

“LEADING CHANGE”

By

John Denton

**Associate Fellow, Said Business School
University of Oxford, United Kingdom**

When : Thursday, 21 February 2013

Where : Razak School of Government

Who : John Denton

About The Seminar

This workshop explored reactions to major change and the practical actions leaders need to take in ensuring that their subordinates are able to successfully transit through major change in the workplace. The theories introduced were all related to practical, real life organizational situations with examples. A range of techniques and strategies were explored from stakeholder analysis, managing the politics, effective communication and involvement.

Summary

Denton began the workshop with a role play namely the ‘Big Foot’ and ‘Small Foot’. The audience was requested to pair with the person next to him or her. One person was to keep their hand raised, while the other tries to influence him/ her to lower their hand. At the end of the role play, the audience shared their experience in convincing their partners to lower their hands. Some charmed, some offered incentives, some used tricks etc. The preliminary idea that Denton tried to convey was that change is possible and there are many ways to influence change.

Whilst the possibilities are endless, Denton drew the audience attention to some theoretical frameworks that could help to facilitate the change process. He started with the Change Curve. This framework which was built upon the foundation of human emotion demonstrates different types of feelings associated with change. Often it starts with the feeling of Immobilisation where one feels uninformed, fears the unknown and fears looking stupid. Over time, Denial sets in. At this juncture, one feels threatened and insecure. Such feeling is understandable as one is no longer in one’s comfort zone. From Denial one gradually moves toward feeling Incompetent, and experiences the corresponding feelings of

suspicion, scepticism, frustration, apathy, isolation and remoteness. In short, Immobilisation, Denial and Incompetence focus on the past.

As the focus on the past hits the rock bottom, one begins to accept reality; the need to focus on the future. One starts to explore new ways to deal with reality (Testing) and seeks to understand the change that is taking place (Search for Meaning). As acceptance and understanding deepens, the positive feelings spiral upward where one integrates with the changes (Integration).

Fast-tracking through the curve is possible to some, but there is always the risk of slipping as the shortcut is delicate and fragile (Thin Ice). It is crucial for the management to take the organisation through the curve conscientiously but swiftly. Denton also cautioned of the necessity to understand the type of change an organisation is going through and to fine tune the change management approach as necessary. Be it Anticipatory Change, Reactive Change or Crisis Change, he reminded the audience to avoid implementing change too soon as the consequences can be far reaching.

Denton shared with the audience what he called the Universal Change Equation to help overcome resistance to change. Though it is not a magic formula, some insightful discretion can go a long way. The formula is $R \leq D \times V \times N$. R is resistance to change, D is the dissatisfaction with the way things are, V is the vision of the future and finally N is the knowledge of the next steps.

To ensure the theoretical framework is meaningful, Denton offered a real life example which he personally went through when he spearheaded a change management program in an established organisation in the United Kingdom. The organisation, at the time, was vying for privatisation and needed to transform itself to attract investment. Operational efficiency, across the board leadership and shared exemplary values were targeted as requiring urgent attention. He highlighted some of the key initiatives taken by the organisation to bring about the desired changes. A Guiding Coalition was set up at the very top of the organisation to provide guidance and to streamline the various parties involved in the change process. He stressed the importance of listening, engaging and bringing everyone on board in the process.

Some short-term-early wins could help to garner confidence in the change initiative. Considering change involves people it is crucial for the management to identify the four categories of people they will face in the change process. They are: the Wise owls, the Innocent lambs, the Clever foxes and the Inept donkeys. The Wise owls and the Innocent lambs are often positive and with good integrity. Unlike the Innocent lambs, the Wise owls are able to read the situations and surroundings well. On the other hand, the Clever foxes and the Inept donkeys are generally more driven by self-interest. The Clever foxes are a dangerous group because they have the keen ability to read the situation and surroundings but act for self interest.

The speaker likened the change process to a marathon; as opposed to a sprint. It requires a shared focus, consistent and continuous communication, a considerable degree of trust (as

it trickles down the line), a deep understanding of issues as well as a genuine human approach.

About The Speaker

John Denton specializes in supporting the implementation of strategic change and developing leadership capability on both an individual and organisational basis. As an Associate Fellow at Saïd Business School he has supported a number of executive education programmes for major clients including BAE Systems, MAN, China Construction Bank, Commerzbank, Nexen and governments of the Middle East and SE Asia. His roles range from programme design and direction, through to senior executive coaching. John has an MBA, is a Chartered Fellow of the Institute of Management, an incorporated Engineer and a Member of the Institution of Engineering and Technology. He is British Psychological Society Level 1 & 2 qualified for ability and personality assessment.

[Photo Gallery](#)