

Christopher DeCola

ORGL 516

Dr. Kristine Hoover

November 23, 2023

Change Agent Strategy

Discovery 1: my ideal self (catching your dreams)

On a three-hour flight back home earlier this week, in the midst of wrapping up work and coordinating family holiday plans, I finally made time to sit in reflection of the aspirational, ideal version of myself. I jotted down the following words that came to mind during this exercise: visionary, intuitive, insightful, wise, kind, open to change, motivational, relevant, inspiring, self-reflective, transformational, equitable, galvanizing, unbothered, honest, empathetic, transparent, humble, thoughtful, inclusive, aware, communicative, decisive, tenacious, possessing foresight, strategic, and in-wonderment.

The concept of intentional change is one that is at once both complex and logical. Richard Boyatzis (2006) presents Intentional Change Theory (ICT) in an appealing fashion, one driven by dreams and aspirations: “an intentional change process must begin with a person wanting to change. This desire may not be in their consciousness, or even within the scope of their self-awareness....events that awaken the person to the need for consideration of change, may be required to bring the person to the process of desired, intentional change (p. 610).

This passage resonates and allows me to reflect with both my head and heart in equal measure. The idea of transformation can be achieved with intentional processes. My ideal self is one that allows my moral compass to be my guide in my change and development as a human and leader. Gentile’s model of giving voice to values is an important tenet that I will hold closely. I find the ideas behind the initial step to be very worthwhile and important: “Clarification and articulation of one’s values – articulation of one’s own values and the impact of acting on those values making implicit principles explicit” (Deszca, 2020, p. 58).

Finally, I notice that my ideal attributes that I compiled high above the Rocky Mountains on Monday can be classified into two categories: those more traditionally associated with self and those associated with the effect they may have on others. I believe, though, that this may be a good approach. For if human-centric change is my over-arching goal then it must be vital to foster the humanity within myself to best be able to cultivate and lead large-scale, complex change in an effective, positive, and successful manner. My hope is that my example will “galvanize” organizational communities that will value knowledge discovery and opinion-sharing in such a way that hands-on leadership styles will be less needed during the time of actual change.

Discovery 2: a personal balance sheet

Interestingly, after seeking the experiences of several colleagues of both current and prior professional experience, who have observed my work during previous rollouts or change initiatives, it was interesting to note both the common and outlier experiences and perceptions. Inspiring, invigorating, transparent and being able to effortlessly manage many different personalities were among my favorite and most surprising comments. I think these are traits

that I aspire to consistently demonstrate and I was somewhat surprised that I may have been exhibiting them in some form or fashion over a decade ago.

Flexible, measured, able to quickly pivot, unflappable, and able to use humor to motivate and be relatable were also taken as complimentary but quickly recalled my participation in change initiatives that were not well researched, planned, communicated, or launched. In fact, this last subset of peer feedback reminded me of some data that was uncovered in tandem with another class exercise, the Foley article collection project.

In *Ethical leadership, frustration, and humor: a moderated mediation model*, Valle (2018) reasons that “individuals experience job demands due to unethical leadership that deplete their resources and ability to cope. When the demands are too high, negative outcomes occur. Workplace humor is viewed as a coping mechanism to help reduce frustration when there is an overload of job demands due to unethical behavior” (p. 666). I believe that these qualities that were perceived as my strengths by the participants polled are, in truth, symptoms of larger scale problems. In fact, I use humor unconsciously to allow for and cushion organizational and personal weakness. As a result, this realization has also helped inform and direct my desired future as a change agent. Further, it allowed me to understand a gap between my real self and my ideal self.

One of the strengths that I’d like to build upon in the future, because I believe it is a vital part of being an effective agent of change, is the use of empathy. When I received feedback that offered that I was adept at managing many different personality types, I was pleased because I believe that I aim to accomplish this using empathy. In fact, I wonder if truly effective dialogic communication must be deeply rooted in empathy. A goal of this exercise is to be intentional about the use of empathy. Currently, I wonder if I am not intentional enough about its use if I am not equitable as to when and who I practice empathy.

A recent professional example of this that may better illustrate the previous remark. It occurred this summer during the re-launch of a change initiative. Fresh from a SATA exercise, I was poised to be an agent of change and connect with sustaining and initiating sponsors, advocates, and targets. Among this group were several high-level participants who have historically been at odds with one another. Additionally, a cross-departmental associate with a very large personality and a possibly unfair reputation as “difficult to work with” was also present. In these scenarios, I was actually excited to better understand their vantage points and the histories that may have led to these hardline stances. Using empathy here was instrumental in understanding issues and needs and presenting them to others in a way that was generally well-received and pushed the project forward.

However, as a change agent, what must I have missed by only exercising this extra focus on the “squeaky wheels” versus the many other project participants who could have offered valuable personal and professional context? In sum, I’d like to insure that tendencies to communicate empathetically are consistent and unwavering in practice.

Discovery 3: mindfulness through a learning agenda

One of the most compelling arguments for a learning agenda is expertly phrased by Boyatzis (2006): “a learning agenda focuses on development. A learning orientation arouses a positive belief in one’s capability and the hope of improvement. This results in people setting personal standards of performance rather normative standards that merely mimic what others have done” (p. 615). He goes on to discuss how punitive, performance orientation plans evoke “anxiety and doubt” (p. 615) about the possibility of successful change.

Further evidence on the importance of this step is mimicked by the Change Path Model which highlights “action planning and implementation” (Deszca, 2020, p. 53) in their Step 3: Acceleration. As a result, I have committed to “systematically reaching out to engage and empower others in support, planning, and implementation of change” (Deszca, 2020, p. 54) as it heavily informs the overall learning agenda.

| | |
|--|---|
| Name of the current organization or entity in which you play a role in a change initiative/effort: | Lincare Holdings, a Linde Company |
| Your role, or description of your current role: | National Product Manager – marketing and sales trainer |
| Strength #1 as a Change Agent: | Empathetic |
| Strength # 2 as a Change Agent: | Galvanizing |
| Gap Area #1 as a Change Agent: | Use of humor to mask frustrations or failures/not transparent |
| Gap Area #2 as a Change Agent: | Equitable consistency |

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. Strength to build or gap to close: | (gap) Transparency |
| What <u>specific action</u> (s) will you take to increase this strength or close the gap? | Will not use humor to mask or mitigate failures or unethical practices |
| Anticipated duration of time needed? | 6-8 months |
| What dates will you begin as well as strive to complete this? | Start Date: 11-27-23. Target Completion Date: 7-27-24 |
| Name a few success measures that will indicate progress. | 1. How often has a roll-out or change initiative failed? 2. How often are these new launches viewed as smooth or positive? |
| Describe your accountability plan (partners). | Examine failures. Provide transparent feedback and invite discussion as to the experience of each participant. Use planning and dialogic communication initially to minimize overall failures. Ask resonant relationships to hold me accountable. Check in on progress at 90- and 180-day benchmarks. |

| | |
|--|---|
| 2. Strength to build or gap to close: | Consistent empathetic dialogue |
| What <u>specific action(s)</u> will you take to increase this strength or close the gap? | Intentional empathetic interactions monitored by EOD daily review of each interaction |
| Anticipated duration of time needed? | 2 months |
| What dates will you begin as well as strive to complete this? | Start Date: 11-27-23. Target Completion Date: 2-27-24 |
| Name a few success measures that will indicate progress. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Am I using empathetic dialogue with the intent of human-centric betterment of my organization or only picking and choosing with people or scenarios are “worthy” of this type of understanding-facilitating discussion? 2. Are participants of projects or initiatives on the same page more frequently as a result |
| Describe your accountability plan (partners). | Cultural change meetings with accountability partners once per month to focus on making empathy a cultural imperative versus an occasionally used tool to speed up change initiatives. |

Discovery 5: resonate relationships that enable us to learn.

Trinidad Perez (206) 495-7214 and Helen Jacques (540) 846-0410 are two classmates who have been adopted as my accountability partners. Our interactions have occurred via one-on-one FaceTime virtual meetings and our book club meetups. We have discussed meeting up weekly for the remainder of the class and it has been speculated that we will continue these roles into future classes and possibly past graduation. Among the many benefits that Boyatzis (2006) lists in his advocacy for fostering such relationships, perhaps this was the most impactful for me: “They may also be the most important source of protection from relapse or returning to our earlier forms of behavior” (p. 617).

I believe that my connections with Helen and Trinidad have been mutually beneficial thus far. I have really enjoyed getting to know them better. I’ve noticed that being an active listener and making connections to things they’ve said in the past to current scenarios they were describing seemed to resonate in three ways.

First, both Helen and Trinidad seemed genuinely surprised by my recollection of things they had mentioned previously and its applicability to the current situation up for debate. This is noteworthy because it reinforces that when people are heard, it is meaningful.

Further, if it was meaningful to people like Helen and Trinidad, whose leadership qualities I very much admire, it’s possible that this is indicative of an overall lack of human-centric leadership and communication among all organizations.

Lastly, if Helen and Trinidad benefited from having the support to make these connections, how many things am I missing in my own journey by not utilizing resonant

relationships? Personally, hearing how Helen and Trinidad handle and overcome adversity and the passion they possess to enact change has been motivational and empowering. I have no doubt that their presence will hold me accountable to the best me that I can be – both personally and professionally.

In this context, Discovery 5 loops back to where it all began at Discovery 1. Recall Boyatzis (2006) when he advises “events that awaken the person to the need for consideration of change, may be required to bring the person to the process of desired, intentional change (p. 610). Resonant relationships, on-going learning, dialogic communication and holding one-self accountable with a learning agenda can all become the “events” that “awaken” our conscious and subconscious need for intentional change.

References:

Boyatzis, R. (2006). *An overview of intentional change from a complexity perspective*. *Journal of Management Development*, 27(7), 607-623.

Cawsey, T., Deszca, G., & Ingols, C. (2020). **Organizational Change: An Action-Oriented Toolkit** (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

Valle, M., Kacmar, M., & Andrews, M. (2018). *Ethical leadership, frustration, and humor: a moderated mediation model*. *Journal of Management Development*, 39(5), 665-678.