

Will Anyone Join Your Revolution?

By Wayne Visser

Margaret Mead once said, 'The only person who likes change is a wet baby', to which Hunter Lovins added 'and the baby squalls all the way through the process.' So change is never easy, especially on the big issues of sustainability. In thinking about this, I have found Richard Beckhard and David Gleicher's Formula for Change rather useful: $D \times V \times F > R$. This means that three factors must be present for meaningful organisational change to take place. These factors are:

- D = Dissatisfaction with how things are now;
- V = Vision of what is possible; and
- F = First, concrete steps that can be taken towards the vision.

If the product of these three factors is greater than R (Resistance), then change is possible. I have seen sustainability change efforts fail for all four reasons. Deep-seated resistance often exists because the benefits of the status quo to those in power are considerable. Sustainability initiatives, especially if they are integrated into the core business, are often seen as extra burden. For instance, an operations manager of a plant really doesn't want the extra hassle of collecting emissions data for a sustainability report, or subjecting his staff and facilities to an audit.

Most often, I think, the dissatisfaction that we may feel with the state of the world or the company's actions really isn't widely shared enough. Jonathon Porritt, author of *Capitalism as if the World Matters*, after many years in the sustainability game (he started the UK's Green Party and chaired the government's Sustainable Development Commission among other things), told me: 'Looking at people all over the world today, rich and poor world, they are not remotely close to a state of mind that would call for anything revolutionary. There's no vast upheaval of people across the world saying, "This system is completely and utterly flawed and must be overturned and we must move towards a different system." There isn't even that, let alone an identification of what the other system would look like.'

Likewise, on creating a compelling vision, Porritt concludes that 'we have not collectively articulated what this better world looks like – the areas in which it would offer such fantastic improvements in terms of people's quality of life, the opportunities they would have, a chance to live in totally different ways to the way we live now. We haven't done that. Collectively we've not made the alternative to this paradigm, this paradigm in progress, work emotionally and physically, in terms of economic excitement. We've just not done it.' Taking first steps is something companies are generally much better at, especially picking the so-called 'low hanging fruit'. But the reason these steps so often don't get beyond the pilot or peripheral stage is because the other two factors – dissatisfaction and vision – are not strong enough.

Another way to think of change in a structured way is Peter Senge's concept of the learning organisation, popularised in his book, *The Fifth Discipline*. He described the five interrelated disciplines as follows: 'Systems thinking [the fifth discipline] needs the disciplines of building shared vision, mental models, and personal mastery to realise its potential. Building shared vision fosters a commitment to the long term. Mental models focus on the openness needed to unearth shortcomings in our present ways of seeing the world. Team learning develops the skills of groups of people to look for the larger picture that lies beyond individual perspectives. And personal mastery fosters the personal motivation to continually learn how our actions affect our world.'

In a follow-up book, *Learning for Sustainability*, Senge, together with co-authors from the Society for Organisational Learning, apply the fifth discipline model to sustainability. In particular, they emphasise connecting the inner and outer work that needs to be done: 'Connecting the inner changes in how we manage and lead with the outer effects our organisations have on larger

systems; connecting the inner changes in mental models and personal visions with the outer changes in management culture; and connecting the inner changes in who we are as human beings with how we act and interact.'

In seeking to create change for sustainability, Senge and his colleagues once again emphasise the interconnected nature of all change processes, and the critical role of business: 'There has never before been a time when the social, ecological and economic conditions that challenge political leaders in any one part of the world have been so interwoven with what is occurring in so many other places. This phenomenon has arisen through the ever-growing web of interconnectedness spun by institutions, especially multinational corporations. Collectively, these organisations determine what technologies are created and how they are applied around the world: which markets develop and which are largely ignored. These institutions determine who benefits from the world economy and who does not.'

Given the interconnectedness, the key to change, believes Senge, is collaboration. To illustrate his point at an MIT Sustainability Summit 2010, Senge asked the question: What would it take to get rid of disposable cups? Who would have to work together to eliminate disposable cups? The answers suggested include everyone from Starbucks and its competitors to paper manufacturers, food service providers, recyclers and municipal governments. To make real headway on really tough sustainability issues is a 'massive undertaking in collaboration'. What's more, the parties that need to collaborate often aren't naturally inclined to.

Senge concludes that a good guy/bad guy mentality can be a barrier to such collaboration. 'You've got to wake up and say "We're all part of the system". You know who is causing the destruction of species? You and me. You know who's causing the huge waste problems around the world? You and me.' Once you become more open-minded to this possibility, then you can look for collaborative solutions. 'Look for small steps of things you can do together with people with whom you traditionally would never have cooperated — and do something useful, no matter how small.'

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