ORGL 516 Relational Dynamics and Organization Development
Change Agent Paper
April 15, 2022

Discovery 1: Who do I want to be as a change agent?

My journey of self-awareness and discovery over the past year has helped me realize my passion for seeing myself as a change agent. The first discovery: catching your dreams, engaging your passion (Boyatzis, 2006, p. 613), resonated with me immediately. For a very long time I did not know what dreams to catch anymore, and I had no idea how to engage my passion. The process of further education and more specifically digging deep into what a change agent is has reconnected my head with my heart. While I have received feedback throughout the course of my professional career that this is an area in which I excel and thrive, change has been challenging for me to balance. In my personal and family life, it has been a struggle for me to navigate the dynamics of my relationships with my family and to feel valued as a change agent within this structure. In my professional life, I want to continue to build the skillset in which I can inspire, initiate transformation changes throughout an organization through development of its people and processes.

When I am my leading with my best self, I enjoy operating with goals, objectives, and short-term sprints. Rallying the troops towards a common goal is where I thrive. I typically lead with my heart first which brings excitement, passion, and emotion. Next, I lead with my hands to execute and get things done, which is typically in a fast manner. Finally, I bring in my head. I have struggled with the sequence of leading in the past and it is area of feedback I have sought counsel on with most from my mentors, family, and classmates.

My determination, persistence and focus enable me to be an effective change agent and engage at multiple levels within an organization and execute at a high level of output. My workloads have been vast and diverse and require parallel execution and constant communication with board members, investors, executive leadership teams, managers, and colleagues. When I am at my best, I am at my maximum output. When I am at my worst, I am working along team members that cannot keep up at my pace.

My network is small, and I value the input of leaders that provide me with the difficult truth of my shadow. I value deep relationships rooted in trust. Reverse psychology works best when I am told I or we cannot accomplish a task or there is no way through. As a change agent, I find the path forward through the impossible scenario and deliver. I do this by surrounding myself with strategic thinkers and key stakeholders within and outside the organization. I seek and include as much feedback as possible from various points of view to reach the desired solution set forth from the Board of Directors or President and CEO and then I execute the vision and mission.

Discovery 2: My Real Self, Strengths, and Gaps (Integrate feedback from your invited colleagues)

When at my best as a change agent, I am persistent, determined, exhibit emotional resilience, and demonstrate ethical use of power. I can also navigate complex organizational changes. I demonstrate business knowledge, strong conflict resolution skills which allows me to persist through the corporate politics and ensure that changes are managed at the organizational, team, and individual levels. Below is an example of these skills put to the test:

"I recall a particular situation where an underperforming employee, managed by another underperforming employee, had to be terminated. Instead of jumping to conclusions and rushing through this decision, I observed Amy persist for 3+ months. She taught me the mentality that there's always 3 sides to a story (not 2), "his, hers, and the truth". She collected as much objective and unbiased information as possible. She ensured that as much information as possible was documented. She kept the employee informed throughout the process. The employee was mentored through a performance improvement plan (PIP). It was no surprise once the employee was let go. Through observing Amy's work ethic, I was taught that it not only is OK to have a healthy dissatisfaction with the status quo, but that through our leadership we can in fact heighten the bar for what it means to lead with integrity. Amy has always been brave enough to attempt the work that most are not brave enough to do." Jessica, A Direct Report at Leesa

As a change agent, I also enjoy providing individuals the opportunity for creativity and autonomy and love to watch them collaborate without direction. It is important for me to continue practicing facilitation, communication, and team building skills. Below is what one employee shared with me about their experience with an out of the box team building facilitation exercise:

"Amy led a change initiative at Leesa Sleep focusing on employee engagement and office culture. She led a design contest amongst the employees to re-purpose and improve the aesthetics and function of various spaces within the office. All employees were required to participate. She utilized her skills in communication, empowering others, and team building. The employees were divided into teams and each team was assigned a particular room or space of the office to re-purpose or redesign to their liking – they could devise their own theme, such as a designated "meeting room" or "quiet space". Each team was given the same budget and deadline and were given the freedom to use their own creativity to buy furniture, décor, etc. Employees at an overseas office location voted on which space was the best. Amy led all the communications regarding this assignment. She empowered the teams to use their creativity and to work together as a unit to design their assigned part of the office. A previously drab, cold, and sterile environment was dramatically transformed by the employees into a vibrant, functional, comfortable, and inspiring workplace. This was a welcome change as such initiatives were prohibited under previous leadership. An office party was held to "unveil" the winning space.

This lively competition fostered employee empowerment, creativity, and team building – and was a major morale booster amongst employees." – Tracy, A Direct Report at Leesa

Finally, resilience is personally the most important skill and attribute to me as a change agent. I was born a fighter and that has not changed. I was born crippled and under extremely distressing circumstances. I have had to teach myself to walk twice once after the corrective surgeries when I was born, and the second after surgeries when I completed my middle school years. I also did not take the traditional path to education, and I was B student. It took me 18 years to complete my undergraduate degree while working full time and raising our son. I never stop goal setting and I never stop pursuing my dreams. During the process of the Change Agent request feedback, I asked my parents and siblings to share their opinions with me as well. A theme that resonated for everyone is there is nothing that will hold me back from accomplishing my goals and for the goals of my family and team around me. Below is an example of how my resilience was demonstrated during the darkest times at Leesa.

"One of Amy's greatest strengths when faced with leading change is her determination and resilience no matter how difficult the challenge. I have worked with Amy during some of those challenging times including a period of difficult cash flows for the business when insolvency was a major concern. She kept the team grounded and focused and worked closely with the Board of Directors and outside counsel as we formulated contingency plans. She is extremely organized even during periods of great uncertainty. She helped drive the process forward in this instance as she coordinated multiple workstreams (legal documents, meetings with stakeholders, planning sessions, etc.) Her persistence in working the problem is a great asset during periods of change.

During this time, as Chief of Staff, Amy also worked in the background to keep our employees motivated and focused as we continued to operate the business. She has the capacity to handle a large workload while simultaneously not losing the ability to focus on our most important assets – our employees. Her energy and drive are assets when working through periods of significant change as she has the ability to manage multiple stakeholders while not losing sight of the objectives at hand". – Mike, Direct Manager & CEO at Leesa

I truly believe that anyone at any time can accomplish anything they want to accomplish. One of my gaps is bringing people along with me on the journey at their pace. I will grow impatient with non-execution and move on from underperformers. This is area that I must work on as people are not disposable and do not have the same strengths, agendas, deadlines, or goals that I may hold near and dear to me. The lessons are in the valleys of the journey. If I try to help people avoid the pitfalls that I have made, it is not useful in their own personal growth and development. This is an area I struggle with in my professional and personal life and one I am working hard correct during reflection - Stop fixing others.

I can be seen as assertive, aggressive, and emotional when things are not going as I had planned or not further along than where I think they should be. I will push through to accomplish the goal and the perception is that I leave anyone in my wake that is not with me on my timeline. This is exactly the opposite of what I desire to be and want to be a good wife, mom, daughter, sibling, teacher, mentor, colleague, and friend.

Discovery 3: Learning Agenda

Name of the current organization or entity in which you play a role in a change initiative/effort:	Family Member and Mentor
Your role, or description of your current role:	Wife, Mom, Daughter, Sibling and Mentor to previous team members
Strength #1 as a Change Agent:	Determination and Resilience
Strength # 2 as a Change Agent:	Persistence and Problem Solving
Gap Area #1 as a Change Agent:	My Drive to Execute and Succeed
Gap Area #2 as a Change Agent:	My Impatience with Progress

1. Strength to build or gap to close:	Gap to Close – My Drive to Execute and Succeed
What specific action(s) will you take to increase this strength or close the gap?	• Constantly check in with my family members and make sure that I am supporting them on their dreams and not imposing my dreams for them onto them. • Text or call family members or mentees and ask them how I can support them on their journey. • Create a list of strengths for each of them that they demonstrate and send notes of encouragement. Fill up their tank.
Anticipated duration of time needed?	• 1 hour a day for check-ins text • Schedule one call a week with someone who can keep me focused on my goals vs. fixing others • 6 weeks to connect with family members
What dates will you begin as well as strive to complete this?	Start Date: June 1st Target Completion Date: August 30th
Name a few success measures that will indicate progress.	• I have a written change management communication and roll-out plan on paper • Blocking strategic time on my Outlook calendar to focus on professional and personal development
Describe your accountability plan (partners).	I will share this with Rob (my brother) and Judy (my Mom) and continue my check-in schedules with them – Mom daily at 9:00am and my brother once a week at 5:00pm. I will share this with 2 peers from this class: Jeremy and Samantha

2. Strength to build or gap to close:	Gap to Close - My Impatience with Progress
What specific action(s) will you take to increase this strength or close the gap?	• Add to my morning reflections, prayer, and meditation to breathe and out and to allow the process of progress to evolve. • Do something once a week completely spontaneous away from the house and just for me so I can calm my soul and reflect on what has gone right • Do not create an agenda for at least one day a week
Anticipated duration of time needed?	• 30 minutes for reflections • At least 4 hours to wander and dream without a checklist
What dates will you begin as well as strive to complete this?	Start Date: May 1st Target Completion Date: August 30th
Name a few success measures that will indicate progress.	• I will share my time (and a photo of activity) that I will be away with my family (Mike and Dylan) so I am not interrupted. • I will add to my calendar a hold for this time
Describe your accountability plan (partners).	I will share this with 2 peers from this class: Jeremy and Samantha

Discovery 4: New Habit Activity

While I have been away from my career over the past year, I have enjoyed the time of solitude, reflection, and correction. However, the longer I stay away the more I am afraid and do not want to go back. There are days that I am paralyzed with fear that no one will ever want me on their team due to my age, gender, qualifications, time away and "all too often, people (I) explore growth and development by focusing on the "gaps" or deficiencies (Boyatzis, 2006, p. 614). I am that person that focuses on the gaps and takes on the ownership of the issues and deficiencies of other people. I have struggled with not meeting my timelines and agenda as I have stated before and reflected on what can bring me the most joy in the valley of waiting.

Part of who I am as a Change Agent is passionate about social impact. When I left Leesa, I was so burned out that I did not want to do anything for anyone ever again. I want to bring the part of Amy back that enjoyed the connection with people that needed someone to show up for them on THAT day. My new (old) habit activity that I am bringing back is volunteering.

A few years ago, we gave mattresses to a shelter here in Indianapolis and I have been thinking of volunteering at this location and seeing how the mattresses have impacted the lives of the residents. I also am considering substitute teaching at the middle school or high school level. Perhaps I can inspire students that do not feel like they are smart enough or good enough to go to college that they can push through and make it happen. While I have not quite zeroed in the exact method in which I will go about it, I am holding myself accountable to volunteering somewhere one day a month.

By volunteering with an organization, I come away with more of a heart of gratitude and awareness of others. I can practice patience and kindness and not fixing people. I am unable to do that in seclusion, within my family or within an organization. Perhaps this will become one of my spontaneous activities during the week outlined in my learning agenda! Perhaps it will set me on trajectory of new opportunities that I have not been able to envision over the past year. Perhaps this will bring me full circle in my leadership healing.

Whatever this new habit brings to me, I hope it is magnified ten times on the other side and people can see my inspiring hope, love, passion, and emotion for them when I am in service to them. A servant leader must first and foremost serve their teams and others and I hope this is an area that I can reconnect my heart and soul with my hands.

Discovery 5: Resonant Relationships

My mentor/accountability colleagues from this class are Jeremy K. jkinney@zagmail.gonzaga.edu and Samantha B. sbaltadonis@zagmail.gonzaga.edu. I chose to conduct individual calls as we were all in different times zones (PST, CST and EST), however, because we are in the same book critique club, we have been able to connect as a group in order to get to know one another. I had one call with Jeremy and one call with Samantha. I asked them both the same questions and solicited help with specific tools and guidance they have found useful on their own leadership journey relating to emotional intelligence and bringing people along on the journey.

My conversation with Samantha was incredibly thought provoking as we discussed women in leadership the biases and unintended bias within our roles. We also discussed our personal lives which we discovered that both our spouses were significantly older than each of us and acted as our great cheerleader, mentor, friend, and partner. I shared with Samantha my struggle with leaving people in my wake due to non-performance or non-execution when getting goals and objectives completed for the organization. She provided great insight on how to balance my expectations and not jumping in to solve the problems when I am beginning to feel in the grip. Further, providing the team with clear expectations regarding delivery and feedback loops should get me in front of the non-performers so I can begin to formulate a plan B should I need to go this route.

For Jeremy, emotional intelligence was being "present" and aware in the moment. Pausing in the millisecond of emotion before responding and being aware of my breath and breathing. I shared with him that I would doodle to still my mind from the emotion in order to not react but to connect my mind with the thoughts. This method proved frustrating from some of my colleagues as they assumed I was not listening, did not care and was interested in what they had to say. In hindsight, I should have spoken to them one on one and shared with them my desire to stay out of the grip and emotionally responding and this was a tool that I used. Breathing deeply, as Jeremy suggested, every time I feel the emotion creep in may help calm the nerves of my immediate need to react.

Finally, regarding bringing people along on my journey, the key for both Samantha and Jeremy were to communicate, communicate, communicate. Not just how I want to be communicated to but understanding how my team and key stakeholders want to be included in the communication and feedback loop. Some may like email, text, one on ones, etc. Also, communicating to them my work style is critical. This will take away the ambiguity of trying to figure out who I am, and it provides the opportunity to build trust and transparency. While I am morning person and I do not necessarily need a response at 5am, the receiver may feel as though they need to respond at that time. Samantha shared a great idea of how Amazon includes a humanity notice in their signature lines stating that the sender does not need an immediate an answer to the email unless

outlined in a timeframe within the email. I will use this process going forward to help people understand my expectations. We also discussed the using daily stand-ups, weekly check-ins and one on ones to stay comfortable with the team's performance and holding myself accountable to deliverables and commitments that they need from me to build trust.

As I reflect on my own progress and how I can continue to adapt to change, I have considered many of the mechanisms to sustain change that were discussed by Donald Anderson in *Organization development: The process of leading change* (2017, p. 373-375). Implementing periodic team meetings, renewal conferences, goal directed performance reviews, active participation and persuasive communication are key areas that I would like to focus on going forward (p. 373-375) with my teams and my family. They will provide me with the opportunity to build my communication skills gap and my facilitation skills to bring those individuals along with me on the journey.

I was incredibly grateful to receive so much feedback from various areas of my life on this project. All participants have provided me thoughtful insight and encouragement. This will definitely help me keep going and soften the edges that need continued work.

References

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Boyatzis, R. (2006). An overview of intentional change from a complexity perspective. *Journal of Management Development*, 25(7), 607-623.