



LEADING CONTINUOUS CHANGE

Questions you could ask when leading continuous change

1. What role does innovation play in the changes we're making? Do we mostly have an intentional process for innovating or are we perhaps relying a little heavily on good luck to get us through?
2. How transparent is our business? You'd want to be reflecting on the quantity and quality of open communication across the organisation, including feedback. Do leadership behaviours promote trust, support and acceptance?
3. What's being done to stimulate and capture creativity? Again, you should be asking whether there is an intentional valuing of creative thinking. Highly agile organisations are 2.5x as likely to provide creativity and innovation training.
4. How well is our organisation dealing with diversity? UGM's research shows that a powerful way to approach diversity is through a repertoire of behaviours that lead to an inclusive culture.
5. On a scale of 1-10, how collaborative is our organisation and my own leadership style? Do silos have much impact on outcomes?

Continuous change is the new normal

Like it or not, continuous change has quickly become the new 'business as usual' for most organisations. Even those that aren't the prime innovators and disruptors of existing business models are nevertheless impacted by significant changes. It's hard to name a single sector that hasn't either been substantially changed or isn't facing imminent large-scale changes to the ways of doing business.

Part of the reason for the scale and frenetic pace of the disruption is because we are still pretty much in transition. The global economy is on the cusp between the historical industrial model and the new digital age. So, we must anticipate and prepare for an acceleration of change moving forward. No signs of things settling down anytime soon. This is no simple 24 hour makeover!

To make things tougher, a lot of what got us to this point in economic development will quickly become irrelevant and obsolete as the radically new models of doing business take hold. Technologies, including leadership and management approaches and tools, will also need to undergo radical changes. A new order will emerge.

An increasing focus on 'agile' organisations

All organisations need to be responsive to changing environmental conditions. This is especially important when changes are rapid and, not infrequently, rather unpredictable. Larger organisations used to rely on scale as a key source of economic power and advantage. But, if organisations aren't very responsive, that previously important source of competitive advantage quickly becomes a problem that may even threaten survival.

Michael Moon, of research organisation i4cp, provides useful insights about organisational agility. It is "the ability to move quickly, decisively and efficiently in sensing, responding to and exploiting change in the business environment".

Fortunately, as much as change has disrupted business as usual, it has also brought with it new and useful technologies. These will help businesses operate in ways that weren't previously possible. For example, people and organisations have a level of interconnectivity beyond anything imaginable, even 50 years ago! Communication should be easier than ever!

Another significant change is the emergence of 'big data' and the growing capability of processing information in ways that deliver very insightful, accurate predictions of future behaviour. Value has also shifted from being largely physical (goods) to intangibles (services) and ever expanding digital

networks ensure this value increases as services are easily distributed, pretty much anywhere in the world.

Leading highly agile organisations

A recently released i4cp study uncovered some important differences between highly agile and not particularly agile organisations. Highly agile organisations (read 'adept at continuous change') are 6.5x more likely to respond to changes in their business environment. They're 3x more likely to adapt to those changes and 4.5x more likely to use the changes to deliver beneficial outcomes.

The research also found that highly agile organisations are ten times more likely to have five particular values embedded in their culture. Listed from most to least predictive of organisational agility, the values are innovation, transparency, creativity, diversity, and collaboration. Take a step back for just a moment and you'll quickly realise that most of these values wouldn't have featured as mainstay values of the industrial success stories of bygone eras.

UGM strongly recommends that clients consider developing a set of well defined 'Principles', rather than pursuing 'Values', which tend to be more broadly stated and, ultimately, less useful in guiding and instigating desired behaviours. For example, having a shared Principle, such as 'Our decision processes demonstrate a commitment to diversity of perspectives and thinking styles', provides useful guidance. Each Principle is more easily pursued by outlining a clear set of supportive behaviours.

Useful pointers for leader behaviours

If you're wanting to be a good leader of continuous change (surely a fantastic asset in any organisation), the five values provide useful pointers to the kinds of leadership skills and behaviours that you'll need. Since each organisation is subtly different, you'll want to reflect on how each of the over-arching principles would need to be implemented for best effect in your own organisation.

A great place to start might be to use the five focus areas and conduct a simple assessment of your own organisation and then your own leadership. Thinking about change, and especially continuous change, what role do innovation, transparency, creativity, diversity and collaboration play in your change processes? It may be that some of the elements feature among your formal processes. In other instances, perhaps you'll find the elements popping up informally – so perhaps a little more by luck than by intention. Some elements may be missing altogether! Remember though, highly agile organisations are ten times more likely to have all five of the identified elements as part of their culture.