



FIRE!!

What's burning most – your personal platform or desire for results?

“Creating a burning platform” is used in change management for designing a scenario to speed up personal and commercial decision making as doing nothing may come to unwanted results – at worst disaster.

The concept is to drive a sense of motivation and urgency which may otherwise be difficult to generate with people. The premise is often one of

fear, “if not, then...!” meaning if you don’t come up with the goods, somebody will be authorized to make decisions to save the greater good.

Not seldom, enacting a burning platform comes on the back of that somewhere, somehow, somebody have lead a team, a division, or the company into a situation of defense and that somebody now re-actively must begin to act.

Interesting!

Actually, and contrary to today’s somewhat destructive meaning, the metaphor was meant to describe a newly discovered pattern in leaders;

“the staunch commitment successful leaders showed toward their initiatives wasn’t due exclusively to their attraction to a new desired state. They also displayed a sense of distress related to their current state. What was becoming clear was that the high cost of maintaining the status quo played an important role in sustaining the motivation needed to truly realize change objectives”ⁱⁱ.

In other words, in peace times certain people are driven to innovate ahead of the curve knowing that standing still will eventually become tax to operations.

Brilliant!

Per Peter Drucker’sⁱⁱⁱ theory companies should focus on two functions primary:

1) Marketing/ Sales;

Marketing does analysis on the customer mass as to which products or services to offer with sales being the outgoing folks to do the actual sales of said products and services.

2) Innovation covering;

a. Actual innovation;

Customer requests for changes to products and services must be attended to by people.

b. Execution;

Customer service, operations, finance, HR, admin, legal etc – anyone who does actual production must wear the understanding that every transaction is an opportunity for innovation and learning.

So, having attended 250 customer calls a better return on time and outcome should be expected per transaction compared to call no 25.

On transaction 56 of a particular document ideas for process improvements or automation must be expected. When you have completed hiring interview number 266 others should be expected your hiring success ratio to hit 99%

Drucker explains that nobody can dug the responsibility of innovation and change. It is not a matter for the few, but for everyone!

And so the world works...in our dreams.

Because, change is difficult.

Some people just don't see change as their bread and butter – they:

- Prefer to be re-active instead of pro-active
- Operate from 120% solutions instead of 80%'s approximations
- Wear glasses favorably viewing the past rather than the future
- Live to feed problems and starve opportunities rather than the other way around
- Are watcher instead of do'ers
- You continue the list

Statistically 7-8 of 10 change initiatives fall short of their intended destination. The explanations are often of poor leadership/ management, the current of times, company culture, complexity, competition etc

To me it's all excuses for something else, something underlying.

If we all had the fire in our bellies we wouldn't need "burning platforms" – would we?

The unpleasant truth is that humans - at even odds - prefer avoiding losses over achieving gains which drives powerful risk-averse behaviors of status quo rather than one of change when it is very much in our best interest.

Of the population in companies 5%, maybe up to 15%, carry the behavior to drive change, being people who fixes and get things done, the doers, go-getters, the productive ones.

Two-third'ish – 64% - of us are classified “passive” - a character mostly comforted with status quo, or at least participating in change in a generously patient process.

What does that do to the equilibrium of change in a company?

You do your math. I suggest it explains why change managers – or just about any leader – have enormous challenges on their hands to get any initiative or change project to its intended destination.

At an organizational level, this tendency increases exponentially. The compounding effect of risk-averse behaviors across tens, hundreds or thousands of individuals – each preferring known working patterns over the perceived risk introduced by change – generates overwhelming organizational inertia.

The end result: We don't upgrade – organizations die.

The subject of change is contagious to say the least. It's congested with psychology explaining human nature, finger pointing, poor management and leadership, “it was better back then”, “she understood us better”, philosophy, them vs us-thinking, and so on... mostly a zero-sum discussion.

Leaders and followers have obligations on either side of the change.

Leaders must turn on their perceptual acuity – to foresee the future – to explain in no un-certain terms the competencies of work required in 3-5-10 years. For instance, we know that work place automatization becomes relevant not just for cost reduction reasons, but also to push resources towards higher yielding efforts, like innovation. What does that do to the range of skill sets in your company?

Funds and programs must be made available to transition and train towards new skills. Take AT&T as an example where 140,000 of its 280,000 employees are in constant training/ upgrade cycle towards the next wave of technology.

Their attitude is “upgrade or die” as individuals and as an organization which is the same pair of consequence leaders should reward anywhere else.

Followers must make hard choices; Do I want to join the band wagon of change, or get off before it becomes though? I mean, to go into mental sit down strike risking is hardly an option...

To me, employees need to put the world into perspective. You are trained and educated in a different era. Your skills and knowledge are potentially expired. Your mindset could well be obsolete. New technologies arrive at even faster pace; new waves of talents stand ready to implement and transform.

In such light I understand it is easier to embrace the familiar current instead of instead of gearing up to learn something new.

In an excellent TED-talk^{iv} Ruth Chang explains how we seek answers to tough choices based on “what is”, ie evaluating option A vs option B on measurables such as bigger, smaller or equal to because of its easier to digest. She argues that we must learn to instead ask ourselves - what do we value? What do we really want? What do we truly believe in that is worth pursuing? It’s an inner journey that will make us overcome the complexity of abstract choices.

I come from a pragmatic world; Make a decision and live with the consequences. A bit simplistic to some, but I think “times” have lulled employees – and many managers – to forget who owns the company. You? The shareholders? Is the process designed to annoy you in individually, or does it serve the greater good? Whose interest is it to change? Yours or the shareholders?

Nicely put change is about convincing people to innovate, make them come

along freely, depart from a position of safety to place of uncertainty, but since we haven't asked people to sign up for the journey, change turns into a New Year resolution of getting onto a treadmill with double, thrice, quadrable incline!

Not only are you to cover a marathon of daunting business transformation with cloudy perspectives which are then topped with multiple complex cultural resistances - "This is not the way we should be doing business", attitude anchors of - "What's in it for me", mind-set challenges "We are not educated for this", complacency issues "We've made it this far what's the hurry?", commitment constrains "I'm busy already time is not a luxury I can afford" and so on...

The law of survival for companies involves change and innovation. They must raise standards and ambitions to survive, introduce new skills, challenge existing mindsets and install new ways of looking at work, and commit to execution of a strategy. Period.

Therefore, which fire is burning in your belly?

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ⁱ The term is inspired by explosions on the oil production platform Piper Alpha in 1986 when in the ensuing seconds and minutes of escape superintendent Andy Mochan found himself forced to make a split decision of jumping 100ft into the North Sea waters littered with twisted steel and other debris - "It was fry or jump, so I jumped", he later explained.

ⁱⁱ <http://www.connerpartners.com/frameworks-and-processes/the-real-story-of-the-burning-platform>

ⁱⁱⁱ Peter Drucker "The Practice of Management"

^{iv} https://www.ted.com/talks/ruth_chang_how_to_make_hard_choices#t-861715