

About the power of individual change and its impact on the organization: Reflexions for PyMES leaders of the 21st century in emerging countries

As a specialist in organizational change management, a central reflection throughout the winter of 2007 was about the following question: How to help leaders of companies in emerging countries to increase their degree of adaptability so that they effectively face the changes that the current context poses for them (both in their personal and professional lives)? This as a result of the increasing number of changes that leaders are facing and the challenges - that sometimes - they experience because of lacking a simple guideline on how to increase their degree of adaptability in the current context.

About the nature of change today

Why to manage change is an imperative in the current context? Simply because the nature of change has been modified. Today changes are more complex, more constant and have more impact. Consequently, company leaders of today are exposed to a number of major changes throughout their lives than leaders in the second half of the 20th century. Thus, if they cannot effectively achieve to increase their degree of adaptability to major changes or to identify what are the ones that truly demand to be take care of, they have the risk of starting to have blindness and/or even to go into chaos.

This will prevent them – personally and professionally– to continue effectively leading not being able to make the difference anymore in their area of influence (local, regional and/ or international).

Based on the foregoing, and before talking about the nature of personal change as well as their transference into PYMES in emerging countries, I wish to state two ideas:

The first one is the definition of change: According to the Dictionary, this term means action and the effect of changing; it also means to leave one thing o situation for another. Thus, for the purposes of this article, when we talk about change, we refer to the possibility that a leader views the challenges of the current under a growth and opportunity perspective. Perspective that also will allow him/her – if wished – to modify its way of approaching life.

Thus, the degree of adaptability refers to the skill a leader has to effectively assimilate the changes he/she faces.

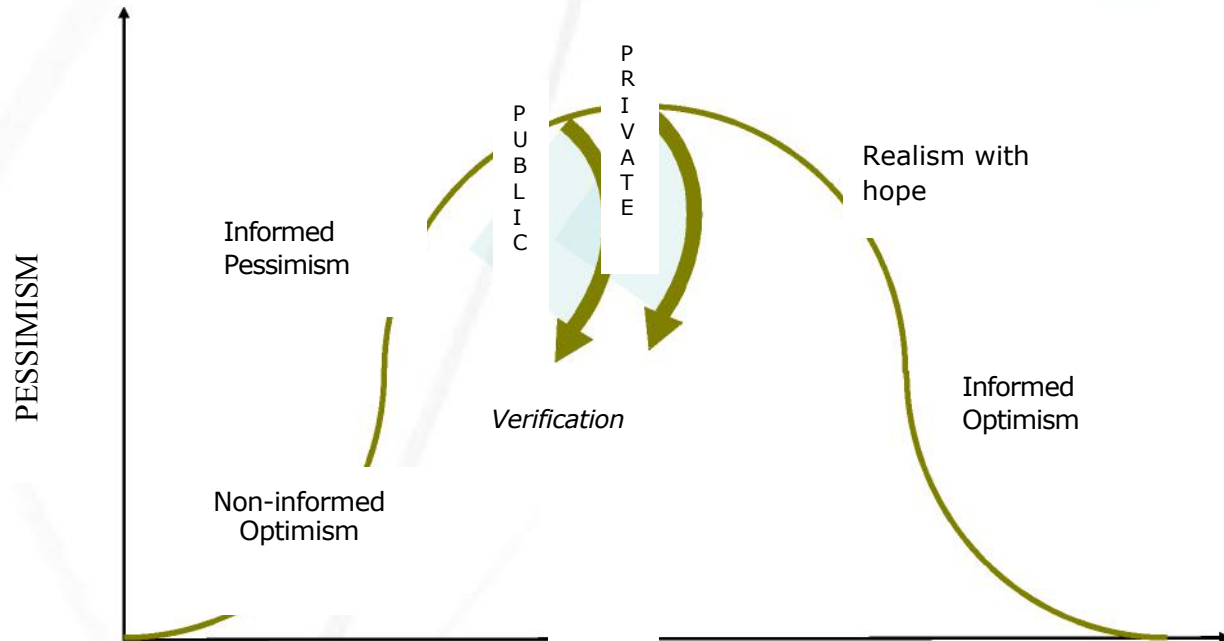
- The second one is that the change itself has been modified as well! This about its volume, momentum and complexity.
- Volume: It refers to the number of changes experienced in a specific moment. It shall be enough, as recommended by Daryl Conner (1993), to read a newspaper and note that unlike what could be seen five, ten or twenty years ago; the number of organizational changes that are recorded have increased considerably.
- Momentum: The time elapsed between one change and another has decreased or their pace is now faster. Sometimes even one change has not finished to be implemented when another is coming.
- Complexity: Indicates that now the number of variables to consider in a specific change is increasing. In order to assure that their product or service offers benefits that make the difference over competition, a company leader used to take into account the product itself and its direct clients...but now he/she has to take also into account the international economy, the technological breakthroughs, business relationships, the regional national or global impact, energetic restrictions among other factors.

Therefore, by viewing that a change is necessary or that a change is already affecting us (favorably or adversely) we have two alternatives: whether we reject it or embrace it.

- If we reject it is because we experience it, whether consciously or unconsciously some point of the following curve which according to Daryl Conner is called “the negative response to change”. This is why it is important to identify how to move ourselves to the next level so we can, at the proper time, reach the acceptance point.



- If at the same time we embrace it is because we are in any of the points of the following curve which Conner also calls “The positive response to change” and this allows us to view that when we are open to change is because we have the information that allows us to assimilate it.



About leaders and the adaptability

The attention capacity of human beings has no limits!... That is, if an individual has demands that conflict him/her or that “distract his/her attention”, he or she will hardly perform his/her activities in an optimal way...it is as if we were a USB (a memory to store information) and there is a point when it is saturated and it cannot store any other file. Thus it is important that a leader of an organization takes also an opportunity to live an integral life so that both his/her personal and professional relationships are healthy and positive.

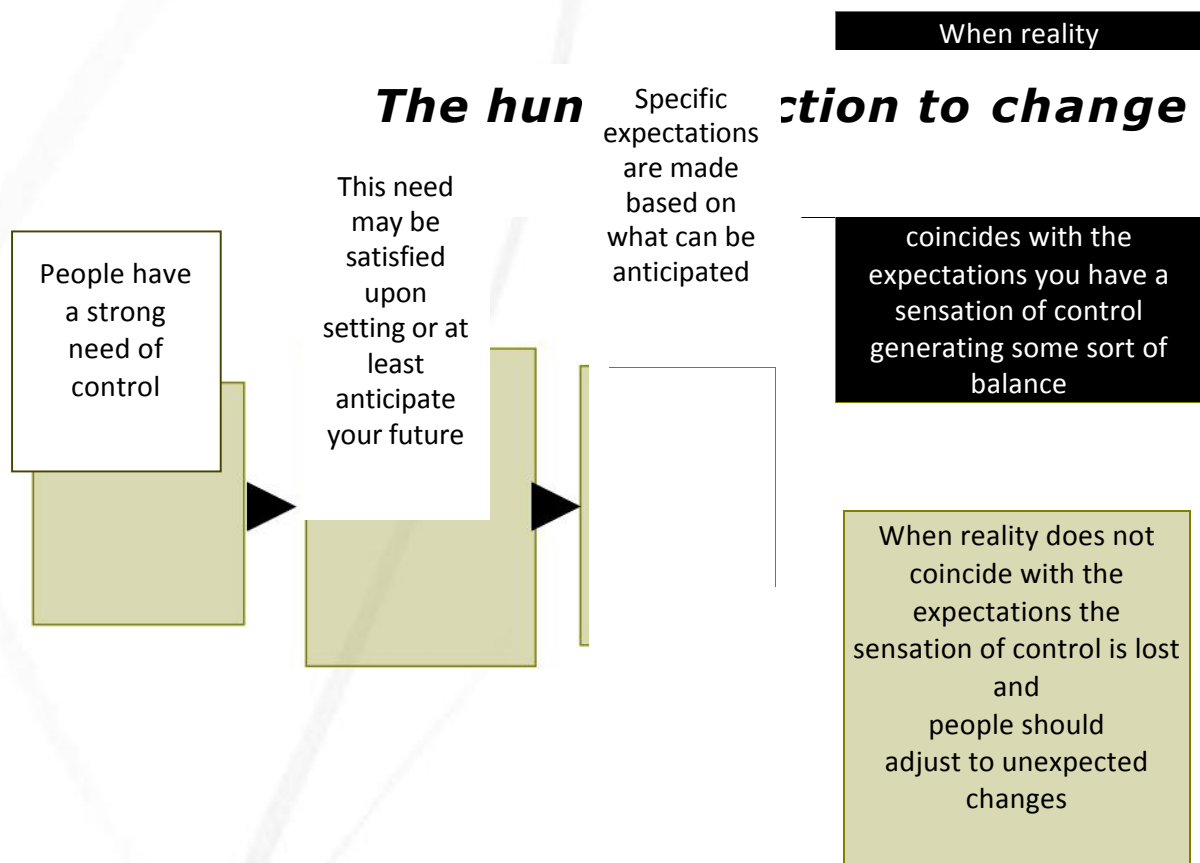
Recently when talking to a couple of entrepreneurs I recorded the following situations:

1. Entrepreneur A. Due to the constant changes my company experience (market and industrial changes) I have focused almost all my attention to the company leaving second my family life. My personal life is almost inexistent, I feel asphyxiated and I don't know where to start. Actually, I have noticed that even if I invest more hours in the company, the operation is getting over me and I have no time to think. I feel trapped in the operation more than in strategic matters!”

2. Entrepreneur B: “Despite the changes and the new challenges the company is experiencing (international competition, cut down in costs), I decided to be more flexible and I now have an integral life plan— that is, I have allowed myself to have different spaces in my life: professional, family and social-wise, to have individual activities, among others - and even in the first semester daring to change was such a challenge for me, since it implied to modify habits and beliefs that were very rooted; in the second semester I have started to notice the difference ...and although I work less hours, my efficiency levels have increased considerably, even for the first time in my life I have started to have time to think about strategic matters”.

As a result, the central question to this respect is... Have you noticed that in the last months (or even years) even when you give out the best of you to move ahead your company, it would seem that you move in circles or that the number of changes that have impact on your family or company are increasing and you feel overwhelmed? If the answer is yes, it is probably that this is a key moment for you to stop and see the root of the problem. Would it be necessary to change anything of you so that you are a better leader? Would it be that this is the time to take yourself the chance to fully live your life and develop all your potential? Would it be this the opportunity for you to decide to increase your degree of adaptability to changes? They say that the darkest moment of night is just when it is going to dawn.

Now, how to get started? How to take this first step to increase our degree of adaptability? First of all, by simply, recognizing that generally we people have a strong need to control and that's why – quite often – the arrival of change represents an unbalance as described in the following figure:



Concepts from Daryl Conner, ODR - ©

Original figure taken from the book *Managing at the Speed of Change*, Daryl, R. Conner, page 75

Thus,

the
different perspective.

the following step is precisely to explore the advantages and opportunities of being unbalanced since that implies “having opportunity” of start over something in our life under a new or

Therefore, I only want to add in this section that in my experience – after having worked for several years with American and European teams and leaders – I have observed that to the extent that they allow themselves to “start over something with new eyes” they are ready almost automatically to increase their degree of adaptability and that they may only need some guidance. This is why that upon deciding to begin something with a new perspective, they are precisely used to seeking specialized support in order to increase their degree of adaptability whether personal or organizational.

An organization that for example offers specialized support to this respect is the Change Facilitation Associates Network where precisely according to the needs of the leaders in different continent, different options of mentoring and support are offered. As for the Latin America region, for example, I am one of the four professionals that have started with the mentoring and/or support service in Spanish to help decision-makers in different industries and contexts to increase their degree of adaptability according to the characteristics of our culture and to the reality of emerging countries.

Leaders in action

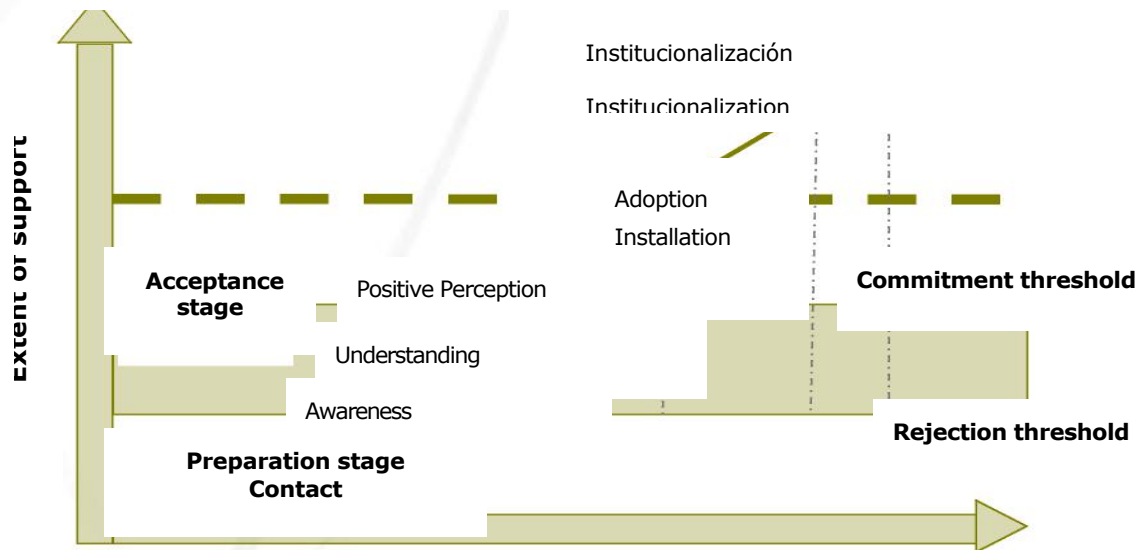
Once the decision to accept change in our lives is taken...or after identifying that something needs to change in our existence...something important is to cultivate our opening to the unknown...and take the risk of living it!

In this section I only want to share what an entrepreneur was telling me about his own way of discovering the unexpected..."some years ago – when a new political leader arrived to power – we knew that we had to leave the state since it would be very difficult to operate. Although this was such a big challenge at the time, our decision was to move to other states of Mexico. At this time, and thanks to this change that at that time was hard, now we operate almost throughout the country". My reflection to this respect is with no doubt, that being opened to the unexpected - and with a quick assimilation of change – this leader and its team capitalized the situation....thus, to the extent that in emerging countries leaders of organizations continue to daring to move on– according to new circumstances and demands of the environment – to such extent there will continue to be opportunities to generate jobs and prosperity.

The road never ends, actually nowadays; to the extent that this entrepreneur and its work team recognize their need to institutionalizing...they are getting ready to plan an organizational change that truly takes them to become highly competitive in the domestic market and in the international market. The challenge is big but they know that it is possible. And it is, because they already know that in order to achieve the successful introduction a strategic change within their organization, they will prepare the terrain to assure that people are "ready, want and can" embrace such change.

If they as vanguard leaders already know that to truly effectively lead a strategic transition within their organization, they need to encourage a commitment among the people (human capital). They are also aware that generating a commitment is not something automatic as shown in the following figure:

Stages of commitment with change

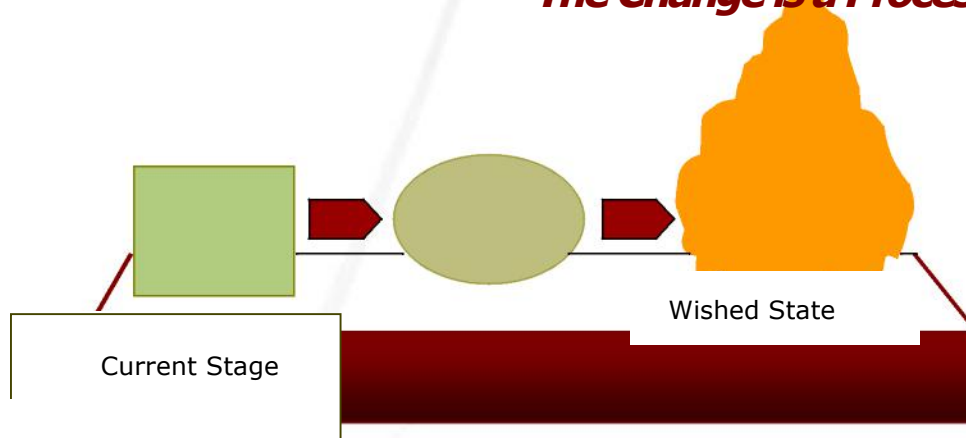


Concepts from Daryl Conner, ODR -

How to capitalize what was learned in the world of business personally-wise? This is simple: As we develop strategic frames that lead organizational action, it is also possible to plan the introduction to personal changes in our everyday life.

Thus, if we consider change as a process, we pass from point A to B with the following elements: Current state – (pain / uncomfortableness) - transition- wished state (opening). And one of the important factors is to recognize that moving from point A to B, in a first stage will bring with it uncomfortableness....and then, opening to new things!

The Change is a Process



Pain Adjustment

Concepts from Daryl Conner,

This is a simple guideline to begin this process in a simple and effective way:

1. Recognize your Present – Where am I going? – What is my current situation?
2. View the future – Where do I want to go? Towards what point do I want to move? (Down, up, right, left, etc.)
3. Identify gaps – What are the areas that require action to start moving to the point I want to reach?
4. Generate plans of action to diminish these gaps.
5. Start Action....
6. Monitor the action...this is evaluate!

About the adaptation capacity in emerging countries and other similar aspects

1. The change is an adventure with no equal...
2. Once you have tasted the benefits of changing by making small personal efforts...your skill to also lead changes in other areas will be ready to be experienced.
3. At the time when you decide to lead an organizational change, remember that some principles of personal change apply (such as passing from a state to another, or resisting to change due to a lack of understanding or information)
4. When you decide to embark in an planned organizational change, take into account that there will also be other elements to consider such as:

identifying the incoming of risks associated to this change and the need to plan the change so that people accept it.

5. Once there are inside your organization precedents of planned and successful changes, to such extent there will also be a possibility to create a culture aimed towards positive change it will start to emerge...and a change may start being seen as an ally, as a variable that at all times makes us grow...at individual, team or organizational level.

Do you have questions or do you wish to have more information about our successful cases in Europe, North America and other parts of the world? Just send me a note, regardless of where I am, I will gladly talk to you.

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- Consultant in Change Management: She personally led global projects from different geographical locations.
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In her last global intervention, Dulce María led three change strategic initiatives from France. One of them had impact on 130 countries. At this time, Dulce María is mentor of top management members in different geographic places and promotes the value of change management in her native country: Mexico.

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