

How outstanding leaders inspire change

Cecilia Boggi

"Intelligence is the ability to adapt to change."

- Stephen Hawking

According to PMI® Guide Managing Change in Organizations, *"Innovation and a highly dynamic external environment force organizations and practitioners to act more quickly and be more adaptive to handle uncertainty."*¹

In these times of globalization, great competition, new disruptive technologies and economies in crisis, organizations must adapt more and more rapidly to change, and the concerns of leaders are increasing.

Regarding this concern, I recently read an article about a top Italian executive and his strategy to get the organization he leads to adopt changes.

At the main private university in Rome, Luiss Business School, the CEO of the ENEL Business Group, Francisco Starace, responds to a student who asked him how to make people really adopt changes in the organization.²

Starace said that, in order to achieve change, *"it is necessary to inspire fear"* and, then, he added that it was important to first locate the "ganglia" - or power points into the organization - that are against the plan, and then "hit" them, creating fear and discomfort.

Obviously, many controversies were generated over these sayings of Francesco Starace and all the international press echoed this.

I was very surprised to read that this person believes that to inspire change should inspire fear and the question that arises in me is if this will be the most effective method.

In my opinion, I think that inspiring change through fear, as well as undesirable, will not be sustainable over time. It may, perhaps, get results in the short term. But, I do not imagine that his direct collaborators feel satisfied with this form of leadership to work motivated. At the same time, they will hardly be able to inspire their own personnel to carry out the desired change.

Perhaps, this may be one of the reasons for the failures of the organizational changes. As states Ron Carucci in his article published by Harvard Business

¹ Source: "Managing Change in Organizations: A Practice Guide" – PMI®

² Source: <http://www.revistaei.cl/2016/05/20/ceo-de-enel-para-generar-cambios-hay-que-inspirar-miedo/#>

Review, "In a survey of nearly 3,000 executives about the success of their enterprise transformation efforts, McKinsey discovered the failure rate to be higher than 60%, while Harvard Business Review conducted a study that suggested more than 70% of transformation efforts fail"³. Carucci considers that too many leaders want transformation to happen at unrealistic speeds, with minimal effort, and everywhere but within themselves.

On the other hand, there are studies of leadership that claim that organizations that survive in times of turbulence and manage to adapt and anticipate change have in common that they are led by "great leaders".

According to Daniel Goleman, in his article "*What makes a Leader?*" published by the Harvard Business Review⁴, what distinguishes great leaders is not their IQ, their knowledge, or their technical skills. Even very often, very intelligent and highly skilled people fail when they are promoted to a leadership position.

Goleman states that great leaders are distinguished by the high development of their Emotional Intelligence. Without emotional intelligence, a person can have the best IQ, outstanding technical qualities and skills, and yet can hardly be a good leader.

Emotional intelligence, according to Goleman, is a set of skills, attitudes, skills, and competencies that influence an individual's behavior, reactions, mental states, and how he relates to others.

These key skills are self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills. Let's briefly describe each of these.

- **Self-awareness:** knowing one's strengths, weaknesses, drives, values, and impact on others.
- **Self-Regulation:** controlling or redirecting disruptive impulses and moods.
- **Motivation:** relishing achievement for its own sake.
- **Empathy:** understanding other people's emotional makeup.
- **Social Skills:** building rapport with others to move them in desired directions.⁵

Conversely, people who lack emotional intelligence show characteristics that distract them from other people, hinder their interactions and obstruct success, according to the publication of Marissa Levin⁶.

These characteristics are: lack of sensitivity, arrogance, volatility, rigidity and selfishness.

- **Insensitivity:** People who are insensitive are often perceived to be uncaring.

³ Source: <https://hbr.org/2016/10/organizations-cant-change-if-leaders-cant-change-with-them>, article authored by Ron Carucci, published in Harvard Business Review, Oct 2016

⁴ Source: "What makes a Leader?" by Daniel Goleman, published in the book "HBR's 10 Must Reads on Leadership", Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation, 2011.

⁵ Source: "What makes a Leader?" by Daniel Goleman, published in the book "HBR's 10 Must Reads on Leadership", Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation, 2011.

⁶ Source: Marissa Levin, <http://successfulculture.com/emotional-intelligence-increases-success-6-easy-strategies-increase-eq/>

Others are less likely to want to work with them or offer help.

- **Arrogance:** A mentor once defined arrogance as “unearned confidence.” Arrogant people project superiority and egotism. They are often closed off to feedback from others, and believe that their way of thinking is the only possibility. They do not make good team players.
- **Volatility:** Volatile people are disruptive, unpredictable, and not attuned to the emotional states and concerns of others. Their presence impedes and harms progress because their emotional state can distract and destroy the advancement of key relationships or initiatives.
- **Rigidity:** Inflexible thinking significantly impedes an individual’s ability to connect with others at a deeper level and establish trust because they are shut down to different perspectives. A relationship can’t develop when one person refuses to grow or accept new ways of thinking.
- **Selfishness:** The best leaders always subjugate their own personal agendas for the greater good of the organization or the team. When we are driven by our own selfish motives, others are unable to trust us because they know we do not have their best interests in mind.

Going back to the article "What makes a leader?", Daniel Goleman mentions that when a company's leaders have a high level of emotional intelligence, their division has on average a performance of 20% above goals, since they obtain the best results of their collaborators.

These leaders also know that emotions are contagious and, therefore, their own mood play a fundamental role in the mood of their collaborators. Their own levels of emotional intelligence allow them to create and nurture these interpersonal relationships.

"If the leader emanates energy and enthusiasm, the team and organization will thrive. Instead, if the leader spreads negativity and dissonance, they die slowly", Daniel Goleman says.

On the other hand, it is interesting to add that Dr. Richard Boyatzis, co-author of the books "*Primal Leadership*" and "*Resonant Leadership*"⁷ says that "*Studies conducted over 60 years proved that people are not convinced by rational arguments, but by emotional arguments.*"

The books cited above state that great leaders establish a deep emotional connection with others that the authors call resonance. Their own levels of emotional intelligence allow them to create and nurture these resonant relationships.

⁷ Source: "Primal Leadership" by Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis & Annie McKee and "Resonant Leadership" de Richard Boyatzis & Annie McKee.

“Resonant leaders are people who are able to arouse in their followers’ enthusiasm and motivation, guiding the emotions of each one and mobilizing them towards change” says Richard Boyatzis.

These leaders today are called the new CEOs, where CEO changes his meaning from Chief Executive Officer, to the one of **Chief Emotional Officer**. These leaders have the primary responsibility to know what their collaborators are feeling.

These leaders, who must lead major transformations, generate an organizational culture where people are valued, considered and empowered and thus able to accompany them in the challenge.

Resonant leaders, or Chief Emotional Officers, inspire change through emotions - not through fear.

To conclude, I will cite this phrase from Richard Boyatzis:

“Outstanding leaders know that the music of leadership is the emotions!”

About the Author



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Cecilia Boggi, PMP is founder and Executive Director of activePMO, giving consulting services and training in Project Management and Leadership skills in Argentina and Latin America.

After graduating with a degree in Computer Science Engineering from Universidad de Buenos Aires, Argentina, she has managed software development projects and PMO implementation projects for more than 20 years both in the government and private sector. Cecilia has an Executive Master in Business Administration from Universidad Francisco de Vitoria, Spain and also has graduated from an Executive Program in Business Management at Universidad del CEMA. She holds the Project Management Professional (PMP®) credential since 2003, is certified as SDI Facilitator from Personal Strengths®, is a Professional Executive Coach accredited by Association for Coaching, UK, and alumni of the PMI Leadership Institute Master Class 2012. Ms. Boggi is Past President of the PMI Buenos Aires Argentina Chapter, and is a founding member of the PMI Nuevo Cuyo Chapter and PMI Santa Cruz Bolivia Chapter. She has been designated by PMI in the role of Mentor of Region 13, Latin America South, for the years 2014-2016. Cecilia has participated in the development of PMBOK® Guide 5th Edition, leading the Chapter 9, Human Resource Management, content team and she is professor of Project Management and Leadership in some Universities and Institutes in Latin America.

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