



# Rocking the Boat ... without going overboard

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# This Morning

1. Alternative perspectives on change
2. Tempered radicalism
3. Amplifying small wins
4. Conditions that nurture tempered radicalism



# Contrasting Perspectives on Organizational Change

- ◆ Change as planned, programmatic, episodic
- ◆ Change as opportunistic, organic, adaptive



# Episodic Change

- Recognizes large scale, discontinuous change
- Views organizations as normally inertial
- Emphasizes programs and structures
- Scales innovation through policy or strategic mandate
- Views leadership as top down, based on formal authority



# Adaptive Change

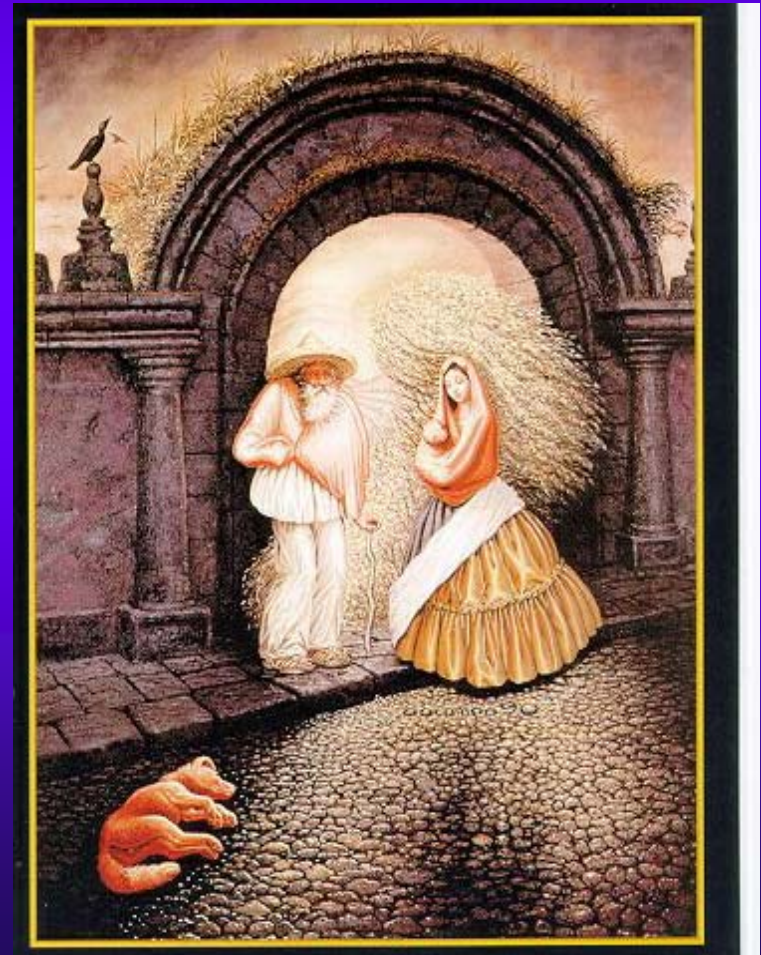
- ◆ Recognizes incremental, ongoing changes
- ◆ Views organizations as normally organic
- ◆ Emphasizes micro-moves, small wins, local innovations, learning
- ◆ Scaling as semi-chaotic process through networks of relations, learning
- ◆ Views leadership as dispersed, based on expertise and actions

# What you see depends on what you are looking for



**“All our knowledge has its origins in perceptions.”**

**– Leonardo da Vinci**





# Tempered Radicals

Tempered radicals are people throughout organizations who walk a fine line between challenging and upholding the status quo.

Tempered radicals express their differences *and* fit in, effect change *and* maintain their legitimacy, deviate *and* conform.



# Tempered Radicalism: The Problem and Opportunity

Often tempered radicals actions are quiet and incremental, so they are hard to notice.

But they can be amplified as positive sources of innovation, learning, and adaptation.

# Spectrum of Change Strategies



1. Changing informal structures

2. Identity moves

3. Negotiated turns

4. Opportunistic Small Wins

5. Organizing Coalitions



# Changing Informal Structures

- ◆ Re-channeling information, opportunities
- ◆ Inviting previous excluded participants
- ◆ Bridging people and networks
- ◆ Acting as mentor

# Identity Moves

- ◆ Acts of self expression that deviate from taken-for-granted notions of “normal”
- ◆ Everyday behaviors and symbolic displays (e.g., dress, office décor, language, communication style, time behaviors)





# Negotiated Turns

- ◆ Using problematic interaction or situation as opportunity to name and reframe issue, to dialogue, and to create learning
- ◆ Turning difficult interactions into opportunities for relationship building



# Organizing Coalitions

- ◆ Create alliances based on shared interest or identity
- ◆ Mobilize collective for change
- ◆ Use collective as network for information and support and to spread small wins

# Opportunistic Small Wins

- ◆ *Doable* opportunities to advance a change
- ◆ Concrete actions that have larger significance in a system
- ◆ Small wins as mini-experiments
- ◆ Small wins create momentum, learning, allies



# Example 1: Reward Drivers Who Use Less Fuel



- ◆ Create special parking spaces for hybrid vehicles along side carpool spaces
- ◆ Create conversation about parking shortage, traffic, and pollution



# Small Wins

- ◆ One hospital unit to hire nurse practitioners in one unit to build a new role
- ◆ Emeritus program for nearly retired managers to keep them in workforce more flexibly
- ◆ Flexible work policies as mini-experiments
- ◆ Recruit under-represented groups through incentive program



# Small Wins

## ◆ Advantages

- Build confidence
- Focus on opportunities
- Uncover allies and resisters
- Generate conversations that can build
- Function as experiments: low cost learning

## ◆ Disadvantages

- Can trivialize and localize problem
- Can disappear without much impact
- Require patience and persistence to scale



# At Your Table

- ◆ Spend 1-2 minutes thinking of a small win that you or colleague developed that addressed a problem or made a small dent in improving a situation.
- ◆ Pair up and share your small wins. Discuss whether small win spread beyond local experiment (3 minutes each).
- ◆ Discuss how you might encourage the spread of small wins such as the one you discussed (5 minutes total)



How do We Move from  
Small, Local Acts to Larger,  
Systemic Change?



# How to Amplify Small Wins

- Start with proven “wins”
- Build meaning around win
  - Use win as excuse to create conversations
  - Frame win in terms of existing interests
- “Bundle” a few small wins as pilot program
- Find people who bridge networks to adapt and spread win



How Can Organizations  
Encourage and Learn from Acts  
of Tempered Radicalism?



# Tempered Radicalism and Psychological Safety

- ◆ Groups create interpersonal risks
  - Fear of deviating from majority => conform and go silent
  - Fear of appearing ignorant => don't ask questions
  - Fear of appearing incompetent => don't admit mistakes or take chance
- ◆ Psychological safety mitigates perceived interpersonal risks



# Psychological Safety

- A shared belief held by group members that the team/organization is safe for interpersonal risk taking, that well intentioned actions will not lead to rejection or punishment by others.\*
- Operates as taken-for-granted perception of the “way things are around here” – as cultural characteristic.

\*Edmonson, 1999



# When Psychological Safety is Low

- ◆ Multiple perspectives on issue are not surfaced
- ◆ Conventional wisdom not challenged
- ◆ People defend position, think narrowly, avoid risk taking
- ◆ Changes are resisted by others

# On your Own, then Discuss at Table

- ◆ Drawing from your own experience, can you think of a time when you were in a culture that was not psychologically safe?
- ◆ What made that culture unsafe for you and others? (10 minutes)





# Barriers to Safety in Organizations

- ◆ Perceived status differences
- ◆ History of shoot the messenger
- ◆ Penalties for experimenting and deviating
- ◆ Rewards for being “right,” following rules, and conforming
- ◆ Frequent and unpredictable changes, lack of information, unpredictable levels of support



# Leadership Behaviors that Promote Safety

- ◆ Reduce perceived status barriers
  - Elicit input that communicates importance of others' ideas
  - Demonstrate humility and learning
  - Accept errors
- ◆ Look for expressions of deviance and inquire about them
- ◆ Celebrate instances of courageous behavior

# Parting Words



Look for people to disagree with you,  
listen to them,  
try to understand their experiences,  
learn something everyday...



# Further Readings

- ◆ Debra Meyerson, *Tempered Radicals: How Everyday Leaders Inspire Change at Work*, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, 2003.
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- ◆ J. Sternin and R. Choo, “The Power of Positive Deviancy,” *Harvard Business Review*, 1999.
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- ◆ K. Cameron, J. Dutton, and R. Quinn (eds), *Positive Organizational Scholarship*, Berrett-Koehler, 2003.