

# From Faiez's Dairy

## Leading the Change from the Inside Out

Since the past one decade or so, a lot is being said about the “*change*”. Almost every individual and every organization is dissatisfied with the status quo and is desirous of “*change*”. Interestingly, everyone is talking about change, seeking for a change, and wants everyone and everything to change overnight. The “*change*” has become the buzzword for our times. No matter, you visit an organization, host a party at your home, go to a wedding of a close relative, visit a restaurant with your friends, go to your car workshop or the service station of your choice, pickup the morning newspaper, or may be just turn the TV on, you would not escape the word “*change*”. If you keenly listen to all these, you would find that everyone’s perception of what needs to be changed is different. However, one aspect of discussion would definitely be common. And that is that something (i.e. system, habits, lifestyle, attitudes, etc.) about their lives needs to be improved or changed.

That is one of the observations. The second interesting observation is that all those who are seeking for a change in their own lives, they would have someone or something else they would like to change. You would hear them saying, “oh, educational system needs a change”, “whole system requires a major change”, “our social set-up and family system needs an overall change”, and many others. Hardly you will hear a person admitting that he/she needs to *change* himself/herself. Unfortunately, we believe that our lives would get enriched if others who matter, change. This myth has brought us to a point where we all are sitting and waiting for a time when a “*masiah*” would come and change our lives. It means that we want “change”, but we do not want to change, ourselves. We resist change.

It is true that people resist change. But the question is that “why they resist it?” Well they resist it because they cannot relate with the organizational or the system change. Either they don’t see any personal benefit as a result of change or may be the change brings additional “burden” or “stress” for them. It means that no matter how big the corporate or social change is, people would be least pushed unless it affects them as a person. Let’s take an example to put it straight. Let’s say that a new role has been given to you in your organization that seeks for a change in your personal routines i.e. in terms of working hours, more self-reading, more analytical work, learning of new skills, more travel, use of computer, etc. leaving you less and no time for other personal activities you have been doing. Many would resist it. Why? Because they would take it as extra work, a burden in addition to the pain of leaving of established habits, e.g. four hour TV watching, eight hour sleep, playing with kids, spending evenings with spouse, etc. From this example, it might seem that people would only resist “change” if it is perceived as “negative”, but I am afraid it was not true. The research suggests that even if the change is perceived as “positive”, it still is resisted. However, the transition time, i.e. time to adjust, in the case of positive change would be much lesser. Remember here we are talking about the “external” change. External change is any change in our environment that is *requiring* us to change. The paradox is that every external change, positive or negative will always be resisted. Not only that there will be resistance to change, even if people were *made* to change to, the change will be undone, the moment, external pressures that caused the change are removed. Even the history suggests that all those changes which were introduced externally, never sustained in the long run. If it was true as it is then the argument arises that if resistance to change is a normal human phenomenon then why to bother? Just live with it.

Well resistance to external change is a normal phenomenon. But how about that instead of being *asked* to change, people *decide* to change, themselves. Instead of the change coming from *outside*, people lead the change from the *inside*. Instead of being told to change, people realize it themselves. Instead of the system, policies and procedural changes, requiring people to change, people change and to support their change, they decide to change systems, procedures and policies. Sounds like a dream. A few even argue that it is impossible. Well, it is not. It is very much possible. How ? By giving people a new *perspective* of change. If we did that, it will have astounding effect at our home, in our organizations, in societies, in communities and ultimately in the world.

Before looking into that perspective, let’s first be clear on the meaning of “Change”, itself. The Oxford dictionary defines it as:

- making or becoming different
- new experiences of life

Now let me share my personal definition. Change is “a continuous living process by which people, organizations and societies strive for improving the quality of their own as well as the lives of their stakeholders.” The stakeholders for individuals may include families, spouse, children, relatives, etc. Whereas stakeholders for organizations may include customers, employees, vendors and shareholders. If you looked at this definition, you would discover that it was also a universal purpose or mission statement for all individuals, organizations and societies. Whatever we do or want to do in our lives, either as individuals or organizations, our ultimate objective of doing it, whether we realize it or not, is to improve the quality of lives of people associated with us. As individuals, all the efforts and struggles we put in our lives on a daily basis are basically to serve the same purpose. Even organizations, whether business or non-business, have the same objective behind all those activities they do on a daily basis. Earning money is a mean to this end, not the end by itself. And the only way to realize this purpose or mission is through a phenomenon, called “continuous learning and change”.

Most of us believe that “change” is one of the social fads for our times and would phase-out with time. However, if we look back at the history of mankind, we find that the “Change” has been the only constant since the creation of the Man. The only difference is that now people and organizations have become more aware of its importance. In fact, this is one of the abilities that differentiates us, (i.e. humans) from animals and other creations of God, our ability to “learn and change”. That is the ability that established the superiority of “Adam” even over angels, as the Holy Qur’an says:

*“.....Behold: thy Lord said to the angels; “I will create a vicegerent on earth..... And He taught Adam the names of all things; then He placed them before the angels, and said: ‘Tell Me the names of these if ye are truthful..... Of knowledge we have none, save what Thou hast taught us..... ” (Baqara: 30-32)*

Our ability to “learn and change” is the only reason for ever-increasing “quality of life” at our homes, our organizations, our societies and the world today. Whereas animals still live, behave, act, eat, and appear the way they used to live millions of years ago. The Learning and Change is in our instinct. As long as we continue learning, we grow and change. And when we stop learning, we stop growing and then we are dead. Change is a “Law of Life”. The importance of this phenomenon or the philosophy of life, whatever you wish to call it, is even reinforced by the Holy Prophet (PBUH), sayings:

- ❑ *“He is a loser, whose today is not better than his yesterday”*
- ❑ *“A Momin (practicing Muslim) does not repeat the same mistake again”. (meaning that he learns from his mistake and change to avoid happening it again)*

Well, if you are familiar with the Total Quality Management philosophy, you would appreciate that how beautifully this more than 1400 years old lessons, portray the Total Quality philosophy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which was responsible for making Japan an industrial giant, before it became the management “buzzword” in the late 1970’s. Unfortunately that is not the way we take this “Law of Life”. Had we realized it earlier then instead of making our organizations Total Quality (TQ) organizations and then expecting our people to change their attitudes, behaviors, and work habits, to support the TQ philosophy, we would have done it the other way around. Imagine if you lived with this “Law of Life”, each and everyday of your life, what you could have become? The Law that expects you to:

- 1) learn from your mistakes so you don’t repeat them, and
- 2) ensure your today is better than everyday in terms of your skills, knowledge, attitude, health, relationships, temperament, habits, contribution to the society, morals, ethics, appearance, dress, etc.

Anyone can imagine that, if all of us live with the “continuous learning and change” philosophy of life as individuals, all those places where we work or live, i.e. our homes, our organizations, our societies, would automatically become TQ organizations.

In the past few years, I was called by a number of organizations which during TQ implementation were facing severe resistance from their people who were not willing to change. They wanted my assistance to rescue them from this difficult and often a painful situation. Now you can well imagine that if people do not support the external change (TQ in this case), what would happen? What about if you gave them the best of machines, systems, processes, and the work environment, but they did not change their basic beliefs about life and work habits? Well, ultimately the TQ initiative will fade out.

I always advocate a simple and straight approach that sometimes does not seem either simple or straight to those who know a little. Instead of trying to initiate the change from *outside* and then forcing it on people and expecting them to support it, how about if we first facilitated a personal change among people causing a change in their basic beliefs and philosophies of life? How about if we gave them new perspective of “change” to live with? Instead of limiting ourselves to giving them knowledge (what to) and skills (how to do), we must create that attitude (want to do). And if we did that, the result would be astounding. Instead of resisting change, not only that people would accept the change but also learn the art of “continuous learning and change”. That is what I call “Leading the Change from Inside Out”. In fact this is not only the best way but I believe, the only way of doing it. I don’t see any other way for “real and self-sustained” change. Even the Holy Qu’ran reinforced this fact, many a times:

❑ *“Because Allah will never change the grace which He hath bestowed on a people until they change what is in their (own) souls.....” (Anfaal: 53)*

❑ *“.....Verily never will Allah change the condition of a people until they change it themselves .....(Raad :11)*

It is so clear in these *Ayahs* that there will be no change unless there is a change inside us, meaning unless we change our beliefs and perspective about life, our world will never change. That is not only a theoretical guideline for change. If you have read the history of mankind and also the Islamic history, you would appreciate that these guidelines have successfully caused the world largest change, the dawn of Islam, globally acknowledged as the best-managed macro change initiative ever. This change could never have been possible without the “Advocates of Change” following on these guidelines first, before expecting others to change.

You see our Creator has given us clear-cut guidelines to live our lives, known as the “laws of nature” or the “laws of life”. It is our job to learn and live with those laws. If we chose not to, then there is a “fine” associated with it. The fine we would pay for not obeying those laws, This fine could be in terms of our physical, emotional, mental or spiritual health. Here we have a freedom of choice. Would we rather learn and live with those laws or would rather pay the “price”. All the best till the next issue.