

**“E” is for Engagement:
Transforming Your Business
By Transforming Your People**

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The purpose of change management is not to create a great change management plan. It is to *engage* people in your business so they can think and act differently about it. If your business is to change as a whole, all the people in your company must realize how they must personally change, at a deep and intrinsic level, to make this transformation a reality.

Just as learning requires thinking, change requires engagement. But what is real engagement? People who are engaged don't notice the passage of time—their hearts and minds are involved, so time seems unimportant. They could be engaged in a captivating dinner conversation, watching a World Cup match, or playing an addictive computer game. It's sustained connection and undivided concentration.

The daunting task for business leaders is to somehow recreate for the people in their organizations that same level of engagement in the business. The leaders must reflect on where people are engaged and where they are not. If they aren't engaged, why not? How can you engage them, and what impact would that have on the business? The quintessential question isn't "What happens if you engage them?" but "What if you don't?"

THE REALITY OF DISENGAGEMENT

It's disheartening to realize that in today's businesses, people are not just disconnecting—they are actively disengaging. A 2001 Gallup study found that 55% of employees surveyed considered themselves "disengaged" from their work; another 19% stated it more strongly, describing themselves as "actively disengaged." It is estimated that disengagement cost the United States economy an estimated \$300 billion in lost productivity. How is it possible to change even minor business results when three-quarters of the people aren't even "interested"?

Effective change management requires engagement of leaders in the process (which is often overlooked), along with engagement learning by the entire organization, genuine engagement in the change at the individual level, and a concerted effort to sustain the engagement of change on a continuous basis.

WAITING FOR SOMETHING THAT WILL NEVER COME

The difference between managing change and actually accomplishing change is the equivalent of working on something versus working in it. Many senior leaders are waiting for their followers, or the "doers," to embrace the ambiguity and uncertainty of change. They want their people to launch head-first into emotional and behavioral change with a clarity of purpose that suggests "you'll be just fine!"

Leaders are waiting for doers to engage in change that they are not willing to undertake themselves. And they wait. And wait. These leaders believe that the doers must internalize and execute the change, but they themselves need only to understand it intellectually. They're wrong.

The doers are waiting too. They are waiting for the leaders to give new instructions. The common refrain is, "Just tell me what you want me to do differently." But in today's businesses, this is not likely to happen.

INTO THE UNKNOWN

When leaders begin to realize that the change they want everybody else to undertake must start with them, they step into the abyss of the unknown. Robert Quinn, in *Deep Change: Discovering the Leader Within* writes of "traveling naked into the land of uncertainty" and "learning to get lost with confidence." Leaders must literally abandon the theories and

practices that got them to this point in their lives, stare into that darkness, and then walk into it.

Unfortunately, this level of engagement by senior leaders is often a missing ingredient. Most leaders have achieved success and have been rewarded for executing flawlessly on what they know, not for embracing what they *don't* know. But only when leaders virtually transform the behaviors that made them successful can they lead the change they claim they want.

THE LANGUAGE OF ENGAGEMENT

When we talk about engagement, it helps to speak the same language. There are four components in the language of engagement:

1. Visualization enables people to see a mental picture in the same way so they can discuss ideas using the same words—and even more important, build the same meaning.
2. Dialogue empowers people to discover the answers in the paradoxes that challenge every business. Because people will tolerate the conclusions of leadership but ultimately act on their own, the way they discover the answers and their own conclusions is critically important.
3. Interactivity allows people to see the consequences of their actions—and their thinking. They can share their assumptions, examine them, challenge them, and then change them.
4. Measurement involves defining the key performance metrics, which helps people understand how you keep score in the business. Defining key measures helps people see how the actions they take connect directly to business results.

CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT POINTS

With the benefits of this “language of engagement,” real change management involves the realization of the critical points that support engagement and change and strengthen the line of sight between the marketplace and each individual. There are three critical engagement points:

1. Engaging leadership to strengthen alignment

The most difficult part of aligning senior leadership is getting the leaders to recognize their behaviors and the need to change. Because they cannot always see themselves clearly, they must be engaged in a process by which they can visualise their behavior both individually and collectively.

One way is to create a visual metaphor that reflects the current state of leadership, and then ask targeted questions that about the behaviors they see, how they've benefited from them, and what must change to achieve the desired future state.

The major benefit of this process is true engagement learning by the leaders, who must assess their behavior, recognize it, and realize how it may not support the achievement of the future state. An added bonus: They can accomplish this without politics, private conversations, and painful comments. They can do it as a team of leaders.

2. Engaging everyone in a “marketplace to me” business understanding

Imagine the reactions of your organization if you dumped a 400-piece jigsaw puzzle on a table and asked them to assemble it as a group without looking at the picture on the box top. Reactions would range from “frustrating” to “counterproductive” to “waste of time.” Think how much faster, smoother, more effective—and more enjoyable—this task would be if everyone knew what the final picture was supposed to look like. We can't engage people in change by just giving them the pieces, and we can't engage them by simply describing the picture. We need the pieces and the box top.

All the people in an organization need to know as much about the business as the leaders, so they can see why they're important. The basic areas of understanding are:

- The “big picture,” so people know why you must change.
- The economics lifelines of the business, so people know critical financial measures.
- The customer value proposition, so people know what your customer wants and needs.
- The core business processes, so people know how those processes shape customer value.
- The strategic direction, so people know where your company is headed and what each person's role will be.

3. Sustaining engagement by keeping the “marketplace to me” connection alive

The next step is translating the visual into digital portals make it possible to extend engagement across the organization. The same results can be achieved by leveraging the visual image with new data in more traditional means, such as town hall meetings, action planning sessions, and work unit meetings. When you can transform the “marketplace to me” connection from concept to reality with constantly updated information and spirited dialogue, you enliven the people in your organization and sustain the engagement. They are no longer simply watching a game in which they have no stakes. They are in the game actively and continuously.

Change is a journey, and engagement is the destination. Engaging people at all levels of your organization assures an exciting, enlightening, successful trip and a much higher probability of bringing the business results you desire from a state of aspiration to realization.

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