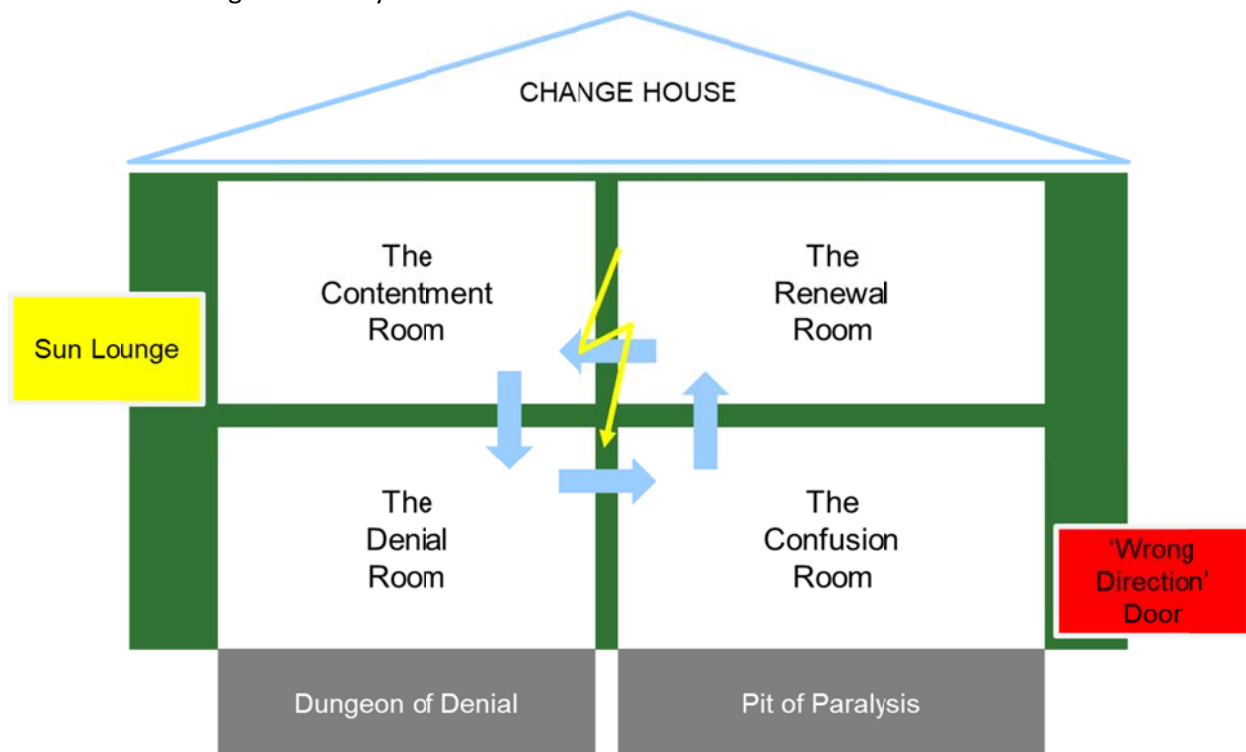


Year End Reflection – Why is Organizational Change so Difficult?

By Drive, Inc.

Every year, we reflect on our organization’s capacity and capability to facilitate organizational change. What we find is that most companies struggle to implement real, tangible change. Sure, all companies are unhappy with something in the organization and, thus, focus on a change of some sort. And, all companies that focus on that change get some level of improvement. Yet, why don’t they achieve all the change that they wanted? Why isn’t much of the change sustained?

From the book, “The Four Rooms of Change,” by Claes Janssen, we see some key reasons for this lack of change. Ultimately, not enough people see the need for change and know how to make change effectively.



People who reside in the contentment room do not personally feel the impact of the organization’s problems. To move from the contentment room, we need to challenge the teams while spreading the discontent. Some excellent ways to do this are to provide a burning platform (if one can), or meeting with large customers and gaining the perspective of their discontent. This is also a great opportunity to provide data and stories on how well other companies, especially competitors, are doing.



When moving out of the contentment room, people typically move to the denial room. They either deny that there is a need for change or they deny that the strategy will yield results. There can be many reasons for this denial, but the strongest reason is typically lack of trust of leadership. This is a time where we intentionally expose the majority of the employees to the problem. Benchmarking can certainly spread discontent while also showing that the solutions are possible. Of course, if the issue is trust, it must be dealt with swiftly and decisively by spending enormous amounts of time where the work is done (gemba), helping people to improve processes and solve problems.

Moving from the denial room, people typically move into the confusion room. They now understand that there is a need to change and they trust that the strategic direction is the right way to go. However, they have not been practicing these changes and they are not good at it. Many of them actually are fearful that their lack of knowledge and understanding will be exposed. What we find is that many of our clients are good at their processes and products, but are not good at making effective change. Here is where we must provide a vision and direction by selling (rather than telling) solutions. Here is where we focus on the next step rather than mapping out the next 100 steps. Here is where we reward new behavior. Here is where we achieve closure on the past.

When moving out of the confusion room, people enter into the renewal room, where every “solution” is a temporary countermeasure until something better is found and every “problem” is treasured with a focus on improvement until perfection is achieved. At this point, the only real concern is to avoid moving back into the contentment room. We must keep providing feedback while refining the new strategy. We must constantly question all the things that we are doing. We must find new ways to define discontent!

I was working with a client in another location after successfully navigating a previous location for that client through the house of change. They were diligently operating in the renewal room and enthusiastically recommending our team to their other location. I repeatedly shared the success of their sister plant while showing them their gaps and opportunities. Each day I would check the status of their process and see, virtually, no change. It finally came to my attention that these people were in the confusion room! I was spending all of my time showing them the need to change when they weren't even in denial. The reason why they were not acting was that they did not know what to do. I then took the leadership team out to the key process and showed them exactly what we need. After a few hours running various improvement experiments, the concept clicked with the entire team. They continued to successfully run further experiments after I moved on to the next challenge.

Please remember two key items while navigating the change house. The first item is in relation to the “Law of Diffusion of Innovation” shown here in figure 2. Many of us are working too hard to get the majority of our people out of a particular room and into the



change house, not realizing that it only takes a little over 15% of the people to achieve critical mass. Focus on the right people changing their thinking and others will quickly follow.

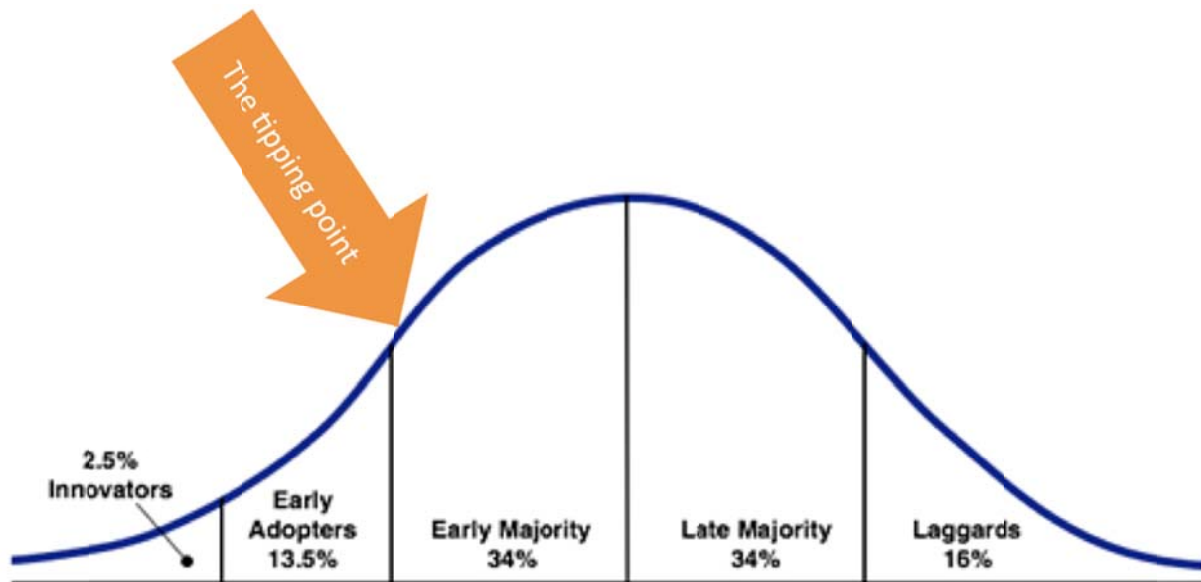


Figure 2

The other item is to focus on “why” we must change rather than “what” we must change. When we focus on the “why” it breeds ownership and mutual accountability. When we focus on the “what”, we simply are training people to do as they are told. Asking questions while getting the teams to propose countermeasures will ensure that we don’t stifle ownership and creativity.

Do you struggle to implement real, tangible change in your organization? Are you receiving all the change that you wanted? Are your changes sustained? Perhaps identifying where the critical mass of people is in your organization, and in which room of the change house they are located, would be helpful. For a no-cost introduction meeting, please contact Paul Eakle at paul.eakle@driveinc.com or 865-323-3491.