



turning potential into performance

How Full is Your Cup? Opening to Change

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"To meet the demands of the fast-changing competitive scene, we must simply learn to love change as much as we have hated it in the past." - Tom Peters

You may wonder why I have chosen to write about change here and you'd be right to wonder. There are a few reasons actually, the third of which will shed light on your own approach to change.

First, learn to love change? It may sound crazy, but change is here to stay; it might even be the third constant right behind death and taxes. Change is occurring today at rapid speed requiring us to *accept* change, since it is already here, and learn to engage it with courage and candor and a large dose of openness.

Secondly, in today's fast-paced culture we all, including our clients and customers, co-workers and colleagues, feel the pressure of impending change. We strive to deliver more with less, to work smarter, to improve the bottom line, all the while attempting to live in balance with ourselves, within our values. A tall, stressful order.

Thirdly, not one of us unaffected by the above dynamics yet we often find ourselves unsure about how to engage change. In fact, engaging change may seem next to impossible.

According to Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary: "Change" is:

- to give a different position, course, or direction to
- to make radically different
- to undergo transformation
- to give and receive reciprocally; interchange

Change happens whether we like it or not. Whether the changes reflect a slightly different course or a transformation will be determined by our attitude and openness towards the process of change and ultimately determine its impact.

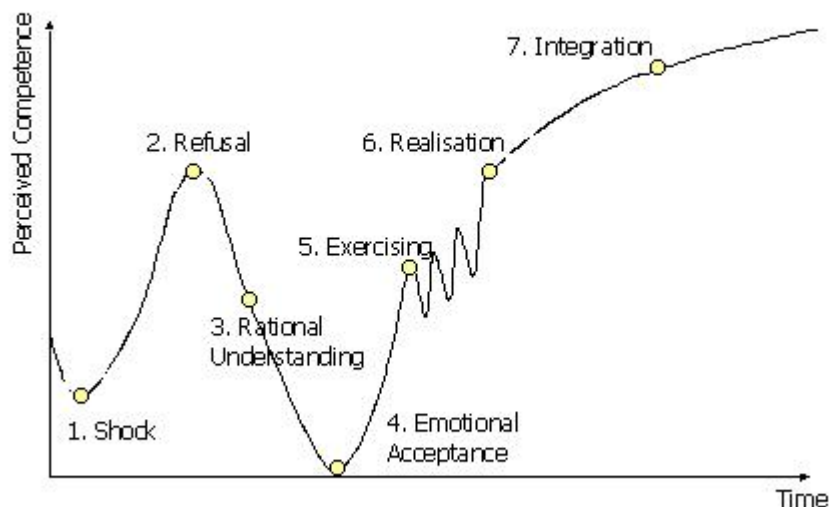
And, change can be difficult. As human beings we resist change; however, if we're open we can co-create our own experiences of change and impact our work environments and the personal worlds that we each live within. Thomas Kuhn, author of *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, states that "*awareness* is prerequisite to all acceptable changes of theory (and practice; mine)." Positive changes require first an awareness of

the need to change and a 'letting go' of old patterns and ways of behaving in order to take on fresh perspectives.

A popular Zen story may help. "A knowledgeable and successful man went to a Zen master and announced he had come to learn and broaden his already significant study of the world. The master invited the man to sit down and have tea. As the master poured the tea, it overflowed. The man shouted, 'It's spilling, it's spilling!' To which the master replied, 'Precisely--you came with a full cup. Your cup is already spilling over, so how can I give you anything? Unless you come with emptiness, I can give you nothing.'"

Just as the full cup accepted no more tea, a full mind accepts no more learning. In order to learn, to change, we have to "empty our cup," to let go of our old ways of behaving and interacting in order to create the space in which new learning in the face of inevitable change and new action, can occur. Of course, this does not mean that our previous experiences are of no value. If we can be open to the possibility of something completely new then our unique perspectives can be an asset rather than just 'too much tea' in our cups.

One way to view both the organizational and personal processes of change, or 'how much tea is in the cup,' is displayed in the following seven stages adapted from *Managing Change in Organizations* by Colin Carnall.



1. *Shock and Surprise*—An unexpected situation occurs. Such situations alert people that their own patterns of behaving no longer work for the new, emerging conditions any more. They perceive themselves as less competent than previously.
2. *Denial and Refusal*—Individuals tap their values as support for the conviction that change is not necessary. With no need for change their perceived competency increases again.

3. *Rational Understanding*--People realize the need for change resulting in a dip in their own perceived competence. The focus here is on short term solutions, thus addressing only symptoms. An unwillingness to challenge or change one's own patterns of behavior becomes clear.
4. *Emotional Acceptance*--This phase, also called 'crisis,' is the most significant one. Only if a willingness to create a forum exists—a safe space to challenge the old values, beliefs, behaviors and practices—will an organization be able to develop its real potential and move into new action.
5. *Learning and Practice*--The acceptance of change creates a new willingness for learning. People start to try out new behaviors, practices and processes. They will experience success and failure during this phase. The resulting empowered action to learn will lead to an increase in individual's perceived competence and greater willingness to work with the team.
6. *Realization*--People continue to gather information by learning and practicing new ways of being. This creates a new feedback loop that opens up their minds for new experiences. Such challenging of patterns of behavior and practice increase individual and organizational flexibility. Perceived competency has reached a higher level than prior to change.
7. *Integration*--Individuals have integrated their newly acquired patterns of thinking and acting. The new behaviors and attitudes comprise new practices for working together.

Spend a few minutes checking out where you are in the above change process of your life.

Love change, you say? Yes, change is always an eager teacher, suggesting new pathways of engaging with self and others, testing out new possibilities for action. Leadership expert, Kevin Cashman, stated, "Change challenges our current reality by allowing a new reality to rush in."

It certainly does. Being open to input, course correction, new ways of thinking, and possibly daunting new experiences can be challenging, not to mention a scary. Resistance often reflects fear since change involves both creation and destruction e.g. a flower blooms but only as the bud is destroyed.

Of course, the only 'place' to really address change is in the present moment; the past is past and the future has yet to be created. So, consider this simple practice: reflect on these questions and record your responses.

- What changes are currently occurring in my life, at work and home?
- What resistances to change do I notice within myself?
- What supports do I need to engage these changes and from whom?
- What practices, or action, will I take as a result of this reflection?

In doing so, you'll be engaging the process of change as you explore, "How full is my cup?"