Q&A CAL- Don't Panic. Stories of Cultural Change

How do you lead teams which have worked using waterfall and have more than 35 years working in that way?

My best advice is to help them see the value of the change. Tell stories and find others who can tell them stories. Perhaps, another department who is successfully using agile principles, or a similar team from another company.

Is it part of change management? or is it related with experiences inside the team?

Yes, to both. Cultural change is changing the traditions, habits, and behaviors in our organization, and that is deeply related to our individual and shared experience.

Could you explain further and give some examples, when you say: Change the direction. Sometimes people in leadership often said, we need to change this or that, but they don't show clearly the things to change.

Remember that we are referring to changing the direction of the culture. For example, if we notice that people are hiding when projects are falling behind, we want to change the direction to one of transparency. We can do this by modeling the behavior, and also by telling stories of how transparency can benefit us.

the change pyramid on one slide says coaching should be long term. What is 'long term' and when do you believe coaches should be able to expect coachee should no longer be afforded training wheels? i.e. my premise is a coach should strive to eventually be no longer needed. Eventually the student should surpass the teacher.

The length of coaching engagements varies based on a number of factors, but we agree with your philosophy of striving to no longer be needed.

Where is the line between healthy and unhealthy vulnerability? How does a leader recognize that line?

That's an interesting question. In order to answer properly, I'm afraid I'd need to know what "unhealthy vulnerability" meant to you in your context. To me, healthy vulnerability is the ability to ask for help and share when the leader doesn't know the answer to something.

Can you expand on benefits of top down for cultural change please?

It certainly depends on the change. In some cases, top down change is beneficial because doors open for leaders that don't as easily open for all employees. If the change requires a process or procedural change, or a budgetary investment, top down change can help.

Would you say bottom up is more show-and-prove compared to top-down?

It's true that leaders have inherent authority that allows them to simply issue an edict, but I'd argue that they have to show and prove too. For cultural change to be sustainable, the organization has to embrace it- not just go through the motions. Employees want to see their leaders embrace a change before they will truly embrace it.

We have this bottom-up initiative in my organization. We are trying to change the culture of hero, blame games and command and control system, but we are facing with the problem with our CEO and his right hand in the organization. We have a low retention rate and employees very often

change their job. They are not satisfied with our culture, and a small business team is trying to change this. What do you advise?

Remember the boiling pot image with the bubbles floating up? In your situation, I'd advise that you just continue passionately pursuing the change from the bottom up and telling those stories. Tell everyone who will listen about the good examples and encourage others to do the same. Be a spark that starts a fire!

What if I can't spark that kind of enthusiasm among my colleagues? Any pointers would be welcome.

Change is hard. Change will not happen until the pain of staying the same is worse than the pain of change. When people have tried to change before and been burned, its easy to become discouraged. Ask your colleagues for their stories. Have they tried something like this before? Did it not work? Do they like things the way they are? When you understand where they are coming from (and they feel understood) you may be able to reach them.

Did you face any challenges vis a vis structure in your experience of transformation?

Structure is always going to be very tightly woven with structure. Its important to understand both and ensure that they are both in alignment with the overall mission and business goals of the organization.

What would you recommend when two different companies merge? The change is inevitable, while the result can be unexpected.

When two companies merge, you instantly have a clash of cultures. It's really important that you openly acknowledge this and have numerous and frequent conversations about it. Ask both sides to tell their stories of history and culture. Together, decide what to amplify and what to dampen.

How do you get executive buy in for cultural change?

Executives are people too! Tell them your stories and ask them for theirs. Find out what might appeal to them about the change.

how do you encourage people who strongly prefer independence and self-reported progress to become more open and collaborative?

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Our agile transformation has sort of been a sandwich approach. We had buy-in from the top down and from the bottom up, but the middle management layer felt threatened by the agile paradigm of needing to adapt and be coaches instead of "command and control managers." We used a bottom up approach with practices and leaned on leaders at the top to help the mid-managers understand how to listen to feedback from their people, and eventually we were able to squash that fear in the middle layer.

Wonderful story! Thanks for sharing. This is a common fear in middle managers, and I'm glad you were able to help them find their footing.

I have an example to share of outside-in change...we had a web-based business intelligence portal that was developed by a development team, and the stakeholders were another department, where sometimes there was a contentious relationship as the two teams competed for how to prioritize the development work. When it came time to do a product update, focus groups of customers

were organized to capture desired changes and prioritize them, which took the battle out of the fight over what to implement - it became about value to the customer, not what either department thought was best.

Love when we can solve a conflict by focusing everyone on the customer. Thank you for sharing with us!

With "resolution by curiosity" aren't you more helping them realize what YOU think is going on, as opposed to what THEY think is going on? I feel like if it's open there needs to be the room for both sides to realize they may have to choose their viewpoint.

The idea here was that, when we find ourselves in a conflicting narrative, we seek more stories in order to understand where they are coming from. As both sides continue to ask more questions and seek more stories, we will find a way to common ground.

What is the best way to engage senior leadership, from a peer to peer perspective? The Agile initiative is not top down, from CEO, but from CIO to the organization, and some other C-level are resistent to it.

Big question. If I may respond with a question…. What's in it for them and their department? How will it help them get things done? When agility is simply for agility's sake, it seems like just another "to do" on our list. However, when we are trying to be more agile in pursuit of a business goal, it starts to make more sense.

Can you explain the interruption part more around Repetition and Interruption?

In this context, "Interruption" was the idea that we have to halt our former narrative in order to change the culture. By continuing to repeat the new stories, we can stop the old mindset from perpetuating.

Agile transformation, like any formative changes within an organization, requires buy in or a conviction to shared value by not only the team but the managers/product owners. Positive and beneficial cultural change won't happen without this.

Completely agree!

what are the names and emails of the facilitators?

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