Understanding Change: The Dynamics of Social Transformation

By Scott London

academic literature is brimming with definitions of change and yet the confusion is as great as ever.

Philosophies of Change

The cyclical process of birth, growth, breakdown, and disintegration has been a perennial theme in philosophy dating back to the ancient Greeks, and perhaps further. Heraclitus, who is remembered for his maxims "there is nothing permanent except change" and "you can never step into the same river twice," compared the world order to an ever- living fire, "kindling in measures and going out in measures." His compatriot Empedocles attributed the changes in the universe to the ebb and flow of two complementary forces which he called "love" and "hate." Correspondingly, the ancient Chinese philosophers viewed reality as the dynamic interplay of two opposites -- the yin and the yang. Their keen understanding of change is reflected in the term they use for "crisis" -- *wei-ji* -- which is composed of the characters for "danger" and "opportunity."

While the function of change preoccupied many of the great Western philosophers, it was not until the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that the first comprehensive change theories were articulated. During this time social philosophers sought to make a science out of history and began more systematic analyses of social change. Among the foremost, if more conjectural, of these was Arnold Toynbee's *A Study of History*. Based on exhaustive studies of some thirty civilizations, Toynbee postulated that the genesis of a civilization consists of a transition from a static condition to one of dynamic activity. This transition may occur spontaneously, through the influence of some civilization that is already in existence, or through the disintegration of one or more civilizations of an older generation.

Toynbee saw the birth of civilizations as the result of a dynamic interplay which he called "challenge-and-response." A challenge from the natural or social environment provokes a creative response in a society, or a social group, which induces that society to enter the process of civilization. The civilization continues to grow when its successful response to the initial challenge generates cultural momentum that carries the society beyond a state of equilibrium into an overbalance that presents itself as a fresh challenge. In this way, the initial pattern of challenge-and-response is repeated in successive phases of growth, each successful response producing a disequilibrium that requires new creative adjustments.

After civilizations have reached a peak of vitality, they tend to lose their cultural momentum and decline. An essential element in this cultural breakdown, Toynbee suggested, is a loss of flexibility. When social structures and behavior patterns have become so rigid that the society can no longer adapt to changing conditions, it will be unable to carry on the creative process of cultural evolution. It will then break down and eventually disintegrate. Whereas growing civilizations display endless variety and versatility, those in the process of disintegration show uniformity and lack of inventiveness. The loss of flexibility in a disintegrating society is accompanied by a general loss of harmony among its elements which inevitably leads to the outbreak of social discord and disruption.

Toynbee noted, however, that during the painful process of disintegration, the society's creativity -- its ability to respond to changes -- is not completely lost. Though the cultural mainstream has become ossified by clinging to fixed ideas and rigid patterns of behavior, creative minorities will appear on the scene and carry on the process of challenge-and-response. The dominant social institutions will refuse to hand over their leading roles to these new cultural forces, but they will inevitably go on to decline and disintegrate, and the creative minorities may be able to transform some of the old elements into a new configuration. The process of cultural evolution will then continue, but under new circumstances and with new protagonists.

Toynbee's ideas echo those of Oswald Spengler, Pitirim Sorokin, and other social thinkers who viewed change as fundamentally cyclical in nature. The major alternative to this model is the linear or evolutionary view of change perhaps best articulated by Herbert Spencer, Karl Marx, and August Comte. This interpretation recalls the faith in science and the inevitability of progress which swept through the social sciences in the nineteenth century. Spencer, who coined the phrase "survival of the fittest" (often misattributed to Charles Darwin), saw all social change as the manifestation of a natural law of progress. The dynamic force in progress was, like that in biological evolution, the competitive struggle for existence in which the fit survive and the unfit perish. This interpretation of social change was especially popular among the so-called Social Darwinists (even though Darwin himself was no Social Darwinist and Spencer's theory of social evolution preceded Darwin's theories of biological evolution by several years.)

If Spencer's evolutionary philosophy provided a philosophical justification for individualism, Karl Marx's theories did the same for collectivism. Marx's theories were based in large part on Hegel's view of history as a dialectical progression. Hegel postulated that one concept (thesis) inevitably generates its opposite (antithesis), and that their interaction leads to a new concept (synthesis), which in turn becomes the thesis of a new triad. Marx adapted this model to his analysis of social change, asserting that all changes in society arise from the development of its internal contradictions. He saw the contradictory principles of social organization as being embodied in society's classes, and class struggle as a consequence of their dialectic interaction. Class struggle was the driving force of history for Marx. He held that all important historical progress was born in conflict, struggle, and violent revolution. Human suffering and sacrifice was a necessary price that had to be paid for social change.

Paradigm Shifts

A more recent perspective on change comes from historian of science Thomas Kuhn. In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, which has been called the most important book of the twentieth century, he introduced the concept of a *paradigm* -- a conceptual model or set of assumptions about reality that allows researchers to isolate data, elaborate theories, and solve problems. A scientific paradigm, as Kuhn defined it, can be as all-encompassing as Newtonian physics or as specific as the notion that life exists only on earth. The chief characteristic of a paradigm is that it has its own set of rules and illuminates its own set of facts. In this way it becomes self- validating and therefore resistant to change.

Kuhn observed that as long as a paradigm explains most observed phenomena and solves the problems most people want solved, it remains dominant. But as new phenomena begin to contradict it, the paradigm succumbs to increasing doubt. As these anomalies multiply, it is thrown into crisis. When a new paradigm is articulated -- such as Einstein's theory of quantum mechanics -- a broad paradigmatic shift occurs. In this way, long periods of "normal" science are followed by brief "revolutions" that involve fundamental changes in basic theoretical assumptions. In Kuhn's view, the history of science is not one of linear, rational progress moving toward ever more accurate and complete knowledge of an objective truth. Instead, it is one of radical shifts of vision in which a multitude of nonrational and nonempirical factors come into play.

While Kuhn was dealing with paradigms in the history of science and has repeatedly cautioned against overgeneralizing in applying the concept to the process of social transition, it nevertheless provides a very useful metaphor for understanding the nature of change. This is reflected in the near-universal usage of the word *paradigm* today. A good example of how the word has been applied in a more general sense is offered by physicist and philosopher Fritjof Capra. A paradigm, he says, "is a constellation of concepts, values, perceptions and practices, shared by a community that forms a particular vision of reality that is the basis of the way the community organizes itself. It's necessary for a paradigm to be shared by a community. A single person can have a worldview, but a paradigm is shared by a community."

The paradigm concept illustrates the extent to which social change can hinge on the state of mind of individuals. In *Global Mind Change*, Willis Harman observes that "throughout history, the really fundamental changes in societies have come about not from the dictates of governments and the results of battles but through vast numbers of people changing their minds -- sometimes only a little bit." Because of the way these changes of mind occur, the effects can appear sudden and spontaneous. We tend to think of cultural innovation as the work of small elites, or what Toynbee called "creative minorities" -- leading philosophers, religious thinkers, scientists, and artists -- who infuse society with new ideas. But, as Daniel Yankelovich points out in *New Rules*, "every now and then a new way of conceiving life and its meaning arises spontaneously from the great mass of the population."

Kuhn's model also sheds light on how change operates in the natural world. For example, biologist Elisabet Sahtouris describes how the metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly follows a similar change pattern. In metamorphosis, small cells known as imaginal discs begin to appear in the body of the caterpillar. Since they are not recognized by the caterpillar's immune system, they are immediately wiped out. But as they grow in number and begin to link up, they ultimately overwhelm the caterpillar's immune system. Its body then goes into meltdown and the imaginal discs build the butterfly from the spent materials of the caterpillar.

These imaginal discs can be likened to the anomalies in Kuhn's model of paradigmatic change. The caterpillar's immune system does not recognize them, just as the dominant paradigm in Kuhn's model

fails to account for anomalies. Finally they overwhelm the system and usher in a new phase. Interesting parallels can also be drawn between imaginal discs and the "creative minorities" in Toynbee's theory of the rise and fall of civilizations. As Toynbee showed, the seeds of the new civilization are contained within the old one just like the blueprint of the butterfly is contained in the cells of the caterpillar.

Cultural Renewal

Another model of social change has been described by anthropologist Anthony F.C. Wallace based on his studies of both indigenous and modern societies. In his 1961 book *Culture and Personality*, he observed that the change process begins with a shift away from cultural harmony, a change that shows up first in the form of increased individual stress. A growing number of individuals find that they are unable to meet certain cultural expectations. At first this is perceived by both the individual and the society at large as an individual problem. But as the number of these individual deviations grows, it begins to weaken the social fabric, eventually to the point where the society must acknowledge that the problem is more than personal. At this stage, it is difficult for the society to return to a state of equilibrium without undergoing a process of revitalization. According to Wallace, this process depends on a number of variables:

- **The formulation of a code**. An individual or small group -- typically people who have been directly affected by the stresses in question -- builds a new idealized image of a "goal culture" that stands in attractive contrast to the existing situation.
- **Communication**. The formulators then communicate their vision to others, beginning with those most affected by the stresses at the root of the problem.
- **Organization**. Once the vision begins to attract converts, some form of organization is required to manage the group and implement a plan.
- **Adaptation**. As the new vision gets broader exposure, it generally grows and changes. This happens for various reasons: the initial vision is usually incomplete, especially in its practical details; certain accommodations may be made to broaden the appeal of the vision; and the original vision may include such things as predictions that fail to materialize, thus requiring re-explanation.
- **Cultural Transformation**. If the movement is able to gain enough support within the society, the thrust shifts from communications to implementation. If the "goal culture" cannot be immediately established, then a "transfer culture" is adopted as the route to get to the full vision. If this cultural shift is successful, the stress experienced by individuals declines dramatically.
- **Routinization**. Once the initial shift of cultural transformation has taken place, the next stage is to establish the new vision as the new steady state, which generally means institutionalizing it in various ways. Those in the vanguard of the transformation process may find this last stage difficult and disappointing, but the majority of the population is glad for a return to normalcy so that they can get on with their lives.

Wallace observes that this kind of revitalization can be either reactionary or innovative in its basic thrust. The reactionary mode is characterized by a belief that present problems can be resolved by "doing the old way harder," and generally tries to undo or suppress recent changes that are seen as the cause of the problem. The innovative mode, on the other hand, attempts to get "lagging" parts of the culture to catch up to recent changes that are seen by the innovators as either positive or unchangeable.

In complex societies under stress, there are usually many revitalization movements competing for attention and converts as the culture begins to disintegrate. Wallace notes that the inherent conservatism in most social systems favors reactionary movements. It is common for a culture to attempt a "let's do the old way harder" revitalization as the first response to realizing that something must be done to get society back in track. It is only after the failure of a reactionary revitalization attempt that a culture is willing to risk fundamental change.

This shift from innovation to reaction and back again is often described in common parlance in terms of a swinging pendulum. The metaphor suggests that social change follows predictable laws of motion and that movement is static in one direction or another. But, as Daniel Yankelovich points out, social change is better described as a process of "lurch and learn." In his forty years of monitoring social trends in the United States, Yankelovich had found that society tends to lurch, often mindlessly, in a new direction and it is only after a period of reaction that integration takes place. For instance, in the 1960s young people

lurched away from the prevailing notion of duty to the search for pleasure. Similarly, there was a lurch away from work to leisure. "The reaction of young people to their father's nose-to-the-grindstone way of life was to see in leisure the possibilities of genuine self-fulfillment. After that lurch, they gradually found that the kind of self-fulfillment they were seeking often could be fulfilled better through a certain kind of work than through leisure."

Scientific Perspectives on Change

Some of the most fascinating contributions to the theory of change in recent decades come not from sociology or anthropology but from an eclectic, multidisciplinary group of researchers at the frontiers of quantum physics, general systems theory, and the emerging theories of chaos and complexity. Nobel laureates such as chemist Ilya Prigogine, physicist Murray Gell-Mann, and economist Kenneth Arrow, along with of host of others engaged in the study of complex systems have pioneered a new approach to understanding the instability and fluctuations that characterize seemingly random events, be it at the level of molecules, of biological systems, or even of social systems.

The science of complexity can be loosely divided into two disciplines. The first is nonequilibrium physics which is based on the discovery of fundamental new properties of matter under far-from-equilibrium conditions. The second discipline is the modern theory of dynamical systems, which is especially relevant for our purposes here since dynamical systems include a wide range of processes including chemical reactions, individual organisms, ecosystems, economies, and social systems. The central discovery here is the prevalence of instability. In essence, instability means that small changes in initial conditions may lead to large amplifications of the effects of the changes.

Ilya Prigogine, who won the Nobel Prize in chemistry in 1977, has been at the center of the emerging science of complexity. In his book *Order Out of Chaos* he explores the nature of change in what he calls "dissipative structures." Dissipative structures are best described as open systems in the sense that they interact with the larger world around them by constantly trading energy and maintaining themselves through an endless dynamic flow. One of the chief characteristics of these systems is that they are subject to constant fluctuations or perturbations, sudden shifts that allow for novelty and unpredictable change. A river can be taken as an example of a dissipative structure: while it acts in consort with the larger environment of which it is a part, it can be seen as an independent system; like all living systems it is subject to constant, erratic and apparently random fluctuations.

According to Prigogine, a single fluctuation adding its strength to other fluctuations may become powerful enough to reorganize the whole system into a new pattern. The points at which this happens are "bifurcation points," at which deterministic description breaks down and the system follows one of several possible forks in the road. These "stochastic" (i.e., not predictable) processes demonstrate that open systems are not mechanistic but random. Prigogine uses the term randomness to denote not blind chance, but rather non-determinism, spontaneity, and novelty. Open systems can thus be thought of as dynamic and "creative."

Prigogine likens the universe to a living organism because it has room for random behavior, allowing dissipative structures to recreate themselves into unforeseeable patterns. These novel patterns are often triggered by small variables or perturbations whose presence can pull the entire system away from one kind of behavior toward a new and unexpected one. In this way, matter is not something static -- inert molecules that are governed by pushes and pulls -- but as something active and alive. Except for systems at equilibrium in which no further exchanges take place, open systems are constantly attuned to their environments. In these open systems, matter is not isolated and solitary, as scientists once assumed, but instead it is responsive, relational, and self-modifying in response to the activities of other matter. In these systems, the smallest change may "destabilize" the system and bring about an outcome not predicted by the logic of linear equations.

Prigogine's theory of dissipative structures and order by fluctuation echoes emerging theories in other fields, such as quantum physics and biology, which are challenging our traditional understanding of change on several fronts. There is growing evidence that systemic change is not a mechanistic, progressive, and linear phenomenon whose causes and effects can be clearly isolated. While Newtonian science has long sought to isolate the basic building-blocks of nature, recent theories suggest that nature appears more like a complicated web of relations between various parts of a unified whole. As the German quantum physicist Werner Heisenberg put it, "the world thus appears as a complicated tissue of

events, in which connections of different kinds alternate or overlap or combine and thereby determine the texture of the whole."

Theories of Social Change

The science of complex systems offers some intriguing parallels between the natural and the social world. Just as the notion of direct causation has been found to be faulty in dynamical systems, it is now widely recognized that so-called "prime movers" such as strong leadership or economic dislocation, once largely unquestioned in sociology, are impossible to isolate from the other causal factors that prompt social change. Social philosopher Alvin Toffler has expressed the emergent view this way: "I think more in terms of process, interrelationships, rhythms, non-equilibrium, and fields than individual causal vectors; more in terms of mutually interactive systems, than of one-way causality."

As sociology has adopted a less deterministic approach, one that acknowledges the inherent interdependence and reciprocity at work in social systems, the emphasis has shifted from the *causes* of change to the *conditions* that are most conducive to change. As sociologist Bruce F. Ryan put it, "if cause is to be sought for change, it is to be found through the analysis of the conditions and processes giving rise to the particular sequence of events." Conditions that tend to precipitate change include:

- A lack of cohesion among the various constituents of a social system.
- The inability of groups or individuals to adjust to their larger social or physical environment.
- Rigid and centralized social structures.
- High population densities.
- Social diversity.
- Creativity and innovation.

Each of these conditions leads to the kinds of social tensions which ultimately manifest in change. By way of comparison, it's interesting to review the characteristics of social systems which are relatively stable over time. Typically these societies have been 1) small in size, 2) isolated from contact with other cultures, 3) technologically unsophisticated, 4) unable to store or transmit knowledge through writing, 5) highly respectful of tradition, and 6) bound to a shared and consistent value system.

Another condition at the root of social change is the oft-cited theory of cultural lag developed by William Fielding Ogburn in the 1920s. He explained that when different systems within a society are out of sync with one another, different rates of change affect different social sectors in varied ways. The result is that institutions struggle to adapt to the time-pacing of other institutions. For example, in the business world innovation and renewal tend to occur very rapidly, whereas public schools and government bureaucracies typically change very slowly. These lags in adaptation create powerful tensions in society. Alvin Toffler, who has been much influenced by Ogburn's theory, attributed the condition of "future shock" in part to this phenomenon of cultural lag.

The literature on social change focuses to a large extent on the dynamics of social interaction -- how groups are formed, how minorities deviate from established norms, how conflict is born and resolved, and the fluctuations in collective behavior. A growing body of research also looks at the process of "diffusion" -- the process by which innovative ideas are spread and ultimately take root in society.

The trouble with much of the academic research on change is that, on its own, it's not very useful. In the words of one observer, "sociologists put primary emphasis on attempting to build a body of verified theory about social behavior, including social change, rather than themselves trying to induce change. The practitioner, on the other hand, although likewise interested in understanding, is principally concerned with inducing change, rather than merely accounting for it." This shortcoming has not been entirely lost on social scientists. In fact, a subfield of sociology has emerged in the past few decades devoted to "planned change." This development is a reaction in part to the shift from the *study* of change to the *methods* of controlling and directing it.

One especially useful, if perhaps excessively academic, roundup of "General Strategies for Effecting Changes in Human Systems" is provided by Robert Chin and Kenneth Benne in their classic textbook *The Planning of Change*. In their analysis, change strategies fall into three categories: 1) rational-empirical, 2) normative- reeducative, and 3) power-coercive.

The *rational-empirical* approach assumes that men and women are rational and practical and will change on their own given the appropriate conditions. These strategies include:

- Provide the right information, education or training to allow individuals to change of their own volition.
- Ensure that the "right" people are in the right "place" to bring about needed changes.
- Invite the perspectives or expertise of outsiders.
- Engage in research and development.
- Promote utopian thinking to stimulate creativity and "best-case" scenarios.
- Clarify the issues and/or reconceptualize the situation in order to bring about greater overall understanding among members of the group.

The second category of strategies -- the *normative- reeducative* -- is predicated on the view that change begins from the bottom up, not the top down. That is to say, it focuses on changing the individuals that make up a social system. It is the preferred method of counselors, trainers, and therapists. Two strategies characteristic of this approach are to:

- Improve the problem-solving capacities of a system by encouraging individuals to be self-diagnosing.
- Release and foster growth in the persons who make up the system.

The *power-coercive* approach to effecting change is the one most commonly associated with political movements and social activism. In the words of Chin and Benne, "these strategies are oriented against coercive and nonreciprocal influence, both on moral and on pragmatic grounds." Strategies in this category include:

- Using political institutions to achieve change.
- Shifting the balance of power between social groups, especially ruling elites.
- Weakening or dividing the opposition through moral coercion or strategies of nonviolence.

Another taxonomy of change strategies is offered by Roland Warren, a sociologist who has devoted much attention to social change at the community level. His list of community-based change strategies include: consensus planning, bargaining, protest movements, research- demonstrations, social action, non-violence, organizations of client populations, community development, conflict, elite planning, organization of indigenous groups, and civil disobedience. He classifies these under four headings: 1) collaborative strategies, 2) campaign strategies, 3) contest strategies, and 4) a combination of strategies.

What this literature shows is that there are at bottom two modes of viewing change: the reactive and the proactive. From one perspective, individuals and groups are the objects of change. They are at the receiving end, in the sense that change happens to them. From the other perspective, individuals and groups are the initiators of change and change follows from human volition. Both perspectives have their validity, of course, and they are closely interrelated. For instance, when one social group actively tries to bring about change, there are invariably other groups who feel put upon and try to resist the change.

Management Theory

One field of inquiry that has taken a particularly proactive approach to the subject of change is management theory. This is not surprising, perhaps, given the competitive pressures confronting many organizations today. In a world buffeted by change, many organizations have learned that the only way to survive is by innovating, that the only stability possible is stability in motion. In the opening lines of *Managing the Future: Ten Driving Forces of Change for the 90s*, Robert Tucker writes:

Two years after *In Search of Excellence* reported on forty-three of the "best run" companies in America, fourteen of the forty-three firms were in financial trouble. The reason, according to a *Business Week* study: "failure to react and respond to change."That "change" and "innovation" have become the bywords of organizational management in the 1990s is reflected in a myriad of business books with titles like *Mastering Change: The Key to Business Success*, *Knowledge for Action: A Guide to Overcoming Barriers to Organizational Change* and *The Change Masters*. As Common Cause founder John Gardner has said, "perhaps the most distinctive thing about innovation today is that we are beginning to pursue it

systematically. The large corporation does not set up a research laboratory to solve a specific problem but to engage in continuous innovation."

One of the more influential management books to emerge in recent years is *The Fifth Discipline* by Peter Senge, director of the Systems Thinking and Organizational Learning Program at MIT's Sloan School of Management. Senge believes that the greatest challenges confronting organizations today involve fundamental cultural changes. Addressing these challenges requires what he calls collective learning. Organizations must be able to learn in order to survive.

The traditional approach to dealing with complex problems is to break them down into smaller, more easily managed problems. But this approach could be fatal to organizations, according to Senge. When we reduce complex problems and try to isolate their various parts we "can no longer see the consequences of our actions; we lose our intrinsic sense of connection to a larger whole," he writes. "As daunting as it may seem, we must destroy the illusion that the world is created of separate, unrelated forces. When we give up this illusion, we can then build learning organizations."

The learning organization is one in which five learning disciplines are continually pursued:

- Personal Mastery, "the discipline of continually clarifying and deepening our personal vision, of focusing our energies, of developing patience, and of seeing reality objectively."
- Analyzing one's mental models and envisioning alternative ways of thinking about the world. Working with mental models means exposing our own ways of thinking, as well as making that thinking more open to the influence of others.
- Building a shared vision, "unearthing shared pictures of the future that foster genuine commitment and enrollment rather than compliance."
- Learning as a team, which starts with dialogue and the skill of overcoming defensiveness and other patterns of interaction that keep members from learning -- individually and as a team.
- Thinking systemically, seeing patterns and the "invisible fabrics of interrelated actions, which often take years to fully play out their effects on each other."

According to Senge, the fifth discipline -- systems thinking -- ties all the other disciplines together. This kind of thinking involves "a shift of mind from seeing parts to seeing wholes, from seeing people as helpless reactors to seeing them as active participants in shaping their reality." If one were to explain systems thinking in terms of an equation, he says, it would not be "A causes B," but rather "A causes B while B causes A, and both continually interrelate with C and D."

Senge notes that the really significant and enduring innovations he has observed have grown out of people from multiple constituencies working together. In education, for instance, "it's been a few committed teachers with some bright ideas, in concert with a principal who has a particular view of his or her job, in concert with a superintendent who is in line with that principal, and in concert with people in the community who are very much part of the innovation process."

Many of Senge's ideas are echoed by Rosabeth Moss Kanter and her colleagues in *The Challenge of Organizational Change*. They focus on how organizations learn to change, emphasizing "the sad fact ... that, almost universally organizations change as little as they must, rather than as much as they should." They characterize learning organizations as "self-designing," "self-renewing," and "post- entrepreneurial." They are flexible and open, and all levels of development -- individual, team, work group, and organizational -- occur simultaneously and synergistically.

The importance of systems thinking and creating a common vision also figures prominently in the organizational approach of Gary Frank, David Angus, and Bob Rehm. In what they call "future search conferences" or "visioning meetings," they bring together a diverse group of people to create a shared vision, innovation, and joint planning. The rationale here is that meaningful, deliberate, consensual, and preferred change must involve as many people with a stake in the issue as possible. It also recognizes that any organization is a part of a larger environment. "The relationship of the organization to its external environment, how that environment is changing, what the change either means to us or how we can influence the change are the key ingredients of the search."

A Note on Individual Change

The emphasis on systems thinking is a recent development in organizational thinking and has yet to be embraced in the mainstream management literature. The same might be said about the role of individual change, or what Senge calls "personal mastery." While much has been written about the processes which help people achieve change, a more fundamental question involves whether they are willing to change in the first place. Is a person prepared to open up to new inputs, insights, and understandings? Is he or she prepared to be changed in the process of effecting change?

From this perspective, social change has a great deal to do with individual motivation. Effective strategies for change must build on the caring and personal commitment of all the players involved. Social philosopher Philip Slater makes this point in his book *A Dream Deferred*. "People are reluctant to change because change is uncomfortable and demands a great deal of energy," he says. "Therefore when people ask where to start working [for change], the answer is that since change makes heavy demands on motivation and energy, you should start where you *care* the most and do what you like to *do* the most -- that will be where you contribute the most energy and be most effective."

Robert Theobald has spent the better part of three decades organizing communities for change. In his book *The Rapids of Change*, he notes that people often ask him whether a particular change is possible. "I respond by saying that this is the wrong question," he writes. "Instead, each of us needs to ask where our commitment is and where we shall act. Once we are committed, we will find ways to be effective."

Developing Strategies for Change

As this brief survey of the literature suggests, a considerable amount of research has been done on how and why change occurs and the methods people use to consciously bring it about. But much of the literature consists of post hoc explanations and tentative theories which have a limited usefulness unless they can be translated into effective action. The question, therefore, is what practical wisdom can be culled from the ever-expanding body of research on change.

By way of conclusion, I would like to outline a number of practical strategies that may be taken to consciously effect change as well as successfully negotiate conditions of flux and uncertainty -- be it in communities, organizations, or groups. This is not intended as a comprehensive step-by-step approach -- after all, there can never be such a thing as a blueprint for change. Instead, what I have tried to do here is bring together a number of key insights from the literature on change and extrapolate some of their practical applications.

Build new relationships. A crucial first step in any process of effecting change is what David Mathews calls "banding together." It means forming relationships, organizing, and claiming collective responsibility for a given issue or situation. This can range from highly organized community town meetings to a few neighbors getting together in someone's living room to discuss their concerns. In some cases, building new relationships may only be possible by fundamentally changing relationships that are already in place. The key is to develop a sense of group identity as well as a sense of agency. Banding together generates "a sense of the possibility for change," Mathews writes. "Being associated with, and committed to, others gives people a feeling that they are equal to their problems." It is therefore an essential prerequisite to bringing about desired changes.

Discuss and deliberate. All effective change strategies hinge on discussion and deliberation. At a minimum, discussion allows the issues to be named and framed. It also helps individuals develop a shared perspective. As Robert Theobald points out, "most fundamental change activities break down because those involved in them do not take the time to gain a shared model of reality." At a more fundamental level, dialogue allows for what physicist David Bohm calls a "higher social intelligence." One of the chief obstacles to change, he says, is that "we've organized our societies by algorithms -- that is, by sets of rules by which we try to affect each other like parts of a machine. The result is that we can't talk with each other about things that are really important." Dialogue helps to eliminate false divisions among people, builds common ground, and allows for the emergence of a more systemic perspective.

Develop shared visions and goals. Setting new directions for the future is one of the most powerful ways of effecting change. When people come together "in such a way that their individual visions can start to interact," as Peter Senge puts it, a creative tension is established that gives focus, direction, and context to changes as they occur. Some techniques for developing common visions include futures commissions, search conferences, and visioning meetings in which participants develop "best case"

scenarios and articulate common goals. As Senge says, "we communicate our individual visions to one another and eventually start to create a field of shared meaning where there really is a deep level of trust and understanding -- and we gradually begin to build a shared vision." This process is very different from such perfunctory strategies as writing "vision" statements. It often involves a great deal of reflection, listening, and mutual understanding.

Foster social capital. Robert Putnam and others have used the term "social capital" to denote the networks and norms of trust and reciprocity that characterize healthy social orders. The term suggests that capital can be measured in social as well as economic terms, that relationships have an inherent value. Scott Fosler, author of *The Public/Private Partnership*, has studied the nature of community collaboration in cities across the United States. "If you look back at what it was that was really key in the development of civic and political institutions," he says, "it was trust that was based on personal relationships." Building networks and relationships within and between individuals and groups is not something that can be done overnight, but it is no doubt one of the most effective change strategies available to communities and civic organizations.

Ensure broad participation and diversity. Fundamental change is impossible without the participation of everybody with a stake in the problem or issue. Without the full participation of all concerned, perspectives will be missing and there is a good chance that some of the issues involved will go unaddressed. Another aspect of this is the inherent value of diversity. Research in anthropology, sociology, and biology shows that homogeneity fosters stability, while diversity invariably produces change. It follows that planned change is best achieved by promoting diversity.

Determine leadership roles. There are many types of leaders, from presidents and mayors to teachers, neighborhood activists, and even parents. But no matter what form they take they lend cohesion to a group and act as spark-plugs for change. Their vision, drive and personal commitment can be keys to galvanizing a group into action. Leaders are also able to champion and protect those within groups who are most willing to risk change.

Identify outside resources. Fundamental change tends to be difficult and painful and always involves uncertainty and risk. Since most communities and organizations that embark on the journey need outside help -- from foundations, consultants, civic organizations, trade associations, government departments, etc. -- they need to develop linkages to outside sources of capital and information. These linkages not only facilitate the process of change they often provide opportunities for lateral learning and growth.

Set clear boundaries. When planning for specific kinds of change, it is important to operate within clearly defined boundaries - - for both psychological and practical reasons. Boundaries provide frameworks for measuring change and give focus and direction to one's efforts. They also provide a sense of what is feasible. On a practical level, clearly defined goals allow one to make realistic plans.

Draw on the examples of others. Change takes place in an infinite variety of ways and there is no single strategy that will work for every individual or group. Still, those seeking to effect change may take comfort and inspiration from the examples of others. Not only does this provide mentors from whom they can learn, it offers them conviction that their goal is attainable.

Adopt a change mindset. Nothing precipitates change like a crisis. Necessity, after all, is the mother of invention. The question is whether it is possible to adopt a crisis-perspective without a crisis, or at least a mindset that is constantly attuned to change. Many innovators and change agents insist that it is possible. What is required, they say, is a shift of perception from seeing change as dis-equilibrium to seeing it as a constant. Strategizing for change ultimately comes down to whether individuals are motivated to change, learn, and grow. As John Gardner says, "unless we foster versatile, innovative and self-renewing men and women, all the ingenious social arrangements in the world will not help us."

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