



“E” is for Engagement:

Transforming Your Business by Transforming Your People

by Jim Haudan and Don MacLean

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 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?"

Passion, Risk-Taking, and Intensity

When we consider how people act when they're engaged, certain words inevitably surface: curiosity, discovery, purpose, connection, passion. How

many of these words would describe how you feel about your work and your role? How engaged are you? How engaged are your employees? When you consider the level of engagement in your organization, are people moving along mechanically, or are they really connecting? When you consider your role in your company's change process, are you really focused on creating engagement, or is it just about completing specific initiatives? Engagement also presents a new perspective on risk. In today's

corporate world, people are managing their risks to a minimum. But engagement allows — even encourages — people to take risks. When you're curious, passionate, and focused on something, the last thing you worry about is risk.

If you want to create change in your business, you need to comprehend the level of engagement in your company, and then help your people get engaged by connecting their role to the business. It's not enough to simply

change the business model; we must focus on changing the level of connection and intensity with which we operate. As Gandhi said, "You must be the change you wish to see in the world."

The Reality of Disengagement

We all know that



How engaged are you?

Respond honestly to each of the statements listed below.

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Time often passes without notice when I'm at work.			
Outside of work, I often research things that interest me about my work.			
I am passionate about my work and enjoy talking about it with others.			
I understand how what I do impacts customers.			
I understand how what I do connects to the business.			

If you could increase the number of statements you agree with, what impact would that have on your level of engagement? What impact would that have on your business?

it's always critical for people to streamline and execute on changes that will impact their organizations and their lives. Study after study identifies the chief concern of CEOs: their organization's ability to adapt and respond with speed and agility to the changes in the marketplace on a customer, competitor, and technological basis.

see it as an indictment of their past performance. They may infer that leaders believe people in their organizations are doing something wrong; otherwise, why would they want to change?

Another reason, one that goes deeper, is that leaders, organizations, and individuals are trying to manage change

intellectually rather than engage in it behaviorally and emotionally.

Initiatives, strategies, and long-term plans that are well conceived but not internalized will not succeed. Many people approach intellectual change with a disposition of “this too shall pass.”

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 accept personal risks without regard for what others may think, to

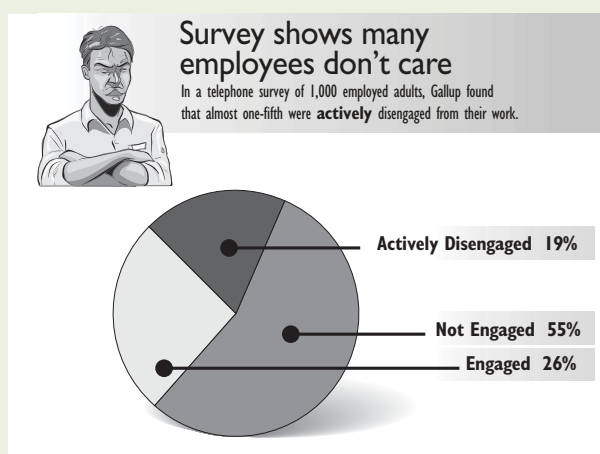
launch head-first into emotional and behavioral change with a clarity of purpose that suggests “you'll be just fine!”

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.

For doers, it's a matter of accepting the continuance of change. When a football coach puts his top players on the field before a game, the plan for the entire game has been well prepared and practiced. Everyone has a role — but no player ever fulfills his role perfectly. The goalkeeper doesn't save every shot; the strikers don't always pass the ball to the proper player. The game will progress once the ball is in motion. The team that prevails is the team that is not only focused on the outcome, but also has the ability to adapt to the circumstances they encounter.

That's what doers need to understand. When the strategy or the change plan is announced, that is simply the signal to *start the game*. As it progresses, everyone will engage so that adjustments and adaptations seem natural. Even the best-laid strategy requires adjustments as



In the face of these findings, it's disheartening to realize that, in today's businesses, people are disconnecting. They are actively disengaging rather than actively engaging. A 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 costs the United States economy an estimated \$300 billion in lost productivity annually. How is it possible to change even minor business results when three-quarters of the people aren't even “interested”?

Why are people opting not to participate? Some people react to change adversely because they

the marketplace serves up new challenges.

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 forward.

Unfortunately, this level of engagement by senior leaders is often a missing ingredient. There is no question that senior leaders can develop effective change plans. Most of them, however, 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.

Bridging the Canyon

The "Disengagement Canyon" below represents the gulf between the leaders and the doers of an organization and their connection to business-critical issues. There's a huge canyon between a company's vision, mission, and strategic direction as seen by senior leadership and the "real world" that is perceived by people who do the work. The "bridge" must be built by facing reality and committing to changing deeply, personally, and fearlessly. To do this, we need to use several components.

- **Visualization** enables systems thinking, the assimilation of the whole picture, and the speed of connections. Aristotle said, "The soul never thinks without a picture." Images in a visual metaphor help

everyone see that mental picture in the same way so they can discuss ideas using the same words — and even more important, build the same meaning. Visualization also helps people see the interaction of the elements of a business in a way that makes sense to them.

- **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 decide on their own conclusions is critically important.

Educational consultants Robert Garmston and Bruce Wellman suggested a distinction between discussion and dialogue. *Discussion* essentially means "hurling ideas at one another." Unskilled discussions often result in poor-quality consensus that represents the opinions of only the most vocal members. *Dialogue*, however, makes meaning "come through the words" as people examine their own and others' beliefs, values, and mental models. Dialogue includes suspension of judgment, setting aside perceptions, and monitoring internal experiences. True dialogue empowers engagement.

- **Interactivity** allows people to see the consequences of their actions as well as their thinking. Interactive dialogue allows people to share their assumptions, examine them, challenge them, and then change



them. Just as you must unlearn something to effectively relearn it, you must change “the picture in your head” before you change the situation as prescribed in the plan formulated by your leaders.

- **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.

Leaders can use many ways to combine visualization, dialogue, interactivity, and measurement to appeal to different learning styles and to engage people in the process of learning. Some other techniques currently in practice include *Learning Map*® applications, storytelling, and role-playing or simulations, which are used to bring audiences into the story and compel the presenter to consider how the story will unfold. More active methods include outdoor adventure exercises and competitive games that develop teamwork and help people focus on personal impact. Some companies use virtual group learning through computers, giving people the ability to connect with anyone, anywhere, and learn about ideas, strategies, and plans together.

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 (“marketplace to me”) which is at the very essence of engagement. Within the Change Management Continuum of Define the Strategy, Develop Understanding of the Strategy, and Deploy the Strategy, there are three critical engagement points.

Engaging leadership to strengthen alignment.

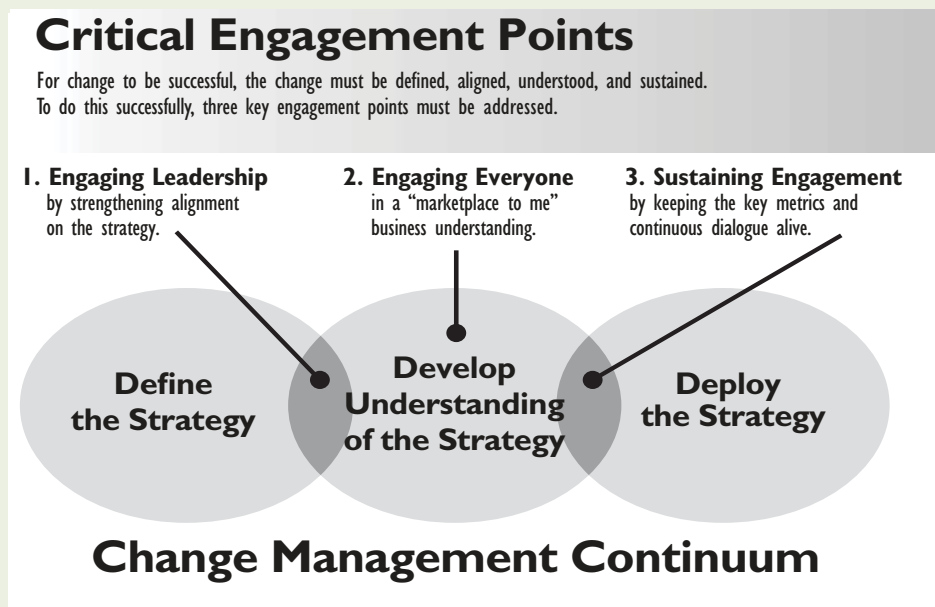
The most difficult part of aligning senior leadership is getting the leaders to recognize their behaviors and the need to change. Because they can’t always see themselves clearly, they must be engaged in a process by which they can visualize their behavior both individually and collectively.

A Fortune 500 company used a unique method to align its senior leaders. This method involved interviews and discussions, with one distinct, intriguing, and immeasurably valuable twist. This is the process this company used:

First, each person’s ideas about the business model, organizational culture, and senior leader behaviors were gathered via private interviews. The leaders were assured anonymity to encourage candid, honest responses.

Then, the twist: A sketch was drawn that captured the current state of the business model and the behavior of leaders as individuals and as a group. This image was, of course, subconsciously anchored in everyone’s minds, but never openly discussed in a way that allowed these leaders to really face their behaviors and talk about them.

Five questions were presented for senior leaders as they looked at the sketch, designed to truly engage them in leading the change they prescribed for the organization.



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.

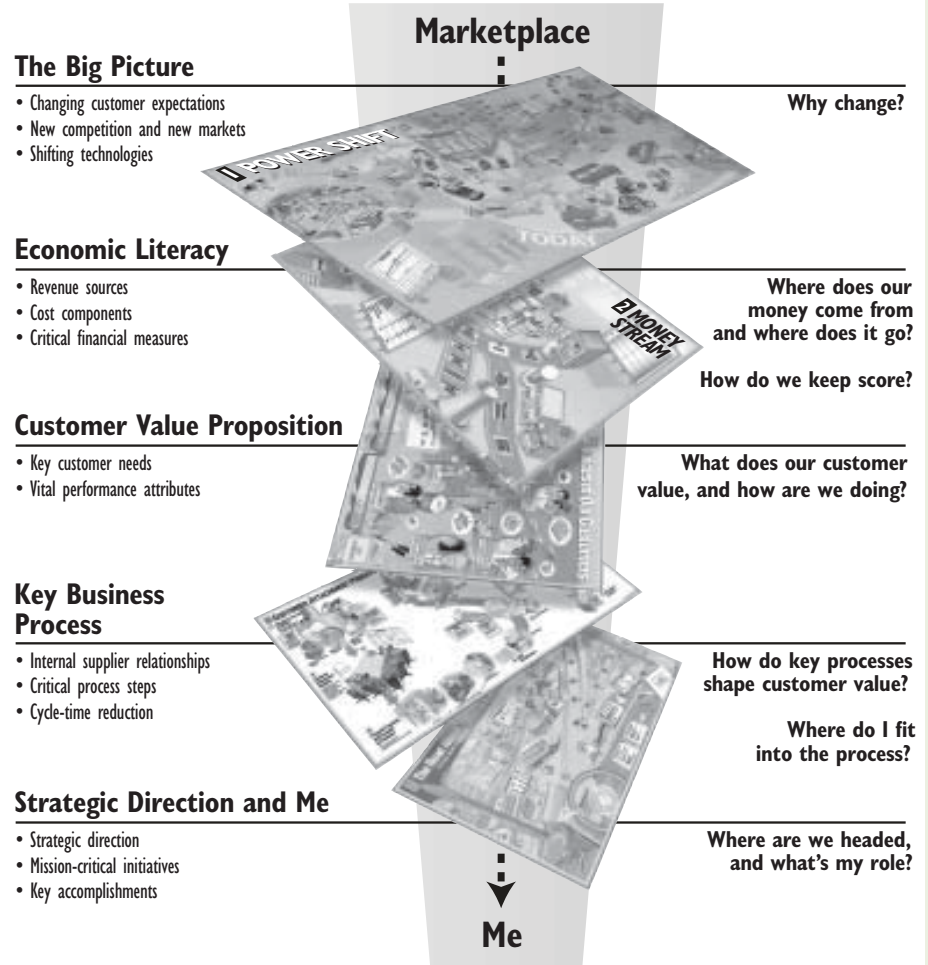
Therefore, the goal is not to manage change, but to manage the reintegration of people's roles, showing them how they connect to the strategy and why they need to change, and engaging them in the process of changing — themselves and the organization.

Engagement begins with understanding. All the people in an organization need to know as much about the big picture and critical systems of business as the leaders so they can see how they “fit” and why they're important. It's only when personal engagement changes your assumptions about the business and your role in it that change will occur. Building a foundation of understanding about the business engages people in the process of learning and contributing.

The basic areas of understanding are:

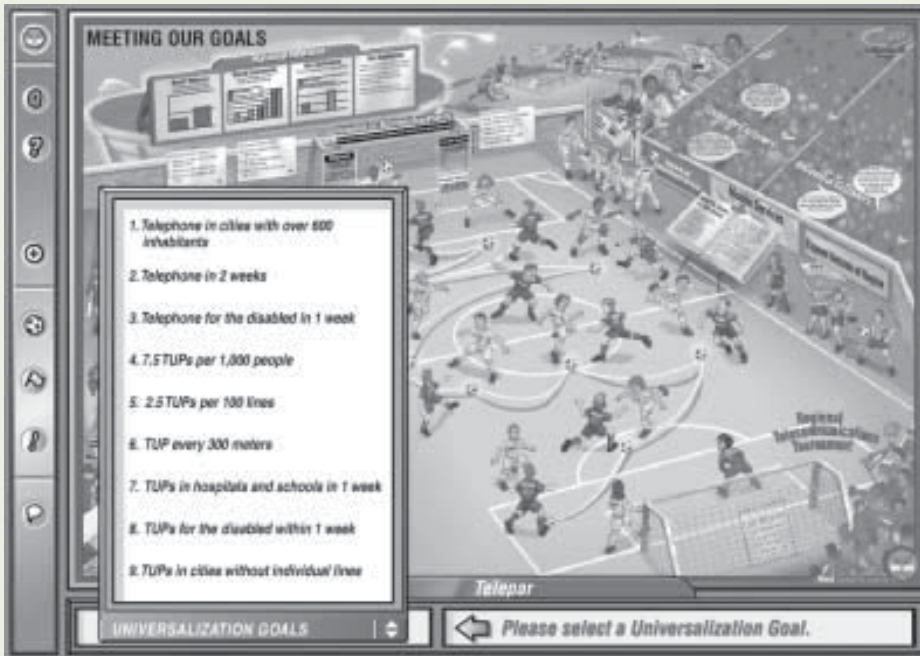
- The “big picture,” so people know why you must change. They need to see what the marketplace “looks like” and how it has changed over time, as well as customers’ expectations, competitors, and internal and external changes.
- The economics lifelines of the business, so people know revenue sources, cost components, and critical financial measures.
- The customer value proposition, so people know what your customer wants and needs, how the company is answering those demands, and the vital performance attributes that are crucial to delighting customers.

Build a line of sight from the “Marketplace to Me”



- The core business processes, so people know how those processes shape customer value and, most important, how each individual contributes to the process.
- The strategic direction, so people know where your company is headed and what each person's role will be. This includes explaining strategy, the mission-critical initiatives that will help make that strategy a reality, and the key accomplishments you have already achieved.

Sustaining engagement by keeping the “marketplace to me” connection alive. Sustaining engagement requires building on the foundation of the “marketplace to me” understanding of the business. The visualization process creates a shared framework or a shared language that is reliable, consistent, and globally understood. Room for misunderstanding is minimized. The visual images that are created replace the assumptions and widely scattered opinions about how business works and the exact drivers of business results.



A digital portal can be used to connect employees to additional data and best practices relevant to the business.

Once the engagement of the business is visually captured, it is much easier to continue to sustain and execute changes by putting these pictures in motion. This means translating the visual into digital portals that are capable of sustaining and extending engagement across the organization, again creating a common picture in the same “language.” Above is an example of how additional qualitative information, new data, best practices,

and strategic dialogue can be continued in a virtual way.

Where technology is not readily available across an 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. These experiences also help to integrate new initiatives or new directions as

the organization continues to evolve, and continually sharpen the focus and strengthen the connection between the marketplace, the organization, and the individual.

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.

Engagement in the Journey of Change

An ancient adage says,
*Tell me; I might forget.
Show me; I may remember.
Involve me, and I'll understand.*

Perhaps it's time to add a fourth line:
Engage me, and I can change the world.

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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