Managing Boundaries, Managing Change

When Judy, who has delivered the mail to campus departments for 26 years, retires, the CFO sees an opportunity: don't replace her. A plan is hatched to consolidate a number of delivery services, including Judy's mail, interdepartmental correspondence, and print shop jobs. Rather than each department making these deliveries daily, all will share efforts. Each office will receive a consolidated delivery twice a week. The change is communicated in an all-campus email blast, and a collective cry of alarm goes up. Within a few weeks, the new system is in place operationally, but few have yet learned to live within the "new normal." Faculty who have typically relied on the print shop to run off assignment guidelines, exams, and handouts are struggling to internalize the new schedule, and so they overwhelm both departmental copiers and the university's instructional designers, who suddenly must support paperless instruction on a large scale. Service offices that count on quick deliveries of transcripts, payments, and other documents begin to ferry their own envelopes back and forth, sometimes several times per day, rather than using the new system—and to do this, they sometimes leave their front desks unattended. The planned efficiency that was to have come with streamlining delivery service instead creates a spread of smaller-scale inefficiencies, both in time and money. On the other hand, as departmental admins chat with one another on their errands, as students arriving at empty front desks receive help from higher-ranking administrators, as faculty wait in line for the photocopier or get to know the instructional design team, and as collective grousing provides a pleasant pastime, the "team spirit" on campus improves remarkably.

Change is hard, even in the best of contexts and with the most deliberate and strategic of lead-in processes. While the change described above has a silver lining in that it contributes to an improved social atmosphere on a stressed campus, it also shows the ways in which unmanaged

change can lead to unintended—often negative—consequences. Change violates personal boundaries, impinging on the sense of confidence that comes with familiarity and routine: an outstanding senior faculty member may suddenly find herself plagued with doubt and confusion as she struggles for the first time to use the LMS to distribute handouts to her students. Change violates well-marked limits around employee and organizational spheres of responsibility. Departmental admins who find themselves on errand duty might playfully call each other "Judy"—wondering all the while if they will also have to become the new maintenance team, IT help desk, or food service managers. Change disrupts the boundaries that organizational culture draws around itself, as processes and policies, echoed again and again, contribute to a collective sense of selfhood and purpose. When an organization changes its "how," that is, it also must ask questions about its "who," "what," and "why"—who are we, what do we do, and why?

Change: A Thing with Tentacles

A change in a process such as mail delivery need not be tremendously disruptive, of course, provided the only thing that change is "about" is mail delivery. On a campus with entrenched roles, processes, policies, and rhythms, however, things rarely exist in so simple a state. The loss of Judy initiates a mourning ritual; someone who was a fixture is gone, and she is missed. The loss of Judy changes everyday habits and routines; suddenly people have to learn new ways to do things at which they were already well practiced. The loss of Judy causes job descriptions to stretch, albeit unofficially. The loss of Judy redraws campus social boundaries, as people and offices that had to that point run parallel now find themselves intersecting. The loss of Judy upsets the status quo, and the status quo has a great deal to do with how people understand who they are in relation to the whole. Anyone who has witnessed an inordinately

large furor sparked by a redrawn parking map, a change in syllabus format, or an altered communication protocol has experienced a version of this: changes, even seemingly small ones, reveal the ways that organizational politics and protocols contribute to people's personal senses of well-being. In an organization where a parking space signifies status, comfort and convenience, or a sense of belonging, a change in such has the potential to feel like a threat.

Davis and Fifolt (2018) note that typically in higher education, change management—if it occurs in a systematic way at all—has taken a business-forward shape that may fit better in a corporate than educational environment. Some approaches, however, work well in the educational context. For instance, models such as Six Sigma with its five phases approach to business transformation (Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve, Control) has strong applicability in higher education, perhaps because it resembles a typical assessment loop that might be used in measuring the attainment of program outcomes or strategic planning goals. Still, even when university assessment processes are used to drive improvements, achieving deep and lasting change is more likely to fail than not. Flood and Coetsee (2013) estimate that 70-80% of organizational change efforts either fail or do not meet objectives. Why is this? Too often, attempts at organizational change fail to take into account the sorts of boundary markers that Judy's resignation, a change in the parking map, or an alteration in the syllabus format will almost surely challenge. Lawler and Sillitoe (2010) note that in the university space especially, significant and deep-seated changes in areas such as federal revenue sources, research funding, and legislative priorities have caused disruptive actions across campuses, yet there has been little to no attempt to manage these high-level changes for the individual campus employee, which is where they ultimately have the greatest effect. Given this, it ought not to surprise us that so much of the higher education environment feels like contested turf.

Lawler and Sillitoe (2010) argue rightly that almost any model for change management is better than none. Lewin's "unfreeze-change-refreeze" model, to take one example, describes the organizational movements that are needed to move from one state to another. Lippitt's Phases of Change Theory augments Lewin's model with more attention to naming the need for change and defining its shape before making plans or implementing. Senge emphasizes the need to understand change in terms of systems: a change in one part of an organization creates movement in other parts. Kotter updates Senge's model and parses it into eight steps, with increasing emphasis on the rhetorical burden that change-leaders bear: they must be persuasive and communicative in addition to strategic. Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation theory also emphasizes the need to create buy-in among stakeholders, though Rogers sees change as a collective enterprise—one in which every stakeholder potentially plays a decisive role from the start. The final stage of change for Rogers is for the stakeholders to recognize that the change has brought improvements and to adopt the "new normal" as a valued part of the organizational culture. Bratton and Gould, followed by Leopold and Harris, focus almost entirely on this last phase of Rogers' model—the moment in which learning occurs at the organizational level. Learning, as opposed to bunkering down, gossiping, or complaining, is the only productive response to change, Leopold and Harris argue.

Collective learning occurs most effectively when the planned change is deliberately plotted out to be as engaging as possible for the highest number of people. Thus, the leader must "imagine it forward"—explore and come to believe in the vision for change—and must claim the story they tell (Comstock & Raz, 2018). Doing so requires the leader to push boundaries and explore in search of meaningful ways to intervene, and to embrace contradictions and tensions. The early work of change-making lives more in the realm of ideas than action, as the leader

engages in what Comstock and Raz (2018) call "storycraft"—adapting the change narrative needed to suit the organization in which it must occur (pp. 18-19). Kotter (1996) argues that the "biggest mistake" people make when they attempt to change organizations is "plunging ahead without establishing a high enough sense of urgency" (p. 4). Changes are buoyed along by a strong and engaged coalition of people who are convinced of the need for change; they have heard the story and see themselves in it. Their engagement must be stoked in turn by moments of celebration of short-term wins, frank acknowledgement of challenges and roadblocks, and constant communication of the ways the change matters for organizational culture as a whole. First, then, change leaders must assure that they have the right team in place (Davis & Fifolt, 2018)—the cast of characters for their tale. In addition to having appropriate official roles and needed skills and capabilities, these individuals must approach organizational culture, systems and processes, and team dynamics with a learning attitude (By, Burnes, & Hughes, 2023), as they will ultimately be charged with implementing change in a dynamic and sensitive way in their many separate spheres within the organization.

In time, as the change-narrative unfolds, this team will be responsible for deploying the sorts of hard interventions that typically make it into PowerPoint presentations (new technology, new construction, shifted reporting chains, etc.) within their areas. To do so effectively, so as to assure a positive adaptive learning process, they will need to take note of the settings in which they operate, including complexities caused by institutional power structures; rules and regulations; informal networks; organizational charts and informal reporting chains; control mechanisms; patterns of reward and punishment; routines and habitual behaviors; promotion pathways; cultural tolerance for change; institutional change history; markers of status, power, and prestige; and tacit assumptions that those within and outside of the organization make about

it (Davis & Fifolt, 2013, pp. 114-15). While leading change ought not to involve an attempt to accommodate every personal foible of everyone on the team, it does require a deliberate engagement with the emotional and affective side of organizational life for learning to happen on a broad scale. If the announcement of the new campus courier system had been treated not as a draconian change in policy but as a celebration of Judy's contributions to the campus, an assertion of her irreplaceability, and an invitation to partner in finding ways to assure continuing smooth campus operations, most likely the changes that followed, while not easy, would have been received with far less collective disruption. As the tentacles of change reach into various parts of campus life, a broad-based team with a handle on the hard and soft shifts ahead can do much to assure the story ends well.

Who Am I? Change-Managing Individual Identity

The core needs that individuals seek to have met within the organizations where they work include competency, autonomy, and relatedness. Any Judy needs to know that she is good at her job, that she will be allowed to do her job without over-management or interference, and that she is part of a missional whole. If she is typical, she will want to direct her own path, to get better and better at something that matters, and to know that her work is of greater significance (Pink, 2011). It takes little effort to imagine why a change, even a small one, might threaten any of these core employee needs. For example: a campus upgrades its student information system (SIS) to allow greater automations in some university processes, including financial aid packaging. A financial aid processor who has been on the job, working productively, for eight years suddenly finds herself wondering whether what she had done for all that time was not good enough, or whether there was some improvement she should have made to help her upline to be more satisfied with her performance. In truth, the automations have been implemented not

because she was not doing well but because (1) they were included as an added bonus with the SIS upgrade, and (2) having this valuable employee free to do more complex tasks, such as assisting the children of deployed soldiers with accessing their military benefits, made more sense for the organization. Yet the employee, not knowing this, feels that her competency is being questioned. Another example: a general education initiative on a campus uncovers the fact that outcomes across multiple sections of the same course vary greatly, even though the syllabi are supposedly identical. To remedy this, high-ranking administrators determine to pilot a "group teaching" model, where instruction in large general education courses such as American history survey, college algebra, and British literature will be delivered by a team of instructors, assisted by graders who norm their work. The affected instructors feel not only that their expertise is being called into question but that they are being treated not as professionals but as factory workers, creating a rubber-stamped product rather than educating students. A poorly managed change causes them to question their competency, their autonomy, and—ultimately—their sense of shared purpose as faculty members. It reminds them, in short, of all the ways their jobs may not meet their core workplace needs.

Like core needs, the concept of boundaries offers another way of understanding why change might be so disruptive to individual identity in the workplace. In their classic text on the subject, Cloud and Townsend (1992) describe boundaries as ways of distinguishing "what is our responsibility and what isn't" (p. 27). Boundaries contribute to and result from healthy "me-we" differentiation (Jarymowicz, 1992, pp. 202-03). They protect individuals against both egocentric and conformist/dependent beliefs and behaviors, they allow space for diversity and differentiation among points of view, they permit empathetic and compassionate interactions among people, and they minimize the potential for hostility and prejudice (Jarymowicz, 1992).

Boundaries are needed to help individuals be healthy, and they are also needed as a basis for those individuals to reach out to one another in kindness. Many classic definitions of ethics, including Levinas' and Ricoeur's, note that one cannot behave ethically toward another without acknowledging that in some deep way, that other is very different from himself (By & Burnes, 2013). When a financial aid processor, then, is replaced by an automated process, or when a group of faculty are treated as functionally the same, the change undoes each person's sense of individual responsibility and undercuts their ability to act as a meaningful and engaged part of the whole. Poorly communicated changes of this sort may even tend to encourage what Dweck (2006) calls a "fixed mindset," in which people, rather than embracing challenges as growth opportunities, double down on their existing qualities—their "certain amount of intelligence . . . certain personality, and . . . certain moral character," which they seek to prove over and over again because they believe those are their sources of value (p. 6).

Given the clear ways in which change may threaten individual boundaries and create perceived or real vulnerabilities around individual core needs, wise leaders and their teams should take particular care to structure the change process in such a way as to avoid these potential areas of challenge. At all levels, storytelling and scene-setting can do powerful work: inviting team members to listen to, understand, and envision the imagined future throughout the process of implementation will prepare them to offer their buy-in freely for reasons of belief rather than command and control (Walton, 2004). Beyond this, in situations where individuals will need assistance with transitioning to a new *modus operandi*—such as introducing new technology, learning new job procedures, or teaching new content—framing the assistance given not as "help" or "training" but as a caring offer of team-spirit and support is more likely to affirm individuals' sense of relatedness without also undermining their need for competence and

autonomy (Nadler, Halabi, Harapz-Gorodeisky, & Ben-David, 2010, p. 183). Schein (2009) concurs on the importance of storytelling and co-visioning to create a team that functions together, as he explains in his classic text on helping. Schein (2009) lays out potential traps that affect individuals on the receiving or transitioning end of a change. These run the gamut from resistance due to mistrust of those leading the change, to resentment or dismissiveness, to over-compliance based on perceiving leaders as rescuers or mere validators (pp. 37-40). Similarly, those on the "helping" end of the equation may find themselves dispensing wisdom and serving as a "change doctor" rather than leading a team of freely participating agents, meeting any resistance with increased pressure or ultimatums, confusing their own value with the success of the change initiative, or pacifying in the face of emotional reactions rather than engaging points of conflict (pp. 40-45). It is important that change leaders resist scripting a change as though it is a stage play. Rather, they should focus on creating the right conditions, setting the proper scene, and gathering the most suitable actors, so that the story's action will rise and fall as it should.

In addition to storytelling, Schein (2009) recommends that leaders ask many varied questions in order to understand the ways that change processes affect individuals within the organization. Pure inquiries are just that: questions that help the leader understand the real person in front of them, and that, in turn, validate the team member's worth and value. Diagnostic inquiries focus on the individuals' understandings of their organizational contexts: the ways that individuals understand their own me-we boundaries. These boundaries become visible in these question-and-answer sessions during moments of emotion, expressions of anxiety or suspicion, and repeated thematic echoes. As necessary, leaders may ask more confrontational questions, or may probe into metanarrative questions, such as asking why team members phrased things the way they did (pp. 69-77). What is needed in all cases, Schein (2009) notes, is not a change-

manager but rather a "process consultant (p. 132) in which a shared vision leads to results that each plays some role in bringing about. Change, managed well, invites individuals to thrive together in new and challenging situations, rather than calling into question their right to speak into the terms of their professional existence. It affirms, rather than destabilizes, the "who" of the team.

What Do We Do? Change-Managing Policy, Process, and Procedure

Many models of organizational culture focus on the role that individuals play vis-à-vis the collective; this is a role that is scripted in large part by the codes that govern organizational function—strategic plans and objectives, processes, procedures, and the myriad unwritten rules that structure what people in an organization do. Mendonca & Kanungo (2007), for instance, say that "All organizational members bear the responsibility to ensure that organizational objectives are achieved in a manner that is consistent with these ideals and serve their own welfare as well as the larger interests of society" (p. 3). When they describe attitude change, then, Mendonca & Kanungo (2007) focus on how individuals determine to join organizational initiatives—to become part of the change. The first transactional stage, compliance, occurs when an individual does what is being asked of them because there will be positive or negative consequences based on their behavior. They follow rules. The second preliminarily transformational stage, identification, occurs when an individual forms a relationship with another person, such as a charismatic leader, and begins to behave in ways that echo that individual's behaviors and attitudes. They internalize someone else's processes. The third and truly transformational stage, internalization, occurs when someone adopts organizational values as their own. The "what" of the organization has become the "who" of the individual team members.

The three following scenarios illuminate the ways the "who" and the "what" of higher ed organizations play into change initiatives, drawing boundaries around how people understand their professional selves and roles.

Scenario #1: Cabinet-level leadership at a small, private, residential school identifies a challenge. Although the school is at the moment financially stable, if recent enrollment declines continue, they will be unable to meet their budgetary needs with tuition revenues within the next five years. The leadership examines a number of possible paths forward, including cutting costs via eliminating programs and student services and consolidating staff roles, finding a new funding model that does not rely so heavily on tuition, seeking new revenue streams via grant funding and research dollars, and seeking to increase enrollment by identifying new target markets. Realizing how painful and demoralizing cost cutting would be for the campus, how few ideas they have for creating a non-tuition-depending funding model, and how unlikely the small, teaching-focused campus is to be awarded significant and sustaining grant or research funding, the leadership determines that it should stand up an online program to assist with the college's impending financial woes. The Provost communicates the decision to the deans and asks for work plans for how their schools might participate in the new initiative. When they reconvene in a week, the Dean of the School of Business expresses enthusiasm but also urges caution, saying that with reaffirmation looming, his school's AACSB committee is already overtaxed. The Dean of the School of Education also seems eager but says that he does not know how he will arrange student teaching sites for even more licensure candidates than he has already—there simply aren't enough placements available. The Dean of Arts and Sciences also seems enthusiastic but says that her Chairs have said they don't know how they will get faculty to approve the change, given that they are already worried that they may be replaced by adjuncts.

Scenario #2: Student Government at a public school brings a petition to Faculty Senate, asking them to create a policy that only OER texts may be used in undergraduate classes. The petition cites concerns about cost and access, particularly for the college's many online students, and it includes letters of support from the University library. A faculty committee is formed quickly, and, with a few caveats that allow strategic exceptions, the policy is created and forwarded to the Provost for approval. The Provost, seeking feedback from other division heads, learns from the team in Accessibility Resources that not all OER texts are compatible with screen readers; in addition, he learns that IT has already signed a number of cost-reducing contracts with subscription-based course content providers such as Cengage and McGraw-Hill. Finally, the head of auxiliary services tells him that the policy may violate the University's contract with its bookstore, which the campus needs in order to give students ways to spend their financial aid dollars appropriately. The Provost communicates these concerns to Faculty Senate, which passes them on to Student Government, which then pens an open letter to university administration about its student un-friendly policies, charging that the University has fallen prey to a number of corporate interests and has consequently forgotten its mission.

Scenario #3: A Christian college has no faith requirements for admission, though most of its students have historically been if not Christian, then comfortable in a Christian environment. When the college's online program begins to grow, however, a significant number of Muslim students enroll, having found the morally conservative bent of the school's curriculum to be more commensurate with their own beliefs than a more mainstream secular curriculum would be. While no one has raised overt objections to having non-Christian students at the school, a problem arises over the use of cameras in online classes. One means the school has used to verify student identity is facial recognition: the student holds up an ID by their face, and the instructor

then verifies their presence. For Muslim women, however, uncovering their faces in this manner is not possible. The school has an industry-standard non-discrimination policy, but there has never been a need to explore how that policy might apply when students need religious accommodations. Neither have they identified another convincing way to verify online students' identities. Just as a workaround has been identified and a more inclusive non-discrimination policy has been drafted, another student approaches the Accessibility Resources office, requesting an accommodation based on the fact that taking a test while on camera triggers her medically diagnosed anxiety. The question is asked in an all-faculty meeting: "How much do we really have to accommodate these types of things?"—and an answer is not easily forthcoming from leadership.

In each of these scenarios, the reasons that needed changes are so hard to implement have less to do with people's legitimate disagreement (or, on a less positive note, with their recalcitrance, stubbornness, political commitments, or general pettiness) than with the fact that the needed change forces hard questions about what it is that the campus, and thus the individuals within it, do. For instance, does the campus (scenario #1) assure continued compliance with accreditation standards, guaranteed placement of would-be teachers, and a high-quality residential experience with full-time faculty? Indeed, yes—this is what the campus does, and these are worthwhile things that ought to be done well. At the same time, the campus must find a way to work collaboratively and creatively in order to assure its own survival, even if it means making changes in how the first three things get done. In scenario #2, does the campus work to reduce costs to students? The answer, of course, is yes—but that may entail a series of small interventions across a number of areas rather than one broad-stroke gesture that is easily explained and politically popular. Moreover, asking any of the individual offices (the bookstore,

IT, etc.) what role they play in this agreed-upon goal will bring on a different, and perhaps contradictory, answer, and certainly it would take skill to harmonize all these varying approaches to the same question. In the third scenario, does the campus offer education in as inclusive a manner as it can? Again—of course—the answer is yes, but what that means in practice for the many campus parties who play a role in creating an inclusive environment will differ widely. What an organization does occurs on myriad levels, in myriad scenarios, and change potentially touches them all.

The answer to the question "What do you [your office, your team] do?" thus draws a definitional boundary in the same way that a person's response to "Who are you?" does. Heath and Heath (2010) remind us that in the context of change, "What looks like a people problem is often a situation problem" (p. 6). As often as not, the intricacies behind the multi-faceted "what" that any employee or office on a campus sees as its task create the resistances that slow and sometimes stop change initiatives. It is not that people say "no" to be difficult; it is that their understanding of what they do will not permit them to say "yes." Kegan & Laskow Lahey (2009) note that many people have personal or organizational beliefs that impede change: they do not resist simply to resist or even because they disagree; it is just that they have trouble making the choice among the competing value systems that implementing a change requires. For example, a study demonstrated that when physicians tell heart patients that they must change their lifestyle behaviors or die, only 1 in 7 people fully makes the change (Kegan & Laskow Lahey, 2009). Few of these patients willfully choose death; they just feel competing commitments to the pleasures of good food and resist the challenges that adopting a rigorous exercise routine would create—not to mention any cultural or familial resistance they may have to weather as well. Kegan & Laskow Lahey thus argue that for any change to proceed successfully, in addition to

setting goals and laying out concrete steps to implement the change, all stakeholders—both individuals and groups—should spend time uncovering their hidden competing commitments, and leadership should assist in teasing out and testing the truth of each group's big assumptions. Maurer (1996) puts this differently: in the face of resistance, we must ask two guiding questions: (1) what's in this change for me?, and (2) what's in this change for them? (pp. 48-49).

In the first scenario, cabinet-level leadership identifies an online program as the best way to achieve an end they all want and that they believe will be good for the college—an increase in enrollment (and thus tuition revenue). They would do well, however, to ask what might be in it—or *not* in it—for each of the groups that they need to help implement the change. Faculty committees already overburdened with accreditation exercises might be more willing to adopt a change that creates more work for them in the short term if they also see ahead of them the possibility of streamlining program and course offerings. Similarly, an education dean already challenged with trying to find placement sites for licensure candidates might welcome the ability to offer programs pointed at already licensed teachers, or at those pursuing non-licensure tracks; and an arts and sciences faculty concerned about being replaced by a largely adjunct workforce may welcome the stability that a larger student head count could bring.

Making time to allow each party in a change process to articulate their understanding of what they do, then also laying out step by step how the proposed change may alter that for good or for bad helps leaders both to understand and to make wise decisions that affect the details of the work that is done within their units. It also—and perhaps more importantly—offers a strategic way for leaders to enter empathetically into their teams' experiences, and vice-versa in some cases. Change, as we have seen, has long tentacles. What seems on the surface to be a simple change in the "what" of some individual's daily job description and habits may in fact

have great significance for the way that individual's team relates to the organization as a whole, for the ways that teams in one area work with teams in another (both formally and informally), for the ways that control and dominance are established and play out across units, and for any number of informal but emotionally hefty aspects of working as parts of parts of wholes. For example, a large online school offering 100 or more sections of freshman composition has an established process that assures that each section has a roughly similar number of students enrolled. This process requires a good deal of work from both IT and the Registrar's office and cannot be completed until the weekend before classes start. To thank staff for working during the weekend, the school sets up a shared workspace and stocks it with pizza and snacks. After this process has been completed many times, the school finds a way to automate it, which leads to the abrupt cancellation of the pizza party—and collective mourning ensues. Moreover, as the two offices cease to be in sustained contact with one another, they seem to be less able to work efficiently and effectively together to fix day-to-day problems that affect both areas. What was once solved with a phone call or quick email now requires a ticket system and a queue.

The example above illustrates the power of established "whats" as part of organizational life. Part of any change process involves not just the change itself but the establishment of new habits (cues, routines, and rewards) that structure the way that units in the organization relate (Flood & Coetsee, 2013, p. 139). While automating a highly manual and deeply costly process makes good sense from a logistical point of view, leadership would have done well to ask those who participated in it over the years how they saw it—what were the strengths and weaknesses of the process? What did people dislike and enjoy most about it? Had they done this, they may have found that both the IT and Registrar's Office staffs shared leadership's frustration with the highly manual nature of the process. At the same time, they might have learned that the shared

annoyance, the social time, and the opportunity to work with colleagues that they did not see every day was of great value, greasing the wheels of relationships that mattered for the whole. It would have been a wise thing to pursue automation but also to find a way to bring these two partner offices together in other meaningful tasks. Doing so would make space for both offices to articulate to each other what it is they do on a daily basis, as well as to learn about how their "what" intersects with all the other "whats" that make up the life of the campus. Good habits make good neighbors.

Why Do We Do? Change Managing Organizational Culture

Change threatens boundaries around the ways that individuals understand their professional identity (who) and around the ways that teams understand their functions and daily tasks (what). Never is change more disruptive, however, than when it unsettles an organization's sense of why it exists. To put this differently, change that calls into question the organizational mission, vision, or goals—or that threatens commonly accepted understandings of such, rather—threatens the most fundamental boundary of all: the foundation on which the structure is built. In a landmark TED Talk, Simon Sinek (2009) explains that corporations need to understand that people buy the "why" behind the company—not the "what" that they are selling. Those "buying" include not just those on the outside (those would-be students, for instance, who are considering a school as part of their college search) but also those within, whose effectiveness increases as they adopt the tenets of organizational culture and apply them to the ways they do their jobs.

To take an example: in 2007, a revered women's college in Lynchburg, Virginia, Randolph-Macon, admitted its first coeducational class. R-MWC ("Randy Mac" as the locals called it) has a long history, a stunningly beautiful campus, and a strong academic reputation; declining enrollments and a nationwide recession, however, created a financially untenable

situation. R-MWC did what it could to steady the ship, even making plans to sell some key pieces from its art collection to make up the operating deficit. In addition, in 2006, the Board took a drastic step, voting to admit male students. The interim president at that time, Ginger Worden, masterfully parried the missional and cultural commitments that this historic vote called into question:

> We believe women's colleges offer an important choice for young women. . . . The College has focused much time and effort into examining different options that would allow the institution to remain single sex. Given R-MWC's circumstances, we are firmly convinced that we cannot continue as both a college exclusively for women and a college of excellence. We have chosen to go forward and flourish as a college of excellence. (Our history and legacy, 2016)

Pointing out the two missional identity points to which someone might point when they think of R-MWC, President Worden insists that being a women's college is a "what"—not a "why." It is "an important choice," a policy and a practice rather than a mission. By contrast, being a college of excellence is a why: an identity marker that will allow R-MWC—thereafter named Randolph College—to "go forward and flourish." The cultural pivot worked for Randolph: enrollments and revenues are up, and the college is indeed flourishing in its new identity, though admittedly not everyone is happy with the loss of the single-sex campus environment.

Other pivots have proven challenging as well. (1) A conservative Christian college faced backlash from its alumni when it amended its dress code to permit women to wear pants to class instead of requiring dresses and to allow men to dispense with neckties; many of the comments on the school's social media feed charged in one way or another that the school had compromised its Christian identity and mission. (2) 2023's NCAA Conference realignment

caused widespread discussion about the extent to which sports ought to reflect the regional spheres of influence of the schools involved or whether they are simply a money-making ploy. What does it mean when the west coast powerhouse Cal joins the Atlantic Coast Conference? How can the Big Ten, the premier conference of the Midwest, add PAC-10 rivals Washington and Oregon to its lineup? Moreover, how can the student athletes at these schools be expected routinely to travel across the country to play while maintaining a full class schedule? (3) Southern New Hampshire University's thriving online program has altered how it explains to the outside world who it is. The website's Commonly Asked Questions page includes details such as where the physical campus is located, assurances about the school's accreditation and not-for-profit status, and an explicit answer to the question "Is SNHU 100% online?"—surely not questions those whose tenure at SNHU began before its online growth would have ever expected to answer. Finally (4) in recent weeks, West Virginia University has announced significant budget cuts that will allow it to adjust for the coming enrollment cliff. These changes include eliminating 32 academic programs, including its entire department of world languages, literatures and linguistics. These cuts have raised significant concerns, not only among the 169 faculty members who will lose their job but also in the general population, about whether after these changes WVU can truly fulfill its calling as a land-grant, R1 charged with bringing socioeconomic mobility to its impoverished region (see Helm, 2023).

Schein & Schein (2017) describe leadership as "the management of culture" (p. 125), and to a large extent, each of the mission-level changes described above requires just this: interventions not just with the people (who) and the processes (what) of an organization but also with the "why" that energizes their activities. So, for example, in the first scenario above, leaders might initiate a conversation not about the dress code per se but about the relationship between

clothing and the school's religious mission—what is essential, and what is mere window dressing? Why, in missional terms, has the dress code historically looked the way it has? And secondly—given the mission—must the dress code *necessarily* continue to look as it has for the mission to be fulfilled? This conversation ought to have both an outward- and an inward-facing component, as the presence or absence of dress code markers likely has symbolic heft for generations of alumni who had to follow a different set of rules, as well as practical implications for current students. These alumni may understand these rules not just as practical guidance for how to dress for class but as identity markers or even faith statements. Meanwhile, for current students (and their parents), the change in dress code may be unwelcome for similar reasons, or it may be more easily embraced by those who prefer flexibility in their wardrobe choices, who want the school's rules to reflect some shifts in cultural mores, or who understand the school's mission to have a different practical application than it did previously. Other stakeholders may be consulted as well about how a proposed change in dress code may affect their "who" and their "what"—who they feel they are as faculty members, as representatives of the university, as staff people, etc., and what they do on a daily basis. For instance: will a professor who teaches a philosophy class find it more difficult to generate the sort of classroom atmosphere that leads to serious intellectual inquiry if students are dressed more casually? Or will the classroom discussions take on a freer and more vibrant tone if students feel more comfortable in their clothing?

In the second situation, leaders across campuses affected by conference realignment might together initiate conversations about large topics such as the role of regional identity in college mission, the unique task set of a student athlete, and the overall functions of college athletics. Must college conferences necessarily reflect geography for the institutions in them to

remain on mission? Must student athletes necessarily limit their travel to play their roles in helping their schools fulfill their missions? As in the first case, leadership at each school would do well to initiate a series of conversations across their campus, including among the athletes themselves. And in the third situation, SNHU leaders might gauge the comfort level of the campus community with fully owning the online identity of the school and adjust their public relations efforts accordingly. And in the final scenario, which is at the time of this paper's composition still unfolding, campus leaders, including the Board, may want to identify ways in which the revised approach WVU is taking will allow it not just to be more fiscally lean but also more intentionally on-mission as a land-grant institution, research campus, and engine of economic mobility—and they would do well to consider imposing some of the same strictures on administrative spending that they have on academic offerings. Must a rural land-grant R1 teach languages to fulfill its mission? Why or why not?

Schein and Schein (2017) describe all of these sorts of rhetorical pivots as consensus-building activities. External-facing adaptation problems, as we have seen, can be addressed by building consensus on mission, goals, means, and measurements, then making corrections and repairs accordingly (p. 150); internal integration problems can be addressed by developing consensus on language, identity and boundary markers, authority structures, and rewards and punishments, and by building trust through offering open conversation about things that need yet to be explained (p. 151). The more areas in which these pivots and consensus-building conversations occur, the more likely the campus as a whole is to claim the change-story that leadership wishes to tell. In fact, change discussions that do not address the "why" behind the initiative will ultimately fail to create any more than transactional change among the "who" and in the "what." But how should such conversations be undertaken? As noted above, questions that

frame the impact of the change in missional terms open the possibility of addressing the cultural impact of change. Per Petrigelli (2023), "leadership, at its core, is an argument with tradition." Tradition, understood not as a series of deadening rituals but as a way that a group tells itself the story of its own identity, must be highly valued and understood by would-be change makers: they must view their own contributions as the next installment in a series, rather than a different thing entirely.

Schein and Schein (2017) describe organizational culture with a three-level model, including the sky (espoused values), the things on the surface (cultural artifacts), and the things beneath (tacit cultural assumptions), all of which set the scene for the change story. The goal of a conversation that attempts to address the cultural components of a proposed change is to address all three of these levels, which together comprise the tradition with which change takes issue. On the "sky" level, the conversation should seek to examine the congruence of the change with the organization's espoused values, such as its mission statement and its strategic plan. Thus, the Christian college pondering the dress code shift will ask whether relaxing the requirements for men to wear ties and women to wear skirts has any significant or broad-ranging impact on the ability of the campus to educate students for the purposes it has publicly identified. It will also address the potential of the proposed change to assist with or detract from the campus's ability to fulfill its goals—increased enrollment, for instance, or higher retention. The same campus will also ask questions about how the proposed change plays with the surface-level "cultural artifacts" that lie on the surface of campus—its advertising and other messaging, its typical lingo, its student activities, and its official documents (syllabi, conduct codes). Finally, the campus will do well to ask patiently the questions that will uncover people's deep and underlying

assumptions about how they think the mission ought to be fulfilled—assumptions that lay out a direct path to understanding what each person privately believes the mission to be.

Often, the loudest detractors are those who cannot fully articulate the "why" behind their resistance. They feel, perhaps, that changing the dress code will remove an important part of the campus experience, one that they shared with their own grandparents, parents, and best friends. More deeply, they may believe that men and women do not know how to behave respectfully unless they dress the part. They may believe that students at this particular school ought to look distinct from and other than students at other universities; they may feel that this campus distinctive, like a military uniform, creates a sense of identity. Another possibility is that their resistance may not be about the dress code at all; rather, it may be the proverbial straw on the camel's back—the most recent in a long list of changes that have together come to feel insupportable. Schein and Schein (2017) note that in a change-heavy environment, leaders need to have this conversation over and again, as there is typically not only one organizational culture, but rather a series of subcultures whose roles and experiences differentiate them; a wise leader will be able to have this conversation on multiple levels and work the varying voices together into a harmonious whole (p. 229).

Making a New "We": Redrawing Boundaries after Change

If change redraws boundaries around the who, what, and why of an organization, then emerging from the change process with a new and healthy set of boundaries intact ought to be a goal for leaders helping organizations through transitions. To that end, establishing new descriptive language that helps people identify their roles (who); new processes, procedures, and habits (what); and reaffirmed, restated, or reapplied missional commitments (why) around each of these makes sense. Throughout this process, the same skills that contribute to overall

leadership effectiveness also contribute to successful re-establishment of boundaries after change. These include careful listening, especially to those facing challenges (Bondi, 1991), behaving with self-awareness and authenticity (Flood & Coetsee, 2013), being deeply involved in the change through its entire process (Comeaux, 2020), and displaying agility and a willingness to change course when needed, as well as patience when things are working well (Rigby, Delk, & Berez, 2020).

Bridges (1999) describes a three-phase approach to transitions, the parts of which correspond in turn to the who, what, and why that change reconfigures. The first part of the transition, letting go, may be understood as a loss or as a release. During this phase, identity markers (who) assume increased significance, as people feel that their professional identity is under assault. This is then followed by the neutral zone where a "new normal" series of practices (what) has yet to take shape. True creatives are happy in this ill-defined space, but for most people, the neutral zone is uncomfortable, and it often leads to an increase in anxious thoughts, as well as moments in which old weaknesses, unproductive patterns, and grievances rear their heads with a vengeance (p. 40). During this time, people sometimes feel overloaded and make more mistakes than usual; they may also begin to behave in partisan or contentious ways (p. 41). During time in the neutral zone, leadership must focus on painting an evocative picture of how people might imagine their roles within the new normal, thus assuring them they still have a defined space and an identity to hang there (p. 60).

The third phase marks the first part of a successful transition (p. 58), as people begin to make an emotional commitment to the new normal. During this phase, the "who" undergoing the change benefit from a coaching or mentoring approach to the "what" that inspires team members to want to be part of the change—to own its "why" for themselves (MacLennan, 1995, p. 3).

This can happen through moments in which team members are invited to join a new team, to adopt positive attitudes and make new connections, to imagine themselves in the new future, and to ask questions as part of the transition process (Orem, Brinkert, & Clancy, 2007). Although this is fundamentally an empowering process that adds to people's skills, it also involves helping these same people to cope with the discomfort of failure—something that is sure to happen at some point during the transition process (Mink, Owen, & Mink, 1994). One of the most challenging parts of establishing a new way to understand the "who" post-transition is introducing grace and patience as parts of the occasion: allowing the previous expertly performative self to make an occasional mistake, to feel some discomfort, or to have some learning yet to do.

Drawing boundaries around a new, post-change "what" may also prove difficult. As Senge (1990) notes, systems tend to cause their own behaviors; two very different individuals in the same system will tend to produce the same result. For Senge, organizations work in systems that connect with one another; learning the ways that these systems interrelate is a key to determining how the system needs to contribute to the new normal. By contrast, organizations can tend to produce faulty results by parrying any one of a number of common narratives. These include telling or implying to employees (1) that they are their role, (2) that challenges come from without, from an enemy that needs to be conquered, from key crisis events, or from catastrophic trends rather than gradual internal processes, (3) that experience is the only and best way to learn, and (4) that self-protection is a viable alternative to change. To avoid promulgating such faulty narratives, even unintentionally, Brockbank and McGill (2006) suggest that individuals at all levels of the organization partner in a process of coached reflective learning and dialogue. In contrast to single-loop learning, where leadership issues a directive that drives goals

and tasks which are then trained for, implemented, and evaluated, double-loop (or reflective) learning occurs when stakeholders ask questions about the change that is being implemented, reflect on its implications, and own their own feelings, areas of defensiveness, and points where their thinking is not clear. Then, this self-reflective knowledge in hand, the change in the "what" can be implemented with a team spirit and readiness to be resourceful in meeting challenges.

Repeated practice of the new policies, procedures, and daily habits—the "what" of the organization—is key to sustaining change. As Kotter (1996) notes,

> Culture is not something that you can manipulate easily. Attempts to grab it and twist it into a new shape never work because you can't grab it. Culture changes only after you have successfully altered people's actions, after the new behavior produces some group benefit for a period of time, and after people see the connection between the new actions and the performance improvement. (p. 156)

Bourdieu's idea of the *habitus*, a mainstay in philosophical study, is useful here. The *habitus* refers to the habitual ideas, tendencies, physical postures, and practices that form a person's disposition, and which in turn structure the way that person sees and interprets reality. It is the "what" of the organization, and a successful change initiative must thus invite reflection on the habits and tendencies that may serve as roadblocks to the stated goals. Where do these habits come from? What in the organization's DNA rewards certain behaviors, and what needs to change for those behaviors to shift as well? For example, a unit head who is concerned about employee well-being notes that although he has repeatedly told his team that they are not expected to come in before the workday starts or to work late except in special circumstances, they persist in doing so. On reflection, he notes two practices that have been unwittingly creating this organizational "what": (1) his own very early and very late working hours, and (2) the fact

that employee awards over the past few years have tended to go to those dedicated few who spend the most hours in the office. Systems tend to cause their own behaviors—so when the leader adjusts his own working hours to a more reasonable span, and when employees who demonstrate creativity and initiative during the 9-5 workday receive special recognition, a new "what" follows, one that aligns better with the leader's goal of organizational well-being.

Typically the highest levels of organizational "whys" remain unchanged: the mission remains, and the overall goals continue to act as the ship's compass. Yet articulating what those mean in practice within the "new normal" proves both challenging and indispensable to the change process. As change is implemented, leadership needs to work with stakeholders to arrive at a new set of language to describe the after-state of the change and to assure that both the purpose and the practical effects of the change are clear. Language matters, and a particularly important term during times of transition is "we." In an organization emerging from change, all the component parts of the organization must unify in pursuit of the mission: Moneyball-style, wise leaders build and solidify a collective of skills, attitudes, and practices that tell a story of team success rather than recruiting and honoring ball-hogging star players. Leaders thus need to emphasize the potential the organization has to do its missional good (Mendonca & Kanungo, 2007) and to articulate clearly how all the parts of the team contribute to this organizational "why." In addition, leaders may call upon any of the four common motives that lead individuals and teams to behave in a communitarian, prosocial way. These include a desire to benefit personally by benefitting another (i.e., "Let's scratch each other's back"), altruism (i.e., seeking another's benefit for its own sake), collectivism (i.e., seeking the benefit of a group), and principalism (i.e., acting in line with a deep belief or principle) (Murray, 1938).

When Judy retires, then, might not the leadership reiterate the ways in which she helped the university to achieve its mission across many years? Then, might they not use the space the discussion of mission has cleared to discuss the ways that new technologies and processes offer opportunities to fulfill this mission in reimagined ways? Similarly, when a campus starts an online program, changes its dress code, or shifts athletic conferences, leadership would do well to initiate a discussion of the ways that these changes—though challenging and though requiring reflection on the "who" and the "what" that make up the organization—ultimately keep the campus on track to fulfill its mission in a more powerful way than it could previously. Change is never easy. It redraws the boundaries that help us to understand our professional selves, that set the habits and processes that make our everyday jobs comfortable, and that help us to feel motivated that what we are doing is for a noble purpose. At the same time, boundaries that never move can quickly become prison walls, keeping those they ostensibly protect from growing to full effectiveness.

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