

Openings: *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose* (the more it changes, the more it stays the same).
No matter which language you choose, the message is clear.

Spotlight: The impetus to modify our way of doing business is usually reactive. An internal or external stimulus causes us to re-evaluate the assumptions we operate under and we initiate a response. The underlying assumption of our response is that consistency and predictability are the desired objectives and for a good portion of business activities, the assumption holds true. Still, there are some activities where courting uncertainty and surprise provides the best opportunity to exceed stakeholders' expectations. Building this capability into your enterprise requires a proactive approach to modifying business processes.

Doing things differently in a proactive manner has significant benefits. Firstly, it signals that routine for the sake of routine is not the norm. Secondly, doing things differently builds a repertoire of possible responses. While a standard response may fit all situations, having a number of possible responses allows employees to choose the best one for a particular situation. A single standard response may be OK and among several possible responses, one will be better than all others will. Thirdly, the more specialised and unique responses that are available, the easier that it is for an employee to say "Yes" to a customer's request. The more yeses, and therefore less resistance a customer experiences, the greater their satisfaction. Building the enterprise's capacity to respond positively reduces the likelihood of a needing to react to problems.

Fostering difference is a very powerful tool because it emphasise goals and objectives over strategies. Becoming detached from strategies opens the possibility for creative solutions and without an agenda favouring a particular strategy, each strategy can be evaluated both on its likelihood of meeting the objectives and on its appropriateness. Often, one strategy just feels better than the others do and while none may be wrong, only one will be exactly right.

The transition to a culture of continual experimentation can meet with resistance. Familiarity creates a powerful inertial force and one that is easier to work with rather than against. Becoming familiar with doing things differently takes both time and a reframing of business processes. What must be emphasised is that at no point was there an intention to create consistency in process and rather, the intention was to ensure consistency in outcomes. That processes may have become consistent was an unintentional by-product and not an objective. What employees must be familiar with is meeting their objectives and doing whatever is necessary to meet those objectives. The same starting and end points remain but what is different is the many routes between those points.

When employees know the objectives and are reassured of the goodness of difference, the enterprise becomes proactive. Being proactive through doing things differently is natural for people because, more than anything else, its fun. Just do it is not enough; just do it differently is the mantra to extoll.

Facts & Figures: Studies show that most terminal health problems are caused by five behavioural issues: too much smoking, drinking, eating, and stress, and not enough exercise. The studies also show that when presented with the real possibility of death, nine out of ten people fail to make any significant and lasting modifications to their behaviour.

With this in mind, when you embark on a program of doing things differently within your enterprise, do not be surprised that you face resistance. As important as your program may be, it certainly does not compare with life and death.

Lexicon: Change is perhaps the most emotionally charged word in business today. It has become synonymous with the uninvited and un-welcomed imposition of another's will upon us. As well, our experience with reengineering, change management, and the latest flavour of the month, has taught us that what is referred to as change rarely is. Without any attempt to be euphemistic, consider avoiding the use of the word in favour of a more precise verb.

Musings: Following our last provincial election, the government established The Citizens Assembly on Electoral Reform. The Assembly consisted of 160 randomly selected British Columbians mandated to investigate the available options for translating votes cast in provincial elections into seats in the Legislature. These people, over the period of a year, determined that British Columbians would be better served by a system different from the current system.

This month, a referendum was held on whether to accept the recommendations of the Assembly. The results of that referendum are an indication of how we, as a province, feel about the future. Those who voted for the new system hoped that the new system would serve us better while those who voted against the new system feared that the new system would serve us worse. I am pleased to report that hope triumphed over fear.

Quote: Actor Elliott Gould is the source of the following quote. Perhaps his uncertainty is rooted in the over use of the word change.

"I believe in evolution and I think when it comes to business and the roots of business and the fundamentals of business, I don't think that ever changes. I think the idea of change is an illusion, but in nature it's necessary to change and perhaps business is a part of nature. I'm not totally sure."