal year are affordable in light of competing demands for cash.”

With large-scale change, extrapolating from the current, known context is not easy. People typically do not comprehend all the relevant options, or at least not very clearly. What does it mean to “change all the business processes?” What does it mean to become a “global” corporation? What does it mean to create “a more innovative culture”? You can’t plan for what you don’t understand. You often have difficulty even having a good discussion of the issues. “We need to have a culture that promotes risk taking.” “Well, yes, I suppose, but risk taking means some errors, and our customers defect to competitors when we make mistakes.” “I didn’t mean risky risk.” “Risky risk?!”

Often, we retreat into the seeming objectivity of numbers. But with nonincremental change, financial analysis has to begin with specific alternatives and then has to be based on assumptions that are often hard to make or, again, hard to talk about.

To help us grapple with this problem of how to redefine our business, we began by picking six or seven basic options, six or seven broad visions of the future. One was to carry on as we were—business as usual—supplying electricity to our Scottish customers along with some limited telecommunication and Internet services. A second was to be an electricity provider for the whole UK marketplace, not just Scotland. So we would forget the limited growth opportunities we had identified in the other two areas of business we were currently in. We’d refocus and just do one thing really well. A third was to batten down the hatches completely, retrench, and only provide electricity within Scotland with a view to being acquired by another organization. These three were probably considered, by many of us at the time, as the safer options that we could take. The others were much more expansive: to be an international electricity company; a multi-utility, offering electricity, gas, and water within the UK; a conglomerate; or an engineering company. As we started to discuss these options, another one emerged—to be in Internet services and telecommunications.

When we came to look at this again, we decided to develop some very simple dimensions by which to describe the options:

• Sales turnover—what might be our revenue in ten years’ time

• Employees—how many employees we would have

• Customers—how many customers we would have

• Businesses—what core products or services we would offer

• Competitors—who our major competitors would be

• Beliefs—what we would have to believe about ourselves to be successful

• Action steps—what the key actions necessary to achieve this option would be

We put together two or three pages on each possible future. We had financial numbers in there, but for the most part we kept the detailed financial analysis separate. As we went through the options, we tried to paint six pictures of the future and then bring them alive. That was the idea—painting pictures of the future.

We scheduled a series of meetings for the eight-person executive team. Before the first meeting, we sent team members the summary pages so they would have a chance to read the material. When we met, I recapped the main points very quickly, using an overhead projector. So for option 1, international electricity provider, our sales turnover in ten years would be and on through each of the very simple dimensions we wanted to use. Then and on through each of the very simple dimensions we wanted to use. Then we would debate each option. We would ask ourselves, “What would we look like?” “What would be our number one product or service?” “Where might we be located?” “What kind of people would we have?” “What would our ads look like?” “What demands would customers make on us?” “What would we do to respond to those demands?” “What might the plants and offices look like?” “What would we have to do especially well?” “How do we feel about this?”

By trying to visualize the future, it gave us a feeling that went far beyond numbers and abstract opinions. It helped us understand the magnitude of the changes we would have to undertake if we embraced any given option.

Our formal discussions were in four-hour meetings. We narrowed down the options rather quickly. Conglomerate was out, and setting ourselves up to be acquired was out. Where we had identified “multi-utility in the UK” as one option, we began to explore “multi-utility in the world” as another. The pictures we had started were, in some cases, quite extreme, so I think it was natural that people played around with them and created new alternatives. After each meeting my team would put together a summary of the options that were left and what we had concluded about them. The summary was on one page. We sent it to each of the directors. You could almost hear the sigh of relief that they weren’t being sent another Excel file or an e-mail with sixteen new attachments. From that point on, we deliberately captured all the feedback after the sessions and summarized it on one page only.

Some common ground began to emerge. “So, we are starting to like the look of an international multi-utility. What would we have to believe about ourselves to know that we would be successful? How would we compete in each of these geographies?” And the process started again. This time, we tested our conclusions each step of the way. We began to focus on the actions that we would take to achieve that vision and whether the financials made sense. We also sent the one-page summaries to our external financial brokers, who gave us some feedback on how they thought the market would respond if we went down each of those roads. We discussed their comments. We started to get more illustrative about the shape of the company, how we would grow, where we would get our financing from. Our finance director said, “We will need to triple the size of our company within five years if we are going to provide our shareholders with a better return than if we had just sold out.” Somebody else said, “We could triple in size if we bought an electricity and water company in the UK and then we made one other similar purchase internationally.” And then somebody else said, “The pennies just dropped for me! I can now see how we would do this.”

Having the financials underneath was necessary. But the pictures were most important in helping us reach a consensus on the vision. They were pictures of possible futures.

In cases of successful large-scale change, you find four elements that help direct action: budgets, plans, strategies, and visions. All four are different yet tightly interrelated, and each requires a different development process.

A budget is the financial piece of the plan. A plan specifies step by step how to implement a strategy. A strategy shows how to achieve a vision. A vision shows an end state where all the plans and strategies will eventually take you. A vision can usually fit on a page and be described in an elevator ride. A strategy might take ten pages and require a discussion over a meal. Plans could fit into a notebook and require examination in a series of meetings. Budgets could require a large notebook and demand even more meetings.

A guiding team never creates all four elements by itself. Others help. As in “Painting Pictures,” sometimes those others are critical not just in providing information used in the process, but also in helping create the right process.

Budgeting is a math exercise, number crunching. Planning is a logical, linear process. Strategizing requires a great deal of information about customers and competitors, along with conceptual skills. Visioning uses a very different part of the brain than budgeting. As the name implies, it involves trying to see possible futures. It inevitably has both a creative and emotional component (e.g., “How do we feel about the options?”). When you use “orthodox planning” to create a vision, frustration and failure are inevitable.

**Painting Pictures of the Future**

**SEEING**

Someone on the planning staff finds a new approach to planning. With sufficient urgency in the group, a frustrated senior management is willing to try it. The planner works with this guiding team to identify some alternatives (e.g., international energy company), then fleshes each out on a few pages of paper along a limited number of key dimensions. He uses that material to create a discussion that helps others “see” alternative futures.

**FEELING**

Frustration (“We aren’t getting anywhere”), anger (“I can see the direction we need to go; why can’t we just do it?”), anxiety (“Will we remake the company into something where my skills won’t be relevant?”), and pessimism (“We’re going to be acquired whether we like it or not”) go down. A sense of relief grows (“Oh, I see what he’s talking about. I can see some good alternatives now”). Optimism grows (“It could be a very interesting company”).

**CHANGING**

They start to have much more productive conversations. They start to make decisions about an intelligent vision of the future.

With incremental change, visions and strategies are often so obvious that you don’t even think about them. All the work goes into exercises that create plans and budgets. With large-scale change, visions and strategies are the hard part because they require venturing into unknown territory. And if they’re not set correctly, you’re dead.

Without a good budget, you can run out of money. Without a sensible plan, you can run out of time. Without a good strategy, you can find yourself painted into a corner. Without a good vision, you can choose a bad direction and never realize that you’ve done so. You will have difficulty coordinating large numbers of people without using endless directives. You’ll never get the energy needed to accomplish something very difficult. Strategic plans motivate few people, but a compelling vision can appeal to the heart and motivate anyone.

The efficient coordinating function of vision is directly related to the issue of speed. In a slow-moving world, a team can walk slowly with blindfolds, guided by standards, without tripping over each other. The team moves in unison, with their feet going left-right-left at a well known cadence. If the lead person runs into a wall, she says “Stop” (probably after “Ouch”). Then she considers the situation and makes a new plan. The plan is communicated—“We all turn 90 degrees to the left, take two steps, then stop. I (the boss) will use my right hand to see if the barrier is still on my right. Then we. . . .” Now imagine a world in which the winners have to run and dodge walls, and do so quickly. Without vision, and without everyone having the same vision, running into obstacles and tripping over one another is inevitable.

The problem of setting direction well, or poorly, during a large-scale change is closely related to history. Accounting has been taught to managers in modern organizations for many decades. Planning became more of a systematic tool in the middle of the twentieth century. Strategy was not a word used in business school curricula until the late 1970s. Vision is still not a serious subject in most of managerial training. Is it surprising what we tend to do well and what we tend to do poorly?

**Efficiency versus Service**

No vision issue today is bigger than the question of efficiency versus some combination of innovation and customer service.

With the pressures on enterprises everywhere, costs have become a huge problem. Many transformations have at their heart a belt-tightening vision. If you’re bleeding to death, a short-term cost turnaround has to be the focus. But in many situations, enterprises are not bleeding to death, yet the vision is squarely centered on achieving much lower expenses. When this view of the future is sensible—it sometimes is not—it can still work poorly as a vision because most people have great difficulty becoming excited about slashing expenses. Fear, anger, and cynicism grow. Change is slowed, resisted.

There is a way around this problem, and it’s not ignoring costs. It’s crafting service-oriented visions that are impossible to achieve without actions that significantly reduce unnecessary expenses.

**Cost versus Service**

**From Ron Bingham**

A vision focused on cutting costs, streamlining the organization, or efficiency just wouldn’t fly. For the most part, our people saw themselves as being here for the entire community, for the public, for what they saw as the greater common good. That’s the way they talked. “We’re not here to make a profit but to provide essential services to the public.” For the most part, they really believed this, often deeply. And they were certainly not here to make a lot of money for themselves. That is not the nature of state government, and we all knew that.

But here’s the rub: The governor saw a lot of waste that had built up over the years. He felt strongly that the public could not, should not, be funding inefficiencies. For him, the bottom line was saving money so the government could increase funding in key areas like education. For my piece of the action, he assumed the vision would have to be one of saving money. When I began, I was of a similar mind.

So we have two trains on the same track coming at each other. Efficiency is the issue; efficiency is not our mission. After a lot of thought and discussion, I finally figured out that we could and should have a vision of customer service. The idea was not to abandon the efficiencies issue, but to think about it differently, focus it differently. The staff thinks in terms of providing essential services. Most would really like to provide better service. They aren’t fools. They can see that the public is not running around saying “Wow, is the state government great. I mean, move over Federal Express and Wal-Mart, these guys have got it.” Since increased funding was a total impossibility, you couldn’t achieve better service with more money. So what is the only option? Removing impediments to better service. And removing impediments in the bureaucracy inevitably leads to taking out wasted money. It follows logically.

So we chose the services vision. When we communicated that, and did so as clearly as possible, people could almost see themselves helping others the way they wanted to help others. They could almost see a citizen of this state thanking them for their good work. I think most employees honestly became inspired with the opportunity to truly improve the way they could serve the public. Stand aside, cynics—it really happened. The response was incredible. We suddenly had people throughout the organization examining what they did and thinking about how they could offer better service. I remember we had a meeting in front of the governor and his senior team where employees were presenting their visions of how their departments would operate in the future. The social services presentation was especially inspirational. This woman stands up and says, “Our vision is a future where we will deal with you as a whole person, as a whole family. We’ll take care of your food stamps, your training. We’ll help you so you can have a healthy vital family. You will feel cared for and treated with respect.” The passion with which she spoke was unbelievable. She was committed and believed in that vision. She was going to make sure these people were helped. And of course to do that meant ripping apart the organization. Tearing down all the duplicative practices that had people filling out the same forms ten times whenever they interacted with social services. All that would have to go, and so would some jobs along with it. But that didn’t matter as much as community service, as much as helping people who can’t help themselves.

A group from the revenue department presented a future state where people could call in with a question about a tax return and not have to wait on the phone for an hour. Even better, people could get the information they required fast with no follow-up. This from the revenue service! Can you imagine? To do this meant the purchase of new technology—which, of course, can be expensive and would have to be offset by job changes, either transfers out of the organization or into other departments. But the new system, if done right, could be much more efficient, and, over time, save a lot of money.

All this created some disruptions. Because people were committed to improving service, most were willing to put up with that. Of course, not everyone felt this way, but enough did.

The result was, a few years into this, that we saved more money than the governor ever dreamed possible. It blew him away. It blew me away. And, we got more of what was also needed—better service. The right vision made all the difference in the world.

In many places today you have the same problem. Costs are bloated but the workforce cannot relate to an “efficiency” vision. In some cases, the complications are greater than in this story. The workforce may be convinced that more money is available. The management may be unwilling to invest in information technology. The bosses may think customer service is just fine. But in many cases, the vision and supporting strategies are simply wrong. The vision is too narrow—it doesn’t see the whole enterprise or consider all the relevant relationships. Instead it feels like a mean budget. So anger and fear grow. A vision that creates anger and fear among a significant number of people will never work.

The solution in “Cost versus Service” can be used in many places. The cynics are wrong: Most of us get a great feeling from helping other people. So you make the vision service-oriented, something with which people can identify. You put blasting the bad system at the core of the strategy. When people embrace these ends and means, costs disappear as a consequence and you get better service. This idea can work in manufacturing businesses, high-tech firms, financial services—nearly anywhere.

**Bold Strategies for Bold Visions**

In an accelerating world, change visions are becoming bolder by necessity. More and more executives now believe that their visions must include being an industry leader, being a firm that is first into new markets, or being the low-cost competitor. Bold visions require bold strategies, and here is where the process breaks down. Fine, let’s be the best, or the first, or the lowest-cost producer. But how? People without a great deal of bold strategy development experience often flounder. They can’t figure out what to do because it’s different from anything they have done before. They sometimes back away from the obvious because it’s threatening. Or they convince themselves that small modifications in their current ways of operating will achieve the vision—eventually. Or, because they can think of no strategic possibility, they conclude that the vision is ridiculous, even though it is not

**The Plane Will Not Move!**

**From Debbie Collard**

A C-17 is a huge aircraft. Its tail rises four stories. Watching it being built is an incredible thing.

Aircraft are typically assembled in a series of locations within one manufacturing facility, locations we call “positions.” You start work in one place, then when a set of tasks are completed, you move the plane to a second, and then another until you’re done. In the case of the C-17, the main fuselage might be assembled in position A, the tail attached over in position B, the wings attached in position C, the cockpit electronics installed in position D, and so on. For this, you have to have a hangar that’s large enough for two or three 747-sized aircraft to be in production, along with the equipment. This is a huge amount of square footage. Fifteen hundred of our employees would be in this giant hangar. They would be dealing with many, many thousands of parts. It’s an incredible production process that requires complex scheduling and coordination.

The speed with which an airplane moves through the different positions is driven by the schedule. If work is not complete at one position when the schedule says it should move, or if needed parts don’t arrive in time, the plane moves anyway and the unfinished work is done at the end. As you can imagine, taking apart a plane at the end of the line, adding parts, and then reassembling leads to quality problems and delays. But this was the way the whole industry did things. No one questioned it. I suppose it was like third-grade children going to school from 8:00 to 3:00 and sitting in rooms with teachers. Of course you do it that way.

As soon as Koz arrived, he made it clear that the priorities for the C-17 program were to excel in terms of quality, schedule, and cost, in that order. He really raised the bar, setting a clear vision of the significantly improved performance we needed. I bet he talked to everyone about this and got much head-nodding. “Sure, boss.” And I bet most people wanted that vision and did try a little harder. But many accepted the existing basic production system as the only way to do things, and with that they accepted certain problems as inevitable. The mind-set was, “Yeah, it would be nice if we were never out of needed parts but that’s impossible in this industry.” So while people made small adjustments, the overall production strategy did not come close to achieving Koz’s raised-bar vision.

Then one day he stood up in a management meeting and made an announcement. “We are not going to move an airplane until it is complete in position. Quality is number one, so that’s what we are going to focus on. Until the plane is done and done right, no movement. Period.”

Everyone thought he was off his rocker. You didn’t do things this way. I think some of his direct reports, in particular, thought he was crazy. They were convinced that we would never be able to deliver on time if we did it this way. Never. Wouldn’t happen, anybody knows that. Something would always bring everything to a halt. You’d have employees twiddling their thumbs at great expense to the company. You might as well expect cars to be made by secretaries on the fifty-ninth floor of the Sears building in Chicago.

We had all heard the quality speech before, but here was a guy telling us that nothing goes anywhere unless it’s properly done. Koz showed complete conviction that this radical idea was right. And if his words didn’t win us over, all day long we had to look at a plane that was not moving until it was complete in a position. All day long, there it was, not moving. Nope. Sitting there.

After Koz made his proclamation, things began to change faster. The fact that out-of-position work would not be tolerated meant that suddenly having parts arrive on time was critical. Our procurement guys got motivated like I’d never seen before. They started coming up with all kinds of new change strategies for their operation. And—incredible since this couldn’t be done—they started succeeding in getting our suppliers to operate in new ways. So we began getting the right parts at the right time! Overall, people just didn’t want to be the reason that a plane was held in position for longer than it was supposed to. They didn’t want to be embarrassed, they didn’t want to hurt the company, they didn’t want to hurt their careers, and they didn’t want to let Koz down. So they started breaking through walls. As evidence began to accumulate that this nutty idea might actually be working, more people got with the program. More started finding ways to punch through walls. When they couldn’t do it by themselves, they would come to Koz with specific ideas, sometimes very clever ideas, for what was needed and for how problems could be solved. Koz would then work with them to remove the obstacles. So if it helped for Koz to talk to the president of a parts company, he’d do it.

Holding the planes in place eliminated all sorts of bad habits. No longer could we say, “Of course some percentage of parts won’t arrive on time. That’s just life.” No, that’s not life. That’s life as we knew it.

To make a long story short, we transformed the place, and, as a result, quality has gone up and all of our aircraft have not only been on time, they’ve been early!

To this day people still tell this story, from the shop floor to the executive offices. “He said the plane would not move. Period.”

If Koz hadn’t had enough respect and credibility among his direct reports, if they did not feel some sense of urgency or if they thought the new vision was nonsense, this approach would have failed. The foundation would not have been there, and people would have devised many clever ways to undermine the boss. But with the early steps in the change process having been done minimally well, and with his actions probably raising the sense of urgency, a bold strategy helped make the bold vision a reality.

Imagine what might have happened in this sort of situation—and often does. Scenario 1: Koz might have never tried something so bold. He might have continued to talk and talk. His people would have continued to say “Sure, boss.” No bold strategies would have been developed. The vision would not have been achieved. Scenario 2: If Koz became louder and applied more pressure, the frustration, anger, and fear would have grown. He might have demanded that people send him new strategic plans. They could easily have gone into a group conspiracy. “Logical” plans would have been submitted full of old ideas. Eventually Koz would have backed off, either because he was convinced they were right or out of total frustration. Scenario 3: As the frustration and anger grew in the workforce, preventing the development of new strategies, Koz might have become more frustrated and angry, creating a nasty cycle that would, in some way, eventually blow up. Scenario 4: The pessimists and cynics might have quickly won the day, probably by convincing sufficient people that Koz was a good man but naive, or was a bad man seeking only to further his career. Sometimes we think one of these negative scenarios is inevitable. But that’s not true.

Notice how it actually worked in this case. The unmoving plane was a huge visual reminder that new action was needed and expected or there would be a disaster with who-knew-what consequences. Change enthusiasts on the staff probably uncorked champagne. “Now we’re going somewhere!” Others learned quickly that the same old routine would lead to disaster—for the plant and maybe for them. So, many people started trying to develop new strategies. As they saw others succeeding, their faith increased. As they personally succeeded, their faith increased more. Some people undoubtedly became deeply fearful or angry. But a combination of Koz’s unfailing, visual, daily optimism and some short-term wins pushed enough employees over to excitement and pride. Enthusiasm, excitement, and pride spurred even more useful action—and voilà, a “miracle” occurred.

**The Strategic Need for Speed**

Speed is one of the most important strategic issues in a leap into the future. How fast must we go? How much time is minimally needed in each stage of the process? How much time must you allow for each wave of change?

Sometimes we just don’t address these issues, leaving the pace of change to itself, unmanaged. Sometimes we are unrealistic about what can be done in a period of months, often because we underestimate all the change that is necessary. Many times, after a few difficulties in steps 1 and 2, we talk ourselves into avery slow schedule to be “realistic.” All these approaches to time can be dangerous.

More often than not, the question of speed is really very simple in today’s world: The answer is to move as fast as possible.

**The Body in the Living Room**

**From Ron Marshall**

We had inertia. We needed change, and the pressures on us were building.

We could have layered this thing into a very deliberate, no rushing, three- or four-year process: One element of change in the first year, another in year two. This would reduce the amount of flux in the organization. Allowing for a four-year process gives people more time to adjust. We’ve all seen people who adjust slowly to change. Because a four-year process means less of a rush, maybe there will be fewer mistakes, and mistakes can be costly. What if you created too many short-term problems and lost the support of critical supporters? You move a little slower and you have the time to give people a sense of involvement. You might be able to give them more of a sense of ownership. I could go on, but you get the picture—there are many pluses for rolling it out over four years.

There is a really good comment that a realtor made to me, years ago, when I bought my first house in New York. I leveraged like crazy to buy the house. It was a real stretch. After I closed, the realtor looked at me and said, “This is a fixer-upper, a real fixer-upper, a sixty-five-year-old house. Now, you’ve got to make sure that you make a list of all the things that you want to get fixed, and get it done in the first six months. Get it done in six months.” I said, “Are you out of your mind? A sixty-five-year-old house? I’m broke. By the time I pay the down payment, the taxes, your lawyer, my lawyer, I’ve got nothing left. Besides, I’m a disciplined guy. Over five years, I will be able to do what I want to do.” She said, “No you won’t, because after six months you get used to it. It seems to fit. You get used to stepping over the dead body in the living room.”

I still remember this conversation. To my great surprise, she was right. I was wrong. Anything that didn’t get fixed within six months didn’t get fixed five years later when I sold the house.

Something like this can happen to companies too. A slow approach to achieving a vision can require an incredible amount of discipline inside a big fixer-upper. What can happen is that the organization just rolls a bit and then gets satisfied and stops. So if you don’t act quickly, organizational inertia will overcome you. At the first sign of any success—after you’ve put out the fire in the oven and you’ve painted your fixer-upper—you’re tempted to say, “Well, we took care of that.” No more fixing up.

Another problem you can have with a strategy of slow change is related to the corrosive effect—that drip, drip, drip effect. There’s a fear, an uncertainty, a doubt that comes into any change process. “Richard left; am I next?” And if that happens over four years, you have continual instability, which does not help.

I think this is a very big issue. You may have the vision, but it’s crucial to think about how fast you want to move in achieving it. I guess there are times when slow is a good answer—when less pressure is on the organization, when the internal resistance might be overwhelming, when the enterprise is just too big, when you haven’t a clue at first what to do. But that was not us.

We chose to move fast. In retrospect, it was an important choice.

Obviously, you can move too fast and find yourself in deep trouble, perhaps increasing fear and anger to dangerous levels. This happens. But we should always remember that in a twenty-first-century world, the pace of external change is only going to increase. This will generally mean that the internal rate of change will have to increase too. If you wonder if that’s possible, consider this: “The Videotape of the Angry Customer” (step 1) was done in a few days, “Gloves on the Boardroom Table” (step 1) in a month, “Painting Pictures of the Future” (step 2) in a few months, the crucial meeting in “General Mollo and I Were Floating in the Water” (step 2) in one hour, the crucial part of “The Plane Will Not Move!” (step 3) in a few weeks, and the vision in “Cost vs. Service” (step 3) in a month. In all these cases, someone with faith and optimism refused to say, “No, we can’t move any faster because. . . .”

In “The Body,” the selection of a move-quick strategy was informed by a memorable, vivid story. That story may have been told by Ron to his people many times. The image would have become one more element influencing the strategies they developed. You might think that influence would be trivial. What can a story do?

An Exercise That Might Help

If a guiding team does not have a vision for their change effort, or does not have a vision they are satisfied with, try this.

Work with this group to draft an “article” for Fortune magazine about the results of their change effort, projecting five years into the future. In the article, talk about the following:

• How the organization is different

• What customers have to say about the company

• What employees are saying

• Performance on relevant indexes

In doing this, be concrete—include quotes from people, actual numbers, and a clear description of a new product or service or process.

In general, make it look like a real Fortune article.

You might have one meeting to capture the ideas, and then have someone write a rough draft of the piece. The draft would be sent out before a second meeting in which additions, edits, and so forth would be made. You would decide, depending on the particulars of your situation, how many sessions there should be and the length of the sessions.

A good rule of thumb from examining human history, the role of parables, and the influence of the Christian Bible: Never underestimate the power of a good story.

Step 3

Get the Vision Right

Create the right vision and strategies to guide action in all of the remaining stages of change.

What Works

• Trying to see—literally—possible futures

• Visions that are so clear that they can be articulated in one minute or written up on one page

• Visions that are moving—such as a commitment to serving people

• Strategies that are bold enough to make bold visions a reality

• Paying careful attention to the strategic question of how quickly to introduce change

What Does Not Work

• Assuming that linear or logical plans and budgets alone adequately guide behavior when you’re trying to leap into the future

• Overly analytic, financially based vision exercises

• Visions of slashing costs, which can be emotionally depressing and anxiety creating

• Giving people fifty-four logical reasons why they need to create strategies that are bolder than they have ever created before

Stories to Remember

• Painting Pictures of the Future

• Cost versus Service

• The Plane Will Not Move!

• The Body in the Living Room

**Reference**

**Kotter, J. P., & Cohen, D. S. (2012). The Heart of Change. Harvard Business Review Press. https://ambassadored.vitalsource.com/books/9781422187340**