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The Seventh Practice – Change Behaviour (and Expand Your Comfort Zone!)

'We must continually choose between deep change or slow death'.
Robert Quinn, *Deep Change: Discover the Leader Within and Change the World.*

Although the learning cycle is not intended to be a 'stage theory' (where one part of the cycle follows another in strict order) it is often the case, particularly in times of change, that changing behaviour comes last. A leader may have paid attention to some personal feedback, she may have successfully come through the emotional challenge this presented for her, she may have recognized that she needs to change aspects of her management style, and then . . . nothing. No change.

This phenomenon is the *behavioural lag*. The behavioural lag is another form of blind spot. It has two sources:

- the tendency to repress, distort, dismiss or fail to notice information that suggests personal changes in behaviour are necessary;
- the refusal to act on the recognition that it is necessary to change one's behaviour (the 'Hamlet' problem!).

The behavioural lag does not occur at all times. When people are leading change in a visionary learning state, spurred by hope, desire

and optimism, they may readily change their behaviour. Also, when people are generally supportive of the change, in an adaptive learning state, they will tend to make small experiments in their behaviour – gradually testing out new approaches to see how they feel and how they work. However, dissonant learning that challenges your sense of identity (i.e. your core beliefs and values) is very much subject to the behavioural lag.

It is easier to see this if we take an example from the diaries. We will look at the example of Will, who, after a long behavioural lag, eventually changes his behaviour. Will's example is somewhat extreme, because the change in behaviour is radical and highly risky. But what this example does is to illustrate the different stages that people often have to go through before they eventually change their behaviour. Will's journey provides an example of dissonant learning and how the behavioural lag operates in extreme circumstances. Although Will does eventually change his behaviour, there were many cases in the diaries where people got 'stuck' during the transition, failing either to recognize the need for change or to turn that recognition into real behavioural change.

Will – To Leave or Not To Leave

When Scientific Solutions was privatized, it brought with it a new set of values around commercialism. The new emphasis placed on profitability, sales and efficiency clashed with the more scientific values based upon thoroughness, risk avoidance and expertise. For example, safety reports that previously might have been critical of 'clients', were changed in tone in order to please the customer. There was a new emphasis placed on time efficiency. Before, scientists could take as long as they believed was professionally necessary to conclude a safety report; now, there was a new pressure to produce reports according to strict deadlines. In addition, it was found that the core activities of the science organization were not particularly profitable. Suddenly, conducting safety reports was no longer 'sexy'. What

was sexy was developing new high-margin products and services that brought in increased revenues.

This presented significant challenges for the scientists. To tell scientists who value objectivity, thoroughness, truth and expertise that what's important is pleasing clients, bringing in revenue and making profits is to challenge important aspects of their identity. Essentially, there is a tacit message suggesting that:

> *'what you thought was important, what you based your whole life upon, is, in fact, relatively unimportant. And what you disregarded (even maybe condemned) is, in fact, extremely important'.*

During this period many of the scientists felt their self esteem dropping to new lows. It was becoming increasingly apparent that their expertise and technical skills were no longer highly valued. There was a sense that a new world had dawned, one in which people like themselves no longer had a valuable role to play.

Will was one of the scientists who had been highly respected and a leader in his field. He was also very good with 'clients', being warm, approachable and a very good communicator. He, too, felt his self esteem dropping as the organization brought in new ways of operating. Will entered a period of dissonant learning which took him on a long and difficult journey of change.

Early days – do I need to change?

When the changes were first introduced, Will tended to criticize the changes along with everyone else. Whilst he recognized the need for an increased commercialism, he felt that the scientific values were also important, and were being dangerously disregarded. He felt that this was morally wrong and poten-

tially putting people at risk. He also felt that short-term financial pressures were being promoted at the expense of longer-term growth and sustainability.

Initially he attributed the 'mistakes' to poor management and to unintended consequences arising from the change programme. His belief was that these mistakes were 'one off' incidents rather than a sign that the organization was going to change fundamentally. He believed that Scientific Solutions would continue to value its people as important members of a scientific community, promote scientific excellence and focus on promoting science for the public good. This view is what we will term the *scientific values schema*. This is contrasted with a growing sense that the organization was becoming more commercial and focusing its priorities purely onto shareholder value. This is the *commercial values schema*.

In the early days, Will would focus on any event that seemed to support the scientific values schema, and dismiss or discount events that seemed to support the commercial values schema. He was motivated to make sense of events in a way that suggested that the organization would stay the same, and, more importantly, that he would not have to make any radical changes in his own behaviour. This, of course, is a form of blind spot.

However, it became increasingly difficult to continue to interpret events using the scientific values schema. One day, Will was told that a growth project he had personally championed would not be given funding. This project was central to his desire to position the company as a leader in a particular field. In effect, the incident was a tipping point that finally reinforced the commercial values schema. As far as Will was concerned, the triumph of the commercial values schema meant the destruction of his goals and aspirations. He was extremely angry. His anger triggered the first important recognition: *I need to change*. Will decided he could not continue as if nothing was going to change; he was going to have

to make some personal changes in order to address the situation. For the first time, he contemplated leaving the organization.

Turmoil – can I change?

Despite recognizing that he might have to leave, Will did nothing about it. He reverted to trying to interpret events in light of the scientific values schema. Why?

Over the period of time in question, Will had, along with many of the other scientists, lost his self confidence. He felt that the world had moved on and his skills were no longer valued. He did not believe that he would be able to find a new job. And even if he did, would he be able to cope? Having spent over 20 years with the organization, it was tempting to wait for early retirement or to convince himself that it would probably be the same in other organizations. There were many ways of making sense of his situation in order to justify not changing.

So Will carried on. But the anger and frustration increased. Eventually, he encountered another tipping point. His professional opinion was not taken seriously by a manager who did not understand Will's professional field. He was so angry that he decided to attend a recruitment fair. This *was* a small change of behaviour but one which carried no risks or commitments – he was 'just looking'!

However, at the fair his world exploded – he discovered that he was valued! People fell over themselves to offer him jobs! His self esteem was boosted and the outside world suddenly looked very different.

Will then reached the next stage on the change journey: I am valued by others – I am a skilled, competent professional. This recognition provided the self confidence to recognize – *I can change*.

Contemplating a new future – do I want to change?

Will pursued a few job opportunities and was offered them. But he had not answered the question of whether he really wanted to change. There would be a lot of upheaval involved in moving the family; the risks of going to a new, unknown organization would be significant. It would be a lot easier to wait for retirement! Besides, with a renewed sense of his own value, he felt invigorated and ready to handle the ups and downs of life at Scientific Solutions.

However, in the face of a number of high profile resignations, senior management decided to offer a group of people a significant increase in salary. Will was not one of those people and he interpreted this event as a personal affront and a sign of how little he was valued in the company. This contrasted significantly with how he was valued by the outside world, as job offers continued to come in. His anger and frustration at this event eventually triggered the next stage on his journey: he realized *I want to change* – I really want to leave this organization.

Taking the plunge – 'I will change'

However, Will still did not hand his notice in. He continued to have concerns and doubts. Nevertheless, he received more job offers, including one that was very attractive in professional terms. Will was in a quandary. Perhaps if he were to inform Scientific Solutions that he had been offered this job, they might re-evaluate his worth to the organization and treat him differently. Then he could stay – he wouldn't have to change anything!

It did not work. In fact the management interpreted his motives as 'angling for more money' and trying to 'blackmail' them. When he heard of this on the grapevine, Will was furious that his motives could have been interpreted in a way that was so totally out of alignment with his values. Seething with anger, he finally resigned!

He had finally changed his behaviour. And, having done so, Will never looked back. He found a new life where he was both valued and happy. But it was a long time between recognizing that he needed to do something and actually doing it. This is the behavioural lag.

As previously mentioned, Will's example is extreme. He faced an irreversible decision – one that was radical and life-changing. But what this example does provide is a clear illustration of the four stages that we all encounter when contemplating behaviour change – I have to change, I can change, I want to change and I will change. Unlike Will, others will have an easier experience of these stages and traverse them more rapidly. Those in an adaptive learning state, for example, will reach the final stage more quickly for a number of reasons. First, the change is not completely out of line with their values. Second, and partly as a result of the alignment with their values, they will have more confidence in their ability to change. Third, they will want to change, for a variety of reasons, ranging from sympathy for what the organization is trying to achieve, to a realization that it is in their own self interest. Lastly, there will be energy reserves to implement the changes; unlike the dissonant learner, the adaptive learner has not been so worn down by all the changes.

There is no doubt that visionary and adaptive learners do not experience the behavioural lag to the same extent that dissonant learners do. However, it is important to point out that we all have areas where we will experience a dissonant learning state and where we are, therefore, particularly resistant to change. In the same way, we all have areas where we are likely to experience a visionary or adaptive learning state, where we will be more receptive to experimenting with behaviour change.

The point about changing behaviour is that there is no going back. It is the riskiest part of the whole learning cycle. Once we have changed our behaviour we enter the unknown. Even if the change

is not as radical as Will's was, changing behaviour still involves uncertainty:

- we may fail;
- people will react differently towards us;
- we do not know what the consequences will be;
- people may mock or reject our attempts to change;
- there may be other risks associated with changing behaviour, such as financial risks or relationship risks (i.e. we may jeopardize our relationships with close friends or family who like us as we are);
- it will feel odd, uncomfortable and scary.

Changing behaviour is where the learning cycle really takes off. As we change our behaviour we translate our learning into the external world, and, once it's out, it's impossible to turn back. There will be consequences. When we change our behaviour we change how people react to us and we break with the normal chain of events – we make different things happen, which, of course, we will have to cope with. Furthermore, we don't know what those events will look like – inevitably uncertainty and anxiety will increase. It is much easier to stick to what is familiar, even if that does involve a degree of frustration.

The sheer energy, effort and emotional exhaustion involved in changing behaviour is a significant deterrent. Frustration with the present is often far more preferable to fear of an unknown future. And many people make that choice, staying in a relatively comfortable, predictable world rather than initiating change and facing uncertainty.

However, there are consequences to staying in the comfort zone:

- As the world changes, our tried and tested methods become outdated and no longer work in the way they used to.

- We lose the ability to learn – we become so used to psychological comfort that we become incapable of handling any form of anxiety or emotional tension.
- Because we are not changing our behaviour, we fail to learn the new strategies and skills that are needed to achieve our goals in the new, changing environment – as a result, we fail to achieve those goals.
- We may be seen as predictable, boring, dinosaur-like.
- Our lives become boring – we know this, but feel incapable of making any changes; somehow we miss the emotional roller-coaster associated with learning.

When we refuse to change our behaviour, despite the obvious necessity of doing so, we are subject to a blind spot. This blind spot arises from a failure to understand that whilst changing behaviour is a big step, so, too, is refusing to change behaviour. Both choices have repercussions, it's just that we often fail to examine the repercussions of *not* changing behaviour.

So what can we do to shorten the length of time taken to change our behaviour or, in some cases, to ensure we do not get 'stuck' in the process? How can we overcome the blind spots that cause us to make sense of events in a way that convinces us that we do not need to change? How can we overcome the trap where we recognize the need to change yet refuse to carry this recognition through to action? In order to answer these questions, we need to investigate the four transition points in greater detail.

1. I Need to Change

There are a number of reasons why people do not recognize that they need to change. Two that we will explore here are:

- their existing paradigms do not make sense of the world in a way that leads them to this conclusion;
- they feel anxious at contemplating an unknown future.

Existing Paradigm Use

We have mentioned before that many senior executives get personal feedback about their behaviour without ever coming to the recognition that they really do need to change that behaviour. This is because their current behaviour 'works' for them – it helps them achieve their goals in a way that makes them feel comfortable and in control. They do not see how changing their behaviour will better help them to achieve their goals.

One diarist had a role that involved influencing large numbers of people throughout the organization. He tended to have an abrupt, task-focused style that alienated people, making them angry and resentful. He did not understand the political sensitivities involved in his role and that he was 'threatening' people, without being aware of it. When he got feedback that he needed to soften his style, he rejected it. As far as he was concerned, he needed to be *more* assertive, as people were not being cooperative and, hence, they were jeopardizing important projects. Whilst he understood that many people would have preferred him to be 'softer' and more approachable, he did not see the utility of changing his behaviour. In fact, he believed that becoming more friendly would cause people to relax, thereby delaying projects even further. We can see here that part of the problem lies in the diarist's lack of 'psychological' and 'power' paradigms. He tended to view the world through his operational paradigm, seeing people as units of resource that have to be forced to work 'rationally' for the overall benefit of the organization.

If we are to overcome this blind spot, we must ensure that we develop our paradigms constantly – particularly the power and people paradigms. We must also ensure that we really listen to and probe feedback that we disagree with – it may be difficult at first to understand how it will help us reach our goals, but we can use it to expand our cognitive complexity and to encourage our acceptance of the need to change.

Anxiety at an Unknown Future

Another reason that people do not recognize that they need to change is that, like Will in the above example, they do not want to

face the awful, threatening and scary truth about the changes going on around them. We come back to another diarist's point, already quoted in a previous chapter:

> *'I just felt that, I'd been feeling like that (unhappy) for a long time but . . . once I'd left this place in the evening or for the weekend, I'm one of these people that can switch off completely. Now if this seeming overwhelming uncomfortableness came with me when I did leave in the evening, then maybe I would have done something about it in the evening or at the weekend, but I didn't, because once I'd left this place, I no longer had that overwhelming motivation to do something about it, and as soon as I got out of this place, . . . I had lots of other things on that were higher priority in the short term.'*

In other words, the discomfort and frustration associated with the present has to grow to such an extent that it is greater than the discomfort involved in facing potential change. The diarist is saying here that he would only sit down and reflect upon the problem when motivated by the prospect of eliminating intrusive, uncomfortable pain. This is, in part, because he recognizes that accepting new ideas and constructs often involves deep-rooted change. Once you accept an idea, you 'have to put your whole way of life' behind the idea:

> *'and I suppose I'm the sort of person that, when exposed to novel ideas, . . . to begin with, you don't necessarily trust them. But as you live with them and have reflected upon them for a year or two, you then think of them as being the bleeding obvious, even though . . . it's taken me some time to accept that way of looking at things. And now I've got it . . .* ***having put my entire livelihood now behind that way of thought, I still have to have the motivation to go through with it.'***

Somewhere inside us we know that if we really sat down and examined the changes going on around us we might have to take some very radical and scary steps – so we simply refuse to think about them. We even tolerate extremes of pain and discomfort before we're ready to face the pain of learning.

This is even more the case with people in senior leadership positions, who are often highly resistant to the idea that they should change their own behaviour. We have seen that, because they have so much to lose, they may be more anxious than others.

This can only be countered by a discipline of structured reflection, as outlined in previous chapters. In particular, it involves focusing on uncomfortable emotions and interpreting them before it is too late to do anything about them. It involves moving from a dissonant learning state to an adaptive learning state, where we may be more ready to make simple experiments with our behaviour.

2. I Can Change

People will not even contemplate change if they believe in the backs of their minds they will not be able to adapt to the required changes successfully. It is noticeable that in the diaries most people changed their behaviour after a sudden and unexpected boost to their confidence. Before Will really started looking into new jobs, he attended a recruitment fair and realized that he was indeed valued by the external world. This gave him the confidence to pursue other opportunities more actively. Another diarist successfully overcame a complex problem that made him remember that he was a highly skilled and successful scientist. Shortly after that, he handed his notice in. Another diarist received positive feedback from a client, which boosted her self belief and gave her the courage to ask for a transfer. This pattern was extraordinarily prevalent during the period of change. People do not change their behaviour until and unless they believe that they are 'valuable' people who have a chance of success. They must believe that they 'can change'.

This is just as relevant to those in senior leadership positions as it is to anyone else. There may be many reasons why those in senior positions feel that they cannot change. They, too, may be scared of failing; they may have relied on a particular management style and feel that changing that style would provoke ridicule or scorn, par-

ticularly in the early days when it feels so uncomfortable. Those in senior positions spend much of their time seeking control over events – changing behaviour feels like the opposite, it feels like you are totally out of control.

This is where some of the techniques of positive psychology have an important role to play. Instead of focusing on the problems, challenges and reasons why people might have difficulties in changing, positive psychology focuses on the valuable contributions that people bring to the change situation. It makes them feel as if they can change, that they want to change and, by providing a source of positive energy, ensures people will change.

Another way of accelerating the change process is to have regular time out with a coach, mentor or close colleague who knows your work. These outsiders can bring a calm, rational but supportive view to bear in situations that otherwise are characterized by 'hot cognition'. They can ensure that you make sense of events in a more positive and rational way than is normally possible when you are caught up in the continuous stream of events.

3. I Want to Change

However, even if people decide that they can change, they are also evaluating whether they 'want to change'. This is a highly complex area. There are many reasons why people decide they do not want to change. We have already referred to many of them:

- The changes are out of line with our values. For example, many people decide that they do not want to 'play politics', even though they realize it is necessary in order to ascend the hierarchy.
- We do not want to suffer the emotional exhaustion of changing behaviour. Changing behaviour can be emotionally exhausting – some people simply do not want the hassle.
- We do not want to take the risks. Whilst we might be up for changing behaviour if the benefits are clear, sometimes it does not seem that the benefits of change outweigh the risks of potential failure.

- We feel angry or resentful that we have to change, having developed an approach that has always worked very well up to now. Often there is an emotional block – 'why should we change?', we ask ourselves. Although we can see there might be a reason to change, we feel angry and sullen that we have to move outside our comfort zones.
- We may feel that the changes required of us will not help us achieve what we want. Whilst there might be a change of management style in the company, we may feel that becoming more of a team player will simply not get us what we want – power, independence, attention . . .
- We may choose an alternative to changing our behaviour – early retirement, relinquishing our career ambitions, focusing on our home life.

It is not uncommon for people to come to the conclusion that they simply do not want to change their behaviour – they do not want the hassle, they do not believe it is right, they do not feel it will be helpful to them and simply do not have the emotional or psychological strength to do so.

This is a common scenario for people in top leadership positions – contrast Sir Richard Greenbury's complacency at Marks and Spencer with Sir Terry Leahy's emphasis on innovation, customer focus and continual change. Even if business leaders recognize the need to change, deep down inside they may not really want the discomfort involved in changing their own behaviour. Life in the comfort zone at the top is *extremely* comfortable. One M&S board member explained to a journalist why he did not take the risk of challenging Greenbury:

> *'Well, there is the prestige of being a director of the best-loved retailer in the land . . . There is a comfortable financial package, wonderful pension, great lunchrooms, a car and a driver, company tickets to the opera and first-class travel wherever and whenever you want it, without questions'.*[1]

[1] Bevan, J. (2002) *The Rise and Fall of Marks and Spencer.* London: Profile Books Ltd, p. 129.

Contrast this with what *Fortune* magazine refers to as Samsung's culture of *perpetual crisis*. According to the article, Samsung cultivate a 'paranoid' corporate culture where disaster lurks around every corner and success only increases the danger of complacency and failure.[2]

However, it is not easy to live your life in 'perpetual crisis'. It is no wonder that many leaders decide that they simply do not want to change their approach, style or behaviour, no matter how pressing the need.

Refusing to change one's behaviour may be a blind spot, but it may also be a rational, valid decision. If a company changes its culture it may be rational to decide that the new values are no longer in alignment with one's own values. If you value teamwork and your company decides to bring in a culture based much more on individual performance, often in competition with others, you may decide quite validly that it is time to move on. If the company brings in new values based on teamwork and you prefer a more independent, achievement-oriented culture, you may decide quite rationally to leave. This is particularly the case if the new values are swept in by a strong visionary leader, who may be blind to the benefits of the existing values already in place.

The point is that it is important to be clear about the true motives behind a decision not to change. Are you avoiding the discomfort, are you running away, are you scared of the risks involved or are you taking a rational, principled decision based on self awareness and an honest appraisal of the situation? This form of sensemaking is again best conducted with a coach or close friend who knows you and understands your work.

Again, after a period of reflection, you may decide that 'change' is too psychologically exhausting. You may decide that it is time to step down because you do not want to change, and this may be a rational decision. The temptation for those in leadership positions is to decide that they do not want to change but, at the same time, refuse to relinquish their comfortable, status-enhancing leadership role. This, perhaps, is a matter of personal ethics – which we will

[2] 'The Crisis Machine.' *Fortune*, September 5th, 2005, pp. 37–43.

look at in the next chapter. Whatever forces lie behind the decision to change or not to change, it can be quite an exhausting time, recognizing that whatever decision you make will either involve some risk or the loss of opportunity.

4. I will Change

The 'will to change' is rather like steeling yourself for your first ever dive off a really high diving board. OK, you've decided that you really do need to learn to dive – maybe all your friends have cracked it and you're beginning to look a bit stupid. You've also decided that you really want to dive – it would be incredibly cool to be able to dive from such a high board – it would certainly impress the girls/boys! You know you can dive – after all, you easily dive off a low diving board.

So, having recognized the need, acknowledged that you want to, recognized that you can, you step onto the diving board. You walk to the end of the board, thrust your arms forward and there you stand, frozen.

There is a second, maybe it feels like a lifetime, where you really, really want to throw yourself off the end of the board and yet you are really, really not sure. You may swing your arms backwards and forwards, saying to yourself, 'here we go'. You may even rock your body forwards with every intention of throwing yourself off the edge, but somehow it doesn't happen. Somehow, there you are, still on the edge of the diving board. Suddenly, someone shouts out – 'get out of the way, loser!' And all of a sudden you find yourself sailing through the air, plunging into the water and coming up for breath – relieved and elated. What was it that made you dive? Actually, it was anger; anger at being called a 'loser'. That anger provided the final burst of energy that overcame the fear; the anger provided the final 'will to change'.

This was very apparent in the diaries. Over the period of a year, many people decided that they needed to change but were stuck on the edge of the diving board, not really ready to take the plunge. The final impulse to change often came in the form of a burst of

energy, sometimes it was the elation of success, or the soul-searching of guilt or the surprise of shock, but often it was anger:

> *'there's an automatic assumption that I should do that because they want me to! My initial reaction was "how", excuse my French, "how f***ing presumptuous". What they've done is taken what their values are . . . to being values that I might have, without bothering to actually question or ask what it was that made me tick and what I actually liked doing . . . no seriously there's no way I want to continue to work for this company'.*

Bill changes his behaviour due to a feeling of guilt:

> *'there were some really good people who were in danger of falling apart I think, and I wanted to try and do something about that personally, just because I felt responsible in a way I guess, because, if you're the person who's in many ways driven this, then you've got to take responsibility for the outcomes. Some of the outcomes were that people were feeling very, very uncomfortable'.*

In Chapter 2 we saw how one manager made a presentation to his colleagues on mistakes he made in managing a difficult project. This was after a long period of denying that he had done anything wrong at all. It was guilt that finally impelled him to change his behaviour:

> *'I wanted to do it because I thought if I did that I would finally purge it from my system you know, and get rid of it, and* ***so I did feel happier afterwards****, I felt as though, right that's it, that's the end of it and we've done our best out of it, not only in terms of closing it out properly but also in letting people know what sort of problems we encountered, and what signs there are to look out for so they can try to avoid them in the future.'* (my emphasis)

Jake changed his behaviour when he felt his vision was being threatened. A discussion involving a project that was crucial to his vision suddenly catalysed him to offer to present to the board (something he had never done before and which he had had no intention of doing):

> *'there is to be a meeting "at the highest levels" of our companies, there is major concern that our directors will not understand where*

Tilco are coming from or where we are in Tilco's perceptions and where we are in terms of the site developments. I ended up tackling both Pete and Chris (two board members) on this issue, and thankfully I'm going to be given a chance to present to the board on these issues – did I say thankfully?'

All these examples demonstrate a change of behaviour that seems to have been propelled by a sudden surge of emotional energy. That energy appears to feed the courage that overcomes the fear of letting go. There has to be something that almost kicks you out of the comfort zone. At some point, if change is to be embraced, there has to be a surge of the will – a determination to jump, no matter what the consequences.

This is important for those in leadership positions, because at the highest levels you can be immune from the shocks or threats or reflective admissions of guilt that provide the energy to change. You can easily find yourself surrounded by people protecting you from the uncomfortable truth or by the ambitious, fearful of challenging your ideas and decisions. Sometimes, in order to penetrate the veil of comfortable illusion that surrounds the leader, the shock has to be so great that it is too late to do anything about it. It is possible to see the history of UK banking in this light – by the time of Big Bang, with the huge and sudden influx of professional American banks, it was too late for British merchant banks to compete. The American banks were too far ahead. Whilst the British were still painfully negotiating the phases of change, many refusing to recognize the need for change, still more not wanting to change, others not able to change, the Americans were what Steve Jobs (CEO/founder of Apple Computer and Pixar Animation Studios) terms 'hungry and foolish' – ambitious, driven and yet neither complacent nor arrogant. This is why Samsung's culture of perpetual crisis, Google's culture of empowerment and 'chaos', Tesco's focus on continuous innovation or Jobs's recommendation to be 'hungry and foolish' are the only ways forward for today's leaders. Not only do they have to discipline themselves to strengthen their will and resist the temptations of the comfort zone, they have to encourage their people to do the same.

And great change leaders often find that the more you push yourself outside the comfort zone, the bigger and more flexible your comfort zone becomes. Eventually, you find that your emotional, behavioural and cognitive repertoire is actually big enough to cope with most challenges and most change. You find that the 'stretch' required to cope with whatever change throws at you is smaller, the steps you have to take when you venture outside the comfort zone are easier to take – you've been out of control before and you know how to handle it. In fact, you might start to miss it!

Leading Change and the Behavioural Lag

Whenever change is introduced, you get the leaders, the followers, the resisters and those who are confused and unsure. The trouble is that the leaders of change experience a visionary learning state. They have recognized the need for change, they are both able and willing to change and they are impatient to do anything that would seem to support their vision. People in a visionary learning state can be highly receptive to changing their behaviour (as long as it suits them and their vision!) and get furious when they encounter others in a dissonant learning state (when the change is out of line with their values and goals). Dissonant learners need time to go through the various stages of change – I need to change, I am able to change, I want to change and, finally, I will change. Visionary learners, however, have been through all of these stages months, even years, before. All they want now is for others to catch them up – to change instantly without having to go through all the different stages. In the middle are the adaptive learners – engaged with the change but still trying to come to terms with it, slowly experimenting with new behaviours to see which work and also feel comfortable and right. This can be a recipe for disaster – with impatient visionary leaders becoming more and more angry because others are not changing their behaviour quickly enough. Yet, often enough, our visionary learners and leaders do not realize that they, too, have to change their behaviour in ways that seem to undermine their own goals and values – they have to learn to be a little bit patient, to listen, to encourage and challenge at the same time. Even visionary leaders are often resistant to changing their style

when it does not suit them; even visionary leaders have their behavioural lag.[3]

Today, it feels like there is a continual pressure on everyone to change. There are limits to how much we can change and by when. There is a natural transition cycle and it takes time to traverse it. Changing behaviour is a discipline, an art, a science and a way of life – it is a crucial skill for surviving in changing times.

[3] This is powerfully illustrated by Bunker and Wakefield in their *Transition Leadership Wheel*. They maintain that a leader has to manage dilemmas, balancing urgency with patience, optimism with realism, being tough with being empathetic, self-reliance with trusting others, capitalizing on strengths and going against the grain. Leaders will inevitably find one side of the dilemma easier than the other, but according to the authors, leaders have to balance both. For many, this will lead them outside their own comfort zones and present them with their own behavioural challenge. See Bunker, K. A. and Wakefield, M. (2005) *Leading With Authenticity in Times of Transition*. Greensboro: CCL Press.