

Managing Change & Technology

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*To Embrace the Future,
Let go of the Past
PdJ*

THE DRIVE TOWARDS SIMPLICITY

Condensed from a Keynote Presentation

A look at how to achieve Simplicity in the Face of Change

In September I was asked to present to Fluke Electronics. The interesting part of the assignment was that they wanted me to address some issues relating to 'simplicity'. Given that they are already masters at creating very user friendly tools, this was a little bit of a challenge. This article is the outcome of what turned out to be a very well received presentation.

It is almost trite, it is certainly a cliché, to point out that we live in a rapidly changing world filled to overflowing with complexity. Regardless of how many times we've heard this it is worthwhile keeping it in mind and, unlike our daily conversations about the weather, actually trying to do something about it.


One of the ways the world is changing is that the traditional boundaries between the work day and our personal lives have eroded. Sitting in the stall of a public washroom, it is no longer unusual to hear a cell phone ring in the stall next to you and then... to listen as they combine work with the most private of human activities.

How does one hold back the tide? How do we find an oasis of calm amidst the hurly-burly pace of life? The Dalai Lama eloquently draws us a picture when he states: "Simplicity is the key to happiness in the modern world." The question we're faced with is, how do we move towards simplicity when everything seems to be moving away from it towards a more complex world?

Another challenge is that when we attempt to define a 'simple life' there should be a strong connection with how we build our tools. There is an obvious benefit in using tools that perform complicated, highly technical tasks as simply and safely as possible. Can our tools, and how we design them, teach us about 'simplicity'... and by paying close attention to tools that already work well, can we discover some deeper rules of design that will enable us to create even better tools in the future?

What exactly is 'simplicity'? Is it merely the opposite of 'complexity' or are there some subtleties that we have to examine more closely in order to gain a true understanding of what's going on? Consider the steering wheel in a car; is it a simple or complex device?

On one hand, if I turn the wheel to the right the car moves to the right and to the left when I turn it to the left. There's a 'simple' relationship between my movement of the steering wheel and the actions of the car. Because of the simplicity of connection, even if I've never been in a car before, I very quickly learn the relationship. Driving a tank is a



much more complicated endeavour because of the way in which the two treads work together (and against each other) to turn left or right.

But the linkage between the steering wheel and the wheels themselves is hardly what one would describe as ‘simple’. You must literally be an engineer to design such a mechanism, and you have to be a very clever engineer to design the linkages so we can achieve the point where we can legitimately claim that steering a car is a simple task.

The secret to ‘simplicity’ is being in control and knowing what is ‘important’ within the context of what you’re trying to accomplish. Example? Door handles usually turn down in order to open a door. It is not that ‘down’ is more logical than ‘up’, it’s merely the accepted practice. When you encounter an incorrectly installed door which requires you to lift up the door handle to enter a room, all of a sudden the door has become a complex device. Mainly because you no longer know what movement of the handle is the correct one. ie. You don’t know what’s important, and you’ve lost the ability to perform a simple task.

How often have you picked up a device and had to search for the mechanism with which to activate it? Welcome to the heart of complexity... not knowing what to do next.


Another aspect of complexity is when unintended results arise from simple actions. We’ve all had this experience when working with computers. Pushing a single button at the wrong moment can result in catastrophic consequences.

Ecologies are like this, we really don’t have any clue as to how the world works. Yet we see fit to make changes without even thinking of the consequences. Case in point? In the 1950s in Borneo, the Dayak tribe was suffering from Malaria. The World Health Organization thought that DDT would be the perfect answer. Kill the mosquitoes and you’ve removed the prime vector of Malaria.

Several months after they’d sprayed the jungle, the thatched roofs of the villager’s huts began to fall down. It seems that in killing the mosquitoes they’d also killed (it’s called “collateral damage”) a species of Wasp... who ate the caterpillars... who ate the straw of the roofs that the Dayaks lived in. No Wasps? More caterpillars. More caterpillars? Weaker straw in the roof and sooner or later the roof falls down.

They also had other problem. The DDT killed many other insects which were eaten by geckos, which in turn died and were eaten by the village cats which also ate the rats. Naturally the cats died. No Geckos? No cats. No cats? More rats! More rats = more disease, in particular an epidemic of Sylvatic plague and an outbreak of Typhus. Finally WHO had to parachute in a load of cats to reduce the population boom in the rat colonies.

Not all unintended consequences happen on so grand a scale. We can see them occur in our own homes. My children asked for a 2nd TV to be placed in the playroom. Seems like a reasonable request. Until you realize the consequences.



A 2nd TV means that the family will split into two groups... one to watch one show and another to watch a second show. This is fine... unless you value family time together, even if it is only to watch a TV show together.

Part of the secret to regaining control over our lives, and living a simpler life, is establishing some way to highlight the things we value and install a process to reinforce them.

In France in 1989, a group of people got together and created the 'Slow Food' movement. It was a direct response to the invasion of 'fast food' - in particular McDonalds - in Paris. Their reasoning was very simple. In Europe tremendous value is placed on family meals, the enjoyment of food and wine. The notion of a 'fast' meal is counter to everything they believe in. The 'Slow Food' movement has now spread worldwide. (www.slowfood.com)

In Italy there are some 32 villages that have integrated the slow food concepts into their town laws. No Cell Phones in restaurants. No phone wires overhead. No TV antennas on rooftops. No traffic in the center of town. etc. etc. At first glance it might appear that they are trying to throw out all technology, until you learn that they fully support cable television. They don't want to stop technology; they just want to be in control of it and what it does to their society.


Another example of this type of thinking comes from, of all people, the Amish and Mennonite communities. These communities have a reputation for being 'anti-technology'; but as we'll see, this is a somewhat mis-guided perspective.

The Amish do use technology. In most barns you'll find a diesel engine typically used to blow silage out of the barn, but you won't find a diesel engine out in the field assisting with any of the 100s of backbreaking, labor intensive tasks. The big question should be "Why?" Why do they permit the usage of a highly technological device in one area of the farm and yet prohibit its use in another area where it might provide even greater benefit?

The Amish have created a very effective technology filter in the form of a question. "Will this (*application of technology*) draw us together, or will it drive us apart?"

In the Amish tradition the entire family works in the fields, only the men work in the barns. If they bring the labour saving device to the fields, there will be less need for everyone to work together. Therefore, bringing the diesel engine to the field will drive them apart.


They use the same rationale when it comes to using the telephone. It is not uncommon for the Amish to own a phone, but you will not find one in their homes. The phone is kept outside of the home in either the workshop or even the outhouse. The reason? They would never allow the interruption of a dinner conversation by the ringing, and answering of a phone. They've made a conscious decision not to become that *type* of people.



How does all of this relate back to our tools? We can focus on a single issue relating to our products. We all suffer from a terminal case of galloping featurism. Every device we build would be that little bit better -- if we only added one more feature. As we give in to this disease our tools steadily gain in complexity and lose the original simplicity of design.

If we created a technology filter -- a clear, concise question we can use to evaluate every proposed addition -- then we'll have a process with which we can protect the original simplicity. The question? One that comes to mind is "Will this new feature add, subtract from or obscure the original purpose?"

The secret to achieving simplicity is, first and foremost, defining clearly what we value and what we're willing to protect.



*Procrastination gives you something to look forward to.
Joan Konner*

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Ssshh! don't tell anyone... I've just signed a contract for 'Vapour Point' due to be published in February 2004! More details as the book takes shape.

EIGHT TIPS *FOR MANAGING CHANGE*

Something lighter

In many ways, we talk about Change Management just like we talk about the weather. There's a lot of moaning and groaning about it, but not much in the way of actually doing anything to make it better. It's as if we've given up, and are willing to accept the notion that Change is overwhelmingly difficult. That's a pity, because the problem of Change Management is as susceptible to rational thought, methodical analysis, and problem solving techniques as is any other problem.

What holds us back from applying our considerable intelligence to the issue of Managing Change, is that we've fallen prey to a flock of myths regarding the Change process. Ironically, these myths fly in the face of what we know personally to be true about how we as individuals react and cope with Change... but we ignore what we know and apply these myths to the behaviours we see around us. The result? A whole lot of fuzzy thinking regarding this very human activity of 'Responding to Change'

1. People Resist Change.

Sorry, but no they don't. People continually seek out drastic changes to their lives and voluntarily embrace them. Proof? Are you married? Have kids? Ever sought a new position? Learned a new language? All of these are huge Changes that we all embrace willingly every day.

2. People do however resist being *forced* to Change.

This is the key. Understand this, and you're 90% of the way towards being able to better manage this thing called Change. If I tell *YOU* that from now on you have to do something differently... then you'll want to know **WHY** this Change is necessary before you agree to Change. Here's a news flash... You're not that different from everyone else. We **ALL** need a reason to Change and will rightly resist anyone who tries to force a Change down our throats.

3. Resistance to enforced/mandated/dictated Change is 'bad'.

This is perhaps, the most destructive belief held by management today. Resistance to forced Change is not only 'not bad' - in this age of rapid Change, it's absolutely vital that we do **NOT** Change every time someone comes up with a new idea. Instead we should strive to put in place, strong barriers to unnecessary Change which only allow necessary Changes to pass through.

4. Resistance to Change is all about the Fear of Uncertainty.

Not entirely true. Reducing uncertainty about the Future is a central strategy in any Change Management project, but it is not, by any stretch of the imagination, the only obstacle to Change.

5. Past success is the greatest obstacle to future Change.

This should be obvious, but it isn't usually taken into account. If you've been successful for the past ten years in a particular manner, you should be very wary of anyone suggesting a 'new' way of doing things. Would it really make sense to change a winning strategy just 'because' someone suggested, without hard proof or evidence, that you should?

6. Getting people to 'Buy into' a Change is the problem.

Exactly right, but *not* in the way most people read that statement. 'Buy in' suggests that management has defined the Change necessary (ie. the solution) and now are trying to convince, persuade, cajole people into adopting this new direction. Why is this bad strategy? Because management typically makes no effort to describe the problem the proposed Change is supposed to fix. Management is trying to sell a solution to a problem that people are often not even aware of. Is it any wonder they resist?

7. Don't sell Solutions... define problems instead.

If someone is aware of a problem and then asked what they could do to solve it, then they own the solution and will, if given the chance, go to great lengths to implement it. This is called 'getting their involvement'. It is the simplest, easiest method by which to make change happen in your organization. If Change is necessary, let them decide what needs to be done and then get out of their way.

8. How they respond to Change, is also how you respond to Change.

That's the real secret behind knowing how to manage Change. Do you respond better to being told to Change... or when people ask you to suggest solutions to a real problem? When learning something new... do you perform perfectly from the start? Or is there an inevitable learning curve... where you make lots of mistakes at first, and get better as time goes on? When placed into a brand new position, with lots to learn... are you filled with self confidence? Or is there a little voice in your head that has you wondering if you'll ever regain your normal level of competency?

To better Manage Change in your organization, first look within. You'll be surprised at the answers you'll find.

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More Change Seminars in the UK, Scotland & Eire

I'll be back in the UK and the surrounding hills and dales for most of February 2003... Currently I have an even dozen confirmed engagements... so I'll be there for the duration!

If you wish to schedule an in-house seminar, presentation or consulting assignment; or even express a desire to get together for lunch in the UK around that time, please contact me, as soon as possible, to make suitable arrangements.

Call for contributions

Folks? In the interest of providing multiple perspectives on change. I'm happy to consider articles of 500-700 words for publication in the next issue of MC&T. Or, if you prefer... pose some change related questions and I'll do my best to provide an intelligent answer.

MY SERVICES & PRODUCTS

I'm primarily a speaker/consultant on issues relating to Change and the Future. You can contact me via e-mail at pdejager@technobility.com or call me at 1-905-792-8706 to discuss how I might be of service to your organization.

My primary speaking topics fall under the umbrella of Change, Technology and the Future. Here are some sample titles.

Managing the Impact of Change...

Basically everything I talk about in this journal are topics I consult and speak about. Let's discuss how I might be of service to you. If I can't help you, I know someone who can.

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Our focus is first on our 'commerce' and then on the Internet

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That's it... see you next ~~month~~ year! (or thereabouts)
Peter de Jager