

Generating Leadership Possibilities

An AI way for developing HR change leadership

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Introduction:

The last decade has been a time of “high voltage” changes in organizations – be it mergers and acquisitions, lay offs, restructuring, changes in leadership, new products and services, technological changes and so on. The prognosis for the next decade is not very different, perhaps change will happen at higher levels of frequency and intensity. Many among the HR leadership in organizations have been through these changes, some successful and others not, and have learned the art and science of leading change.

Human Resources Group in organizations is expected to catalyze and anchor this change process. However, in many organizations, the human resources group itself becomes the holder of cynicism towards change. Then, change efforts fail and lead to new levels of frustration among employees within the organization.

Why does this happen? We believe that all the organizational “problems” – be it performance, culture, decision making processes, leadership styles are all projected on to HR and the HR personnel tend to introject them. This process over a period of time leads to building lethargy, cynicism and helplessness among HR professionals.

We see an opportunity here because we see huge potential among the HR Professionals to unleash the energy and take leadership for organizational change. We believe that they have the ability and can be key to the success and institutionalization of change. All that is needed is to bring back the self-belief and the willingness to do so. This was the premise of our work with an HR group of the largest public sector steel company in India.

The Organization:

The Client Organization is the market leader and India's largest integrated steel manufacturer with a capacity of 12mn tons with a vision to be a respected world-class corporation and the leader in Indian steel business in quality, productivity, profitability and customer satisfaction. This organization has a sales turnover exceeding 4 Billion USD and a workforce of 125,000.

Objectives of the Intervention:

Based on discussions with the Executive Director of the HR division of the organization, the following objectives were created for the intervention:

- Developing Appreciative Leadership- the ability to perceive the positive inherent generative potential in a given situation and to act purposively to transform the potential to outcomes.
- Learn the ability of organizational diagnosis and facilitation of change
- Identify and co-create change projects within the organization

The above objectives had the dimensions of personal growth, building competencies for change leadership and creating application projects in their back home environments.

The Process:

The assignment design was made in two phases.

- An initial *Workshop Phase*, to sensitize the management to AI, and to work intensively with the self and others to become change leaders. A 5-day experiential workshop was designed using AI and other process technologies for 25 HR Managers from different plants spread across the country.
- A *Follow up Phase* to measure the impact for AI applications and projects using a Questionnaire Survey (Qualitative & Quantitative) and telephonic interviews.

The Workshop :

The workshop had the elements of self discovery, building competencies in appreciative diagnosis and application of the same for identified change projects across the organization. Along with AI, other technologies were combined to enhance the effectiveness of the intervention: a) behavioral skill training methods b) group activities c) interpersonal work and d) Café methods for discussions.

The anchoring methodology used was the 7D AI process created by Malcolm Odell as part of the Appreciative Planning and Action (APA) model, first used for Women Empowerment project in Nepal in August 2000. We added an 8th D – **Define** – to set the context for unfolding the next seven D's. See below the 7 D model of Malcolm Odell.

1	Discover	-- Asking positive questions, seeking what works, what empowers, what gives life
2	Dream	-- Visioning of what could be, where we want to go.
3	Design	-- Making an action plan based on what we can do for ourselves
4	Delivery	-- Making personal commitments
5	'Do it Now!'	-- Start taking action, now! Take small symbolic steps together, right now
6	Dialogue/Discussion	-- Reflecting on the process we've just gone through together; and personal commitments for replication and sustainability
7	Dance & Drum!	-- Celebrating our successes, enjoy, sing, dance, share stories and humor; enhance our commitment to 'joy in work.'

Applying the “8Ds”:

Given below is the narrative of how we implemented the various steps in the 8D’s model (adapted from Malcolm Odell). The steps were however not linear and sequential all the time. For example, we used Dialogue and Reflections at the end of every day. We also used “Do it Now”, when we wanted to see how the group can “walk the talk”. “Dance and Drums” were a spontaneous activity most of the times, end of the day celebrations, but we as Facilitators also used them whenever we felt the group needed to bring in some energy or when we were feeling bored!

AI process	Methods and Activities
Define	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Icebreakers• AI film• AI theory presentation• Defining purpose of HR change leadership using Café Method
Discovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Story telling of peak experiences of leading change in personal and organizational life• Identifying life giving forces of change• Discovering themes from the stories and presenting them as poetry and songs in the participant’s language
Dream	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Creating a personal dream of being a change leader by writing an autobiography of their future• Creating a Harvard Business Review article on the organization that would be published in 2012.• Developing a provocative proposition for HR change leadership – the statement was as follows: <i>“We unleash the potential and make our organization a World Leader with a Human Touch by Inspiring Trust, Cultivating Competence, Opening Minds and Celebrating achievements”</i>
Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identifying the underlying elements of purpose, values and elements of culture that will help build this dream• Identifying opportunities to implement the dream. Some of the opportunities identified were:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improving patient satisfaction in Steel Plant Township Hospital• Plant wide implementation of AI based practices• Instituting scholarships for children from Community around Steel Plant

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing better relationship between Town Maintenance staff and Employees. • Manpower utilization, motivation of ground level operators
Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation of the project plan in small teams with specific steps and outcomes expected. • Presentation to the Executive Director. • Getting organizational support for implementation
Do it Now	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving appreciative feedback to each other to build interpersonal relationships • Offering commitment and support to each other's projects • Living the vision of change leadership in the here and now –actual discussions and/or in a simulated exercise, where the participants observed their own leadership.
Dialogue/ Reflection	<p>Dialogue and reflections were done at the end of every day and also at various milestones. The questions explored were:</p> <p>Identifying what were the best moments of the group and how can this be replicated back home?</p> <p>What could be even better? If we were to go through this process again, how could it be even better than what we did now?</p> <p>Identifying personal level actions/ behaviors for change</p>
Dance and Drum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating and reciting poetry • Making collage of the organizational change leadership • Singing sessions of old Hindi film songs • Playing musical instruments – flutes, drums and bells • Playing games for fun and to improve teamwork • Dancing – though in a very sober way!

The above activities generated very high levels of energy, commitment and most importantly the belief that they have the capability to bringing about transformational change in their organization.

The Follow Up:

Three months after the workshop, we initiated a survey to determine the status of the projects identified and impact on the participants as well their role as HR Change Leaders. The results indicated a very high level of learning and internalization of the AI philosophy and process within the participants. As illustrations, 60% from participants agreed that AI

has given them a new perspective to look at issues of change management and 80% people agreed that AI has helped them deal with each other in a more emotionally mature manner.

This was also evident in the qualitative feedback like the ones given below:

“AI is an eye opener, has to be cultured & nurtured continuously”

“My team is now perceiving me as a more positive and dynamic HR person”

Some of the behavioral indicators identified by the participants were the following:

- Started Resolving disputes in an appreciative way
- Started seeing possibilities in every adverse situation. Able to manage them better now.
- Focusing on active listening and started valuation rather than evaluation of people

The following projects were completed as self-reported by participants after three months and documented on the company Intranet:

- Job enrichment of Crane operators
- Organized 2 days AI workshop to enhance quality of life and interpersonal relationships
- Conducted 2 days AI workshop for staff and executives to enhance positive attitude
- Facilitation skills development for HR executives
- Job Counseling using AI approach for 25 employees

Our Learning:

This has been an inspiring project for the three of us. Working with a 60 year old organization and Managers with more than 25 years experience, getting them excited about new possibilities in their lives was a challenge. But we believed in them and they started believing in themselves! Some of our professional learning from this assignment is given below:

- HR Leadership is the holder of organizational cynicism and releasing this energy is crucial for organizational change. Building Change Leadership among HR is key to bring about sustainable change within large organizations
 - Holding the belief as Consultants that beyond the cynicism there is hope – releasing the energy of cynicism brings in hope.
 - Reinforcing our faith in self work; discovering the change leader within is a trigger to developing organizational change leadership
 - Using all channels of expression; storytelling, writing, poetry, painting, collage making, music, dance etc. helps groups to discover hidden talents within themselves. This helps letting go of cynicism by reconnecting to those deep spaces where possibilities have been long buried. Releasing this energy becomes a powerful vehicle for driving self belief leading to external change.
 - The advantage of five days of full time work with a cohesive work group enhances effectiveness of an AI intervention
 - Some of the post implementation follow up couldn't be done in this assignment due to the recession that hit the client's business. The learning from here is to get a budget commitment from the client for the entire process even before we embark on such a large change process initiative.
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