From Chump to Chimp to Champ

By

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Background

The new Corvette weighs 3,444 pounds, accelerates from 0-60 in 3.9 seconds, brakes from 70-0 in 146 feet and gets 29 miles/gallon.

The 1973 Corvette weighed 3,520 pounds, accelerated from 0-60 in 7.2 seconds, braked from 70-0 in 242 feet and got 14.5 miles/gallon.

We are getting better performance today and twice the mileage. Performance has virtually doubled over the past 40 years at half the operating cost. In most technological arenas, we are getting substantially better performance today than we did forty years ago. For example, Moore’s Law stated that the number of transistors and other devices in an integrated circuit would double every two years, a trend that has been maintained for the past 50 years. That same trend has not been maintained for change projects.

Victor Vroom wrote a book in 1973 called Leadership and Decision Making. In that book he stated that the success rate for projects involving change was about 30%. He defined success as meeting the agreed performance objectives on time and within budget. Forty years later, according to the Standish Group who create the CHAOS Report every five years, the level of success is still about 30%, despite training hundreds of thousands of people in change management. Something else must be happening.

Victor Vroom closely examined the projects that did work and discovered two conditions for project success:

- The team believes this is the best possible solution (decision quality).
- The team is committed to change implementation (decision buy-in).

The best possible decisions require better information, more creative solutions, and better evaluation (costs/benefits/risks) of the alternatives against our objectives.

Buy-in depends on the involvement, participation and engagement of the team—the more, the better. We get involvement by asking better questions, listening very carefully to the answers, evaluating the ideas more effectively, and getting agreement, commitment and support from the team and the stakeholders.

Change management is more than completing the templates, even when we do it well. We need to do more.

System 1 & System 2 Thinking

Daniel Kahneman in his book, Thinking Fast and Slow, discussed the differences between System 1 and System 2 thinking. He seemed to especially admire System 1: It was faster, more intuitive, more instinctive, could handle large volumes of complex information, and it just felt right. System 2 was more thoughtful, more considerate, took longer, was more rational but seemed more sterile. System 2 was also lazier; it only got involved when System 1 requested help, which was not often enough.

Jonathon Haidt in the Happiness Hypothesis also expressed a preference for System 1 thinking over System 2. He called these two different aspects of thinking, motivating the elephant and directing the rider. Of course, the elephant is always much stronger than its rider. The emotional aspects of a decision will always outweigh the logical aspects of any change. He also seemed to favor emotional aspects over rational aspects for implementing change.
System 1 thinking, despite its emotional and intuitive appeal, has limitations:

- We make assumptions, some of which are unrealistic, instead of gathering the facts.
- We jump to conclusions, often ignoring risk, and make some difficult-to-implement choices.

The rationally-based change manager thinks: If only we could get our people to pause, ask a few questions and listen carefully to the answers, we would have better decisions, more successful changes and improved corporate results. In other words, use System 2 to get better answers and, by involving the team, get more buy-in.

It seemed to be a losing battle. Change agents would do as suggested: Pause, ask the right questions of the right people, and listen carefully to their answers to get better decisions with increased commitment to implement. They even followed good critical thinking processes to:

- Gather information to ensure understanding.
- Generate ideas to avoid jumping to a solution.
- Evaluate ideas to choose the best combination of cost, benefits and risk.
- Seek agreement, commitment and support from the stakeholders.

They would then go back to “noisy” work environments where speed was more important than the quality of their solutions and implementation was always too hurried. Human nature intruded. Rather than work against human nature, they need to work with it. As in judo, change agents can use the momentum from fundamental human nature to complement their deciding and implementing, not have their instincts work against them.

The Nine Human Instincts

Andrew O’Keeffe wrote a wonderful book called Hardwired Humans. It shows a better way to solve problems, to make decisions and to implement successfully by understanding and harnessing the nine fundamental human instincts. Eureka: A rational questioning process plus the nine human instincts can work together to produce better results.

The nine human instincts represent the behaviours that come with being born human. They are the behaviours that we have carried through the long journey of human history. The nine instincts are not unique to humans – they tend to exist in nature with all big-brained hierarchical species, with the most similar comparison being chimpanzees. So, by utilizing the human instincts, which closely parallel System 1 thinking, with the more thoughtful, more rational System 2 thinking processes, we can arrive at better solutions with a much greater chance for successful implementation.

This is the thinking progression that we sometimes see on change projects.

Components of the Human Brain

The reptilian brains reacts immediately —fight, flight or freeze — which is not terribly helpful for arriving at better conclusions with greater buy-in. Our chance of success for this issue could be high or low by sheer happenstance; our
chances for success on the larger project evaporate with this kind of thinking.

We typically focus on the more human thinking processes: ask the right questions of the right people; get more and better information; generate possible solutions; choose the best possible solution and gain the buy-in and support of the organization or its stakeholders.

Kahneman said that System 1 will usually trump System 2:

- Emotions trump reason.
- Risks or losses trump benefits.
- The short term will always trump the long-term.
- Certainty trumps uncertainty.

For example, we know at the rational level that we should not eat that extra piece of caramel walnut cheesecake, but at the emotional level we grab it quickly before others can change their minds. Or the opposite: We often arrive at the best possible, most rational solution but it sometimes lacks emotional appeal and nobody wants to do it. So, what are these human instincts that we share with other big-brained primates?

By understanding the nine powerful instincts that propel us at the emotional level and that underlie our rational thinking processes, we can make better progress. These nine instincts help to explain why some changes are easy and some are much more difficult.

What do chimps know that we forgot we knew—but make a difference when implementing change?

1. **Social Belonging**

Humans create strong bonds within family-sized groups of around seven people and a sense of belonging in groups of up to 150. We have a strong sense of loyalty to the team and a strong loyalty to the group. Beyond 150 people, we seem to naturally form silos: them versus us.

**Implications**

Teams work best with 7-8 people; when teams go beyond 10 members, cliques or teams-within-teams, start to develop. This can hinder change efforts by hindering the communication process.

Survival exercises foster a team approach; for example, in survival exercises (arctic survival, desert survival, jungle survival) we normally discover that:

- Good teams almost always do better than the average individual.
- Great teams usually do better than the best individual.

Great teams understand the three minimum conditions for team success and build awareness and skills in these areas:

- Common purpose: We all understand why we need to do this change.
- Interdependence: I need you; you need me; we need each other to make the change happen.
- Common process: We share a common thinking process and language for initiating, defining, planning, implementing, monitoring and controlling, and measuring change success; we understand the ground rules for working. Together

Another strategy for applying this concept to change: Break the change into bite-sized chunks with separate teams and team leads, attempting to maintain the 7-9 target for each team. Other non-core subject matter experts (SMEs) can be added as needed to do specific tasks.
In Hardwired Humans, Andrew O’Keeffe suggests that the leader on a large project with several teams should:

- Know the names of each of their people.
- Know 2-3 important things about each individual that defines them as individuals (marital status, colleges attended, children, important upcoming events in their lives).
- Know their roles in the team and demonstrate that you value their roles.
- Establish directions, goals and purpose for the team in change charter.
- Create an environment where everyone is acknowledged and rewarded for pulling together.
- Arrange social functions during work hours to build a sense of community.
- Coach the team leads to address any freeloaders who are diminishing the team’s efforts and interests.

Also, integrate new members into the team: provide introductions, confirm goals and objectives, obtain resources, and assign work locations and desk space. Consider how best to on-board every new member of the team: Roles, progress to date, resource availability, location and co-ordinates.

One way that people build bonds with other people is to do them favours. Social animals believe in reciprocity: If someone does something good for me, I want to do something good for them. Find ways to reward people: recognition, provide work they enjoy, measure results and provide feedback to give a sense of achievement.

2. Hierarchy and Status

Humans seek superiority or security in hierarchical systems. We actively seek status symbols, recognition and elevation within the hierarchy. We want to know where we are in the pecking order and we want to be at or near the top.

Implications

As people on change teams perform better and better, their contributions need to be recognized. As they perform better and better, their roles need to expand: They move from team member to team lead and from team lead to change manager. As they gain more experience, skills and stature, they become portfolio managers, managing a portfolio of change initiatives with several change managers to meet strategic goals.

Find a way to give additional recognition and status to people who perform well; this can be a great motivator.

Be careful about putting people in positions of power who have no desire to lead others. If they have no motivation to lead, they will not step up to the plate.

One challenge with putting people in power is getting them to use it in an escalating way: giving people the “look,” verbal warning, written warning, removal from the team. The temptation is to drop the atomic bomb at the first transgression. Use of power can be hazardous: too much and people vote with their feet; too little and things may not get done.

Remember that 80% of people who leave a team, leave because of their relationship with their immediate manager.

Shift focus to the impact of change on business users and on clients; they are the BIG targets of change and its most direct beneficiaries.

Continually communicate small wins to business users and to clients. Give users and clients opportunities to recognize and reward the people who made these wins happen.
All these things elevate the change agents within the organizational hierarchy.

3. Emotions Before Reason

People trust their emotional instincts above all else and use their emotions as their first screen for all information received. We hear negative news first and loudest.

Implications

Change is all about communication. Many change managers do not realize that a hierarchy of information exists:

- Anecdotal: Events, situations, or examples: My neighbor took his uncle to that hospital and three days later he died. Do not ever take your relative to that hospital!
- Qualitative: Comparative information: Ambulance drivers tell me that if they have a heart attack victim, they always take them to another hospital because the death rate is lower.
- Qualitative: Hard numbers and facts: A survey of all 150 hospitals in the country revealed that this hospital had the second-highest death rate.
- Qualitative information is often the most persuasive from a rational perspective, but anecdotal information appeals more to the emotions: It involves people at the personal and instinctual level.

Also, since emotions almost always trump reason, we must engage people in the change. Let them know the purpose; let them know how it will affect customers, business users and employees; let them know how this change will make a difference.

Most people have a burnout point—when stress gets too high. Many people do not realize that stress has two components: task stress and relationship stress. If you reduce relationship stress at the beginning of a project; then you can increase task stress to get the change implemented while minimizing burnout.

Build a great sense of urgency. We really, really need to do this project: Look at the impact on our customers and our people.

Consider where emotion fits:

- Perception: See it or hear it.
- Classify: Is this good or bad.
- Emotion: How do I feel about it?
- Results: How well do I perform?

The more positive the emotion, the more likely we will get the expected results.

4. First Impressions to Classify

We quickly classify people, situations, and experiences into categories (good or bad; in or out) based on first impressions and gut feelings. Most of us do this within two seconds or within the first seven words we hear.

Implications

- If the situation is bad, our brains immediately go into fight, flight or freeze mode. We react—and sometimes not well.
- If we believe the situation is good, we start to think about its implications and ways to make this work even better.
- If we are not sure, we assume it is bad and our reptilian brain again takes over: Fight, flight or freeze.

We often take advantage of this in change management. We get the organization’s attention by focusing on the burning platform. The burning platform example happened several years ago when a North Sea oil rig
exploded and caught on fire. Most of its occupants were killed in the explosion or fire. The survivors had a choice: Remain on the platform and we consumed by the flames or jump 200 feet into the cold North Sea. The burning platform gets our attention. It highlights the opportunity to improve:

- We must increase our revenue, our funding, or our market share.
- We must increase customer value to become even more competitive.
- We must reduce our delivery cost.
- We must comply with new regulations or new legislation.

In other words, we are doing a good thing, not simply eliminating a bad thing. Bad things get our attention; good things maintain it.

5. **Loss aversion**

We seek to avoid loss; we only reach out when we feel secure. It has been demonstrated that most of us hate to lose at least twice as much as we like to win.

**Implications**

The loss aversion instinct plus the immediacy effect explain the hierarchy of motivators for change.

Hierarchy of Motivators

- No. 1: Current pain
- No. 2: Future pain
- No. 3: Current gain
- No. 4: Future Gain

Most of us, when advocating change, focus on the future benefits, which is No. 4 in the hierarchy. Most of us, when affected by change, focus on what we will lose after the change occurs, which is No. 2 in the hierarchy. No. 2 will almost always trump No. 4. That is why we are resistant to change. The losses trump the benefits. So, to reduce the resistance to change, we should amplify the gains and reduce the losses.

Every good change plan will identify, assess, avoid and mitigate loss. By addressing risk, we build even greater commitment to the change.

6. **Gossip**

We seek and share information, especially with others we like and use information to build alliances. We love to tell and to listen to stories; stories have great power to move us.

**Implications**

Build the tone of the gossip to reflect, “This is good, not bad.”

For example, when making a major move, one company spread the word that their business was doing so well, it was now necessary to move to larger quarters: This change is good; we need to do it.

Make sure that the gossip around this change—and there always will be gossip—is good, not bad.

7. **Empathy and Mind Reading**

We use empathy and mind reading—through tone of voice and body language—to build relationships.

We use empathy to understand what other people want and we use reciprocity—doing other people favours incurs favours—to get what we need.

**Implications**

The need for face-to-face communication, especially when planning the change: Determining objectives, understanding their importance and gaining commitment to the
change objectives. Albert Mehrabian said that the understanding of any message depends on:

- Words used (7%)
- Tone of voice (38%)
- Body language (55%)

Great change leaders read body language and hear tone of voice, the better to understand and to be understood. This has also been expressed as one of the seven habits of highly-effective people, and is especially important for change managers.

Research confirms that people want to hear about change from their direct manager. As a change person, advise managers to invoke reciprocity: “You have heard the rumors. We are making a major change. I am letting you know now, so you can help me make it work. I need your ideas on what we should do and how we can anticipate problems.”

8. Confidence before Realism

People follow people who radiate confidence. We allow confidence to conquer realism and to get what we want. We want to build enough confidence to offset any thoughts of loss.

Implications

It has been said that there are two kinds of people:

- Those who radiate confidence about the success of an impending change and, even if the change fails, they will be remembered for being enthusiastic.
- Those that express misgivings about the change, its potential for failing to meet its objectives and the risks that will be encountered. Even if the change succeeds, they will be remembered for their lack of enthusiasm.

The ideal is the combination: Be enthusiastic in public about the change; in private, identify the risks and develop a mitigation plan to deal with those risks

9. Contest and Display

We seek to impress others; we continually demonstrate our worth as a means to gain advantage and to build relationships.

Implications

Aristotle said that we have three areas of influence to get us what we want:

- Ethos: Our own personal credibility is so high that others will do whatever we suggest.
- Pathos: We appeal so strongly to others emotions—happiness, sadness, fear, anger—that our solution and its impact on people will get their support.
- Logos: Our logic is powerful; we have the numbers to back us up; this solution makes great sense.

The ideal strategy is to develop all three areas to get what we want: We generate the best possible answer with a high level of commitment for its implementation.

Strategies for enhancing your ability to influence include:

- Build your portfolio of successful changes: I have done it before; I know what to do; I can do it again.
- Ensure that your ducks are all in a row: Show the costs versus the benefits; show the plan; show the risks and your mitigation strategy. Demonstrate that this change is very worthwhile, that the budget is realistic, and the timelines are doable.
Show the impact on people and the reputation of your organization. This is a change that must be done: It confirms your values and moves the organization in the right direction.

Summary of Instincts

An integrated change model uses these instincts to reduce resistance to change and to get better results on time and within budget.

- Get their attention: Understand the need to change (burning platform)
- Show the benefits: Consider the best approach
- Understand the risks: Identify and address the risks and losses
- Confirm what we will keep: Identify what will remain after the change

Change Model

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Burning platform</th>
<th>Benefits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Show the pain</td>
<td>• Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Convert to opportunity</td>
<td>• Customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Employees</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>• Stakeholders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comfort Zone</th>
<th>Risks and Losses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Keep what we value</td>
<td>• Identify concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Reduce impact</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We reduce the resistance to change by filling in the four boxes as a team. We get better answers with greater commitment to implement.

The jump from chump to champ is large and difficult. As a change professional, remember the intermediate step—your inner chimp—and use your natural instincts to make change easier.