

Leading People Through Change

Presented by David Kiel, CFE Leadership Coordinator, February 25, 2011, CFE Conference Room.
Notes from the discussion and presentation.

Type A and Type B Change Models

Leadership programs use one of two models for change. One mode, let's call it "Type A," consists of planning for and creating change, while "Type B" focuses on ways people react to changes imposed by other people or events. A colloquial but expressive way of showing the difference between the two models borrows a line from a recent country song, "sometimes you are the windshield," and "sometimes you are the bug," with Type A being the windshield and Type B being the bug.

Type A models are conceptualized from the perspective of the visionary and aggressive leadership team that sees the changes that are needed in the organization. The leaders are savvy and relentless in shaping the organization and its units into more productive, adaptive, and dynamic entities. Type A models often deal with the problem of how to get complacent or resistant organizational actors to take the difficult but needed steps to improve the organization at all levels.

The Type A model assumes that leaders can "get out ahead" of changes and proactively reshape the organization to respond to, or be relatively insulated against, change. This type is exemplified by Tom Peters' *Thriving on Chaos*, Joseph Grenny's *Influencer*, John Kotter's *Leading Change*, or Jim Collins' *Good to Great*. Most of these books, needless to say, came out before the global economic train wreck of 2007-8, which is the proximate cause of UNC's current budget woes.

One could argue that Carolina during the period 2003-2008 was a Type A organization. Most people felt they were driving change. UNC had its best-ever capital campaign, the Carolina Covenant, adopted, faculty salaries improved, as did increased research revenues. We put a new emphasis on entrepreneurship, and won men's basketball championships in 2005 and 2009.

Type B models may seem more relevant to the present day where we are all dealing with budget cuts for the third year in a row. Type B models assume that change is not chosen but imposed from the outside. This model ultimately wants the "victims" of change to regain the initiative, and be proactive, but suggests this is a process. You can't just "flip a switch" and people will go from feeling pushed around to empowered and creative. Type B models have the value of helping leaders at all levels understand the feelings of those experiencing imposed changes and provides guidance on how to be more effective in leading people through these compulsory changes.

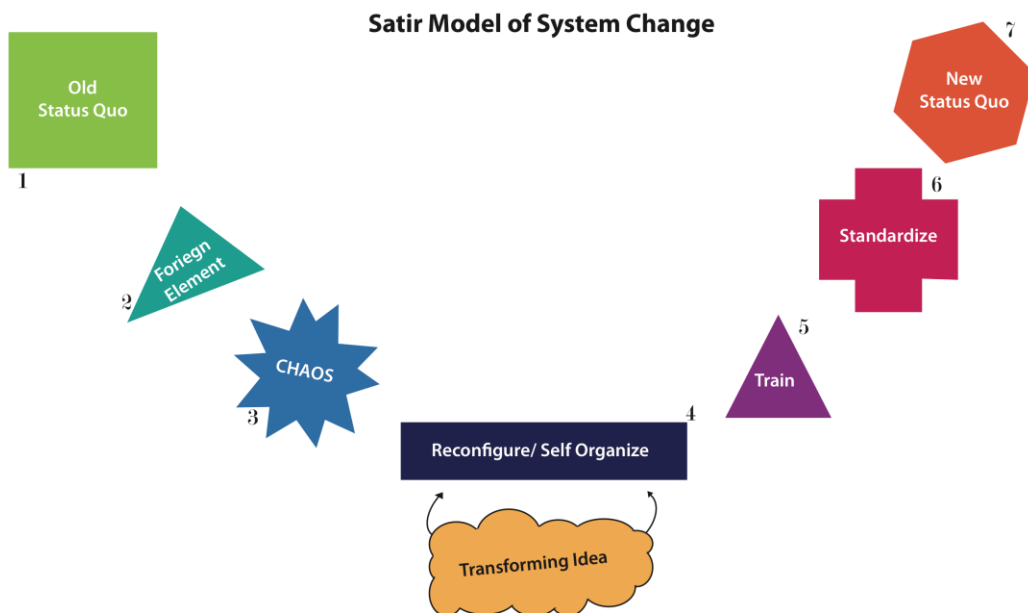
In the first seminar of this series, *Managing in Stressful Times*, we focused on the leader's role in communicating information about impending changes. In the second seminar, *Getting there Together: Negotiating When Times are Tough*, we emphasized the skills required to turn challenging conversations into promising ones when confronting the necessity of change.

Yet, in both of these seminars, the discussion seemed to be inevitably drawn on the emotional challenges and shifting moods participants felt and saw in their own departments and schools. This third seminar addresses those emotional challenges and shifting moods directly.

The Satir Model: The “Bird’s Eye View” of Major Systemic Change and Transformation

This seminar offers three Type B models as a jumping off point for discussing these emotional challenges and shifting moods as they affect the arena of faculty leadership. The models include Virginia Satir’s seven-stage *Change Model*, Scott and Jaffe’s four-stage model of *Managing People Through Change*, and William Bridges’ three-phase model for *Managing Transitions*.

Virginia Satir was one of the early pioneers of family therapy and the author of many books on healing, communication, and family dynamics. Her models were later adapted for understanding organizations and larger systems as well. Her multi-stage model may be best understood as describing how a human system might experience, react to, and then adjust to change over time. It is a highly general model that may be used to understand how and people cope with a major change (e.g., an individual going through a divorce, a department faced with budget cuts, or even the current revolutionary events in North Africa.)



In the Satir model, it is in the nature of individuals to resist change and cling to familiar ways of doing things. For many, no matter what the level of present difficulty, things could always get worse, “if its not (entirely) broke, don’t fix it.” This leads to the “old status quo,” stage one. Often, incentives are perverse and keep the system in stasis until a major change, or perhaps even an implosion, is unavoidable. This is what happened to GM and is now going on in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya. On a smaller scale, this stage may characterize a UNC department that can no longer support the level of needed classes with the current reduced teaching budget, and their old status quo teaching models.

The old status quo is disturbed, perhaps entirely destabilized by a “foreign element” something that catches people unaware. Here, Satir’s model anticipates the more current “Black Swan Theory,” which has been quite influential as a way of understanding the events that led up the recent financial crisis. This theory, put forward by the thinker and writer Nassim Taleb, claims something unexpected (always) comes and knocks us off our (shaky) pins.

The arrival of the “foreign element” precipitates a period of “chaos.” This is both the most liberating and terrifying aspect of the Satir Model. It describes what many leaders and followers actually feel during this time. The old orders of production, hierarchy, and ways of doing things have broken down. The financial model no longer works. The, perhaps illusory, notion of predictability and control is shown for what it is. People are thrown back on their own resources. Leaders no longer have the answers. There may not be actual chaos with people throwing things in our offices and classrooms, but at this stage of the change process it feels out of control and that’s what’s important for leaders to recognize. The leader’s role here may be to help people calm down and stay engaged with problem solving. By being a model of relative calm, listening, being optimistic and encouraging, and addressing problems as they arise, the leader helps the department, division, and/or program get through this stage.

The fact that the model predicts a chaos stage within Type B change may seem like bad news, but the Satir Model also has hopeful news. Satir is optimistic. She predicts and often observed that people under these circumstances often ultimately find a “transforming idea” which aids adaptation to the changed circumstances.

The long history of UNC is filled with “transforming ideas” that made us what we are today. When UNC was falling farther and farther behind private institutions like Duke, we discovered that public universities could raise money from private donors, literally billions of dollars. When it seemed likely that UNC would become unaffordable to students from poor families because of a crushing debt burden, we came up with the Carolina Covenant. When our astronomers realized they were in big danger of having no way to look at the cosmos, they came up with the idea of building a telescope in Chile, which put us back on the astral map. When undergraduate education was criticized as being too dependent on lecture, we came up with undergraduate research, study abroad, and experiential and service-learning programs, and so on.

The role of the leader may be to foster brainstorming, encourage exploration of ideas, bring people together to confront and solve problems, look for good ideas from other organizations, and so on. The tendency is for staff to say we can do this **or** that. The leader needs to push for transforming ideas that get staff and faculty to come up with ways of doing this **and** that. * Paradoxically the transforming idea might also be that we can give up something we always thought was needed. (Who misses Saturday classes? Why not year round schools? What is so important about 120 credit hours?)

Not all transforming ideas are good ones however, and sometimes we may have to try several before the chaos phase is tamed and we achieve a renewed sense of direction. Leaders need to help the organization experiment and see what works. This will require encouragement and requiring proof of concept. As President Reagan said to Gorbachev, “Trust but verify.” The leader needs to be a risk-taker, but also should be able to assess and quickly recognize ideas that don’t quite meet the requirements of the situation.

*DK Note: In terms of stimulating creative solutions, it seemed important in our discussions for the leader to help faculty and staff grasp that the solutions have to meet new and more stringent criteria: e.g., teach more students and treat more patients with the same number of staff at equal or higher levels of quality while still protecting faculty research time; merge library functions, save operating costs, but still address the unique needs of each discipline and part of the campus. This is the “this **and** that” criterion discussed above.

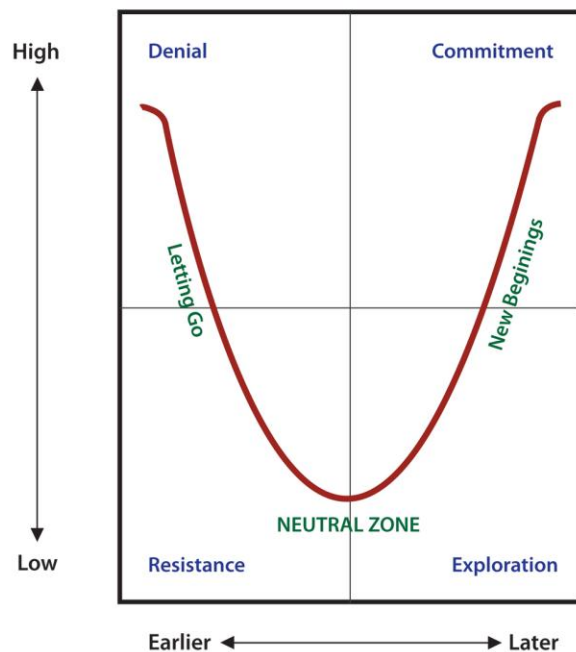
Any new approach will likely require reorganization and reconfiguration. This, in turn, will require changes and adjustments in reporting relationships, role expectations, and perhaps, turnover of personnel, particularly if new skills need to be imported into the organization. Once new methods and products or services are identified, there will need to be a process of training and standardization before the organization returns to a stable state and a new status quo is established. The effective leader, having a sense that this process is a multi-stage endeavor, will be a patient but demanding guide, helping the organization evolve to a new level of stability and productivity.

The Perspective of the Individual in Organizational Change and How the Leader Adjusts and Responds

When we switch from the big picture to the individual level, the two other models presented, that of William Bridges and Cynthia Scott & Dennis Jaffee, give leaders a useful framework. These two frameworks aid in assessing individuals or groups within each of the phases of change that are discussed in the Satir model. These models suggest that people go through an attitudinal and emotional cycle once these unwanted changes are imposed. They say these attitudes and emotions evolve over time in a roughly foreseeable manner.

These two models are discussed individually in the two handouts for this workshop; however, they can be combined effectively as one joint framework, which is illustrated below.

Engagement Curve



As an individual encounters the first task of adapting to change, “Letting Go of the Past,” he or she is apt to have an attitude of denial and perhaps be emotionally detached. However, as the reality of change sinks in, there is likely to be anxiety about impending losses, whether real or imagined, sadness, and/or anger and resentment. People react individually. Some may be angry first and sad later, in others that sequence can be reversed. This is the stage of resistance. The leader needs to be prepared for all this (at the same time he or she is going through similar feelings, in sync, our out-of-phase with staff and faculty.) If the leader can acknowledge the feelings but still reinforce the reality of the change and the need for change, then people can move on. It helps to honor what was good about the past, but old ways of doing things have to go in order to make way for the new ideas and approaches.

When people are first willing to consider and then experiment with new ideas, then they enter what Bridges calls “The Neutral Zone.” Behavior may be tentative as some people may be frozen with anxiety and fear of the new. Others may be a bit manic and run about in all directions, wasting effort. As often with new approaches, all the bugs may not have been worked out, so initial efforts may be frustrating. The leader needs to help people learn from mistakes and stick with it until the new methods show results. During this period, roles may still be unclear. The leader needs to be prepared for conflict when people “bump” into each other before “the new rules of the road” are fully understood and accepted. Hopefully, leaders can foster an attitude of “forgive and forget” on the interpersonal level, while learning from the encounter on an organizational level.

“New beginnings” result when people emerge from “The Neutral Zone” with a strengthened sense of how they are going to do things differently in the future. These emerging changes, if successful, will correct the deficiencies that became so apparent during the last days of the “old status quo.” These changes will also help the group adapt and thrive in the changed environment. Leaders at this stage will need to celebrate accomplishment, recognize progress, and continue to build the team.

Conclusion: The Key to Leading People Through Change

One key to leading others is to recognize that unwanted change is a recurring, though usually difficult, aspect of organizational life. Even if the change itself was unpredicted, the human response to that change is foreseeable to a certain extent.

The organization will go through various stages and the people in each unit will, by and large, respond in emotionally and behaviorally predictable ways. However, this behavior and these emotions will not be “business as usual.” Leaders will need to adapt their styles to both the stage of the department, program, or school, and the emotional response of faculty and staff. Ultimately, we all have to get through this together and if we do, we build resilience.

Leaders who understand, accept, and manage through these responses with awareness are likely to be more successful than those who fight human nature. Their organizations are likely to make it through “to the other side” quicker, with less wear and tear, and with more creative and adaptive solutions. Hopefully, by studying the insights these models provide, we can get a better handle on where our staff and faculty are in the curve of engagement with change, and how to lead effectively in this situation.

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