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Changing others through changing ourselves: The transformation of human systems

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Full text   Full text - PDF   Abstract/Details

Abstract Translate

Successfully altering the human system is a critical part of adaptive change - change where needed expertise
and tools do not already exist. Real adaptive change only can be achieved by mobilizing people to make painful
adjustments in their attitudes, work habits, and lives. To gain a better understanding of how to make adaptive
change, a set of principles that comprise what is called Advanced Change Theory is derived. These principles
deal with both the change practitioner/leader and the change targets/followers. Existing categories of planned
change and how each approaches the issue of adaptive change are reviewed. The propositions underlying ACT
are presented. The applicability of ACT in examples of adaptive change at different levels of analysis are
explored. Finally, the potential criticisms of ACT are considered.

Full text Translate

Parents seek to change children. Therapists attempt to alter individuals, couples, and families. Executives seek
to transform groups, departments, and organizations. Politicians attempt to alter entire societies. Because the
struggle to change is ubiquitous, social science scholars seek to better understand and develop effective
strategies for altering human systems. One consistent research finding is that change does not come easily. For

example, Cameron (199 found that as many as three quarters of all reengineering, total quality management (TQM), strategic planning, and downsizing efforts have failed or created problems serious enough to threaten the survival of the organization. Why? Because these organizations failed to successfully alter the human system.

Successfully altering the human system is a critical part of adaptive change-change where needed expertise and tools do not already exist (Heifetz, 1994). Real adaptive change can only be achieved by mobilizing people to make painful adjustments in their attitudes, work habits, and lives. In adaptive change, people must step outside known patterns of behavior-- they must surrender their present selves and put themselves in jeopardy by becoming part of an emergent system. This process usually requires the surrender of personal control, the toleration of uncertainty, and the development of a new culture at the collective level and a new self at the individual level. In adaptive change, traditional change strategies are not likely to be effective.

So what is the alternative? Our central research question is What alternative change strategy may be effective for making adaptive change? How can an individual engage others in a change effort when doing so requires them to make painful adjustments and put themselves in jeopardy? Our answer is that changing others requires changing ourselves first. We attract others to change when we first change ourselves. Consider the following case:

The top management team of a mid-sized company had invested heavily in sending all managers and supervisors to Deming total quality seminars. They looked forward to implementing a "quality culture" to reap dramatic improvements in morale, productivity, customer service, and profit. In the midst of a strategic planning process, an outside consultant decided to challenge their idealistic assumptions by reading an actual case in which a similar company engaged the same path and after three years showed no results. The consultant read the account to the group. They were most troubled and asked why the anticipated outcome did not emerge. The consultant refused to answer and asked them to answer their own question.

The consultant reports: "A long, heavy silence permeated the room. Finally, one of the most influential members of the group said, `The leadership of the company didn't change their behavior.' I nodded and pointed out that they themselves had made a lot of assumptions about the behavior that was going to change in others. Now I challenged them, 'Identify one time when you outlined specific behavioral changes in even one member of this management team.' Again there was a long pause. Something important and unusual was happening. This group was suddenly seeing something that few people ever clearly see. (Quinn,1996, p. 32)

Executives spent 1 1/2 days articulating changes that other people would need to make. In that time, never once did the management team look at itself as needing to change. This is not uncommon. We often see the root of the resistance to change in the behavior of others. In this case, after a confrontation by a consultant, the executives were suddenly beginning to understand that changing an organization requires leaders to change themselves first. These very competent executives were immobilized by their own inability to recognize the need for personal change. When challenged to examine the need for personal change, they delayed engaging the challenge and never returned to it.

INTRODUCING ADVANCED

CHANGE THEORY

To gain a better understanding of how to make adaptive change, we derive a set of principles that comprise what we call Advanced Change Theory (ACT). These principles deal with both the change practitioner/leader (who changes and empowers the self to be aligned with a vision for the common good) and the change

targets/followers (the change practitioner attracts others to change themselves to achieve the new vision). We call ACT advanced because this change strategy is less observable and more complex than the traditional change strategies of rational persuasion, coercion, or participation (see Table 1). ACT is not readily observable because it is used less frequently than are other strategies. ACT is not easily understood because it transcends the assumptions of self-interested, transactional human behavior, which permeate more traditional change theories. ACT is more complex because it requires the leader to employ a high level of cognitive, behavioral, and moral complexity (Hooijberg, Hunt, & Dodge,1997). We use the acronym ACT because an understanding of ACT requires a change agent to engage a particular path of action, a path of courage. These notions are speculative, not definitive, and our intention is to provoke ideas and thinking regarding the process of effecting change in human systems.

In the remainder of the article, we will review existing categories of planned change and how each approaches the issue of adaptive change. We will then present the propositions underlying ACT. We will explore the applicability of ACT in examples of adaptive change at different levels of analysis. Finally, we will consider the potential criticisms of ACT.

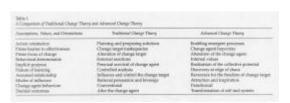EXPLORING THE LIMITS OF

TRADITIONAL CHANGE STRATEGIES

Table 1

IN ADAPTIVE SITUATIONS

Chin and Benne (1969) developed perhaps the best known categorization of change strategies: (a) empirical-- rational (making logical arguments for change), (b) power-coercive (using forms of leverage to force change), and (c) normative-reeducative (using participation and pursuing win-win strategies). We wonder how each of these change strategies might answer the question posed at the beginning of this article: How can an individual engage others in a change effort when doing so requires those others to make painful adjustments and put themselves in jeopardy?

The empirical-rational strategy assumes that people are guided by reason and will calculate whether it is in their best interest to change. It assumes that if people understand the logic for change and see themselves as benefiting from the change, they will be more likely to change. Resistance to change comes primarily from ignorance and superstition. To counter resistance, individuals must be educated about the logic and benefits of change. Hence, this strategy's answer to our research question would be, "explain why the change target should change-make a persuasive argument."

Although the empirical-rational change strategy may be effective for technical changes, it is not likely to be effective for adaptive change because it has a narrow, cognitive view of human systems. It fails to incorporate the affective and normative domains. Thus, although people may understand why they should change, they are usually not willing to make the painful changes necessary for adaptive change.

The power-coercive strategy focuses on forcing people to change through the use of external sanctions. This strategy emphasizes political and economic power. Political power implies an ability to apply sanctions when others do not align themselves with the change. Economic power brings control over resources and the ability to

apply economic sanctions to force change on those with less power. Hence, this strategy's answer to our research question would be, Identify and apply levers of power and force others to comply.

The power-coercive change strategy also has limited use in adaptive situations. In adaptive change, people must commit themselves to the collective purpose. The power-coercive strategy usually evokes anger, resistance, and damage to the fundamental relationships of those involved in the change. Thus, it is not likely to result in the kind of voluntary commitment that is necessary in most adaptive situations.

The normative-reeducative strategy involves a more collaborative change process. Individuals are still guided by a rational calculus; however, this calculus extends beyond self-interest to incorporate the meanings, norms, and institutional policies that contribute to the formation of human culture. Using this strategy, the leader of change welcomes the input of others as equals into the change process. Change does not come by simply providing information, as in the empirical-rational strategy. Rather, it requires the leader to focus on the clarification and reconstruction of values. In this mode, the leader attempts to identify all values and works collectively through conflict. The emphasis is on communication with the followers rather than their manipulation. Hence, this strategy's answer to our research central question is, "Involve others in an honest dialog while mutually searching for win-win solutions."

The normative-reeducative strategy would normally be thought of as the process most central to adaptive change. We agree that emergent dialog is often a central element of the adaptive process. ACT, however, is more comprehensive than the normative-- reeducative strategy. It puts a greater emphasis on the need for leaders to change themselves. It emphasizes engaging self-deception, acting on faith, dealing with paradox, and surrendering oneself to an unproven vision. In some cases, such behavior can bring about adaptive change without any dialog at all. Witness Gandhi's efforts to stop the religious civil war between the Hindus and Muslims in India. Gandhi's strategy did not include any dialog. He simply looked inside himself and then committed himself to a change in his own behavior. He decided to fast until he died. By modeling such commitment to the principle of nonviolence, he caused people on both sides to reflect and to reframe their meaning systems. The war came to a seemingly miraculous halt.

ACT does not reject any of the above three strategies but includes aspects of each. It accepts the need for factual explanations, for leverage (in very particular situations), and for emergent dialog. In this way, ACT is not conceptually distinct from existing change strategies but overlaps and can be used in conjunction with other influence strategies. A practitioner of ACT may use these other strategies with more or less emphasis. In the section below, we will examine the principles of ACT.

THE PRINCIPLES OF

ADVANCED CHANGE THEORY

Our initial insights into ACT came from our examination of the similarities between Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. Because King was a student of Gandhi, these similarities are not surprising. In addition, because both were students of the change practices of Jesus, we expanded our examination to all three change leaders. Rather than focusing on the specific religious focus of these leaders, we instead focus on the philosophy and actions commonly demonstrated in their attempts to embrace adaptive change. From our analysis of these leaders, we describe ACT in a set of 10 principles. In presenting each principle, we also draw on observations and findings from the various social sciences. This helps to conceptually ground ACT. These connections to the

literature are representative rather than comprehensive. Their purpose is to give the reader a sense of how ACT may be embedded in the larger literatures on organizational change, empowerment, human development, consultation, leadership, and complexity theory.

Principles 1 through 6 focus on ACT practitioners and their efforts to change and empower the self to be aligned with a vision for the common good. Principles 7 through 10 focus on the ACT practitioners' relationship with others, attracting them to change themselves and embrace the change effort. Furthermore, each principle builds on at least one of the two core underlying assumptions of ACT-making painful adjustments and placing oneself in jeopardy

1. Seeks to Create an Emergent System

The focus of ACT is developing a new social reality. The concern is for the system or relationship, not the self-this often requires the individual to make a painful adjustment away from self-interested behavior. In trying to bring about a new social reality, the leader works to build an emergent community that can learn, adapt, and grow. It is a community capable of honest dialog, one that enacts new forms of behavior and that is often at odds with the norms of hierarchy It is built on intense commitment and voluntary contribution. Members are willing to enroll in an effort that requires them to make significant personal sacrifice and results in their own transformation.

To facilitate emergent community, the leader strives for inclusion, openness, and development, minimizing the need for hierarchy. Gandhi, for example, envisioned a nonviolent community aimed at transcending the manipulative effects of the British rule over India. In Gandhi's nonviolent army, "the generals are just chief servants-first among equals" (Iyer,1990, p. 25). Jesus transcended the religious hierarchy and built a community of disciples drawn from the nonpower elite-common fishermen, in fact (Matthew 20:25-26). Martin Luther King, Jr., suffered the alienating effects of racial discrimination and worked to create a community based on equality through nonviolence. In his writings, King explains, "Nonviolent resistance does not seek to defeat or humiliate the opponent but to win his friendship and understanding. . . . The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community" (King,1986, p. 7).

Given the inertial and often disempowering qualities of hierarchy, there is much literature that points out the need for emergent community Feminist writers, for example, have emphasized the important role of relationships and community in human interaction (Fletcher,1998). Kegan's (1994) work on human development emphasizes notions of intimacy at the highest stages of development where interconnectedness is valued over formal authority or control. The interindividual constitution of the self values inclusion, communion, and community. Spreitzer, Quinn, and Fletcher (1995), in their work on individual peak experience, refer to this emphasis on community and inclusion as the "journey of collective fulfillment." It transcends the need for hierarchical control and seeks the collective development associated with emergent systems. Clearly, Gandhi, King, and Jesus all strove to operate at this level of interaction, exemplifying notions of inclusion, community, and interconnection in many of their deeds and actions. This move to a new emergent community required painful adjustments away from self-interests.

2. Recognizes Hypocrisy

and Patterns of Self-Deception

Another principle focused on the need for painful adjustments is the recognition that hypocrisy and self-deception impair individual and collective growth. Agents of ACT see hypocrisy as ubiquitous in everyone. They, therefore, take on the difficult task of engaging their own hypocrisy and that of others. In the case of the

adulterous woman, for example, Jesus responded to a crowd seeking to stone her: "Let him that is without sin among you cast the first stone" (John 8:7-9). The crowd dispersed. Gandhi asserted that without simplicity of the heart, there is always "gross-deception or hypocrisy" (Iyer, 1990, p. 108). King explained his core strategy: "It is a method which seeks to implement the law by appealing to the conscience of the great decent majority who through blindness, fear, pride, or irrationality have allowed their consciences to sleep" (King,1986, p.148). Instead of acting out of self-interest, these change agents sought to achieve a higher purpose, to align their own behavior and the behavior of others with that higher purpose. This always involves some form of personal sacrifice and transformation. Although these men were not necessarily perfect in all aspects of their lives, they were willing to recognize this and strive to reduce their own integrity gaps so they could model behavior that would awaken the consciences of others and inspire them to courageously follow a more noble future.

The above paragraph makes the unusual claim that the reduction of personal integrity gaps is a foundation for change. Why? Social science gives us some insight. Schein (1996) indicates that people and organizations will change when personal defenses, group norms, and organizational culture are unfrozen. This involves three processes: (a) disconfirmation of expectations, (b) induction of learning anxiety if the disconfirming data are accepted as valid and relevant, and (c) provision of psychological safety that converts anxiety into motivation to change. Unfortunately, the second step is often negated because we fear that if we admit to ourselves and others that something is wrong or imperfect, we will lose our effectiveness, our selfesteem, and maybe even our identity. Given such risks, it is natural that our defense mechanisms serve to shut down the change process, both personally and collectively. We claim that we want progress, but we pursue the preservation of our current position.

Argyris (1988) argues that there is a systematic discrepancy between what people espouse and how they behave and that they are often unaware of it. This resuits in "miscommunication, self-fulfilling prophecies, self-sealing processes, and escalating errors" (Argyris, 1988, p. 261). Argyris (1991) suggests that there is a "universal human tendency" to organize our lives around four basic values: remaining in control, winning, suppressing negative feelings, and making a rational pursuit of objectives. Thus, when we encounter even the suggestion of failure, we become defensive and shut down. This occurs at the moment when learning is needed most. The practitioner of ACT stays ever aware of this process.

3. Personal Change Through Value

Clarification and Alignment of Behaviors

As ACT practitioners turn inward and examine the potential for self-hypocrisy, they require personal discipline to cope with the pain involved in examining integrity gaps and changing behavior. For example, Gandhi talked about "obtaining reform by growth from within, which is obtained by self-suffering and self-purification" (Iyer,1990, p. 90). Jesus said, "Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shaft thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's" (Luke, 6:42). King described the courage necessary to take a stand and do what one believes is right: "I am taking a stand for what I believe is right. But now I am afraid. The people are looking to me for leadership, and if I stand before them without strength and courage, they too will falter" (King,1986, p. 509). Gandhi, Jesus, and King each focused on changing themselves to ensure that their behaviors were consistent with their beliefs.

Grasping the dynamics of hypocrisy, Torbert (198 suggests that most professionals practice "conditional confidence": confidence that they will perform well as long as their assumptions about the situation are not violated. Yet, Torbert argues that it is possible to deviate from the norm through "awakened attention," which

allows practitioners to press forward in uncertain and threatening situations, learning as they go. Torbert calls this process action inquiry. It requires an unconditional confidence that one can discard inaccurate assumptions and ineffective strategies in the midst of ongoing action. According to Torbert, this unusual capacity is predicated on increasing one's personal integrity, which, in turn, is achieved by engaging one's lack of integrity.

Closing an integrity gap results in personal growth. Perhaps most important is the sense that one is becoming the kind of person one wants to be. Continuing to apply counter-conditioning and stimulus control is most effective when it is based on the conviction that maintaining change supports a sense of self that is highly valued by oneself and at least one significant other. (Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992, P. 99)

In his work on transformative participation, Reason (1998) emphasizes that leaders of change must be open to the possibility of reframing their viewpoint in a situation, consciously seeking and choosing new frames to ensure that their behavior is aligned with key values. In this way, the change agent is self-creating and self-transfiguring. In the context of leadership, Bennis (1989) emphasizes the importance of changing yourself to be the real you, quoting William James (1961):

I have often thought that the best way to define a man's character would be to seek out the particular mental or moral attitude in which he (sic) felt himself most deeply and intensively active and alive. At such moments, there is a voice inside which speaks and says, "This is the real me." (p. 53)

Richard Harrison (1995), a highly recognized organizational change agent, writes about his own lack of integrity and suggests that such recognition is crucial for overcoming personal denial and increasing one's self-consciousness. This process helps him recognize that "the finger I point at the world points back at me and that my clients usually mirror my own failings and difficulties" (p. 40). ACT maintains that the process of engaging and reducing personal integrity gaps leads to value clarification and the personal confidence necessary to relinquish control, accept shortterm defeats, identify and explore negative feelings, and trust the uncontrollable emergent process. This is the essence of the vision-driven and growing individual.

4. Frees Oneself From the

System of External Sanctions

Having clarified their own personal values, the practitioners of ACT feel less constrained by external sanctions. Often placing themselves in jeopardy, they do what is right rather than what is prescribed by existing laws, rules, or authority. Public opinion has little influence on them. For example, when the popularity of Jesus peaked and the people sought to make him king "by force," Jesus "went off, himself alone" (John 6:15). That is, in the face of intense worldly acclamation, he chose to remain on his own path. Similarly, Gandhi saw that by obeying the voice of his own conscience and being his own master by seeking the Kingdom of God from within, he could not be controlled by the British rule (Iyer, 1990, p. 90). King freed himself from external sanctions by confronting his greatest fears (King,1986, p. 511). Each of these leaders was not dominated by external powers but by what he truly believed in.

In reading the organizational studies literature, one would think that human behavior is largely shaped by situational influences and resource dependencies. There is work, however, that suggests that individuals are free and can make strategic choices. For example, DeCharms (1968) emphasizes the notion of self-determination. Carl Rogers suggests,

The self-structure moves . . . to a sense of integrity, wholeness, reconciliation, relief from tension, and a trust in one's own organism. As the point of evaluation shifts to within the self, a sense of positive worth, personal direction and a capacity to take risks develop. The growth of a congruent personality involves: . . . a greater independence from social pressures to conform combined with a capacity to understand other people's frames of reference. (Hampden-Turner, 1981, p. 116)

Such notions of free will and controlling one's destiny are important components of much of the recent work on empowerment as well (Quinn & Spreitzer, 1997). To practice ACT, individuals must be able to go against the status quo, freeing the self from external sanctions while pursuing an internalized vision. The freedom to live in the present increases the capacity to feel the real needs of others.

5. Develops a Vision for the Common Good

Feeling less pressured by external constraints, the individual is more likely to see new possibilities. A new vision for the common good can emerge. For Jesus, it was the capacity for loving personal sacrifice for the good of humankind: "This is my commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you. Greater love bath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:12-13). For Gandhi, the vision was securing self-rule to permit the self-realization of the Indian people (Iyer,1990, p. 3). For King, it was a country where all people are created equal, regardless of skin color (King,1986, p. 219). Regardless of the content of the vision, each of these leaders developed a meaningful vision for the common good. When people have a vision and stretch themselves to behave according to that vision, they can become a revolutionary force. There is no hesitation in working to make that vision a reality.

The notion of vision is central to much of the leadership literature: Real change leadership must begin with a compelling vision for the future. Bennis and Nanus (1985) refer to a vision as a dream articulating a realistic, credible, attractive future for the organization. James McGregor Burns (1978) similarly emphasizes,

Leaders . . . experience an idealized state or a vision for the future that is discrepant from the status quo. The cognitive realization of an idealized vision is a profoundly transforming spiritual experience. The essence of the experience is that the transformational or charismatic leaders identify with or personally relate to a set of values that raise them to "higher levels of motivation and morality." (p. 20)

Not just any vision will do, but a vision for the common good, because selflessness (as opposed to self-interest) is critical to the ACT change process. People are more likely to be attracted to and sacrifice far a purpose when the role model is acting in an altruistic fashion. The ACT practitioner's integrity attracts others to act on behalf of the change. They are more likely to be willing to make painful adjustments and even put themselves in jeopardy when they are acting for what they truly believe in.

6. Takes Action to the Edge of Chaos

ACT practitioners feel increasing commitment to a vision for the common good and often develop an extraordinary courage to act on faith, without guarantees and placing the self in possible jeopardy Modern complexity theory terms this the "edge of chaos." Operating at the edge of chaos means leaving the wellstructured world of known cause and effect and enacting a new order. For example, early in his career in South Africa, Gandhi needed help with his work. One day, a man arrived from another country and volunteered to join Gandhi. The man asked Gandhi if he was surprised that he had arrived at such a fortuitous time. Gandhi replied "no" and pointed out that when one discovers what is right and begins to pursue it, the necessary people

and resources show up in a seemingly spontaneous way (Iyer, 1990). This principle suggests faith in the process of action learning. Jesus, for example, instructed, "When they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak" (Matthew 10:19-20).

Complexity or chaos theory is gaining increasing attention. The principles of complexity theory aim to describe whole living systems in their complex, natural state and can provide important guidelines for understanding the transformation process (Reason & Goodwin,1998). Wheatley (1992) describes it:

Finally, the information grows to such a level of disturbance that the system can no longer ignore it. At this point, jarred by so much internal disturbance and far from equilibrium, the system in its current form falls apart. But this disintegration does not signal the death of the system. In most cases, the system can reconfigure itself at a higher level of complexity, one better able to deal with the new environment. (pp. 19-20)

ACT practitioners do not have a safety net but rather operate at the edge of chaos. They must build the bridge even as it is walked on (Quinn, 1996, p. 83). They know that in withdrawing from the present social sanctions and in acting unconventionally, the old self disintegrates and is immediately replaced by a new self that is more aligned with the current emerging reality. Virtually the same thing happens to the social system itself, in that the old arrangements disintegrate and new, more aligned arrangements emerge.

7. Maintains Reverence for

the Others Involved in Change

ACT practitioners maintain reverence for the freedom and dignity of others. Rather than forcing others to change, ACT practitioners have faith that the change will take hold in others-that others will be attracted to the moral goodness of the new vision. Often, this requires a painful adjustment in how the leader relates to followers: Trust rather than control must become the basis for relating. Jesus, Gandhi, and King each treated his followers with respect and honor-- having faith that his followers would be attracted to the moral goodness of his vision. For example, Gandhi said,

Instead of bothering with how the whole world may live in the right manner, we should think how we ourselves may do so. If one lives in the right manner, we shall feel that others will also do the same, or we shall discover a way of persuading them to do so by example. (Iyer, 1990, p. 182)

Here, the leader attracts others by maintaining reverence for them and an awareness of their highest potential self. This attraction process works because the individual is not operating out of self-interest but for the common good.

The importance of maintaining respect for others involved in the change process is well documented in the organizational literature. These ideas are similar to Senge's (1990) notion of enrollment in the organizational learning process-giving others the freedom to choose whether and how they will participate. These ideas are also well grounded in contemporary writing on the empowerment process:

The experience of being empowered by an influencing agent who is strong and virtuous, trustworthy supportive, and nurturing is a spiritual experience. The followers' dependence on such an agent does not imply a mindless, servile, or parasitic subordination. Rather, it implies a dependence that is of the nature of a growth-oriented

identification with the leader. This allows followers to draw inspiration with the leader so that they might be self-efficacious and, like the leader, achieve a similar self-transformation . . . followers do so with complete autonomy and of their own volition. (Kanungo & Mendonca,1995, p. 97)

These ideas are also captured in research on emotional intelligence (Cooper, 1997; Coleman, 1995). Great leaders and executives touch their followers' hearts-they understand and have reverence for their needs and feelings-and this enables them to build deep, meaningful relationships that go beyond basic notions of exchange and self-interest. With such emotional intelligence, the leader sees the follower's perspectives as significant and valuable, leading inevitably to a change that is highly democratic and participative (Reason, 1998). Thus, this emotional intelligence, this need to maintain reverence for others, is a critical element of ACT.

8. Inspires Others to Enact Their Best Selves

ACT practitioners inspire others to enact their "best selves" in the change process. The individual may engage others in unusually demanding tasks for the good of the collectivity. This requires followers to place themselves in jeopardy by totally committing themselves to the leader and the vision for the common good. For example, Jesus held his disciples to very high standards, asking them to give up all that they had to follow him and become "fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19). Gandhi and King inspired their followers to be part of large-scale boycotts that involved significant personal sacrifice. All of their followers took on significant personal risk in making their dedication to the cause public.

Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. We must forever struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. (King,1986, p. 218)

Each leader encouraged his followers to stretch themselves to higher levels of morality.

It is possible that a leader may push followers so hard that conflicts arise. James McGregor Burns (1978) argues that such conflict builds character because it must be confronted and embodied to push the relationship forward. In asking for "stretch efforts," the leader continually models the courage, integrity, competence, and concern expected of followers. In this way, mutuality is created between the leader and the follower. For example, Gandhi believed that the only way to raise the standard of public life was through the lives of leaders who served as role models (Iyer, 1990). Jesus and King likewise strove never to ask more of their followers than they had asked of themselves (John,13:15; King,1986, p. 122). All three willingly endured, even welcomed, physical abuse. This level of commitment to principle was a powerful form of communication and provided the moral power necessary to enroll others in stretch efforts.

We already know that transformational leaders stretch their followers, often asking followers for more than they believe they can give. Yukl and Van Fleet (1982) suggest that transformational leaders "conceive and articulate goals that lift people out of their petty preoccupations, carry them above the conflicts that tear a society apart, and unite them in pursuit of objectives worthy of their best efforts" (p. 90). Such leaders hold followers to their own high standards and stretch the followers to achieve more than they thought possible (Bennis,1989). In this way, the leader achieves the full potential of the followers while maintaining dignity and respect for them.

9. Models Counterintuitive, Paradoxical Behavior

ACT practitioners' willingness to walk on the edge of chaos facilitates counterintuitive, "out of the box" thinking (Wanniski,1978). Much of this has to do with transcending external sanctions and putting the self in jeopardy (Bass, 1990). Such individuals see not only linear relationships but also the dynamic, often paradoxical cycles of conflict that are inevitable in the change process (Burns,1978). For example, Jesus said that whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, yet whoever loses his life will preserve it (Luke,17:33). In his focus on civil rights, King drew on Hegel's work on an emergent synthesis that brings together opposites in fruitful harmony (King,1986, p. 491). Gandhi drew on the simplicity of spinning yam to devise complex and subtle maneuvers that in turn provided precarious insights into a world that was not otherwise knowable (Payne,1969, p. 557). The recognition of such complex and hard to understand behaviors is a key reason why ACT is termed advanced change theory.

The result of enacting behavior at the edge of chaos is increased sense making and greater cognitive complexity. A more complex worldview provides wisdom that allows for sagelike intervention (Siporin & Gummer, 1988). Such sagelike intervention involves modeling counterintuitive, paradoxical behaviors (Thompson, 1988). Problems are solved or strategies altered by asking a profoundly simple question or engaging in a frame-breaking behavior (Quinn. 1996). For example, when his home was bombed, King's followers wanted to place an armed guard at his home. But King feared his followers would be distracted by the presence of a guard and lose the moral offensive, sinking to the level of their oppressors (King, 1986, p. 57). Thus, he declined a guard even though his safety was at risk. Likewise, even though others might have seen it as political compromise, Gandhi engaged in frame-breaking behavior when he argued that the English should be permitted to remain in India as administrators and policemen (Payne,1969, p. 23). These frame-breaking behaviors serve to distort existing routines, require sense making in others, and move the system to the edge of chaos. At the edge of chaos, the system is more sensitive to small stimuli than it is in a more stable condition, and transformation is more likely.

10. Changes Self and System

ACT practitioners believe that changing the self can alter the external world. This principle is the foundation of ACT. This process requires painful adjustments in behavior on the part of both the leader and the follower. Practitioners of ACT know that change must begin with looking inside. They then alter their own behavior to fit their values and, ultimately, their vision of the common good. The result is new capability and potential for action. Jesus, Gandhi, and King were all advocates of this notion. Payne (1969), for example, notes that Gandhi had extreme beliefs about the notion that the external world is altered by such personal work:

By purifying himself and subjugating the flesh he would increase the powers of the soul and thus acquire the strength to dominate events. The strength of the soul grew in proportion as the flesh was subdued, and from the absolutely pure soul there flowed out in ever-widening circles a power that was ultimately invincible. He was perfectly serious in the belief. (p. 557)

A key point in ACT is that revolutionary power follows from the practice of reflection, self-examination, and the creative enactment of clear principles. When a person enacts principle-driven behavior, it challenges the current system and forces people to choose between what is expedient/easy and what is the right thing to do. This kind of awareness separates people and generates conflict. It alters everyone, including the leader of change. It is a principle that Thoreau (1993) articulated in Civil Disobedience:

Action from principle, the perception and the performance of right, changes things and relations; it is essentially revolutionary . . . It not only divides states and churches, it divides families; aye, it divides the individual, separating the diabolical in him from the divine. (p. 29)

Such assertions suggest that our circle of influence might be larger than we often believe. Jesus, Gandhi, and King all had a strong action orientation and did not wait for permission to make change in the larger system. They enacted principle-driven behavior, and it resulted in conflict but ultimately in transformation.

ACT IN PRACTICE

The above principles derived from the practice theories of Jesus, Gandhi, and King seem larger than life. This fact raises questions about the applicability of ACT to everyday change. Jesus, Gandhi, and King were leaders of social movements acting as insurgents to transform societies. One might wonder whether ACT is relevant to a person who is trying to make a change in some straightforward process-for example, an employee trying to change an aspect of quality circles. To answer this question, we return to the issue of why so many change efforts fail. Many changes that on the surface appear simple are not simple. They of feet the culture of the system and require adaptive work. Because doing adaptive work is so difficult and complex, it is often met with denial. Change agents often deceive themselves into believing that incremental or technical changes will be enough. Too often, these efforts fail. We believe that any change that requires changes in ingrained behavior patterns requires a social movement at some level. Even in a corporation, culture change requires the authority figure to become the leader of a social movement. Why is this a radical thought? It is because the notion of change driven by authority and the notion of change driven by social insurgency are assumed to be mutually exclusive, even at war with one another. Authority exists to resist insurgency and vice versa. The notion that a CEO, or even a lowly employee, needs to model moral power and become the leader of a social movement is both intellectually and behaviorally difficult at best.

In the sections below, we provide a set of cases for understanding the applicability of ACT for normal human beings. The cases are selected to illustrate change attempts in contexts ranging from intimate microrelationships to more public macrorelationships. The unique aspects of each case will be discussed in this section, while the commonalities across the cases will be summarized in the next section.

Changing a Child

Warner (1992) provides a case of a mother-daughter relationship. The 8-year-old named Erin does not care about doing schoolwork and even cheats. The mother insists that Erin complete her homework and spends hours with her. Erin complains. The mother tries to be cheerful but gets continually more irritated. The mother states, "The trouble with Erin is especially frustrating because for years I have given her my best efforts." The mother describes the self-discipline necessary not to compare Erin with her sister and her ef forts to give Erin warm hugs on a daily basis. She describes drilling Erin with flash cards and the seemingly intentional efforts of Erin to frustrate the effort by intentionally giving wrong answers. The mother recounts the feeling of being "kicked in the teeth" and her frustration at not knowing what else to do.

In attending a workshop run by Warner, the mother is exposed to many notions that parallel ACT. She is led to reexamine herself. Afterward, she notes considerable self-deception and implicit communication of negative affect: "I was outwardly encouraging, but inwardly I mistrusted her, and she felt that message from me." With her new and more complex worldview, the mother takes on a higher level of concern for Erin: "I cried when I realized the price she had to pay for my inability to love her without reservation." With a new vision for the relationship, the mother stops micromanaging the relationship, models the importance of self-discipline, and encourages Erin to come to her for help when she is ready The relationship dramatically changed. The little girl began to perform well irt school. The mother goes on to report a particularly interesting moment:

But this time I pulled her up on my lap and looked at her, and I had this overwhelming feeling of love for her that just seemed to flow between us. I hugged her tightly and told her how much I loved her. I realized that for the very first time in eight years I was expressing true love for her. Previously I had hugged her but the love didn't flow. This time the love just flowed. It was as if I was holding a new baby for the first time. Tears were streaming down and she looked at me and said, "Are you crying because you love me, Mommy?" I nodded. She whispered, "Mommy, I want to stay with you forever."

The mother, the ACT practitioner, is no longer self-- deceptive. Instead, she has increased self-confidence and is capable of genuine love for her daughter. Erin is attracted to, not forced by, the efforts of the mother. Real change in Erin only came when the mother first changed herself.

Changing a Class

Covey (1989, p. 265) provides a classroom case that is illustrative of the principles of ACT. In this case, the ACT practitioner is not the course instructor but a student. Covey illustrates how natural it is for all of us to unconsciously accept and enact transactional assumptions in relationships. For example, he brings all the normal trappings of educational authority and control to the classroom: a syllabus, textbooks, presentation plans, and a structure for grading. All are tools for controlling information flows, structuring context, and applying sanctions.

Three weeks into the class, an unexpected event occurred:

One person began to relate some very powerful personal experiences. A spirit of humility and reverence fell on the class-reverence toward this individual and appreciation for his courage. Others began to pick up on it, sharing some of their experiences and insights and even some of their self-doubts. The spirit of trust and safety prompted many to become extremely open. Rather than present what they prepared, they fed on each other's insights and ideas and started to create a whole new scenario as to what that class could mean. . . . "I found myself gradually loosening up my commitment to the structure of the class and sensing entirely new possibilities. It wasn't just a flight of fancy; there was a sense of maturity and stability and substance which transcended by far the old structure and plan." (Covey,1989, pp. 265-266)

Covey goes on to describe the extraordinary and lasting outcomes produced in this bottom-up example of change. A self-empowered student (let's call him John) dared to model the behavior of ACT and led the class to the edge of chaos. John had previously been quiet and unassertive in the classroom. He changed his behavior by taking a risk and opening up to the class by sharing his personal experience. His modeling behavior made it safe for others to risk new patterns of behavior. Rather than Covey teaching the students through traditional pedagogical methods, the students began to learn from each other through the sharing of their experiences. As the vision of what was possible spread across the system, Covey followed the behavioral modeling of John in allowing the normal assumptions of course design to be transformed into something new. Notice the seeming paradoxical observation about giving up the old structure and plan, yet discovering stability in the emergent system.

Changing a Unit

The authors recently interviewed middle managers in a large utility company and identified several people who were practicing ACT One particularly provocative story was told by a man (whom we'll call Tim) who led a downsizing effort. One of his direct reports, after being told he was being laid off, went home and committed suicide. He also left an audiotape for Tim. Tim told us that after he listened to the audiotape, he made some

drastic, value-driven decisions. One was that he would never again play the political game and that he would tell the complete truth in every organizational situation. Tim said, instead of being fired as he first believed might happen, he has become surprisingly powerful. He claims that over time, he has drastically changed, and consequently, so has his unit. Within the unit, people have complete trust in what Tim tells them, and they are willing to make great strides for his vision: "We behave like a tight-knit family." People above Tim also trust him and respect the performance of the unit. They trust the information Tim provides and tend to supply the resources he requests.

Tim was jolted by the suicide of his employee. The jolt caused him to question the political model in which he was embedded. As Tim clarified his values, he became value driven, and that led to unconventional behaviors. Although the decision to always tell the truth seemed risky, what Tim found at the edge of chaos was a new way of seeing and behaving. Instead of being fired, his personal power increased. Tim's capacity to influence increased. The relationships around him changed, and his unit changed.

Changing a Division

The next case also involves downsizing. A large corporation engaged in three downsizings over a short period. One senior executive (we'll call Paul) graphically described his fears of losing his job and not being able to maintain his standard of living, send his children to college, or keep his home. After months of agony, Paul began to confront his fears and clarify his values. In doing so, he concluded that he had an identity separate from the organization and that he could survive on a much smaller salary if necessary. This change in perspective had an empowering effect. Paul stopped worrying about the dangers of change and how he was seen by the organization. He began to ask himself what was needed in the present. Paul saw his immobilized colleagues and realized that he needed to do something to empower them. He designed a new role for himself: Paul carefully selected people and invited them into meetings and asked them what they wanted the division to look like in 10 years. Initially, they were startled by his question, but gradually, they joined the process of designing the company's future. Paul's empowerment spread to others. Gradually, things began to change (Quinn, 1996, p. 7).

Paul had become more internally driven and began to create his own external world. For executives embedded in transactional assumptions, the notion of having actually empowered employees is unthinkable. Although administrators have learned to explicitly espouse empowerment in organizations, they implicitly know that it cannot actually occur in a transactional system. Actually having empowered employees would be an enormous threat. As one person asked, "How would I manage such people?" In short, administrators become masters of talking participation and empowerment while practicing instruction and control. With this in mind, there is a seeming paradox in Paul's orientation to the troubled company: In freeing himself from the system of external sanctions, Paul now acted much more independently, yet, he cared more about the organization and went to great efforts to help his associates and the company. The paradox is that empowered people are more loving and loyal to the people and the system than are the normal people who employ transactional assumptions and worry about the dangers of empowerment.

Changing a Corporation

The final case involves a Fortune 500 corporation with which one of the authors is currently involved as a consultant. For 5 years, the CEO (we'll call him Sam) drove dramatic change as the company moved from a domestic to a global operation. Profits were driven up as Sam called for stretch efforts. At the end of 5 years,

however, extensive problems were manifest, including declining profits, unclear values and priorities, change overload, loss of life balance, too much hierarchy, strained interpersonal relationships, and one-way communication. The occurrence of these problems led Sam to recognize his inability to mandate change.

As we became more complex and the environment more intense, it became impossible to get things done through the force of leadership. Everything in my mind has always been so clear and logical. I felt if we just do what we know how to do every day, this thing will work. I had this grand design and vision, and I thought I could articulate it and get people lined up. It did not happen. It absolutely did not happen. I think I had to come to grips with the fact that it is not enough to be committed, to have a plan and understand where we are going. I realized I had to get everyone engaged and committed.

This realization led to a massive culture change ef fort in which Sam and his associates realized that organizational change begins with personal change. Sam gradually experimented with honest confrontation of issues. He began to see the creative power of honest dialog. Eventually he made a bold intervention, as some senior people were beginning to question his global strategy. Instead of coming down on them, as he might have in the past, he invited three important financial analysts to the annual meeting of the company's top 120 executives. He asked them to provide an extensive criticism of the state of the firm. The response was seemingly disastrous. Relationships seemed to disintegrate into widespread conflict. Instead of addressing the conflict, Sam gave his executives 2 days to discuss and explore the tensions. The result: A new meaning system emerged, and they left the meeting with renewed commitment to the strategy. After this session, Sam continued to experiment. Eventually, he began to allow people to challenge his own personal behavior patterns. At each stage, he grew more confident with this approach, continually exhibiting new behaviors; as he did so, he learned to facilitate the emergence of new realities.

People operating out of the traditional model assume that change starts with the top. When the CEO says to change, then. it will happen. This CEO was articulate, persuasive, and forceful. Yet, he discovered that these tools were not enough. Gaining commitment for the necessary adaptive work required personal change on the part of the CEO. Even CEOs, or maybe especially CEOs, need to practice ACT.

KEY ELEMENTS OF ACT

EMBEDDED IN CASES

The cases provide some applications of ACT in the everyday change efforts of ordinary people. Here, we will elaborate the lessons from the cases in a series of diagnostic questions.

Am I Aware of the Realities

of the Emergent System?

In each case, the individuals worked to create a new social reality that was driven by a concern for others, not just themselves. Erin's mother wants to build a relationship of conditional love with her daughter. Covey wants his students to connect to each other and the material. Tim, the unit director, wants to create a tight-knit organizational family. Paul, the division director, wants to create a truly empowered workforce. Sam, the CEO, wants to create an authentically global company. Each of these ACT practitioners sought to build an emergent community and new social reality.

What Are My Patterns of Self-Deception?

In each case, we see patterns of self-deception at the beginning of the change. Erin's mother can consciously articulate her extensive, loving efforts as a suffering and unappreciated mother. Advocating and teaching synergy, Covey unquestioningly applies traditional structures to course design. Tim at first accepts traditional models of organization and lives a disempowered life. As division director, Paul submits himself to the role of victim. Sam, the CEO, insists on believing that he can will the company to change. If we were to confront any of these people with their hypocrisy, we would certainly raise their defenses and their indignation. ACT suggests that people initiating the change need to reflect deeply on their own values and recognize patterns of self-deception.

Are My Values and Behavior Aligned?

ACT practitioners seek to reduce integrity gaps by aligning their values and behavior. Erin's mother had to reexamine her motives and, in doing so, realized the real messages she was sending. This realization brought great pain and a desire to more fully align her behaviors with her espoused values. When Covey realized what was happening in his classroom, he dropped his authoritative props. Tim and Paul, the unit and division directors, had to alter their behaviors to fit their clarified values. Because Sam, the CEO, wanted the company to succeed, he had to recognize and own his lack of control. In each case, the ACT practitioners had to clarify their own values and engage new behaviors that were more aligned with those values.

Am I Freed From External Sanctions?

Practitioners of ACT become empowered when they take responsibility for themselves, risk new behaviors, and evolve meanings (Spreitzer & Quinn, 1996). When this happens, they are less concerned about the existing sanction systems. Leaders become self-authorizing individuals with a unique voice (Spreitzer, 1995). They have more impact, which in turn provides positive feedback that reenergizes others. The mother and Erin, the risk-taking student John and the class, the executives and their people, all experienced this process. As indicated above, true empowerment is a threatening concept to the administrative mind-set. Empowerment programs are typically designed based on transactional assumptions (Quinn, Sendelbach, & Spreitzer, 1992). The result is a "flavor of the month" or "empowerment in a box" approach, which simply reinforces the existing transactional power relationships. Organizations cannot empower people. People can only empower themselves.. Although organizational environments can encourage risk taking (Spreitzer,1996), they cannot mandate the process-the process requires that the leader transcend the sanction system.

Do I Have a Vision of the Common Good?

A key element of ACT is creating a vision that integrates the individual and collective good. The ACT practitioner discovers how to engage in behaviors that result in synergy. Erin's mother has a new and more complex understanding of the nature of the relationship. Covey and his students begin to experience synergy in the classroom and are willing to make a number of changes for the common good. The executives all do the same. ACT practitioners have a vision of the common good, of how everyone can win. When they embrace change and obtain a new path, the result is the growth of both themselves and others.

Do I Operate at the Edge of Chaos?

This is a particularly difficult notion. From the cases, we learn that it is normal for people to behave transactionally For example, Erin's mother is being transactional and not loving as she so strongly claims. In trying to change others, traditional leaders draw on the power of expertise and formal authority. This intention ties leaders to established ways of knowing and can potentially disconnect them from being aligned with a

changing reality. Operating at the edge of chaos means engaging uncertainty It means giving up control with faith that a new order will emerge through the change efforts. At the edge of chaos, ACT practitioners tend to discover ways in which seeming opposites interpenetrate. Because the new vision is more complex than the old, leaders are able to integrate differences. This usually happens when leaders are required to step outside the safety of our prescribed role, to be different, to risk the unconventional.

Do I Maintain Reverence for Others?

As ACT practitioners go through the process of personal transformation, they are filled with concern for others. They come to appreciate others' system of needs and their right to decide. Erin's mother gives love as never before and sees Erin as a being of value. Covey drops his trappings of authority by trusting and encouraging the choices of the students. The division director Paul returns to the company, not with directives but with questions about the future. The CEO Sam begins to initiate honest dialog about issues that were not previously up for discussion. Because ACT practitioners experience personal transformation, they have increased empathy for others and understand the critical role of choice in human development.

Do I Inspire Others to Enact Their Best Self?

ACT practitioners are supportive yet maintain a focus on the task at hand. Erin still does school work. The students are deeply bonded while freely choosing to put in far more time than they put into other courses. Unit director Tim pursues high performance; division director Paul tends to the future of the enterprise, and CEO Sam continues to pursue stretch goals. Support does not equal weakness. On the contrary, it results in considerable strength and stability. Because ACT practitioners are filled with both love and vision, they are able to ask for extraordinary efforts from those who are part of the change effort. The followers sense genuine concern, respect the vision, and know that the required effort will result in personal growth and increased common good. Commitment grows. Such phrases as "tough love" and "carefrontation" have been coined to capture this notion.

Am I Behaving in Unconventional

or Paradoxical Ways?

ACT practitioners realize that to inspire others to change, paradoxical behavior is often necessary. Erin's mother takes the pressure off Erin to perform, even though she wants her to perform more than ever. Covey gives up the syllabus, textbooks, and other trappings of educational authority. Tim, the unit manager, learns to let down his guard as a manager and trust completely Paul, the division manager, lets go of a need for control to authentically empower his people. Sam, the CEO, invites analysts to come in and critique his strategy in front of all employees. In these cases, ACT practitioners step out of their traditional behavior to model counterintuitive, paradoxical behaviors.

Have I Changed Myself as a

Model for the System to Change?

In these cases, ACT practitioners change the system through changing the self. These individuals know that the change process must begin by looking inside. They alter their behavior to fit their values and the vision of the common good. This personal change attracts and inspires others to change themselves and ultimately the emergent community. Consequently, emergent reality is transformed.

The above set of questions helps to provide an action framework for change agents seeking to employ ACT. In Table 2, we list the questions, along with similar questions for strategies of rational persuasion, coercion, and participation.

CONCLUSION

This article is speculative, not definitive, and it is intended to provoke ideas and thinking regarding the process of effecting change in human systems. The introduction of ACT as a set of propositions for effecting change in human systems extends traditional approaches to change by formulating a theory for change in adaptive situations where people must make painful adjustments and even put themselves in jeopardy. Although Jesus, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr., provide textbook examples of ACT in practice, this strategy can be used in everyday experiences of change as well. By articulating ACT, we hope not only to extend the traditional theories of planned change but also to expand the array of approaches available to individuals in bringing planned change to human systems. In closing, we would like to articulate and address some of the anticipated criticisms of ACT These come from both intellectual and practical perspectives.

ACT Is a Formula for Failure

This potential criticism suggests that ACT would never apply in the normal organization because under the veneer of civility is a treacherous, Machiavellian world in which the weak always lose. Notions of principle are fine for rhetorical posturing, but leverage is the only thing that matters. In the end, social life is a Darwinian game. ACT is even dangerous because it could lead normal people to get hurt. The reality is that practitioners of ACT are not weak. It takes tremendous strength and courage for Gandhi or King to willingly submit himself to the club of an enraged, racist policeman. It takes tremendous courage for a CEO to invite external analysts into the company to make a brutal assessment of the strategy on which he has built the future of the company. Such people are neither weak nor naive. They have discovered an advanced theory of change, one that includes but exceeds traditional change theories. ACT practitioners are less naive than the seemingly politically astute advocates of the Machiavellian position. They have a larger perspective on power and have more choices available to them. Yet, their choices do highlight the fact that there is danger in the change process. Making deep change always involves risk or walking on the edge of chaos. Traditional change theories wish this reality away whereas ACT recognizes the danger and embraces the associated pain. This is possible for ACT practitioners because the purpose is now more important than self. It is not possible for traditional change agents because the survival of the current self is more important than purpose.

Gandhi, Jesus, and King Were Flawed and

Thus Are Not Appropriate Models for Change

Another potential point of attack is to criticize one or all three of the leaders featured here. This can be done by pointing out their personal imperfections or by objecting to the latent consequences of their change efforts. Gandhi, for example, might be criticized for his child-rearing practices. Jesus might be criticized because of the terrible crimes committed in the name of Christianity. We respond by emphasizing that ACT does not require perfection but rather the engagement of the leader's own lack of perfection. It requires leaders to continually search for patterns of self-deception and hypocrisy. The requirement is to be in the process of reflection and integration, not to be in an end state of perfection. The fact that one or more of the people featured here might have had an imperfection is not a disqualification of ACT. Moreover, the change patterns that ebb from the personal change process are not controlled or predictable. Because every creative act suggests that something

is being destroyed, all social change will be objectionable from the point of view of one or more parties. The key here is not the specific leaders nor the specific outcomes but the principles that can be learned from their general patterns of behavior.

Gandhi, Jesus, and King Were Heroes

and Thus Are Unlikely To Be Emulated

This is basically the opposite of the above criticism. The courage and wisdom of three people featured here are seen as bigger than life. Hence, another potential criticism is that although ACT is powerful, it may not be applicable. How could we ask an ordinary human being to live up to such standards? The risks are enormous. The required personal accountability is too much for normal people. Our response is that every human being is continually facing the dilemma of making deep change or accepting slow death (Quinn,1996). In any given sample of people, we expect the majority to choose slow death and to live disempowered lives of quiet desperation. However, as we tried to show in the long list of case illustrations, ordinary people, from mothers to professors to CEOs, may occasionally employ and experience ACT Hence, ACT behaviors may be rare in any given social context but more common than we think across our individual life experiences. We can escape accountability by separating the three actors from ourselves by making them bigger than life, but in so doing, we lock ourselves into patterns of stagnation. The deep change or slow death dilemma is ever with us.

ACT Can Only Work Under the

Most Positive Boundary Conditions

The potential criticism here is that although there may be some validity to ACT, it has only very limited windows of application. For this change strategy to work, individuals must be open-minded to the need for change and have a strong identification with the organization. They also must have respect for the leader to be attracted to a vision for the collective good. It is easier to bring this sort of radical change to an organization that has a culture of respect and honor for its employees. For example, it would be difficult to implement the ACT in an organization that has been slashed by numerous downsizing efforts while maintaining extreme levels of executive pay or in an organization where employees have been conditioned to be passive.

Table 2

Quantitative analyses may or may not provide eventual support to these generalized propositions. If so, they would mask a key point. ACT works in the most impossible of situations. Witness the work of Jaime Escalante at Garfield High School in East Los Angeles, whose story is recounted in the film Stand and Deliver. The school had degenerated to the most despicable of conditions, yet Escalante built an astounding community of success and pride. He did this despite the fact that there was no honor or respect in the culture. The school community was closedminded, it had no identification with the organization, and there was no respect for Escalante. Escalante had to establish a vision, build respect, and attract highly resistant actors into the process of transformation. Furthermore, Escalante was not the senior authority figure in the school but merely a teacher. In that supposedly disempowered

role, he transformed an impossible situation. He did it by behaving in ways consistent with ACT. ACT is applicable even in the most oppressive of settings.

In summary, all these criticisms share the logic of transaction. This logic reflects the reality that most of us experience most of the time. That is, we believe the transactional paradigm, we enact it and in so doing co-create a world that is transactional. In doing this, all our assumptions are confirmed. ACT practitioners assume an emergent reality, enact it, and in so doing co-create an emergent community In doing so, they discover new meanings and alternative possibilities and strategies-and learn to enact an advanced theory of change.

Sidebar

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