



## **Management by Instinct Leads the Way to Change**

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Despite the best efforts of hundreds of the world's top managers and consultants, creating an effective, repeatable roadmap for navigating major organizational change has been elusive. There have been successes, but they appear driven by the individual, intangible genius of a few business superstars. These leaders not only drive change, but also successfully manage the process of change to solve problems of physical infrastructure, strategic planning, and the riddle of how to adapt and optimize the human capital of their organizations. What do these leaders use to produce results and how can their successes be translated and taught to others? The answer lies in understanding the part of individual, team, and organizational behavior that remains a constant before, during, and after the change process. The answer is instinct.

For years, change management was an issue only for outside consultants. Leaders within organizations relied on the "perspective" of outsiders to identify issues and deliver unpleasant news, such as reductions in force or wholesale changes in the strategic plan only recently adopted and funded. While the tactics, or even the strategy, presented by outsiders often made sense, the implementation usually fell short. Reliance on this approach alone has proven to be an ineffective solution for companies facing change.

What was missing was the expertise to manage change. Little has been done to quantify the problems caused by change, much less the solutions. Most advice on the subject appropriately revolves around the need to operate in the dynamic environment of teams. Even back in 1952 Reinhold Niebuhr recognized this in *Irony of American History*, "Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone." And says Robert Hargrove, a consultant based in Brookline, Massachusetts, and the author of *Mastering the Art of Creative Collaboration*, "More and more of us are faced with having to achieve breakthrough goals and to solve complex problems. You can't do that alone. The only way to meet these kinds of challenges is through collaboration." (Fast Company, November 1998).

Virtual teams — those constantly formed and reformed — were supposed to be the answer. They were supposed to be more nimble than the traditional military command and control structure of clear and unbreakable lines of authority. Yet teams proved a drain on resources when they involved many people getting bogged down in the rehashing of problems. They often didn't justify pulling people away from regular assignments. People more often than not seemed to produce more working on their own than when asked to work cooperatively. "Self-proclaimed 'teams at the top' typically fail to deliver acceptable returns to shareholders or customers." (Katzenbach, Jon R. *Teams at the Top*, 1998, p. 3)

A problem for teams as big as the lack of improved productivity was managers' inability to predict whether a team would succeed. Managers were forced to leave people in roles that were comfortable and predictable or run the risk of shuffling the deck and perhaps being dealt a worse hand. On the one hand was a paradigm that worked well in a static environment; on the other was one that seemed better suited to the increasingly unpredictable business environment but was very risky. Over the past few years evidence that companies simply do not have the luxury of holding onto old systems has become overwhelming. "Within the context of leading a complex enterprise to an increasingly high set of

balanced aspirations, team performance is ... the one with the most potential for immediate results — as well as the one that is most neglected within top leadership groups.” (Katzenbach, p.213.)

Managers in most industries essentially had no choice but to move toward more flexible structures. But they still had no way to predict whether a team was likely to succeed. Was it the right group of people? Would they work well together? What kinds of conflicts would they have? Would they end up in analysis paralysis? Might they form splinter groups? Would team members obsess on some problems and overlook others? There was no telling what would happen.

The United States Department of the Navy reported in 1998 that goal attainment depends increasingly on the effectiveness of teams, but it noted, “A specific problem in improving team effectiveness is the lack of diagnostic tools to determine which team characteristics need improvement to make the team more effective.” (Office of Naval Research, November 1998, <http://www.nprdc.navy.mil/nprdc/dig-tool.htm>)

Retreating to individual cubbyholes is not the answer when we are waging a war with the massive force of change. We must build strength around it and recognize the magnitude that we are attempting to withstand. After all, what Heraclites said in 420 BC, and Swift, Shelley, and others have oft repeated stands true today, “Nothing endures but change.”

Leaders cannot ignore the overwhelming impossibility of employees trying to deal with:

- huge fluctuations in international financial markets;
- consumer mood swings spawned by singular events and communicated worldwide almost instantaneously;
- the swirling effect of mergers and acquisitions to the point where they may not recall the name of their once local bank or traditional suppliers;
- new compensation and benefit plans requiring expert help to figure out whether they are gaining or losing in the deal;
- technology advances increasing the time it takes to get most anything done even though most parts of the process happen much faster;
- lawsuits changing workplace employment rules without clarifying compliance standards;
- longer life spans influencing health care costs, retirement plans, and quality of life without open discourse on what’s wrong with that picture; or
- instantaneous communication where debate is now a matter of who can type the fastest.

Marketplace victories simply require figuring out how to make teams work. The longest tradition in team building has been to put people together because they have the skills or experiences necessary to get the job done. Specialization allowed for success and efficiency. If you were climbing a mountain, it’s been understood that you need at least one person who knows about weather conditions, one who manages supplies, someone to do the cooking, and an expert on climbing who knows the terrain as well.

But teams put together with great regard for such learned or cognitive abilities alone often still failed. So the conventional wisdom began to include recognition of the importance of attitude. Organizations spent untold sums on what came to be known as “feel-good” seminars. If you were going to risk your futures together, the message was that you should try to like and trust team members. Programs sprouted up that engaged work groups in everything from walking on coals together to painting pots that symbolized their unity of purpose.

Still, if we do not know how well a group of people is likely to perform without these interventions, how do we know if the dollars spent will improve the odds of success? With few diagnostic tools available to measure team effectiveness, the commonsense approach has been to query team members on their

satisfaction with the results. Did they get more done working together than they would have accomplished on their own? (They usually say team meetings were a burden and team issues a distraction.)

Team leaders often single out problems that have nothing to do with lack of skills. They believe motivation was high, but decreased over the course of the project, despite their constant efforts to improve attitude. The head of one technology project commented, “I’ve become a baby-sitter. Instead of doing their own jobs, they want to talk about how it feels to work on a team with people who don’t do an equally good job in other roles.”

Skills are essential. Attitudes matter. But the only way we will ever be able to make teams more effective is by putting teams together with the right mix of natural abilities. Managing by instinct makes it possible to predict whether a team will reach its goals. People strive in natural patterns, or MOs. The modus operandi of the individual is ingrained; it’s an innate ability. Therefore, you can trust it. Because it doesn’t change, it is both predictable and reliable. You know what each team is going to do, regardless of the changes that come about. “It takes a major event to bring ... instincts into play at the top of well-established hierarchies. As a result, it happens all too rarely, and it tends to occur much too randomly; thus significant team opportunities are overlooked.” (Katzenbach, p. 66.)

Since team members will perform true to form, there is at least one constant that leaders can depend upon. Just as teams require specific skills (the cognitive domain) and shared values (the affective domain), so do they need a diversity of instinctive approaches (the conative domain). Conative actions are those derived from instincts. Striving instincts are subconscious and therefore not measurable, but the conative actions derived from them are now quantifiable.

Conative assessment allows us to ensure a team has an appropriate balance between inclinations to innovate and to stabilize, between those who will justify and those who will simplify, between contributions of organized systems and the ability to adapt systems to change, of tangible and intangible solutions.

Research now proves there is a natural tendency among humans to initiate solutions, prevent problems, and respond to changing needs. Synergy can be quantified as the balance among these three zones of instinctive operation. When these instinctive energies are distributed within a team according to a prescribed natural balance, team members will add productive value to the team over and above what they would have accomplished as individual contributors.

Efficiency of teams is also a matter of managing by instincts. Some members’ instinct-based differences in approach can be mediated by others who naturally bridge otherwise divisive gaps in innate processes.

Changes, without recognition of the importance of instincts for dealing with them, can mean a constant churning of roles with such negative affect that retention becomes a pervasive problem. Keeping a team together — viability — relies on leaders being able to assign specific, though changing tasks, that fit the person’s MO. Skills can be taught as required, but instincts don’t change. Teach people the best ways to utilize their natural abilities and training dollars will be more effectively spent, people will have a greater joy of accomplishment, and productivity rates will improve as much as 200%.

Instinct-based management is not a vision for the future. Over 500,000 case studies prove it is a capability on which leaders of today can be trained. Leaders of the teams that will take advantage of opportunities for the future will not fear change. Successful leaders control change by giving people the freedom to operate according to their instinctive strengths.