The Dance of Change:
The Challenges of Sustaining Momentum in Learning Organizations

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Building Leadership Communities that enable organizational learning: The Bold, The Powerful and The Invisible.

- **Local line leaders:** undertake meaningful organizational experiments to test whether new learning capabilities lead to improved business results

- **Executive leaders:** provide support for line leaders; develop learning infrastructures; lead by example in evolving the norms and behavior of a learning culture

- **Internal networkers/community builders:** the "seed carriers" of the new culture; help create the capacity (skills, infrastructure) for sustaining change; move freely to find those who are predisposed to change; help out in organization experiments; aid in the diffusion of new learnings

Three Growth Processes of Profound Change (p. 42)

1. Enhancing Personal Results ("because it matters")

2. Developing Networks of Committed People ("because my colleagues take it seriously")

3. Improving Business Results ("because it works")

Most important changes seem to have these qualities: (p. 43)

- They are connected with real work goals and processes;

- They are connected with improving performance;

- They involve people who have the power to take action regarding these goals;

- They seek to balance action and reflection, connecting inquiry and experimentation;

- They afford people an increased amount of "white space"; opportunities for people to think and reflect without pressure to make decisions;

- They are intended to increase people's capacity, individually and collectively; and

- They focus on learning about learning in settings that matter.

Most effective change initiatives create environments for learning by incorporating these three cornerstones: (p.44)

- New guiding ideas

- Innovations in infrastructure

- Theories, methods and tools

The learning disciplines (and core competencies) remain a foundation for all organizations (p. 45)
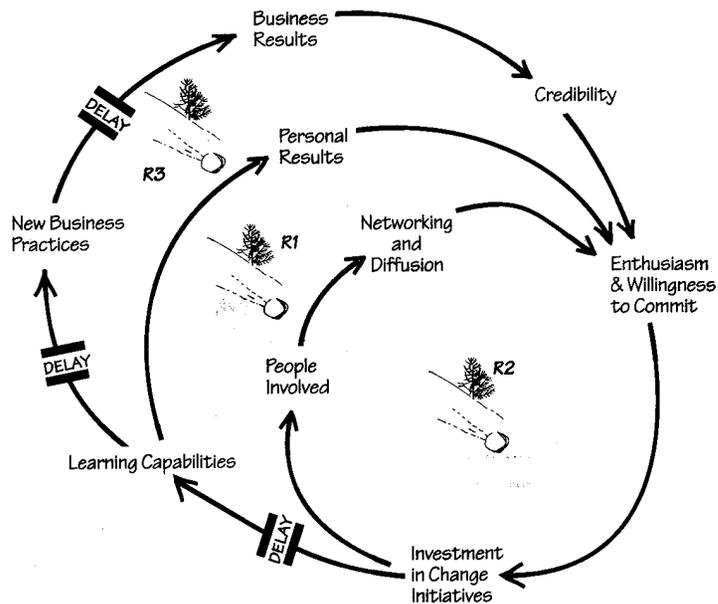
- Aspiration

- Reflective conversation

- Understanding complexity

The basics: (p. 55-56)

- While nothing happens without commitment, initial commitment is almost always limited to a handful of people.

- Start small, grow steadily.

- Intended results and useful tools are more important than a detailed plan.

- If you're short of time and you're up against the wall, fix the crisis first.

- Remember that leverage lies in identifying the limits and lessening them.

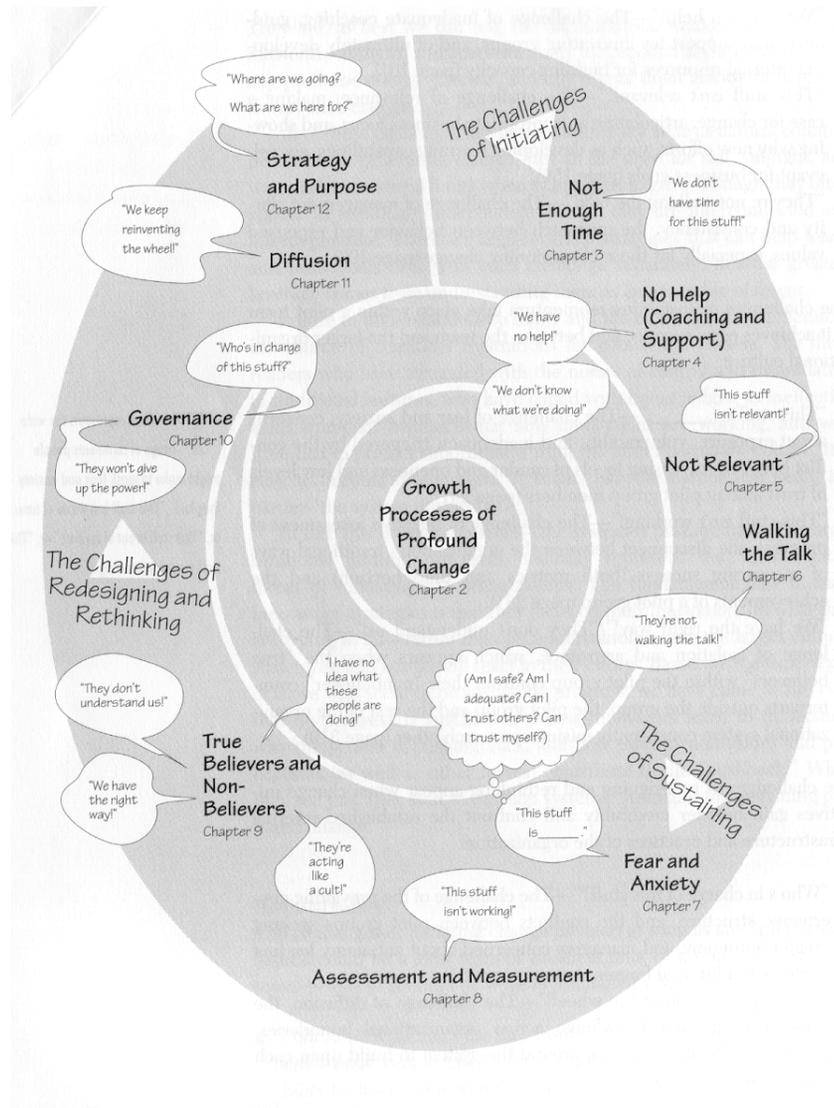Study notes for *The Dance of Change: The Challenges to Sustaining Momentum in Learning Organizations* by Peter Senge et al. NY: Doubleday, 1999.
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Growth Processes of Profound Change

From *The Dance of Change* p. 54

Challenges

From *The Dance of Change* p. 28

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Phase	Challenge	Mental Models	Strategies
Challenges of Initiating	1. Not enough time The lack of a pilots group's flexibility and control over its own time.	We don't have time for this stuff! Limits: *Time flexibility* *Time available*	• Integrating initiatives • Scheduling time for focus and concentration • Trusting people to control their own use of time • Valuing unstructured time • Building capabilities for eliminating busywork • Saying "no" to political game-playing • Saying "no" to non-essential demands • Experimenting with time
	2. No help (coaching and support) The need for coherent, consistent knowledgeable coaching, guidance, and support.	We have no help! We don't know what we're doing! Limits: *Help available*	• Investing early in help • Creating capacity for coaching • Finding a partner • Building coaching into line management • Attitudes about seeking help
	3. Not relevant The absence of a clear, compelling business case for learning.	This stuff isn't relevant! Limits: (affect commitment) *Clarity of business case* *Degree of personal connection*	• Build strategic awareness among key leaders • Explicitly raise questions about relevance in the pilot group • Make more information available to pilot group members • Keep training linked tightly to business results • Inquire openly about perceptions that some people are getting "carried away" • Revisit relevance periodically
	4. Walking the talk The vulnerability and lack of reflection engendered by a gap between espoused values and actions, especially for those championing change.	They're not walking the talk! Limits: *Clarity and credibility of management values and aims (affect trust)* *Safety for reflection and dialogue (affect reflection)*	• Develop espoused aims and values that are credible in terms of the "living quality" of the organization • Build the credibility of organizational values and aims by demonstration, not by articulation • Don't go it alone--work with partners • Cultivate patience under pressure • Develop a greater sense of organizational awareness • Think carefully about your beliefs about people • Make room for talk about individual's values • Cultivate patience with bosses • Practice shuttle diplomacy

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Phase	Challenge	Mental Models	Strategies
Challenges of Sustaining Transformation	5. Fear and Anxiety Triggered by openness and candor among members of the pilot group.	• Am I safe? Am I vulnerable? • Am I adequate? Do I measure up? • Can I trust myself? Can I trust others? This stuff is _____! Limits: (affect openness) *Psychological safety and trust* *Individual and collective capacity for openness*	• Start small and build momentum before confronting difficult issues • Avoid "frontal assaults" • Set an example of openness • Learn to see diversity as an asset • Use breakdowns as opportunities for learning • Do everything possible to ensure that participation in pilot groups and change initiatives is a matter of choice, not coercion • Remember that skills matter • As a manager, work to develop a common frame around vision and current reality • Don't shoot yourself in the foot • Remember, and remind people, that fear and anxiety are natural responses to the precariousness of a learning situation
	6. Assessment and Measurement The gap between your change initiative and the organization's ways of measuring results.	This stuff isn't working. Limits: *Implicit time horizon (affects expectations of results)* *Metrics in use (affect negative assessments)*	• Appreciate the time delays that are involved in profound change • Build partnership with executive leaders around assessing the assessment process • Learn to recognize and appreciate progress as it occurs • Make assessment, and developing new abilities to assess, a priority among advocates of change
	7. True Believers and Non-believers The tendency for profound change to fall into an escalating dynamic of perceived threat and siege mentality.	We have the right way! They don't understand us! I have no idea what these people are doing! They're acting like a cult! Limits: *Cultural flexibility* *Reflective openness* *Capacity for engagement*	• Become "bi-cultural" • Mentoring • Build the pilot group's capability to engage the larger system from the beginning • Cultivate reflective openness • Respect people's inhibitions about personal change • You don't have to convince people • Deploy language consciously • Lay a foundation of transcendent values

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Phase	Challenge	Mental Models	Strategies
Challenges of Rethinking & Redesigning	8. Governance As pilot groups expand their reach, how can they develop the legitimate autonomy they need to act in tune with existing power and accountability structures?	Who's in charge of this stuff? They won't give up power. Limits: *Local capabilities for managing interdependence (integration)* *Tolerance for local management of interdependence* *Tolerance for independent self-governance*	**For Pilot Group:** • Pay attention to your boundaries, and be strategic when crossing them • Articulate the case for change in terms of business results • Make executive leaders' priorities part of your team's creative thinking • Experiment with cross-functional, cross-boundary teams, if you can get them sponsored by the hierarchy **For Executive Leaders:** • Begin at the beginning: with governing ideas • Develop specific structures that guard against "authoritarian drift" • Deploy new rules and regulations judiciously • Never underestimate the power of small changes in complex situations--if they are the "right" changes • Be prepared for a long journey and don't embark alone
	9. Diffusion How can the entire organization (and its external partners) learn from the experiences of profound change initiatives? What infrastructures and practices can help prevent organizations from continually "reinventing the wheel?"	We keep reinventing the wheel. Limits: *Capacity to appreciate different world views* *Infrastructure of community building* *Capacity to diffuse new organizational practices*	• Learn to legitimate and value network leaders as carriers of new ideas and as coaches • Pay explicit attention to existing communities of practice • Release information about new innovations with less constraint • Get "the system" in the room • Design more effective media for internal information exchange • Cultivate "Appreciative Inquiry": other people are probably not as crazy as they seem • Make research part of executive accountability • Develop the managerial ability to conduct research, especially by line leaders • Remember that all boundaries are ultimately arbitrary

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Phase	Challenge	Mental Models	Strategies
Challenges of Rethinking & Redesigning, cont.	10. Strategy and Purpose What does it take for an organization to continually reinvent itself as its world changes? How can new ideas about purpose and strategy that emerge from innovative pilot groups potentially influence thinking more broadly?	Where are we going? What are we here for? Limits: *Collective capacity for re-thinking and re-designing (affects reinvention)*	• Use scenario thinking to investigate blind spots and signals of unexpected events • Combine scenario thinking and explorations of organizational purpose • Develop stewardship as an organizational ethic and practice • Engage people continually around organizational strategy and purpose • Expose and test the assumptions behind your current strategy • Focus on developing better strategic thinking and ethical thinking capabilities • Learn to pay attention to subtle shifts in the sense of possibility

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