

Creating Rapid Widespread Engagement

Let's cut to the chase. Without engagement, you won't have buy-in. You are left with two alternatives: force and failure. There are occasions when force works. This book is not about failure.

Force works when it is okay if people don't care. Or if they think you are wrong, giving bad, misguided, or rotten direction, and they're willing to do what you say because it doesn't affect them, is not detrimental in the long run, or the consequences of not doing what you say are more than they can bear.

In all of these situations, people will act on your ideas only so long as someone else keeps them in front of their nose. This is called the *lighthouse effect*. Wherever the change leader casts her attention, it is as if a light is projected, and the people inside that light spring into action, visibly demonstrating how they are enthusiastically carrying out their mandate. But just outside the light, activity quickly slips back into chaos.

This is typical of new ideas. It happens because their importance, significance, and value are not shared. Instead they are imposed. Shared value takes place when people get together to construct the meaning of a new idea or application. Imposed value happens when one person or one group sends an idea out—as if all that is required is that others understand their intentions.

This does not work for two reasons. First, people are overloaded with demands and barrages of information as well as multiple, conflicting mandates from above whose purpose they don't understand. Second, even if you can get their attention (and you will with the techniques I show you), this way of communicating by commands and directives—*“Let me tell you a better way,” “I have the answer; the information, knowledge, and research . . .” “I have been giving it good thought and consulted with the experts and we have figured it out”*—is built on the wrong communication model.

I am going to show you a better one, one that works in the tumult of modern organizational life. This way of thinking about communication forms the core from which everything else in this book emanates.

In 1996 I was working on my first large-scale change initiative at the World Bank. I was part of the small team that won international recognition for the World Bank's Knowledge Management (KM) effort. Working on this program was like driving on a racetrack that was changing its course while you steer: the course and the environment were always changing, but we made incredible progress.

In two years we went from an unfunded idea in a back room to \$60 million in annual allocations, from no resources or incentives to every staff member receiving two weeks to dedicate to KM as well as having a component of their annual evaluation dedicated to it, from no recognition to international awards.

To make this happen we had to answer questions like these:

- How do you penetrate the conflicting demands and mental clutter that are part of everyday business life in the twenty-first century?
- How do you penetrate the assorted messages the media constantly bombard everyone with?
- After you have gotten through this confusion, how do you get people's attention?
- Once you have their attention, what do you do with it to get people engaged, involved, and contributing?

- How do you coordinate this activity when you have no formal authority?

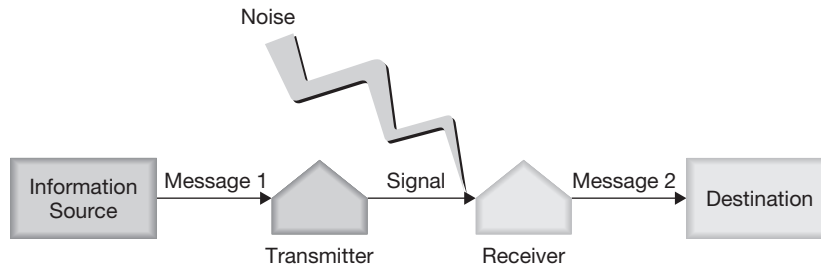
To answer these questions, let's first look at the prevailing misunderstanding of how communication works, and then I will show you a much better way to think about it.

Most people intuitively use a communication model that originated in 1948 and was published by Shannon and Weaver in 1962.¹ Although this model was great fuel for the information revolution, it is completely inadequate when it comes to person-to-person meaning making—which is what drives the rapid spread of new ideas.

In its own domain, the Shannon-Weaver model is extraordinarily useful and can be credited with initiating much of modern information theory. It has been called by some the “mother of all models.”² It states that you have an *information source* that develops a *message* that is sent using a *transmitter*. The *signal* travels and encounters *noise* on its way to a *receiver* where the subsequent *message* is delivered to a *destination*. (For a visual depiction, see Figure 1.1.)

The unquestioned assumptions that percolate in the minds of a typical communication team betray their use of this model. They go something like this:

We will talk to our president [*Information Source*] and craft a message that is easy for people to understand [*Message 1*]. We will place this message in various media including newsletters, posters, e-mails, Web sites, and town halls [*Transmitters*]. If we can get people to stop and read what we wrote, take the time to attend our events and listen to what we say, they will be exposed to our concepts and ideas [*Signal*]. Although they are uninformed, distracted and overloaded [*Noise*], they will hopefully read our writing when it appears in their inbox, come to our events, and listen to our presentations [*Receivers*]. They will then interpret what they have read and heard (Message 2) and understand what we are about. We will have reached them [*Destination*].

FIGURE 1.1 Shannon and Weaver's Communication Model

Although the Shannon-Weaver model is great for sending digital signals, it is horrible for people trying to make sense of their world. We thinking humans are just not as simple as this model.

Making meaning is a much more complex task. For example, we don't just decode information and understand it. If we did, you could pick up any book in a university library, read it cover to cover, and fully absorb what the author intends. But you cannot. You also need teachers and other students.

The reason we need teachers and other students is that we construct meaning socially, through interactions. We need the input of others to help us develop our ideas, place them in context, and make them relevant to our world, our experience. It is a collective project. This is called *social construction*.

We construct our understanding of the world through our relationships. As human beings we thrive on liaisons and partnerships. Social construction gets to the heart of how people make meaning together. It opens possibilities for reaching people who understand the world very differently, creating collaboration among diverse participants.

It is also a humane way of looking at communication, enabling compassion and kindness. Importantly it makes it possible to extend these qualities to technical and business-oriented interactions, bringing people together and generating esprit de corps even when people are from widely differing cultures. This is a critical milestone in communication.

Here is how social construction works. One person makes a statement of some kind, putting an idea out for the other to respond. Then there's a reaction, an answer of some kind, which probably includes new information. For example, some part of the original idea makes sense and there's an acknowledgment. Or some aspect appears wrong and there is a negative response or a correction. Or maybe it's not clear yet, so there is a request for more information.

And so the participants go along together, making moves and counter-moves, building a shared understanding or not being understood. Either way, an experience is generated that becomes a touch point for future interactions. And so together, back and forth, in messy iteration, understanding is fashioned.

Here's an example:

Raj: Hi, Juanita, I have this new direction from our boss, Sylvan. He says I have to ask everyone for input before we plan our next conference. He isn't sure we did such a good job last year of checking with everyone to see if their needs were being met as far as the agenda goes. He wants to me to ask you what you thought of last year's conference.

Juanita: Last year's conference was a disaster. But it wasn't because Sylvan didn't ask for input. As I remember, we had a lot of input. It was because he took us to the beach in the monsoon season. Nobody wants to go to the beach then! He should have taken us to an indoor resort that time of year or scheduled a time when the beach would be fun.

Raj: Okay, so you had the chance to contribute to the agenda, and the content wasn't a problem; it was the location and time of year. Is that right?

Juanita: Yes, that's right. But now that I am thinking about it, what is the process for putting together our agenda? Are you just going to ask everyone and then put together a hodgepodge of whatever people tell you?

Raj: No, we're going to meet with Sylvan and do our best to outline what we think we should cover. At the same time, I'm going to talk with everyone and ask them what I'm asking you. Then we're going to

compare what we hear with what we put together on our own. At the end, Sylvan will look at everything and make some decisions.

Juanita: So we're just going to do what he wants to do regardless?

Raj: I hope we can influence him with the results of these conversations. I think he's pretty open to what we have to say. I don't think he's a tyrant.

Juanita: If anyone can influence Sylvan, it's you, Raj. He loves the way you think. But I'd be surprised if he doesn't dictate the agenda in the long run.

And so the conversation goes, to and fro, each one putting forth a proposition or question and the other reacting, refining, then putting forth a view until the conversation comes to an end. It's not that a consensus is reached, but that Raj and Juanita have both developed and refined their sense of what's meaningful through the interaction.

How does this apply to communicating new ideas and getting widespread engagement? Becoming adept in this kind of back-and-forth construction is where the value is. It is not in the technical smarts or the ability to articulate your own position. Those certainly play important roles, and any good idea is doomed without them. But the real challenge is in high-quality interaction, because that is where people decide if your message is relevant or worth their time and attention, and subsequently develop their sense of how best to act on it.

Here's the kicker: professional expertise abounds. Technical know-how is in great supply. This is referred to as *hard skill*. But engagement, participation, and the genuine desire to contribute rely on goodwill, a cooperative attitude, sincere interest, and a desire to be helpful. In most change programs, these are in short supply. This is the *soft stuff*. In today's work world, the soft stuff is the hard stuff.

This book is about getting the soft stuff right. This is the people part of change. You know the systems will work, but the people may not. And people can corrupt a perfectly good system. With the wrong attitude, they can let obstacles go untended, ignore necessary protocols, and turn their gaze away from difficult challenges. But when they share feelings of pride, a common loyalty, and fellowship, they will create

synergies, become inspired to address difficult challenges, and unite in their efforts. This is what makes change happen fast.

Social Construction in a Nutshell

Social construction is a way of looking at how people build a common understanding and negotiate their way into the future. Here are five core principles:

1. *The ways we come to understand the world and ourselves are created in relationships.* All of our understandings spring from our interactions with others. During our lives, we develop a history of relationships—a set of traditions that come from the groups we belong to (family, professionals, jobs, and others). From this springs the ways we think about our experience and the world, including what we believe to be real, fair, and good.
2. *We do not all interpret the world in the same way.* Two people who observe the same event may come to different conclusions. This is normal. What is obvious to one person is not necessarily obvious to another.
3. *Our shared interpretations of the world survive only if they are useful to us as individuals.* If you want me to change my behavior, get involved in your idea, and take on the challenges it presents, then show me what difference it makes in *my* world and why I should care. Make it easy for me to see why I would get involved. Make it clear exactly how I can take action. Show me a spreadsheet that has no impact in my day-to-day life or ask me to read a report that does not change what I know or do, and there will be no additional shared understanding as a result.
4. *Our understandings influence the ways we behave and possibilities for our future.* For example, if we belong to a group that regularly recounts how powerless we are to influence a management decision, we will likely do little to sway it for better or worse. However, if we think we have strong influence, we are much more likely to become engaged.

5. *Reflection on our assumptions—what we take for granted—is vital to improving performance.* Because our view of the world is something we construct, we have the ability to change it with reflection. To maintain our self-determination, our capacity to adapt and influence, we must continuously call into question what we take for granted. This happens by listening to others who see the world differently and wrestling with the consequences of their perspectives.

Social construction is a way of thinking about how people develop their beliefs about and understanding of the world. It provides critical insights as to how people from differing backgrounds navigate their way forward together.

At the center of every good working relationship is shared understanding. Social construction puts tools in our hands to guide the development of this understanding. Most important, it shows us that different perspectives are as legitimate and valuable as they are common. It provides helpful guidance for bringing people together to build common understanding. This is fundamental to getting change right, creating engagement across different communities with different ways of understanding the world.

Moreover, if we look closely, we see that each person is different—even the two guys in the boiler room who work next to each other five days a week or two office workers who work together and think together on the same problems eight hours a day every workday. Though they are side by side, each has a different and legitimate viewpoint. If you want to engage them, and the thousands of others who will bring your change to life, you must give them something to do, draw them into conversation, accept their experience and stories, and allow them to change yours.

Social construction does a great job of explaining how people create meaning together, influence each other, and generate a way forward. Using this as your communication model, you can do a much better job of reaching people and working together to create, communicate, and spread innovation.

KEN AND MARY GERGEN ON SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION AND LEADING CHANGE

Expert Input

Ken and Mary Gergen are recognized thought leaders in the field of social construction. Ken teaches at Swarthmore College and Mary at Penn State University. They are also active in the organization they helped found, the Taos Institute (www.taosinstitute.net). Ken calls the institute “a group of scholars and practitioners exploring the idea that through our relationships we construct our realities and futures together.”

This husband-and-wife team works in tandem, developing ideas, writing, convening thinkers and practitioners, and promoting social construction.³

Ken: Our society places great emphasis on the individual, including when it comes to leading change. We place a single person, a champion if you will, at the center of all activity, as if a lone person could be responsible for introducing new ideas and driving them to fruition. In the constructionist view, the emphasis on the individual is replaced by relationships. Our views of the world are formulated within relationships, jointly created. The implication is that no one person is the originator of an idea. At base, all ideas are created through interactions.

Mary: That's not to say that there isn't room for people to shine through, for their presence and influence to be felt. Each person draws on many experiences, a history of relationships, to inform the meaning they make of the world. And when they interact with others, they bring all these points of view with them. This takes the whole idea of persons as coherent in their views and attitudes and stands it on its head. If you look at communicating to advance a new way of doing things, social construction is going to tell you to open up the conversation, to bring more people to the table.

So when you are leading change, dialogue with many different groups is important?

Expert Input

Ken: Often we have a conversation in one relationship, and we expect it to apply across the board. But every interaction circulates assumptions that are locally shared. These ideas don't always translate to other relationships. They can even unintentionally suppress or dampen other ways of looking at things.

How do you compensate for this?

Mary: You have to open a space in which people who have radically different ways of looking at the world can contribute. Encourage people who might otherwise be marginalized to give their perspective.

Ken: Every interaction generates meaning unique to its context. Effective leaders have to develop their abilities to include diverse people and span these different contexts. In this way creativity is also stimulated.

THREE THINGS CRITICAL TO CHANGE LEADERS

1. *Reaching people.* To make contact with people, you must successfully penetrate the ongoing onslaught of information and competing demands from others.
 2. *Responding to changing needs.* To be responsive, you must get feedback, pull in relevant information to flex and adapt to emerging conditions as they develop.
 3. *Spreading innovation.* To extend new ideas and better ways of working so they catch hold, you have to involve others in building the future.
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Penetrating Information Overload

People are pulled in so many directions as to be rendered ineffective at much of what they do. Everyone is pushing forty initiatives forward an inch, and no one is pushing anything forward a mile except you. You have a mission to accomplish. So how do you get through the mountain of mandates, responsibilities, and irrelevant information?

You do it by building an initiative that helps the people who will bring your initiative to life. I call them your Most Valuable Players (MVPs). (For explicit detail on who exactly qualifies as one of your MVPs, see Chapter Three.)

You work together to construct paths forward into the future that resolve the dilemmas both you and they are facing, bring aid and support to their most difficult challenges as well as your own, and create wins both of you can take to the bank. When supporting your initiative becomes the best way for others to resolve their most important conflicts, ease the pressures that daunt them, and help them get ahead in ways they care deeply about, they will see you as an ally. That's when they will join forces and begin to work for your success because it is interwoven with their own.

All of your efforts on this must be genuine. If it is a charade or a sales job, the veneer will crack, and your effort will backfire. You will have new enemies, and your initiative will suffer untold harm. But if you genuinely weave your stakeholders' interests into your common future, you will become a master of the win-win, and the results will be amazing.

FIVE WAYS TO PENETRATE INFORMATION OVERLOAD

1. *Call a special meeting to address your stakeholders' concerns.* Bring in the people who matter most: their boss, critical partners, peers of influence, thought leaders in their field, customers, and members.
2. *Bring in your most valuable players to evaluate a critical decision you are facing.* Make a thorough presentation that lays out the context, the options, and the dilemmas. Ask them to think both independently and together about the best way forward. Highlight win-wins as they appear. Take action based on their advice, and give them credit for their guidance.
3. *Do something countercultural to catch attention.* Take on the concerns and issues of those who show resistance and make them

your cause célèbre, attracting public attention and support. This is an effective way to reverse hostility and join forces with those who would oppose you.

4. *Stage a concentrated series of highly visible activities.* In a very short period of time, appear to be everywhere at once. Contact your constituents during this campaign and ask them to help with the design, planning, presentation, or execution of your project. Give careful consideration to their contributions, incorporating what you can.
5. *Go directly to the source of competing demands to win support.* For example, call a meeting of all managers who supervise the people you want to engage and demonstrate the effectiveness of their subordinates. Connect their common self-interest to the objectives of your initiative.

Effective change leaders master the art of cutting through the daily bombardment, piercing the chaos, and replacing it with opportunities to succeed.

This accomplishes success on two levels: (1) the way you work enrolls more and more people, creating the network and momentum for continued success, and (2) you are more connected with day-to-day life, enabling the greater flexibility and responsiveness which keeps your effort relevant and on track.

Establishing Flexibility and Responsiveness

It is essential to become adept at listening to and integrating new knowledge into your program as news breaks and circumstances change. When you establish a program that is tightly connected to current events, able to receive and integrate important changes as they occur, you secure two important things necessary for dramatic success.

First, your reputation will precede you, bringing people to your side even before you open your mouth. Interested parties—those looking to improve things themselves—recognize the power of a program that is

adapting to the winds of change, adjusting appropriately as situational factors shift.

Second, you will build in the necessary feedback mechanisms for real success. As you will see over and over again in the pages ahead, you and your team have a limited perspective. Yet you serve in critical roles: champion, herald, coordinator, convener, context creator, strategist, designer, inspirer, executor, momentum generator, communicator, harvester, and broker.

You are cultivating a multidimensional response from a complex system, and feedback is fundamental to your success. Your effort is multidimensional because it operates in many spheres of activity, some of which act independent of others. You must have your finger on several pulses simultaneously to steer through successfully.

Because you are operating in a complex system, it is not always clear what actions influence what results. In a linear system, if you push, you see the impact. In a complex system, this does not necessarily happen. The impact may be so removed in time that you cannot observe it directly. Or the push may be part of a system that causes its impact to be amplified, diminished, or even ineffective. In this situation, you rely on the eyes, ears, and minds of others to provide the necessary guidance.

As a single person or a group, you have by definition limited access to the entire system. Therefore, your perspective and your understanding will constantly be tested, stretched, expanded, and enhanced by others. This is one of the most valuable and most difficult challenges of successful, large-scale change.

SIX TECHNIQUES FOR IMPROVING FLEXIBILITY AND RESPONSIVENESS

1. *Know the core intention of your work.* For example, the core intention of a program in a large government think-tank was to bring the best minds to bear on the most important challenges. It was not to build a fully searchable document storage tool or create professional

communities. Those were tactics. As the political environment changed, the tactics changed, but the core intention held firm. Holding onto the core intention allowed those working on the program to take constant pushback and maintain progress continually.

2. *Intentionally invite people who hold opposing or adjacent views to be thinking partners.* Import other perspectives. Purposefully embrace the challenge of looking at your own initiative from other points of view.
3. *Embrace new ways of looking at your work that are difficult to understand.* Sidestep the temptation to see one perspective as right or dominant. Instead, allow the tension to resolve in ways that do not compromise either view. This takes time and patience. Having a tolerance for this kind of work leads to much more robust solutions.
4. *Understand the assumptions that you bring to your efforts.* Is there any player who is diminished as a consequence of your perspective? If so, meet with him to learn about and build respect for his experience. This is one of the most difficult activities you can engage in, but it is also one of the most powerful. It will broaden your understanding and increase the strength of your work.
5. *Create mechanisms that encourage or incentivize others who see things differently to provide constructive ideas.* An example is an anonymous e-mail inbox that allows people to comment on the success of the program. Periodically publish comments that you have taken to heart and acted on.
6. *Ensure that news travels transparently through your office, without censure.* Set an example of successful media coordination, providing others with relevant reports, communications, or articles that might aid their success.

Creating a Shared Stake in Success

Success at leading change—dramatic, sustained improvement—is largely determined by a leader’s capacity to not only enroll others but engage them in a mutually supported vision of the future. *Engagement*

means getting their whole-hearted support and participation, their involvement and best actions. When this happens, change is held in place by myriad hands, heads, and hearts.

Achieving a shared stake is critical because obstacles are part of life, and you need all the help you can get to realize success. You want resources to flow to you—people, money, and time to be dedicated by any and all who see a shared road to success. When this happens, synergies will take place you do not mandate or coordinate. You may not even be aware of them because the ideas have successfully spread, and other people in other places are taking action.

FIVE TECHNIQUES FOR CREATING A SHARED STAKE IN SUCCESS

1. *Practice exceeding others' expectations.* Every morning ask yourself how can you “wow” somebody who is critical to your success. Then meet with her face-to-face to express your appreciation and discuss how your combined efforts are creating a better future. Ask, “What synergies do you see in our work?” Listen and learn.
2. *Engage others in conversation* to discover their answers to these questions:
 - a. What are your most pressing issues?
 - b. What needs do you have that are not being met?
 - c. What successes are you working toward?
 - d. Who are your constituencies, and what do they want?

Then explore with them how these can be addressed through your efforts.

3. *Hold meetings with groups of allied players to identify mutual goals.* Follow up with regular progress reports showing the results of your efforts and the challenges you encounter. Work together to overcome obstacles and clear logjams.
4. *Create a visible representation of your key players' interpretations of success.* Post it where others can see it easily. Do not require different or conflicting views to be reconciled. Instead, invite people to view

the representation with you and think together on how seemingly irreconcilable objectives could be achieved. This generates a sense of inclusion among all who participate and mutual ownership as everyone sees their thumbprints on the future.

5. *Ask senior stakeholders to describe in detail the future state they are working toward.* Go through the details with them and listen carefully:
 - a. What does this future state look like? Describe it in detail. What will be different? What new capacity will emerge?
 - b. How will you know it when it happens? What are the indicators you will look for? How will success be measured?
 - c. What are the benefits to you personally? To the organization? What is the return on investment for the effort?

Write up what you learn in a one-page summary and present it back to each senior member you interview, or otherwise visibly demonstrate what he or she communicated to you. Verify with them that you have captured their point of view. If necessary, refine it with their input until they are satisfied.

Laying the Groundwork to a Shared Future

The only way to have a new idea catch fire is to set it free in the world in ways that enable as many people as possible to begin using it constructively. That's when exponential growth occurs.

Interaction lays the groundwork of the future. You must get out of your office and talk to people. Find out what they are facing and learn how they see the world independent of your needs and goals.

We are constantly generating the future through interaction with unforeseen events and circumstances. The understandings we carry—what we are doing, where we are going, what and whom we are hoping to influence—shape our responses and initiatives and our behavior.

Communication, done well, enables us to (1) make sense of what is going on around us, (2) decide where to put our efforts, (3) balance the needs of the moment with our long-term goals, and (4) take action.

Communication done poorly does the opposite: it (1) confuses us, (2) makes it difficult for us to choose where to put our effort, (3) distracts us from the needs of the moment and our long-term intentions, and (4) stifles effective action.

Once you begin using communication effectively, you will immediately win support of a very important contingent: those who are focused on getting things done well, resolving pressing circumstances, and moving steadily toward their overarching objectives. This is the first layer of effective penetration. Simply by doing a good job of communicating, you attract others who are effective because they rely on a social network of effective communicators and you have joined them.

The implications are significant. For example, it means you can't just send a well-crafted memo (or report or PowerPoint or spreadsheet or presentation) and expect people to read it and change their behavior to conform to your conclusions. And yet that is essentially what most communication efforts amount to.

Think about it for a moment. A report consists of words on paper. Without people to read and interpret, reports are just sheets of paper or bits of magnetized metal. All the action is in the interpretation of the people who wrestle through the document and absorb it into their relationships where they make sense of it and take action with others. Social construction tells us that this process needs to happen with other people, not in the privacy of a single brain.

This is why getting people together, face-to-face, to share air, is so important. Today we have lots of technology that makes it possible for people to talk otherwise—everything from telephones and chatrooms to state-of-the-art videoconferencing facilities. But face-to-face is still the most valuable, highest-leverage activity.

So what's a change leader to do? Create ways for people to get together and converse. Get them participating, engaged, and involved. This is the road to personal investment, enthusiastic support, and genuine buy-in. This is how you move people across the line from "I *have* to do this" to "I *want* to do this." And that makes all the difference in the world.

Getting people involved in thinking together about new ideas is difficult for many leaders. Often they think they have to invent the universe in advance or at least figure out all the major components. But social construction shifts the emphasis away from “let’s figure everything out in advance” to “let’s do a good job of starting the conversation and get the right people involved.”

To succeed, you become an ace at bringing people together and creating healthy interaction. How to do this is the focus of this book.

It’s the difference between you or your office pushing all the information and having a network of change agents pushing *and* pulling from multiple points simultaneously. If it’s up to you to do all the pushing, then everything slows down or stalls when you stop. When you have a distributed network of change agents in action, they create synergies and drive the program from multiple points simultaneously. This results in more effective widespread engagement.

GETTING CHANGE RIGHT

Getting change right means:

- Bringing people together and helping them interact in ways that create meaningful engagement for new and better ways of working.
- Tapping into a high-leverage web of experience and information so your initiative responds in real time to changing circumstances.
- Getting many, many people on board as quickly as possible, creating a fast-paced buy-in.

When people grab your ideas and run with them, you will find the increase in speed and reach growing faster than you can keep up with it! This is a good thing. It means your change is taking off. This is how success happens.

Eight Conversations That Create the Future

For each of the eight conversations that follow, you must establish an atmosphere of genuine exploration. These topics are meant to open the doors of perception to new possibilities, creating an environment where half-baked ideas can emerge for examination and development, insights can form, and new possibilities can edge their way into view.

Think of each topic as one variation on a theme, and come back to it over and again in the conversation from different angles. In this way, you can generate a series of questions and adventures, each revealing possibilities for how you might go forward together.

The Eight Conversations

1. What is the best possible thing that can happen as a result of our efforts?
 - a. What performance improvement is possible as a result?
 - b. What could this mean to you, me, and us?
2. How do new ideas successfully take root in our culture?
 - a. Where has success happened in the past?
 - b. What innovations have we operationalized with good results before?
3. Where do the trajectories of our efforts converge?
 - a. What are the possible synergies if we are both successful?
 - b. How can we leverage each other's results?
4. What motivates us to succeed?
 - a. What is the source of our inspiration or motivation?
 - b. How can this be leveraged for even greater returns?
5. What would be the consequences if we were both successful?
 - a. Can we describe this world?
 - b. How would individual and organizational work be improved?

6. If we were to generate dramatic results, what partnerships would we rely on?
 - a. Who else must we involve in our achievements?
 - b. How do we provide returns to them?
7. What prerequisites do we both rely on to achieve big wins?
 - a. What can we do to ensure we have what we need?
 - b. Where can we combine efforts to ensure success?
8. How can our interdependence be improved?
 - a. What are the opportunities for mutual leverage?
 - b. Where can we exceed expectations by working together?

Accelerating the Speed of Buy-In

Value is at the heart of all negotiations. Your job as a change leader is to enter the worlds of your stakeholders, learn what they value, and find ways for your idea to help them achieve that as quickly as possible.

There was a period in my work when I was called in over and over again by a large bank to help teams that had become stifled or stuck and watched their productivity take a nosedive. It was difficult work. Often my first engagements were with groups whose animosity was high and I was there to create a breakthrough.

One group had taken on a particularly visible project that the CEO was watching closely. The team was made up of two groups: the technology specialists, or *techies*, as they were known to their peers in that company, and the content specialists who were called *SMEs*, for subject matter experts. They were working on delivering a series of solutions over the Internet to people in many countries around the world. The whole idea was to take the SMEs' knowledge and deliver it straight to the client, through the Web.

The CEO was hopeful that this would create a breakthrough in delivery, and the CIO (chief information officer) was keen to demonstrate his ability to generate solutions to the company's challenges. So all eyes were on this team. The team, however, had completely broken

down after six months. The techies had what they considered to be great solutions but felt the SMEs were inept when it came to technology. So they were reluctant to show them anything but a finished product. The SMEs resented the condescension and wanted to be involved throughout the process.

The SMEs were guilty of the same judgment, but in their area of expertise. They were sure the techies had no idea about the content and were unable to provide real content for the techies to work with, thinking it would be misrepresented and the company would be liable for resulting catastrophes.

By the time I arrived, all communication had fallen apart. I walked into a silent room with eighteen professionals sitting at desks, looking down at their notes or glaring at each other. No words at all. Before arriving, I had read all of their materials. I have a strong background in information technology, so I was able to grasp enough of what the techies were up to so that I could have an intelligent conversation with them, though the details were beyond me. And the SMEs had provided me with a thorough detailing of their material.

I sat down in the silent room and waited a minute before speaking. Because the quiet was so heavy, it seemed to concentrate the moment.

“Why are you here?” I began, and then continued: “Let me tell you why I am here. Then I would like to know from each of you why you are here.” I said, “I am here because I care about this organization. I want to see it succeed. I was brought in because this is an especially important project, and the powers that be want you to succeed. Let me tell you just a little more about myself.”

I had spent the morning with my son and was carrying a picture of him with me. Spontaneously, I pulled out the picture and showed it. “This is Gabriel,” I said. “I am here because I want the world to be ready for him, and I am committed to doing what it takes to give my best to make that happen.”

I passed around the picture of Gabriel and went on. “Part of my job is to make sure we do our very best everywhere we have an opportunity to make an impact, and this project has the potential to make a great

impact. I want you to succeed, I want him to succeed, and I want to succeed. That's why I am here. Why are you here?"

Then I shut up. There was a long moment of silence. Eventually the lead SME spoke up and said that she was there for a different reason: she wanted to use her professional training to make a positive impact in the world.

Slowly we went around the room and heard from everyone. There were several themes as to why folks were in the room. Nobody else mentioned his or her children, and I was a little uncomfortable that I had said something that had maybe not been well received. However, it became clear that my vulnerability unleashed a much-needed conversation about people's personal motivations for the project. The overriding theme from the team was that they were there to offer their professional expertise, knowledge, and experience that each had paid a significant price for. This was their moment.

When everyone had spoken, there was another silence. I was tempted to break it, but I let it last instead. Finally, the lead techie stood up and spoke: "We are in the midst of rapid prototyping. We need to move through our iterations quickly. We have been hesitant to let you [he pointed at the SMEs] become involved because we have concerns that you will slow us down. If you will work with us to do this at a good speed, I would like to invite you to join us in the process."

That broke the ice.

My job was over. The team went on to deliver a great project and even named themselves the *Collaboration Community*.

It took only forty-five minutes.

During that one meeting, everyone put their cards on the table—why they were there. For most of them, there was value in demonstrating their professionalism to the CEO, the CIO, the organization, their peers, and each other. For some, it was different. But a way forward was found that gave each what they were looking for.

Once it became apparent how to generate value for each person on the team, there was more than agreement. There was committed action.

That is buy-in. From that moment on, each person invested personally in the success of the team, and their results were stellar.

The lesson here is one that has come to me over and over again, and it permeates this book. There is no shortage of professional talent in the world. Superlative efforts result when we are able to create a shared spirit of joint success. Then nothing can stop us. Oh, and by the way, *this takes only a moment*. Then it's all for one and one for all. That's the heavy lifting.

THIRTEEN TECHNIQUES FOR ACCELERATING BUY-IN

1. *Create a team of change agents.* Teach your most avid supporters, your evangelists, how to listen and have productive conversations with everyone they meet. Regularly conduct role plays where they bring in their toughest situations and learn from each other how to handle them well.
2. *Replicate your team.* Teach your evangelists how to teach others to have these same productive conversations.
3. *Adapt and integrate your ideas with multiple contexts.* Those much-touted elevator speeches (rehearsed speeches that can be delivered in the time it takes for an elevator to reach its destination) are almost useless for most great ideas because they are disconnected from context and make no sense to many listeners. Practice connecting your ideas to different contexts by raising it in different circumstances.
4. *Distribute easy-to-understand teaching tools.* Provide anyone who wants to advocate on your behalf with the materials they need to explain your ideas and their benefits. Use the materials yourself. Set an example.
5. *Leverage strategic reflection.* Create time to review what is working, what is not, and how you can change your behavior to increase the speed of change.

6. *Build a web of thinking partners.* Find people who understand what you are trying to do and have the professional experience and expertise to help you develop your activities.
7. *Become expert in efficient and effective communication.* Use media tools that disseminate relevant news immediately to all parties.
8. *Choose a network over a hub-and-spoke relationship model.* Make it easy for your supporters to reach each other without going through you. Provide everyone with e-mail addresses, telephone numbers, and access to project tools—anything and everything that allows them to initiate collaboration on their own.
9. *Delegate everything — or as much as possible.* If you have a budget, pretend you don't. Move activities and responsibility out to the periphery so it can spread.
10. *Follow enthusiasm and commitment.* Go where the energy and excitement are. Make time for people who are dedicated and supportive. Blow their coals into fire.
11. *Provide as much face time as possible.* If you use electronic media, turn to them to enable people to get together. Whenever possible, share air.
12. *Create time in your day to talk to others.* Don't become so overloaded with tasks that you can't have a conversation. Remember that dialogue is the basic building block of change.
13. *Dedicate space for conversation.* If possible, have a living room or somewhere else with a casual atmosphere where people can congregate when the need arises. If all you have are conference rooms, make sure that everyone knows they are available for casual conversations and impromptu meetings.

Why Formal Authority and Budget Don't Matter

Solid, lasting change is not about answering to authority. It is about real application that makes good sense in the many levels that people have to operate in every day. This kind of change can catch and spread

through a system faster than any one person or group can dictate, and that's a good thing.

For the same reason, it has little to do with budget. Now, I would never turn down money. If you offered me a budget, I would tell you in short order that I can spend it. It's just that I have seen good ideas take off like wildfire with no money behind them. A perfect example of this is the second KM change initiative I participated in at the World Bank.

As I mentioned previously, in 1995 I was recruited to join the team building the World Bank's Knowledge Management System (KMS). It was a small team with a dedicated budget whose mission was to design and implement a powerful new tool they hoped would revolutionize the way business was done. We had the unwavering support of the CIO. He regularly spent time with our project manager. We paid for some of the best minds in the industry to come and work on our KMS. We were told that we had permission to change the way the Bank did business. We had the authority to design a revolution.

One year later, the enthusiasm was still confined to a small group, and it seemed to me we weren't progressing. That was when I made up my mind to leave and Steve Denning approached me with a new job. In contrast to the first group, Steve had no money or resources. He also did not have much recognition for his program. He had landed in the IT department because the Bank did not really have any other place to stash him.

Steve had been on the rise in the Bank's Africa group. Just as he neared the top of that organization, the president of the World Bank, Lewis Preston, died. Shortly afterward the Bank was reorganized, and Steve was given the job of dealing with information overload. As Steve tells it, this was the equivalent of being sent to Siberia.

Steve was a guest in the IT group, working with virtually nothing. Yet in the next two years, our little group did way more than the first team ever accomplished with a dedicated budget. In fact, we did more than teams that had millions of dollars in their budgets. Whether we knew it or not, we intuitively understood what engagement was, and we set about doing it.

Two years later, our team had expanded to a grand total of six people and achieved the phenomenal results I wrote about in the Introduction. We had also developed a network that included over 120 communities inside the organization to champion our program. Thousands of people were deeply involved both inside and outside the World Bank, pushing the agenda forward on multiple fronts in a giant social network. And we started this all without formal authority or budget.

We identified all the people who were major players and contacted them regularly. We convened those who understood and supported what we were up to—our evangelists. We met with directors and project managers who had the most to gain from our ideas. We brought in key players like the World Bank publisher, whose participation could make or break some of our most important efforts. And we didn't stop there.

We invited *anyone* who was interested to be part of our work.

We created working groups. We met with clients. We visited other agencies that were doing what we were trying to do and brought them in to visit us. We met with business thought leaders like Peter Senge. We even met regularly with detractors.

We met with everyone, everywhere, at every opportunity. We lived in a river of conversations that never stopped. The dialogue spread and flowed to parts unimagined and permeated the tiniest crevices, until everything was wet with new ideas and innovation. Everywhere we went, people were thinking about Knowledge Management—what it meant to them and their work, how they could become involved, and the benefits it could bring to their beneficiaries.

The power of the transformation was awesome, even unnerving. It traveled so fast and far that it often outreached where our little team was able to go.

Expert Input STEVE DENNING ON OPERATING WITHOUT BUDGET OR AUTHORITY

Steve Denning is the global thought leader on organizational storytelling. He has written five books on the subject, including two award-winning books: *The Secret Language of Leadership* and *The*

Leader's Guide to Storytelling.⁴ The *Financial Times* chose *The Secret Language of Leadership* as one of the best business books of 2007, writing, "If business leaders do not immediately grasp the vital insights offered by this book, both they and their organizations are doomed."⁵

Steve is the former program director of knowledge management at the World Bank, where he spearheaded the organizational knowledge-sharing program. When I served on his team, I had the chance to work hand-in-hand with him leading a large-scale change initiative.

In November 2000, Denning was selected as one of the world's ten Most Admired Knowledge Leaders by the Teleos Leadership Institute.

When I joined your team at the World Bank, we had no real authority to speak of. Clearly this did not stop you from pressing forward. What can you say about leading without formal authority?

Well, formal authority can be a real problem. We did get the support of the president, Jim Wolfensohn, and that was helpful. He furnished us with a clear message: "We will become the Knowledge Bank." But it was just as important to our success that we did not have middle management breathing down our necks. What you want is someone outside the team giving clear priorities—"Here's the goal," "Here's the vision"—and then a tear in the fabric of the universe. Space opens up that allows the team to self-organize into high performance.

What about budget? You started out with no money.

It was a blessing in disguise. When you're given budget, you have to figure out what to do with it, and other people try and take it away from you. It creates a whole set of distractions that take your eyes off the real work, which is talking with people and discovering together what's possible. Of course, we needed resources. But they came as we needed them. When I needed more people, you and Lesley Shneier, a senior knowledge and learning specialist, were given to me on loan. When we needed to put on an event, like the Knowledge Fair, we made it enticing enough that people paid to be a part of it.

Expert Input

So the resources came as real value was generated. When there was something worth pursuing, people showed up and helped to fund it.

It was all based on real work. Most initiatives are based on someone's idea of what should happen. They ask for money first, and then they have to figure out what to do with it. If they spend it on their idea and nothing happens, they look bad. We didn't have to worry about that.

We created activities and events that people looked at and said, "I want to be involved in that. I'll pay to have a table in the fair; I'll let the group meet in my conference room; I'll host that event."

Principles for Creating Rapid, Widespread Change

The World Bank's Knowledge Management Program delivered results around the world for years. Many of its initiatives survive today in various forms despite changes in leadership, budget slashing, staff turnover, and reorganizations.

I have used four guiding principles since that powerful World Bank initiative with every organization that seeks my services:

1. *A great idea in the hands of champions trumps formal authority any day.* Unfortunately, formal authority is mostly associated with bureaucratic requirements or top-down mandates rather than enthusiastic engagement. Champions, in contrast, take on ideas because they have confidence and vision. Followers detect the difference easily.
2. *A great idea implemented through engagement takes on its own momentum and generates the funding it needs to succeed.* As success mounts, people are able to recognize ROI and invest accordingly.
3. *Groups of enthusiastic, competent professionals develop applications, ideas, and innovations that go beyond anything one team can dream up.* We were constantly amazed by the power and far-reaching implications of the KM efforts. It went far and away beyond our expectations.
4. *Engagement takes ideas further, wider, and faster than any one group can control.*

I have discovered time and again that widespread esprit de corps is far more effective than having power in the hands of a privileged few in terms of speed, reach, and effectiveness. It's that simple.

Success Rules

- Getting people on board requires a new, deeper understanding of how people communicate and create meaning together, and lays the groundwork for the future. Social construction provides this.
- Getting change right is about:
 - Penetrating information overload and competing demands
 - Establishing flexibility and responsiveness
 - Building the shared future that creates buy-in and engagement
- Conversations create the future, so you have to get out and interact with your most valuable players.
- Getting people to participate and invest in your initiative is about generating value they can take to the bank.
- Success can be achieved without formal authority or budget.

