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21st Century Schizoid Change

By Glenn Allen-Meyer

*The essential feature of Schizoid Personality Disorder is a pervasive pattern of detachment from social relationships and a restricted range of expressions and emotions in interpersonal settings
– (DSM-IV)*

A BRIEF TALE OF MISPLACED ATTRIBUTION

IN EARLY 1993, Land’s End employees had so thoroughly resisted a major corporate culture change that the CEO brought in to make the changes was forced out. One employee, commenting on the change-promoting slogans on buttons, bulletin boards, and banners, said, “We don’t need anything hanging over our heads telling us to do something we’re already doing.” Interviewed after his termination, the outgoing CEO rationalized his difficulties by saying, “People just don’t like change.”

While there may be some truth, in general, to

the statement made by the outgoing CEO, in the case of Land’s End what people did not like was the programmatic way in which the change was implemented. Like so many people in so many changing organizations, people at Land’s End did not like the way in which the change was “sold” to them.

BROKEN ATTACHMENTS TO PLACES OF WORK

Today, change comes to people at work quickly, repeatedly, and relentlessly. When change is continuous, we as consultants and leaders begin to think that each change needs to stand out from the last in order to be noticed. This is the same problem faced by organizations as they work to differentiate their products and services in the marketplace. Unfortunately, the methods typically used to make each change seem unique and special also tend to distance people from attachment

and commitment to their places of work. People at work know that they cannot easily say “no” to a centrally driven change. So, the greater the hype and buzz that surrounds a change, the more likely it is that a significant percentage of people in a changing organization will distance themselves from the change and from the organization for fear that the hype will be followed with strong pressures for compliance. This distancing, this detachment, explains why so many people simply “lay low” during major change. This response severs the bond between people and their places of work, drives joy from the workplace, and limits the acceptable range of emotions in the workplace regarding change.

CHANGE AS MARKETING

Without knowing it, we as organization development professionals help leaders create persuasive internal marketing campaigns to implement change. How do we know we’re facilitating the marketing of change? Listen to people as they describe what they expect will happen during major change. In general, they say they know change will:

1. come from the top
2. be given a catchy name
3. mean a new tee shirt
4. be “sold” to them by their managers and supervisors
5. possibly mean a new job title
6. often lead to a new work group name
7. require that current activities be shown to support the change
8. necessitate more reporting and documentation
9. demand they attend more training programs
10. be something they can cope with if they display compliance
11. probably be supplanted shortly by a subsequent change

WHY MARKETING?

It’s what most organizations do. Marketing is a core technology of most firms and an ever-present

driver of contemporary society. We should expect to find that people in a marketing culture and organizations with a core competency in marketing will tend to use this competency to solve a variety of problems, including the problem of how to get people to commit to a new way of doing business. Marketing enables an organization to quickly disseminate persuasive messages for the willing purchase of change by those expected to change. Problems occur, however, when we assume that the people to whom we are marketing change are independently willing to purchase what we have to offer.

MARKETING CREATES DETACHMENT

People at work are not truly independent, free-minded consumers of change. Inside work, they do not have the same freedom of choice they have when they are consumers in the marketplace.

Outside of work, they can say “no” to a marketing campaign simply by keeping their money. At work, commitment is the currency of change. When people do not respond favorably to the marketing of change at work, they keep their commitment, but because they can not easily say “no” to the change—since saying no might cost them their jobs—they give their compliance. Compliance is a bad check. Compliance provides the change infrastructure with positive feedback, but it greatly diminishes the potential motivation available for the change.

Like a bad check, compliance negatively impacts both the giver and the receiver. The receivers—the people or groups responsible for ensuring the gains promised by the change—find that change is not fully “bought into” or that it takes too long, is too costly, or is shadowed by a level of dysfunction not completely identified as being related to the change. Those who give their compliance are often stressed by the gap between what they would

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really like to do and what they find they must do to be in support of the change. When a significant proportion of a workforce complies instead of commits, stress, resistance, absenteeism, tardiness, accidents, grievances, substance abuse, violence in the workplace, and turnover accompany the improvement efforts and the change is less beneficial than it could have been with a different strategy. When people at work hear the marketed messages of change, they know they must either com-

mit, comply, or leave. When they do not see the value-adding features of the change, and they feel they must comply in order to keep their jobs, then the difference between their true feelings and their compliance creates a detachment—a schism—between themselves and their place of work. Schizoid-type behaviors follow as people detach. They keep their heads down, they avoid interaction with the core purposes of the change, they do not speak honestly, and they hope they are not noticed.

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they are willing, able, and even eager, to add value. Unfortunately, constant, marketed programmatic organizational change has detached far too many people from work. Organizational change can help people at work—it can re-attach them to their work—if it doesn't lecture, teach, or force them. Effective change demonstrates to people the ways in which the values, goals, tools, techniques, processes, skills, or competencies of the change add value to the day-to-day work being done at

RE-ATTACHING PEOPLE TO WORK

So, how do we compel people to change in a world of relentless change? Useful answers to this question can only come when we understand that the schizoid response produced by marketed change limits genuine participation with, and commitment to, change and, ultimately, to the organization undergoing change. If we recognize the schizoid response for what it is, then we know we need to find a new change implementation paradigm—a paradigm for change that re-attaches people to their jobs and to their places of work.

People who are securely attached and committed to their places of employment find that

“GOING NAMELESS”

Nameless organizational change (an approach I developed) is about losing the hype and minimizing the dysfunctional reactions that so frequently accompany major organizational change. It is not about being any less deliberate, prepared, or accountable. The following steps can help an organization implement meaningful change without the hype and without the resistance so typically associated with major large-scale change.

■ STEP ONE: *Plan Strategically*

As many members of the organization as possible assess internal and external environments,

challenges, threats, and opportunities. This is a critical component of any major change. Traditional organization development functions such as participatory data gathering and assessment are particularly valuable here.

■ **STEP TWO: *Delve Into the Vision***

Clearly define the mission, vision, and values of the change to such a level of clarity that everyone in the initial planning groups understands these elements to be the change itself.

■ **STEP THREE: *Don't Name the Change***

This may be difficult, and it is critical. While a working title will help those involved in planning refer to the efforts being undertaken, the meaningful, diverse, and potent mission, vision, and values of the change should not be treated as a single discrete "thing." While refusal to name the change may frustrate your organization's change infrastructure, this most powerful step distinguishes this effort from other changes. Refusal to name focuses the organization on the improvement, not on a "thing" that can be marketed and resisted.

■ **STEP FOUR: *Understand the Underlying Value of the Change***

Unnamed change can be positioned as an added value to the work being done without triggering dysfunctional, schizoid reactions in the workplace. Accomplishment of this goal, however, requires careful enumeration of all of the potential benefits, tools, techniques, systems, and processes of the change. One way to approach this step is to continually ask "What will this do for us?" about each aspect of the change. If, for example, the change involves some aspect of work process improvement, then an underlying value might be "to reduce paperwork." While a person at the front line of work might resist a snappily named work process change effort, she is likely to be interested in specific solutions to her own problems with paperwork.

■ **STEP FIVE: *Create a New "Value-Demonstrating" Change Infrastructure***

Help people in your organization's change infrastructure (HR, training, OD, management, etc.) understand that their role is to help all those

expected to change to believe the change is adding value to their daily work processes. The path to this place involves allowing people at work to be beta testers of the change by applying the underlying goals, tools, and processes of the change to real-time, real-world issues. When the fit is not apparent, change agents negotiate the differences, sometimes adding value to local needs, sometimes diversifying and adding value to the change. When people experience the way in which the change adds value to *their* work, at *their* level, from *their* frame of reference, then they attach themselves to the change and to their organization.

■ **STEP SIX: *Disperse this New Infrastructure Into High-Payoff Areas***

Get people out into the organization to those places that will be expected to change. Have them listen, listen, and listen again to the things people are trying to accomplish in their day-to-day work. Have people in the change infrastructure use elements of the change to meet real needs of people at work. Choose high-payoff areas first, where success will be noticed and respected. When other people see success in these high-payoff areas—success that comes from using elements of the change to help people's work—they take notice, ask for help, and come to support the change.

■ **STEP SEVEN: *"Reap the Gains" and Leverage them Toward the Change***

Look for and support the converted—those people who have seen how the change adds real-time value. Don't let them preach, though! Turn them loose to help others solve their issues via the merits of the change.

■ **STEP EIGHT: *Negotiate Differences***

When real-time needs are not readily resolved by applying elements of the change, conduct interest-based negotiation between the change and the local issues. Most of the apparent disagreements between local needs/issues and the elements of the change can actually be resolved by looking for that level at which there is agreement between the change and the local issues. If, for example, a change will require all managers to submit quarterly budgets and the managers are frustrated by this requirement, examination might reveal a

deeper purpose of the budgeting process which is actually valued by the managers. This method of negotiation, so successful in some of the world's most seemingly intractable conflicts, can surely find integrated interests between those asking for change and those being asked to change.

■ **STEP NINE: *Institute More Formal Rollout***

When a critical mass of support has been generated, more traditional methods can be used to formally implement the change even though, in many instances, this formal rollout is in name only. The balance of the change can be implemented at this point without undue risk of stress, resistance, and the production of detaching, schizoid and costly responses.

■ **STEP TEN: *Measure Improvement***

To ensure that your organization's leadership and change infrastructure learn from this process, be sure to track standard outcome measures (cost, profit, etc.) and demonstrate the success of this approach to change.

THE CORE OF CHANGE

A brief review of the psychiatric literature offers a sense that the therapeutic treatment for someone suffering from Schizoid Personality Disorder centers around helping that person build attachments with others. An extensive review of organizational development and organizational change theory, literature, and practice demonstrates the pervasive power of the marketing paradigm in our profession. While the hyping of change may have provided gain during more stable times, in today's world of continuous change, a marketed change is merely another detaching event for people at work.

The nameless approach to change has much in common with civic action projects where people from one nation and one ideology live and work with others from a markedly different background. Even as the visiting workers help local people build roads, schools, sanitary water and sewer facilities, and bountiful farms, they serve as

powerful models for the society which sent them. President Kennedy knew this when he initiated the Peace Corps.

As organization development professionals, we are in a unique position in a unique time. We can continue to help our clients plan, develop, and implement major programmatic changes that distance and detach. Or, we can "get in the trenches" with those we expect to change and listen for the real issues they face on a day-to-day basis. Like members of the Peace Corps, we can find processes and tools from our culture of change that will add value at the local level. In so doing, we will have proven the worth of the change as well as built attachment between people at work and the changes we know will strengthen the organization. Equally important, there will come to be a core of internal advocates for the change who will help implementation proceed quickly and completely.

This high-touch method of change is, in many ways, more difficult than programmatic change—initially, at least. When compared with the energy we as change agents exert trying to sidestep the schizoid, stressed, and resistant responses we often produce during major change, we have to admit that this approach is certainly worthy of the investment. When we roll up our sleeves, and open our personal and professional selves to the realities of change at the very level where it is implemented, we may find that this form of OD is, in the words of the Peace Corps, "the toughest job we'll ever love." ■

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