Literature Review & Self Analysis
in the Context of "Deep Change"

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Abstract

This document describes the main points of Robert E. Quinn's book, "Deep Change" and then turns to the author's understanding of self and personal change.
Change or die. The person who ignores his diabetes unknowingly deteriorates until something goes terribly wrong. The person who does not maintain his professional skills eventually experiences professional failure. The corporation that ignores market trends and new customer requirements eventually dissolves. One cannot ignore change. One must respond to change with change. The purpose of this paper is to examine "Deep Change," a book by Robert E. Quinn.

A long, heavy silence fell in the room. Finally, one of the most influential members of the group said, "The leaders of the company didn't change their behavior." I nodded and pointed out that they themselves had made a lot of assumptions about the behavior that was going to change in others. Now I challenged them: "Identify one time when you said that you were going to change your behavior."

Again, there was a long pause. Something important and unusual was happening. The members of this group were suddenly seeing that few people ever clearly see—the incongruity of asking for change in others while failing to exhibit the same level of commitment in themselves (Quinn, 1996, p. 32).

Change begins within the first person, the self, "I." "I must change in order to influence others to change," but who am I?

When somebody asks us to talk about ourselves, we talk about family, work, academic background, sports affiliations, etc. In all this talk, where is our "self"? The answer is nowhere, because the self is not a thing, but as Jerome Brunner says, "a point of view that unifies the flow of experience into a coherent narrative"—a narrative striving to connect with other narratives and become richer (Quinn, 1996, p. 42).

The individual cannot expect others to change without a willingness to change, himself,
first. Moreover, when one chooses not to change and failure sets in, the individual may project reasons for failure onto others.

When we experience failure, it is natural to externalize the problem—to blame some factor that was outside our control. Once in a while this actually does happen. But I have seldom heard anyone say, "The change didn't happen because I failed to model the change process for everyone. I failed to reinvent myself. It was a failure of courage on my part."

One key to successful leadership is continuous personal change. Personal change is a reflection of our inner growth and empowerment. Empowered leaders are the only ones who can induce real change (Quinn, 1996, p. 34)

Change is not easy. It starts with the self. It cannot be avoided. Avoiding deep change indicates failure on the part of the individual. Reasons why a person or an organization cannot implement change are excuses. "I'm fifty-seven, and I'm doing all I can to hold on. I know we need to implement this thing. I just don't think we can do one more major change" (Quinn, 1996, p. 15). "'If I can hang in just a couple of more years, this problem will belong to someone else.' The issue is not what's good in the long run; its how to survive right now." (Quinn, 1996, p. 15)

Attitudes like these will destroy a company. A manager who bides his time, collecting a paycheck until retirement, is not a leader.

A lack of leadership in the individual will lead to malaise, self centeredness, and a lack of cohesion in members of the organization.

We are dying. In the meantime, my boss goes around reducing everything to numbers and charts. He leaves the real task of leadership to others. Because we no longer believe in the organization's future, we're all tending to our personal futures. I would love to be thinking about constructive alternatives, but it's simply too late (Quinn, 1996, p. 17).
In this example, the lack of leadership among management and the reaction of individual contributors will ultimately lead to a company's "slow death." Without maintenance, the company will experience small failures, all of which will contribute to a wave of corporate destruction. In this case, slow death is the choice of individuals at the management level and individuals at the production level. This is because change can take place at any level. It can occur horizontally, through comradery and coaching. It can occur at the leadership level by initiative. If everyone throws up his hands, however, an organization will fail to function.

Slow death comes from bad habits that one chooses. "The second point is that we do not tend to choose the healthy alternative. We actually seem to prefer slow death. Slow death is the devil we know, so we prefer it to the devil we do not know" (Quinn, 1996, p. 24). After all, deep change involves risk. "The alternative, being clarified by the therapist, may appear to be the road to fast death" (Quinn, 1996, p. 24).

Shedding oneself of bad habits that prevent deep change may be blocked by denial. "Denial occurs when we are presented with painful information about ourselves, information that suggests we need to make a deep change. Denial is one of several clear paths toward slow death" (Quinn, 1996, p. 53).

Running on a treadmill that takes a person nowhere can lead to slow death. Following this train of thought, Quinn tells the story of the man trying to cut a stack of wood in preparation to keep warm during oncoming heavy weather. The saw the man uses is too dull to effectively cut the wood pile. The man knows that to be effective, he must sharpen his saw, but instead of taking time to repair the tool, he insistently continues to cut the wood. By the end of the day, he is nowhere near done and the oncoming storm sets in. This, Quinn refers to as task pursuit.

People commit "task pursuit" in their offices all the time. Quinn refers to inbox tyranny.
Inbox tyranny occurs when an office worker focuses only on what is dumped into his inbox, and never addresses underlying problems. The person is "too busy" focusing on the daily grind. Eventually, things spiral out of control when the underlying structure, not having been maintained, collapses.

"Over time, everyone develops a formula for success. We get recognized and rewarded for our efforts. Positive experiences validate our worldview" (Quinn, 1996, p. 66). Success, however, can lead to failure without deep change. "What we fail to see is that our success by the old formula is like a map that has guided us to the edge of the known territory. We cross a line into new territory and when we try to apply our old map there, strange and frustrating things happen" (Quinn, 1996, p. 66) The world quickly becomes uncharted territory. That is because the world is in a constant state of change. Maps must be updated. In other words, one must update his worldview to match new topologies.

From the individual's perspective, worldview may refer to professional knowledge related to a changing industry. From management's perspective, worldview may refer to understandings regarding changing customer relationships, new players in the business, or newly introduced technology. Everyone must watch for topological change and reshape his perspective, accordingly. Quinn (1996, p. 77) suggests that, "In a world of constant change and uncertainty, unconditional confidence is a very desirable characteristic." The value of unconditional confidence enables a person to take on challenges that many would rather not face.

Tackling deep change and facing a new future, we must be willing to get lost with confidence. This confidence, along with tenacity, will guide our actions as we begin to build the bridge toward our vision. It is only when we experience deep change that the
new vision comes into view. When we can actually "see" our vision, we must be willing to put it into action (Quinn, 1996, p. 86).

The use of a new "map" may be necessary not just because the world is in a constant state of change, but also because one's position in the world changes. Quinn sites the engineer who transits into a management role. In his role as an engineer, his ability to produce, produces reward. However, in his management role, it is not so much production but perception that counts with his boss. The "now" manager's boss comments about his being impressed with an individual contributors because this particular employee is always in early. The engineer-turned-manager investigates and finds out that the reason his engineer is always in early is because he has kids who wake him up and create bedlam in the house. So, he comes into the office, early, reads the newspaper and has breakfast. The manager now realizes that at higher levels, perception has become very important. His life changes dramatically when he functions within the "perception paradigm."

The engineer who becomes a manager may eventually become a CEO. As such, his internal map must once again change. While a manager may, "engage in transactional behaviors, like analyzing problems and driving task completion" (Quinn, 1996, p. 150), the CEO should engage in, "transformational behaviors, like providing vision and motivating people" (Quinn, 1996, p. 150). However Quinn's team "found that the most frequently played role was that of taskmaster, followed by analyzer (both transactional roles)" (Quinn, 1996, p. 116).

Quinn details another condition which can lead to the need for deep change. It is called "the tyranny of competence." It is where a highly competent person poisons an environment by being overbearing. This leads to competition, instead of cooperation, and later to ill will and "subtle forms of sabotage" (Quinn, 1996, p. 116).
Currently, this author is in the midst of deep change. A year ago, he was laid off from a company in Northern California. Upon his return to Southern California, this author has begun to rekindle relationships that had begun to wither. He has re-entered the University to "sharpen" his "saw." He has done some freelance work, fixing software. His hope is to locate full time work at the end of the current semester.

This author has learned a great deal about himself throughout this semester. In particular, he has learned that there are far better methods to deal with conflict than to operate in an adversarial fashion. He has learned enabling techniques when working with others. He has learned about spheres of influence versus spheres of concern, and upon what to focus. He has learned about systems for education and their history. Most of all, however, this author has learned that there is much more to learn. Peter Wexler is currently navigating the hero's path, finding his way through uncharted territory, with the expectation of emerging stronger and better.

As for Quinn's "Deep Change," the conclusion this author reaches, is that change is ever present. One must undergo change for many reasons, including the impact of world events and personal challenge. Individuals change themselves, and in turn, change those around them. There are many barriers, however, that may prevent a person from changing, including fear, comfort and denial. Failure to change, however, will lead the individual to experience "slow death."
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