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and Development

Linda BRIMM
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Linda Brimm*

* Emeritus Professor of Organisational Behaviour at INSEAD, Boulevard de Constance, 77305 Fontainebleau Cedex, France. Email: linda.brimm@insead.edu

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Abstract

This paper describes a framework that I have developed to help people reflect on major changes in their lives. The Seven C's of Change is useful both as a descriptive and a diagnostic tool. The more an individual has a framework for telling a story, in this case a change story; the greater one's ability to articulate it clearly and to learn from experience. This also increases the likelihood of being understood by another and creating a genuine dialogue. The 7 C's framework also affords insight into difficulties encountered in the change cycle, those moments when individuals get stuck and need support or assistance.

Keywords: Psychology; Change; Personal Change; Development; Change Dialogue; Telling a Story of Change; Learning from Experience.

Change is threaded throughout our lives. One way of pulling together these pieces into a coherent whole is through what I call the Seven C's of Change and Development. This is a recurring process, which cycles through: **Complexity, Clarity, Confidence, Creativity, Commitment, Consolidation and Change.**



The Seven C's of Change is useful both as a descriptive and a diagnostic tool. The more an individual has a framework for telling a story, in this case a change story; the greater one's ability to articulate it clearly. This also increases the likelihood of being understood by another and creating a genuine dialogue. The 7 C's framework also affords insight into difficulties encountered in the change cycle, those moments when individuals get stuck and need support or assistance.

Stages of a Change and Development Cycle

Each of the Seven C's describes a stage of the change cycle. At each stage there are elements that must be resolved to allow the process to continue. For each stage, it is important to understand the task, what facilitates accomplishment of the task and what might derail or slow down the change effort.

The cycle is set in motion by a trigger event, which may be internally or externally initiated. Some external stimuli are quite positive as in the unsolicited offer of a dream job, or an encounter with someone special. Less positive stimuli might include the death of a friend or family member, an illness, or an unexpected job loss. Equally, "internal" events can also set the cycle in motion. An insight about your home or work situation arising from reflection or unexpected feelings of restlessness can be as much a trigger as any external event. The unforeseen consequences of earlier decisions or internal feelings that have been building over time can also become the 'event' that launches a change cycle.

The trigger for change is not always obvious and immediately perceived. The signals that point to a need for change may be missed or misinterpreted. The fear of loss or the uncertainty of new situations may lead to denial or an inability to confront the requirement for change. Often what appears, as a surprise, is simply the 'sudden' recognition of a pattern of signals that have long been present.

However, once the need for potential change is perceived, the change cycle begins. The cycle is only complete when a new direction is established and one is living a change.

Complexity: Identifying and understanding the variety of implications created by a change.

The task of this stage revolves around the struggle to become aware of and understand the complexity surrounding an anticipated change. The prospect of change moves one from the relative stability and known dimensions of the current state to the consideration of numerous variables and the uncertainties of an unknown future. These new elements expand the complexity beyond the individual to considerations of the impact on significant others affected by the change.

It is essential to find ways to understand and accept this new complexity. Failing to do so leaves individuals overwhelmed and seeking the relative simplicity and certainty of the status quo. Other unsuccessful coping methods push prematurely toward simplifications that lose or suppress important aspects of the prospective change. Positive resolution of the task at this stage is often facilitated by

techniques such as preparing lists and considering systematically elements of the change process. The challenge at this point is to avoid panic and manage anxiety in the face of many new and unknown factors. Resolution begins in the following stage.

Clarity: Bringing coherent understanding to the complex issues raised by change.

Now it becomes important to find frameworks to organize and prioritize the numerous issues created by a prospective change. It is not possible to maintain the large number of competing issues in mind at once. The establishment of priorities is a first step toward bringing clarity to the confusion generated at the initial consideration of a change. With increasing clarity, a positive circle of anxiety reduction follows. The more that clarity emerges; the less anxious one feels. The less anxious one is feeling; the easier it is to find greater clarity. To the contrary, unmanaged anxiety is a significant cause of derailment at this stage leading an individual to abandon the change effort because of an incapacity to cope with a large array of issues and impacts.

Equally important at this stage is recognizing useful resources that can help bring clarity. While many friends and colleagues may wish to help, their ability to listen may be hampered by their own feelings about the prospective change and its impact on them. They may be tempted to advise on the basis of their own needs or their own desires to pursue similar changes.

A previously developed and strong support network is an important resource to manage this process. Relationships with individuals who can listen without judgment are difficult to develop in the midst of change. The development of such relationships would require significant investment at an earlier time, but promise a big payoff at this stage.

Confidence: Developing the belief that one can be successful in the changed situation.

The ability to confront the problems and risks that have become apparent requires a high degree of self-confidence. While many aspects of the change may be out of one's control, it is important to feel sufficiently capable of managing the process in order to proceed. On one hand, over confidence yields a risk of plowing ahead with insufficient sensitivity to important or newly emerging information. Too much self-doubt yields a helplessness in the face of difficulties that allow the change to be subverted. Failure to assume a sense of control can imply that the individual is a passive recipient of the change and has little or no ownership. Without sufficient confidence, constant rethinking or other forms of paralysis result.

While a significant part of confidence is conditioned by life history prior to the change in question, self-confidence can be facilitated by small actions at this point. Alliances that provide personal and emotional support are significant. Concrete resolution of some small problems associated with the change can build a sense of successfully confronting issues. The ability to focus on a successful outcome of the change rather than spending extensive time concentrating on the possible pitfalls is often a major help in moving ahead. Self-confidence is critical to building and maintaining the necessary energy to proceed through the next stages of the cycle.

Creativity: Finding new options or solutions.

At this point the process requires the generation of appropriate options to achieve the desired change and overcome those obstacles that threaten to undermine it. These options may be creative new approaches or the adaptation of past, successful strategies. This stage requires an openness to new ideas and the willingness to seek innovative solutions to the problems at hand. The magnitude of the change may seem overwhelming and suppress any energy to seek new approaches. As a result, one may retreat to previously successful strategies that are not suited to the current context. At the other extreme, innovative but unrealistic solutions may be designed in an effort to solve all possible aspects of the change. It is essential to find an appropriate balance between creativity and realism in generating options.

At this stage, once again, personal relationships can be a significant resource in designing realistic and innovative options. Other individuals who have faced similar obstacles can provide information as well as the benefit of their own experience. Others who are willing to brainstorm with you can facilitate your own thinking into innovative approaches. Finally, trusted others can provide important reality testing to ideas that you have developed.

Commitment: Taking the first steps to implement the change.

Having taken the time to generate options, this is the time to choose and act. Forward movement at this point is necessarily based on the realization that there is no one right or perfect answer. Rather, successful change is based on commitment to a good, realistic solution that is skillfully implemented. Then, choices are translated into commitment by taking “first steps.” These first steps often close options or preclude a return to a previous situation and, as a result, confirm the commitment to the change process.

This realization can lead individuals to get stuck in self-doubt and backsliding, but the closing of “escape options” may generate so much anxiety that paralysis results. This is often evidenced in second-guessing and an inability to act. This is a particularly difficult step in the change cycle. It is the feeling of stepping into the dark of an uncertain future and naturally breeds anxiety. For some, the recognition that this step is neither right nor wrong, but simply the choice of a different path is soothing. For others a push to take the first step allows the individual to get moving and access internal energy to keep going. The first step is often the hardest; however, there is no change without one.

Consolidation: Adopting the new identity and ex-identity that this change represents.

As William Bridges points out, all changes feature an ending and a new beginning. While some aspects of identity must be set aside or abandoned, the understanding and acceptance of this loss contributes significantly to moving forward. Similarly, one must begin to adopt important characteristics of the new role into one’s own identity. Individuals in a new company who say “We” referring to a previous organization have not yet made this change. Divorced individuals, referring to themselves as “we,” are still clinging to their identity in a couple. While such transition does not take place quickly, it is facilitated when one begins to adopt the new identity and communicate it to others.

Derailment occurs when one has difficulty letting go of an old role. Others often recognize this before it becomes obvious to the individual in the process of change. Trusted friends and colleagues can help build awareness of these residual aspects that are difficult to shed and block the change process. However, these same people may be the sources of resistance to change if they cling to the past basis of their interaction for fear of losing the relationship. Further resistance may come from friends and colleagues who recognize that they must change in order to maintain valued relationships with a person in a change process.

While it may seem contradictory, change requires that individuals assure that certain parts of their identity and life space will remain the same. Recognizing factors that preserve a feeling of being anchored provide the stable basis for safe experimentation with other aspects of the new identity. This stability can be linked to items as small as familiar foods. More significantly, the linkage to people, places or a sense of core values can provide a safe platform to permit change in other aspects of identity.

Some individuals move more easily through this passage to a new identity by focusing less on loss of self. Rather they feel that the change is developmental and brings them closer to a “true self” or to possibilities that they might now achieve. While accepting that change implies loss, this framing of change as forward movement yields significant benefit in this consolidation stage.

Change: Living the change

As the consolidation proceeds and one is living the new identity, it is necessary to face any unintended consequences of the change or new challenges as they arise. While there are still elements of a transition taking place, the change needs to feel like, and be seen as, a new beginning. This is not a static state. Rather every new beginning plants the seeds of subsequent change.

Therefore, successful change should be an energizing experience that furthers the motivation for subsequent changes. For Global Cosmopolitans and an increasing number of others, change is the steady state. Discomforts and mistakes along the way should be framed as learning opportunities. If they become feelings of regret, loss and an aversion to future movement, the change cycle becomes increasingly threatening.

It is equally important to help others accept the change. When a young woman makes a significant departure from her current situation, friends and family only ‘knew’ her in a previous context. They knew how to work with her, get her attention and influence her. Her change requires adaptation and new behavior on their part in recognition of new elements in her identity. The change may alter her availability to them or present new and unfamiliar behaviors. Helping significant others manage the loss of the person they knew and the acceptance of a new persona is an important task. If not accomplished, these key relationships may become a drag on development and eventually disappear.

Taking the Story of Change Forward

The 7 C’s of Change is a framework for structuring a story, a story about change. It allows a deep reflection on the change process and the challenges along the way. It can be used as a map for understanding as well as a basis for communicating the change story to others and bringing them along.

Knowing how to tell the story of the change can make it easier to engage others appropriately in the process, particularly when looking for understanding or assistance. Ultimately, this may form the ability to teach others about a new identity and the change process in general.

Given individual differences and the variety of change situations, there is great variance in the amount of time necessary for a cycle of change. There is no single answer on how long that should take. Some people linger in one stage unable to resolve the fundamental tasks at that point. Others speed too quickly through a stage and must return to confront the unresolved issues. Still others remain at a stage to absorb the learning necessary to proceed successfully through the subsequent stages. Finally, some choose to slow their progress to allow time for significant others to accompany them. For those seeking clearer prescription, the unsatisfying answer is: “As fast as you can; as long as you must!”

One additional utility of the 7 C’s framework is to facilitate learning about the change process. Learning from past change can contribute to greater facility and skillfulness in managing future change. For Global Cosmopolitans, change is often a fundamental theme in their lives. Change is normal and is often triggered quickly and unexpectedly. The acquired skill in navigating the 7 C’s of change is a cornerstone of their resilience and success. Their ability to learn from experience facilitates the continuous cycle of change in their lives as well as the growth and development of the unique competencies that characterize this group.

SAILING THE 7 C’S: NAVIGATING PERSONAL CHANGE

While change represents significant turning points for all individuals, it is threaded throughout the lives of Global Cosmopolitans. A key aspect of any self-assessment process is gaining perspective on your own experience of change

This is an opportunity to apply the 7 C’s of Change framework to a change that you recently navigated or other change that was significant in your life. This is an opportunity to understand your approach to change as well as a vehicle for identifying those parts of the journey that you “sail through” as well as those, which are a bit more turbulent. The more that you are able to understand yourself in the process of change, the more you can improve your ability to sail through the next one.

For each stage of the cycle, answer the following three questions:

- Task: What was the nature of the task at this stage?
- What helped: What facilitated accomplishing the task?
- What hindered or threatened to derail the change?: What interferes with accomplishing the task?

Start with a brief description of the change and what triggered the change cycle. Then answer the checklist questions for each stage of the cycle.

What changed?

What is the specific change that you want to consider for this exercise?

What triggered the change?

What were the factors, the new opportunities or personal dissatisfactions, that triggered the change?

The 7 C'S of Change

1. Complexity: What are the complications created by the prospect of this change for myself and others?

Any prospective change raises a variety of issues that greatly increase the complexity of one's life space. These include greater focus on uncertainties about the future; concerns about the impact on others and reassessment of the current situation. This new complexity creates an overload that can be paralyzing or can lead to denial of important factors.

Task: What was the nature of the complexity created by this change? How did I manage the life complexity resulting from all of these issues?

What helped: What helped me recognize the many implications of this change and cope with this increased complexity?

What hindered: What kept me from confronting aspects of the complex impact of the change on myself and others? What was difficult for me to look at?

2. Clarity: How could I bring clarity to the complex and seeming intractable issues?

In the face of complexity, the way forward depends on finding frameworks to organize and prioritize the numerous issues created by a prospective change. Failure to achieve this clarity yields an unwieldy list of issues with little understanding of their interaction.

Task: What were the key confusions raised by the prospect of change? How was I able to frame the prospective change to clarify and prioritize the dilemmas posed by the complex set of issues?

What helped: What helped me gain and maintain clarity? Who were the people and the emotional processes that helped?

What hindered: What kept me from getting clarity initially or along the way? What caused confusion to continue or return as I explored the change opportunity?

3. Confidence: What allowed me to feel that I could be successful?

Realizing that one is sufficiently in control affords the possibility to take the risk of proceeding with a change process. A more general lack of confidence or self-doubt can be inhibiting factors. Without sufficient self-confidence, there is the trap of constant rethinking or other forms of paralysis.

Task: What did I see as the key risks of the change? How did I mobilize the self-confidence to take the risk and move ahead?

What helped: What helped me have sufficient confidence to proceed?

What hindered: What were the sources of self-doubt that kept me from going forward?

4. Creativity: What allowed me to be creative and find new solutions?

The decision to proceed requires the generation of new and appropriate options for moving forward. These may be creative new approaches or the adaptation of past, successful strategies that can be adapted to the new setting. Derailment is possible if one falls back on previously successful approaches that are not suited to the current context or is not sufficiently creative to find new solutions for the unique aspects of the current situation. It is important to find the appropriate balance between creativity and realism in generating options.

Task: What were the perceived difficulties that had to be resolved to make the change? How did I generate creative and realistic options to build the path to a successful change?

What helped: What helped me generate new solutions appropriate to the setting? What provided the reality test to assure that the solutions were workable?

What hindered: What made this task difficult or kept me stuck in previous patterns that did not apply to the current situation?

5. Commitment: Can I commit and take the first steps to implement the change?

This is the time to choose and make it happen. These are often first steps that close options to return to a previous situation.. Backing down can happen when there is self-doubt about being able to drive the change, second-guessing or getting blocked when it comes to overcoming obstacles.

Task: How did I choose a plan and take the first steps to move from the idea to a reality that would make this happen?

What helped: What helped me move into action?

What hindered: What slowed me down and kept me from taking the necessary first steps to move from the current state?

6. Consolidation: What was the new identity and the ex identity that this change represented?

Part of change is ending a past situation and moving on. This is the time to begin seeing oneself in a new role. Derailment can happen if one has difficulty letting go of the old situation or the old role or gets stuck in the change process rather than moving ahead.

Task: What aspects of my identity had to be abandoned to move forward? How did I begin to incorporate this change into my new identity?

What helped: What helped me make this transition? What allowed me to see myself as being in a state of change? What aspects of the new situation was I able to start incorporating as part of identity?

What hindered: What made it difficult to let go of the old and move forward with the new identity? What were the hardest pieces to let go of?

7. Change: What is it like living the change?

The change has happened and one is dealing with it and living the consequences and the new challenges as they occur. While there are still elements of a transition taking place, the change needs to contain the feeling of, and be seen as, a new beginning. Successful change should be an energizing experience and opportunity allowing motivation to further change.

Task: What needed to be resolved to create comfort in the new situation? Did others recognize the change?

What helped: What things helped me stay energized both in the new context and looking forward to engaging in new issues and changes?

What hindered: How did I cope with elements of regret and loss? ? What kept me from easily living the new identity rather than looking backward or being mired in regrets?

Using Appropriate Help And Support Through A Change Cycle

Although changes concern other people in your life, they can be actively involved in the change itself. They can be sources of help, particularly if you are able to articulate the kind of help you need. They can also be active in some aspects of problem solving at each stage of change. In other cases, change is necessarily a solitary process.

Read through the change cycle that you just described noting the role that people have played in the change process. Look for examples in your own relational behavior.

When did you actively involve people for help and support? Can you cite an example where it was helpful? Were there situations where it caused a problem?

Identify moments when you chose to avoid dialogue? Can you cite an example where this was helpful? Where it caused a problem?

Identify at least one improvement you can make in managing help through a change cycle:

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For questions, please contact:

Linda.Brimm@Insead.edu

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Palgrave Macmillan 2010

Europe Campus
Boulevard de Constance
77305 Fontainebleau Cedex, France
Tel: +33 (0)1 60 72 40 00
Fax: +33 (0)1 60 74 55 00/01

Asia Campus
1 Ayer Rajah Avenue, Singapore 138676
Tel: +65 67 99 53 88
Fax: +65 67 99 53 99

Abu Dhabi Campus
Muroor Road - Street No 4
P.O. Box 48049
Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
Tel: +971 2 651 5200
Fax: +971 2 443 9461

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