



# Nothing changes until behaviour changes

Changing the leadership behaviour of a business will have a huge impact on its performance. In a corporate setting, it may be as few as two or three things that need to change in order to bring significant change.

The purpose and processes outlined in this article highlight how best to improve corporate performance from the inside out. This is also applicable for those committing to and undertaking their own personal transformation. If one can work in partnership with a client or customer – corporate or individual – and enable him or her to change personally, then that client will be more effective at winning the hearts and minds of others to the process, and lead change by actions and behaviour rather than dictat.

Lasting change is achieved when people change their behaviour and explore new ways of interacting with themselves and others. It is critical to build a robust series of change processes for those who are undertaking the change. This is applicable whether as leaders or managers of a large organisation or individually in a one-to-one development relationship with a personal coach. What is important in both contexts is that those undergoing the change display a sufficient level of self-disclosure to illustrate to others in the change process that they are serious and will lead the required improvements through examining and by practising new behaviour.



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Until behaviour changes, nothing changes at all. It is pointless committing to a large-scale strategic change programme, then failing to internalise the required change in terms of one's desired style of management. Without a demonstration of personal commitment to advancement in organisational and personal leadership style, can you possibly hope that others further along the chain can believe you are serious?

### Change should be real

The process is similar in the context of personal or corporate change. Research tells us that change does not happen unless there is individual change in those leading it. Without this important commitment to change behaviour, the changes introduced will not last, the initiative will lose its momentum, few improvements and practices will be implemented, and sustained change will be perceived largely as a cosmetic exercise.

No change takes place at the level of operations without leaders starting to behave in new ways and refraining from that behaviour that constrains improvement or reinforces the idea that we can go on failing to evolve. We cannot go on operating in the same old way with the same old styles, culture and processes. To survive and succeed we have to look for new ways of behaving and shift to a new state of enhanced value and performance for people and shareholders alike.

### Why people resist change

People resist change because it is not easy to admit: *'I could be better'* or *'I know what I am doing is wrong.'*

It is easy to say we are personally committed to change, but real change can be evidenced in people taking actions and behaving in new ways. This requires appraising old behaviour and being prepared to take action and practise new ones. It requires the ability to be self-reflective and then self-disclose to others when we value the input of others to improve our interactions with a variety of people.

### How much do we like change?

Personal change is not easy. If it were, we would all live to be 100; we would probably never retire. We would live a long life because we would reject all damaging habits, including stress and conflict. No one would be overweight. We would all be fit and healthy, working out every day in the gym, eating the right combination of foods and rejecting all toxic personal habits: we would drink alcohol moderately, if at all, and would not smoke.

We would probably accept rather than reject the unfavourable comments from others on our ability to lead, work with others, deal with conflict and improve our performance. We would have few, if any, self-limiting beliefs, speak privately and publicly with vigour and confidence, and be high-energy motivators and influencers. We would be right at the top of the learning curve

in self-development, people management and technological knowledge. We would be great parents and learners. We would constantly and fearlessly seek personal feedback on our performance in all arenas and be the first to admit when we were wrong and then learn new things. It sounds great, but how real is all that?

Most of us do not like change. Yet how often are we guilty of imposing it on others, whilst we reject those things we should embrace? We give ourselves permission and excuses, and create our own inner dialogue, rationalising that it is right thing to do from our perspective and imposing it on others.

But we do not like others imposing change on us, do we? This is because it does not suit us, and may require us to move out of our comfort zone to areas to where we feel we are at risk. To be honest, we do not like change if we cannot control it. If that is the case, we either avoid situations that require operating in the desired manner, or demonstrate 101 ways that the change will not work, and take every step we can to resist it, albeit in a passive rather than an outwardly aggressive, manner.

All resistance to change is passive. Very few individual actively campaign in a forthright active manner unless they can band together with like-minded people, such as a trade association or trade union. Many professionals who drive change focus on technical aspects, the technology or the processes that support change, rather than dealing with behaviour that is the heart of the matter. The massive energy that powers the implementation and the momentum to drive change home resides in the energy of individual leadership behaviour.

### Transferability of learning

If we can master personal change, the transfer of the process to the corporate setting is relatively easy. Let us look at the nature of personal change and use the application of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and other techniques to bring about desired improvement. What you think about, and say to yourself becomes your own prison, constraining choice and advancement and the ability test your new ideas.

Our inner dialogue programmes us to succeed or fail. We all talk to ourselves and hear that inner voice, which can be positive or negative. When your inner dialogue supports you, it is fantastic; you break through to new higher levels of enhanced performance. But when it does not support you, when it tells you negative things that inhibit your performance, it can make you feel uncomfortable. It reinforces the idea that you do not have the resources, the will or the faith to rise to the challenge.

Your inner dialogue illustrates the mind-body connection brilliantly. Your thoughts are what create butterflies in your stomach when you hear you are to deliver a presentation to your fellow





managers, or customers at a business conference, or when you have to make a speech at a family or business event.

### Whispers that affect your behaviour

Those few negative words that you silently mutter to yourself can create significant change in how you feel in your body, and often the words that trigger feelings and emotions will release chemicals in your brain that create changes in your physiology. You experience the 'flight or fight response', and this causes a multitude of responses within your physiology: the gnawing feeling in the pit of the stomach, the sweaty palms, the confused thoughts associated with fear and trembling that many experience as the feared event draws nearer. The cortisone released when you experience fear is exactly the same whether the event is real or anticipated. Even events that are due to take place in the distant future can still trigger huge negative emotions and swings in your mood, impacting on your performance now and growing as the anticipated event gets closer. This is probably one of the biggest problems holding back your personal achievement.

The negative inner dialogue has prompted the saying: '*The brave man rising to the challenge dies only once, whereas the coward dies 1,000 times.*'

### The nature of fear

So why worry about something that has not happened? Why worry about something that you can control should you choose to do so? If the events and outcomes had already taken place, you would not fear them; but because they have not happened yet, you do: and how the suspense and the tension grow!

Negative inner dialogue keeps you fearful and anticipating the worst, whereas positive dialogue improves your personal performance and enables you to experiment, confident that the outcome can only propel you upwards. When you are feeling positive, the only choice you have to make is how to take charge of your emotions and take action. You have to take conscious control of your inner dialogue, and this is relatively easy, when you know how.

Ultimately, what we believe about our capabilities and ourselves is mirrored in our inner dialogue and can make life a heaven or hell. If you live in this hell, this will definitely hold you back from

mastering your true potential. Although this choice also protects you from threat and keeps you safe, there is a price to pay.

Maintaining your safety 100% and keeping you safe from harm means you do not progress to conquer your fears. Take a deep breath and consider: do you want to advance or retreat? Do you not owe yourself the opportunity to conquer these fears and design your life the way you want to live it? Do you want to be able to sit back at the end of your life satisfied with the actions you have taken, rather than regretting the challenges and quests that remain uncharted. Now is the time to take back control of your emotions.

### How your behaviour works

Your range of abilities and behaviour is based on what you believe you can achieve. To understand how you do this, you have to examine your strategies for creating for solutions that you will utilise to encounter problems in the future. This is how you learn to improve your repertoire. This is how your mind works.

Suppose you encounter a problem. You work through solving it and take action, noting that the action you take resolves the problem completely. Does that reinforce your faith in that particular solution? Once you encounter a solution that works, you tend to rely on it. But sometimes you put too much faith in your solutions and apply them inappropriately, rather than finding new ways of responding.

What are the implications of staying in your comfort zone, rather than working on new solutions, and how does this impact on you and your confidence? If you fail to take the challenge, your range of solutions and strategies becomes too narrow. Then, sooner or later, the applications of a few tested solutions applied to a wide variety of problems will highlight your inflexibility and ineffectiveness. You see, your actions are not fixing the problems at all. Rather than adopting a tailored approach, you are using those things you are good at and employing them indiscriminately.

When you do this, others are aware of your drop in performance. This puts you and your ego at serious risk. If you fail to change and improve, you will retreat into your comfort zone: sometimes, permanently.

### Sliding back into your comfort zone

When this happens, you will have a strong tendency not to disclose your fears and your limitations to others in a bid to improve and advance. But if you fail to self-disclose, learn and practise new beliefs and ways of thinking, how can you eradicate your fears and move to the next level of performance?

If you do not take action to remedy the situation, in all likelihood you will develop threat-sensitive responses and behaviour that is highly defensive in nature and will lead to significant personal tension that manifests as stress. By not taking action to eradicate the beliefs and negative self-talk, you create a vicious and ever decreasing circle that stunts your personal growth and your mental health.

The resulting behaviour is that you are not discriminating and instead are using your solutions as a panacea: one size fits all. That is when there is a breakdown in your personal effectiveness and when you recognise you are, in effect, applying unsuitable solutions to complex problems that require

more insight. All this happens because you are most comfortable with what seems to work and are not prepared to seek alternative approaches to development. However, go beyond that comfort zone and you can learn different skills and new ways of working to deal with your changing circumstances.

### Mastering the inner dialogue

How often have you caught your inner dialogue giving your negative self-talk? *'I'll never be able to do that'* or *'That will not work'* or *'I tried that before and it didn't work'* or *'Don't put faith in others, they only let you down.'*

These words reflect your belief systems and govern your actions. Such self-limiting beliefs tend to exhibit themselves in these examples of negative self-talk. So, when you are prompted to think about something where you do not feel able to cope with, these negative phrases pop into your head and discourage you from taking action. Over time, these phrases become automatic, and part of your unconscious response. Here we have a complex set of stimulus–response relationships.

Consider this: the anticipated negative event or scenario arises and *Wham!*: your negative self-talk bypasses your conscious rational mind and *Boom!*: you experience in full Technicolor a depressed or unresourceful emotional state. You have responded in the same old tired way. This is the first step in the pessimistic route of learned helplessness, consciously deciding to behave in ways less than helpful for your personal development.

### Taking charge of your emotions

You have to override the automatic unconscious response and replace it with a positive conscious trigger and set of positive behaviour that becomes your new automatic response. This is a technique that I have used with myself and others, and it has a really powerful influence on personal effectiveness, especially destroying old negative habits that breed self-limiting behaviour.

Think of situations that you find personally challenging: public speaking; creating rapport with a new client; feeding back bad news to colleagues; dealing with difficult team members; eradicating a personal damaging habit, such as smoking, drinking to excess, overeating or under-exercising; procrastinating, being lethargic and lazy; failing to take action that would prevent problems arising for customers; constantly failing to take the leadership challenge and implement change; being automatically negative and resisting personal and organisational change.

It is time to appraise, regroup and take back lost ground from the enemy – and the enemy is you! It is time to have those adult conversations, and this starts with examining how you have been conditioned over the years through stimulus–response relationships.

### Automatic response

Remember, you generally respond automatically to a stimulus. Now is the time to break the negative cause–effect relationships and negative emotions, and replace them with more empowering ones that will enable you to take action. The feeling is like taking the handbrake off a fast-moving car. You accelerate into the future and leave the past behind. You can now rise above the negative experience and move through the situation, experience or event that previously you feared and learn the process that can take you forward.

You have to prepare and prevent yourself from going into automatic mode. By replacing these old habitual patterns of negative inner dialogue with new empowering thoughts, your behaviour will instantly generate the results you crave.

Previously, when shocked with your inner voice being negative, you had been frozen in your response, inactive and stopped in your tracks. Now you can use the following technique to enable you to rise above the challenge that limited you in the past. When the experience or the situation you dread – the stimulus – enters your conscious awareness, your immediate response is no longer a negative emotion, but a positive one that you welcome and act upon.

### Destroying negative self-talk

You hear or see the event or incident in your mind's eye and your instant response is *Wham!*: a negative emotion. A friend of mine only had to hear the phrase *'We'd like you to present your findings'* and *Wham!*: negative thoughts raced through his head. He visualised himself standing speaking to his colleagues, quivering with fright with the inner dialogue racing and looping inside his head stating in a very depressing, shrill, whinging, voice: *'I cannot do this – I lack confidence – people will judge me, and I may have a panic attack and then what will they think of me?'*

So it is not surprising that my colleague never volunteered to speak in public; and at every meeting he attended he was so wary of others asking him to stand up at the flipchart and demonstrate his views that he retreated into himself, and sought a more junior technical role in the company, rather than the senior leadership position that he had enjoyed for a number of years.

### Changing belief systems changes behaviour

There is a whole host of techniques, many built on OD practice of corporate change and elements of CBT, that have been modified from personal behavioural interventions and redesigned to meet the needs of modern corporate life. Here I highlight an example based on changing personal behaviour.



Step 1	Fear: I cannot do it.	What happens if I have a panic attack?	Anxiety: will they see how nervous I am?
Step 2	I am not an expert.	What about my personal credibility?	I am fearful of looking foolish.
Step 3	Can I meet the challenge?	I am too tense to make a difference.	Can I really influence others?
Step 4	Can I negotiate my role with the sponsor of the change?	I want to be balanced, but I am still stressed.	Look back at past successes: yes, I do have it in me.
Step 5	Is it ok that I build a change partnership with my sponsor?	I am in control of the message.	This could be the best thing that has happened to me
Step 6	I am going to build a real depth of rapport.	I cannot wait to rehearse my big presentation.	What a great opportunity to sell myself.

## Steps to improve personal effectiveness

Table 1

From the example of the fear of public speaking illustrated above, I can introduce a simple methodology that can have a profound effect on how individuals and organisations operate. To work through this methodology requires an assessment of our individual perceptions of situations or contexts under which we feel under threat or are fearful. It is highly unlikely we will respond in our most creative, risk-averse way when we are confronted by situations where we can be exposed personally or organisationally. It is a simple method to get us to reframe our perceptions of problems and negate our negative self-talk. It is impossible to negate a bad habit or way of thinking without replacing it with a desired new behaviour or habit. That is why most diets fail for most people. That is why giving up smoking, drinking alcohol or any other personally damaging habit or pastime is doomed to failure unless there is a corresponding activity that uses the person's resources and time to better effect.

Those who succeed in abstaining from alcohol or who finally give up smoking, lose that extra 50lb have all – and I mean *all* – replaced a negative habit with a desirable habit that gives so much *pleasure* it counteracts the *pain* of clinging on to and being addicted to the old habit. People value what they do and do what they value, so ensure that what you value adds more pleasure to you than returning to the old ways of behaving. Here, I will give two examples: you can modify them. One is an individual example, the other corporate.

### Are you facing fear, panic and anxiety?

This is what I usually ask when undertaking this exercise. To work through this methodology requires an assessment of individual perceptions of situations or contexts under which we feel at threat or are fearful.

#### Example 1: public speaking – personal effectiveness

I would ask the individual to think of three negative words or phrases that would come to mind when thinking about having to give a high-level presentation that could impact performance to either senior managers or customers. On the individual level, I request that the individual consider the immediate feeling and thoughts that race through his or her head.

The three phrases are:

- Fear: I cannot do it
- What happens if I have a panic attack?
- Anxiety: will they see how nervous I am?

Then I ask the individual to think about giving that presentation again without using those three words or phrases and to come up with three new words that reflect how he or she feels:

- I am not an expert
- What about my personal credibility?
- I am fearful of looking foolish

Now I ask the individual to think through the situation again without using these six words at all or even thinking of the words to describe the personal feeling. This time the three words become less negative. You can see where this is going.

In an intervention with one individual manager it took up to six episodes to arrive at a situation where the individual became very positive about the opportunity to present. Of course, this was the start we needed to help him improve his personal performance. We stopped the negative internal dialogue and replaced it with the more positive words and feelings. We also used other methodologies to support the person in this personal change.

Table 1 shows the results for one individual manager. Notice how the individual is starting to reframe his attitude to the event.

#### Example 2: procrastinating – failing to introduce corporate change

A similar example – see Table 2 – relates to a manager who did not feel he had the skill, ability or aptitude to want to introduce, and personally commit to, culture change.

By working with this manager, I enabled him to think differently about his perceptions of his own role and his behaviour in leading change. This took only another five rounds of the exercise. We also used other techniques to ensure that this new behaviour was anchored within him and now when we talked of him as leading change, he rightly considered himself an excellent change agent. Better still, others are emulating his behaviour.

Step 1	It is a waste of time.	It is not my responsibility	My role is purely technical.
Step 2	When am I going to do my day job? I do not have the time.	First they can change, then I will.	What is in it for me?
Step 3	I did not join the business to be doing this.	I could make some enemies.	I have to develop change skills.
Step 4	Could I make this work for me?	There are no real risks.	I will get a lot of self-esteem from this.
Step 5	I feel am adding some value.	It will help me grow.	It could mean rapid progression in my career.
Step 6	It is a good use of my time.	I am a change agent.	I have never felt so alive in years.

## Embracing corporate change

Table 2

People love success and other colleagues witnessing his success and commitment are giving change the benefit of the doubt, and changing their own attitudes and beliefs. We also used other reinforcing techniques and provided some hands-on coaching.

Change operates in the mind first. Focus on that and you can change the person from the inside out. It works every time.

### Tipping point

It is clear that for change to last it has to become absorbed in the mindset. In a corporate setting, it must be real and not cosmetic; it must have deep meaning and deliver the desired results. Too often, senior management teams commit to a programme for change without any depth of thinking because their competitors had blindly committed to a similar change strategy without starting with a firm end in mind. They think it is the right thing to do, but do not know how to bring about that change.

It is the same as buying a self-help book and not reading it properly. You can have shelves of the best books, but if you do not read, internalise and make their ideas live on a personal and corporate basis, they will not make any difference to performance.

I remember when I first started in consultancy. As a young man who had written extensively in management journals, had researched and worked with some leading companies, such as Corning Glass, BT and Dow Chemicals, I focused on using behavioural approaches to instigate a culture of quality. This was in the 1990s when industry, especially manufacturing in the West, was being crushed by exceptional quality competition coming in from the East, namely, Japan. I worked with companies to introduce quality structures, cultures and processes into the

workplace. We were probably the first to push for matrix management to introduce the Toyota Way central to lean manufacturing.

Witnessing the huge expenditure that companies invested in quality conferences, training, consulting, ISO accreditation, books, tapes, trade and best practice visits to Japan and America were impressive, indeed, but mostly they were a complete waste of time. Their investment did not work, because few internalised that the required organisational to be undertaken had to be absorbed at the personal level first. They had failed to bring about change because they did not understand that until behaviour changes, nothing changes. Working on this behaviour level and 'what it means for me' is central to building a quality culture change in a wider and diverse enterprise, but it all starts at the individual level.

### Conclusion

I have outlined the key issues that hold people in place and help reinforce the belief that change is difficult. We looked at one technique to examine the belief systems that hold back the ability to change. This is very powerful.

Changing the leadership behaviour of a business will have a huge impact on its. In corporate setting it is as few as two or three things that need to change in order to bring significant improvement.

To create a tipping point of impacting performance by 97%, we may only have to change the vital 5% of behaviour. This is a simple example of the techniques that can release the abilities and potential, not just of people, but also of organisations. Those who are in charge of change need to commit to real change that starts from the inside out. Those who are committed to lead the process will create a legacy for themselves and their organisations.



### About the author



**P**hilip Atkinson specialises in strategic cultural and behavioural change. For the last 20 years he has been engaged as a consultant supporting companies in strategic development, organisational design, post-acquisition integration, quality management and culture change. He has partnered with a variety of blue-chip companies in industries ranging from pharmaceutical to genetics, and the automotive industry to finance and banking. He regularly presents at conferences and workshop sessions and has written seven books on change management.

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#### *Leadership and Change Management*

Author: Annabel Beerel

Publisher: Kogan Page – 2009

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Members £28.49 RRP £29.99



Recognising and responding to change is the oxygen of life for an organisation, and leadership is fundamentally about focusing organisations on these new realities. Leadership and Change Management provides the reader with a practical, real-world understanding of several dimensions of leadership that are usually neglected in management textbooks, such as the nature of new realities and how managers can improve their insight into them, and how leaders can identify and overcome resistance to change. Drawing on a wide range of insightful, global real-life case studies to capture the imagination, the topics covered include critical systems thinking, philosophies of leadership, group dynamics, authority, ethics, personal character and the psychology of leadership. This comprehensive text will be of interest to anyone looking for a more thoughtful engagement with the key issues in leadership and change management.