



CHANGE CAN BE CHILD'S PLAY



THE RIGHT
MINDSET
FOR LEADERS
IN A
**WINNING
TEAM**

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INTRODUCTION

'YOU HAVE TO DRINK LESS COFFEE', my doctor told me. I cursed him thoroughly. Coffee was a lifesaver. Each morning the first coffee of the day was steaming on the table in front of me, almost before I had opened my eyes. And I drank at least another two cups before I could think about setting off for work. And when I arrived at the office, what was my first destination? You've guessed it: the coffee machine. Now, according to the doctor, I should drink no more than two cups a day, with perhaps a shot of decaf in the evening! 'Impossible', I thought, even though I knew that coffee was the cause of my months of stomach pain and sleepless nights. No one – not even me, apparently – likes change. No matter how liberal our ideas, or how much we like a challenge, or how proud we are to see ourselves as cosmopolitan citizens of the world, we all still like something comforting to hold on to. No matter how small that something might be. From an automatic routine for breakfast – with one hand pouring your coffee (yes, I know, I'm at it again!), while the other hand slots a piece of bread into the toaster – to a fixed ritual before going to bed each night – with one hand cleaning your teeth, while the other hand fits your ear plugs to save you from your partner's relentless snoring. Or a thousand and one other things.

It is the same in our professional life: we like the comfort of the familiar. It is not without good reason that we speak about the 'security' of 'permanent employment'. When we apply for a job, we look for 'stable' companies, which have been operating for as long as we can remember and – to the outside world, at least – hardly seem to have changed during all those years. This is certainly the case in Belgium, where working for the government is still one of the most popular career choices. What could be safer than that? Every change on the work floor, in whatever organisation, inevitably encounters

resistance. Even if we are not happy in our work, many of us prefer to stay stuck in our 'reliable' rut than to risk trying something new. In 2015, the average level of job satisfaction in Europe was 7.1 out of 10. That might sound a high score, but it isn't. Because it is an average, it means that there are an awful lot of people in Europe who, for whatever reason, are certainly unhappy with their daily occupation. Understandably, this has an influence on their personal happiness and functioning, but it is also, self-evidently, not a good thing for their employers. Nevertheless, the vast majority are content to 'grin and bear it' and very few go in search of new professional opportunities. At the same time, most organisations show the same lack of enthusiasm when it comes to taking measures to improve job satisfaction, effectiveness and efficiency. Because that would require change. And change always hurts.

Even so, change is a necessity. And change is unavoidable. *Panta rhei*, as the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus once said. Everything flows. The only constant is change. And if that is true for metaphysics, it is also true at the more prosaic level of organisations. Some changes take place automatically, almost without being noticed. Others are more intrusive and some are so far-reaching that we speak of a transformation.

Change management steers these processes of change and transformation. Not in an improvised manner, but based on insights that are supported by huge experience and tons of literature. In fact, change management is one of the most widely researched and written-about practices in the organisational domain. So why add yet another book to this already impressive corpus? My answer is simple: because most of these books concentrate on just one vision or school of thought relating to change management, whereas in reality there are many different visions and schools. I do not wish to put all my eggs in one basket, as it were. I prefer to investigate what actually connects all these visions, rather than what separates them. I then test these common factors against what practice has to tell us.

But there is another important reason why I wanted to write this book: change is really not as difficult as it is sometimes portrayed and as we often seem to think. Primarily, change is a question of finding the right mindset, of knowing why you want to change something, how you want to do it, and what exactly

you will need to make this possible. The more clearly you can answer these questions, the sooner you will realise that change is really child's play. That is why in the following 180 or so pages I will approach change as though it were a kind of game, just like the family games we all play at home. Sometimes it seems like *The Game of Life*, in which you need to make smart choices at strategic moments to stay on the right path. On other occasions it is more like *Ludo*, where all four pieces are moving forward towards the same destination at the same time. Board games of this kind all have rules that, in theory, need to be followed strictly. But when we land on a 'Free Parking' square during a game of *Monopoly*, many of us are still inclined to pocket the 'fines' money that has accumulated in the centre of the board, even though this is not what the rules say! As far as I am concerned, you can apply this same flexible approach when reading my book. If you want to work your way from cover to cover, no problem! But if you want to cherry pick, or start in the middle and come back to the first half later (or not at all), that's no problem either! Hardly surprising, then, that for the cover of the book we chose an illustration of the world's bestselling board game!

To make things easier, the book has been compiled in the form of a figure of eight, which allows you to jump in at any point. At the same time, a figure of eight also has a pleasing symbolism: it is an endless loop, just like change itself. Every change starts with the question of why you want to change something. Only then can you decide how you want to change things and what you will need to make this possible. Initially, this might seem like walking along a straight road, but in reality it will take you on a twisty-turny course that ultimately brings you back – sometimes after a real rollercoaster of a ride – to the point where you first started: the 'why'. To make sure that you don't get lost along the way, at the beginning of each chapter you will find a map of the figure of eight loop, with an arrow indicating your current position. A bit like on the street maps that you can find in most towns and cities. And just as in *Monopoly* you follow the streets in the direction indicated by the arrow in the 'Start' square, so you do the same with the arrow in our loop. Each part of the loop – in other words, each chapter – starts with a list of questions that will help you to find your way through the change trajectory. There is one question in particular that applies to all change in all organisations: what kind of

leader do you want to be? Because change and leadership go hand in hand. A process that does not match your skills as a leader is doomed to failure. Perhaps you are not the right person to lead change in your organisation? Maybe not, but this is not an insurmountable problem – as long as you realise it in good time.

Because playing a game on your own is not much fun (and in the case of *Monopoly* is impossible), I have called on the help of a number of experts to accompany you. You will be able to benefit from their practical knowledge and experience throughout my story. Anyone who has ever played *Dungeons & Dragons* will know that it is dangerous to stay in the dark forests where the trolls live. If you ever find yourself there, you need a good dose of magic to survive. Hopefully, this book will not lead you into a dark forest, but it never does any harm to have a little bit of magic at your disposal. For this reason, the text contains a number of magic cards, which refer you to books that have inspired me over the years. Some of these books come from the world of change management; other come from completely different worlds, but offer alternative points of view on a range of subjects that can be hugely useful during change trajectories.

And how did things work out with my coffee drinking? As soon as I convinced myself that it was all a question of mindset – after all, I am a change manager! – I quickly discovered that this change was also child's play. My doctor is delighted – and I now sleep like a baby!

Why me and not someone else?

That's all well and good, I can hear my critical readers thinking, but who the hell is Yves Van Durme to try and thrust his vision on change management down my throat? Who am I? That is a good question – and one that is as difficult to answer as eliminating all those men with glasses, moustaches and beards in a game of *Who Is it?*, so that you can finally find the person you are looking for. Who I am is the result of various change processes I have undergone since the earliest days of my youth. Who we are, what we do and how

we think are never static. We are all constantly in change, from cradle to the grave. My particular cradle was in the midst of a family from the Belgian city of Ghent, although it was to be a number of years before I saw much of my 'home town'. When I was just 18 days old, we moved to Mali, where we stayed until I was in nursery school. This was followed by a spell in Burundi, where I followed the first and second years of primary education in Dutch at the Belgian school in Bujumbura, before we moved on again, this time to Yaoundé, the capital city of Cameroon, where my schooling continued in French. This is a lot of adjustment for a child to take on board, but at the time it seemed like the most normal thing in the world. If you grow up in these kinds of circumstances, change becomes part of your daily life. This was something that stood me in good stead later in my professional career. In addition, during our time in Cameroon, we had to live through a failed coup d'état, another experience that stays with you for the rest of your days.

After Yaoundé, our next port of call was a miserable town in the north of Cameroon, where they spoke English. For me, it was strange how the towns in that part of the country were laid out on a strict grid pattern, like the streets in New York, whereas the cities where the French influence was strongest developed in a more random, more organic manner, comparable with the medieval street plans in Western Europe. The same difference was also noticeable in the culture of the local inhabitants. At first glance, they all seemed alike, but when you live amongst them and look more closely, the nuances that distinguish them become more apparent. These differences were more pronounced when it came to their attitude towards foreigners. They showed much more resentment towards Belgians than towards the French, and this because of associations with the colonial past. The French saw their colonialism much more as an emancipatory enterprise than the Belgians. Mixed marriages were allowed and the schools were also mixed. In Belgian colonies, there was greater segregation and relationships between the colonists and the indigenous population were officially forbidden. By seeing these differences as a young child, I learnt early in life to search for the things that connect people, rather than separate them.

From an academic perspective, this was not the most interesting or profitable period of my education. When we lived in northern Cameroon, the

French school in Yaoundé sent me weekly lessons by post that I was able to complete in two or three days, after which I had a very long weekend! But at least I learnt how to speak decent French. From Cameroon, we later relocated to what was then Zaire and is now the Democratic Republic of Congo. In Lubumbashi, I once again found myself in a Belgian college, but still speaking French. I also felt the same colonial resentment against the Belgians that we had experienced before.

” You can push people to give the best of themselves, but you should never push them over their limits. That is something that I no longer do with myself.

By now, I was a teenager and my parents thought that it was time to give me a more solid grounding. Consequently, just after my fourteenth birthday, we returned to Belgium, where I soon found myself attending the third year of secondary education at what is now the ivg school in Ghent, where my lessons were once again in Dutch. There was obviously a certain logic in my parents' thinking, but their hopes for me were not wholly fulfilled. All that travelling as a child meant that I could adjust and had no real attachment to any one place, but it also meant that there was nowhere I really felt 'at home' – not even in my native country. I didn't really belong, in part because I was not familiar with (or felt comfortable with) local habits and customs. If I wear a shirt today, it is because I learnt to do so during that period. In Africa, we wore as few clothes as possible and certainly not shirts with the 'right' label. To compensate for this 'out-of-place' feeling, I threw myself into playing sport. I trained 19 hours a week in my efforts to become an even better squash player. Even when I wasn't on court, I spent time analysing my performance right down to the smallest details, searching for that extra one percent that could make all the difference to my game. Why? I had a compulsive desire to prove myself. It was at least one aspect of my life over which I had control.

Because I quickly achieved a higher level, I was asked if I wanted to give squash lessons. It was an interesting offer for a seventeen-year-old in need of some extra cash, but it turned out that I was an awful teacher. With my younger pupils, I had no authority. With my older pupils, I simply gave them bits of my own training, on the assumption that what worked for me would work for them. I soon discovered, however, that ‘the harder, the better’ was not what everyone needed. Fortunately, there were a few sensible thirty-somethings who said: ‘Yves, have you ever asked yourself what we expect to get out of your training?’ At first, I didn’t understand the question, because in my opinion what I was doing was right. They soon made clear that it was not always my opinion – or my choices – that counted. If I wasn’t careful, club members would start to spend their free time differently – and I would lose my nice little earner!

This moment was a turning point for me. The signal that I should learn more about how to give lessons and how people interact with each other was a real eye-opener. I realised for the first time that inter-human relations always need to come first, whatever the context. It was my first (unconscious) experience of change management. Because training, and giving lessons in training, are learning processes that involve constant change. It is not simply a question of constantly trying to perform better, but also of taking account of the ever-variable human factor.

Thanks to sport, I was able to learn about myself through and through. I learnt how to get the best out of myself, but also learnt how to recognise my limits. Because you inevitably make mistakes, and these soon take you over those limits. There were times when this was emotionally challenging, but it was precisely because I went through those difficult moments that in my professional life I now take account of the emotional strain that people are able to bear. You can push people to give the best of themselves, but you should never push them over their limits. That is something that I no longer do with myself. I know myself well and I know what I can do and, most importantly, what I can’t do.

After scarcely a year back in Europe, my father was posted to a new job in Tunisia. It was decided that it was better for his wife and children not to accompany him. This meant that I only saw my father five times a year and for the next four years we had to spend our summers in Tunisia, where it was blisteringly hot. It was there that I learnt to watch the Tour de France on television, simply to pass the time. Yet during that same period I also learnt during the cold winter months how to keep a family together. My father wasn't there and my mother was drifting further and further into alcoholism. As the oldest of the three children, it was up to me to take the lead and assume responsibility, whilst also trying to help our mother to free herself from her addiction. This taught me a huge amount about human behaviour. You can cry, beg, threaten and even blackmail an addict, but as long as he or she does not want to 'kick the habit', you will have little or no impact. It was a lesson learnt through bitter personal experience.

This knowledge is something that I still take with me today in all the change trajectories with which I am involved. If people do not want to participate in change, you can move heaven and earth but nothing will persuade them to the contrary. My basic question is always this: what do you really want to achieve, how badly do you want it and how much are you prepared to sacrifice to get it? If company leaders say 'I want to make things better for our organisation', that is a fine and noble objective. But if I then ask them what price they are willing to pay, are they willing to change themselves and will they let go of people who cannot accept the new philosophy, the conversation suddenly becomes more difficult.

After secondary school, I felt that my parents should sponsor me to travel and see the world. Because they couldn't (or wouldn't) agree on the financial aspect, I ended up going to university instead to study medicine. Why? Because I wanted to found a clinic where parents could order their 'ideal' baby (at the time, I was a great fan of science fiction). Not perhaps the best motive in the world for studying medicine and, not surprisingly, I soon lost interest. The course was too long, too boring and I knew that I lacked the necessary self-discipline. My parents still insisted that I should get a diploma of some

kind and so I went to study commercial engineering, before later moving on again, this time to the EHSAL management school, where I was given a top-sport status, since I had now trained several junior squash players who had won titles in Belgium and the Netherlands.

Because none of the players I was coaching preferred to put sport ahead of their studies, at the end of the 1990s I decided to move to Malaysia or the United States to become a full-time professional coach. I eventually signed a contract in New York to give lessons to the children of rich parents. American elite schools not only demand academic brilliance, but also sporting excellence. My coaching was designed to ensure the second part of this equation. Soon after, however, I saw an advertisement by De Witte & Morel: the recruitment company were looking for someone who could identify the strengths and weaknesses of candidates in a single day. I wasn't optimistic about my chances but decided to apply anyway. I had a fun day doing the tests and interviews, but thought that would be the end of it. The feedback, when it came, was surprisingly accurate. Even more surprising was the fact that I got the job.

As a qualified commercial engineer, at De Witte & Morel I found myself half-way up the pecking order, somewhere between the clinical psychologists, who were the top of the hierarchical ladder, and the industrial psychologists, who were very much at the bottom. For the next eleven years, I was once again very much the odd man out. I learnt how to identify high potentials: ill-mannered individuals who develop at lightning speed, going from one promotion to the next, usually with an unpleasant degree of arrogance. Unfortunately, they increasingly reminded me of myself... I was just 31 years old and already in the senior management committee. It made me cocky and I regularly clashed with the managing director, Ivan De Witte. One of our confrontations was so fierce that it was impossible to repair the breach between us. I can't remember who was right, but De Witte was the boss and therefore I had to go – but not until eleven months later, because I was locked in financially. For the future, this taught me to make sure to always maintain a sense of independence. If things aren't working out, we part company. That is the independence that I have today at Deloitte's.

At De Witte & Morel, I was concerned primarily with individuals. How can you coach individuals and map out their strengths and weaknesses? We were also interested in HR policy. But for me, it was all too theoretical. All the major consultancy players design structures for people who don't really exist. I wanted to take the organisation and its existing teams as the starting point, to create structures and recipes for change processes. At Deloitte, I now work far more with strategy and organisation, with individuals and how they function in a team. This is a completely different angle of approach.

Even so, in recent years I felt that I wanted and needed something more. To me, the dominant insights in the field of change management feel out-of-date. That is why I have studied the newest theories in great depth and also learnt much from other domains. As a result, I have elaborated a new global vision on change that is not a passe-partout, but is highly dependent on the specific organisation, the wider context and, above all, the people who are responsible for the change. This vision does not always comply with current thinking at Deloitte, but they have allowed me the freedom to further develop my ideas, but with a caveat: show us what you mean and set it down on paper. That is what I have done with this book.

Nelson Mandela

15 LESSONS ABOUT LIFE, LOVE AND LEADERSHIP

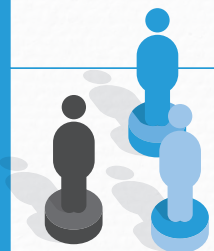


It is not always businessmen and women who inspire people the most. Perhaps it has something to do with my youth in Africa, but if I am looking for inspiration I often look no further than Nelson Mandela. After years of imprisonment under the apartheid regime, he attempted to seek the peace and reconciliation that would set South Africa on the path towards a better future. He was a natural leader and a charismatic president. Richard Stengel has written down the most important life lessons of Nelson Mandela in this book. A book that I like to open whenever I am not sure which way to go.

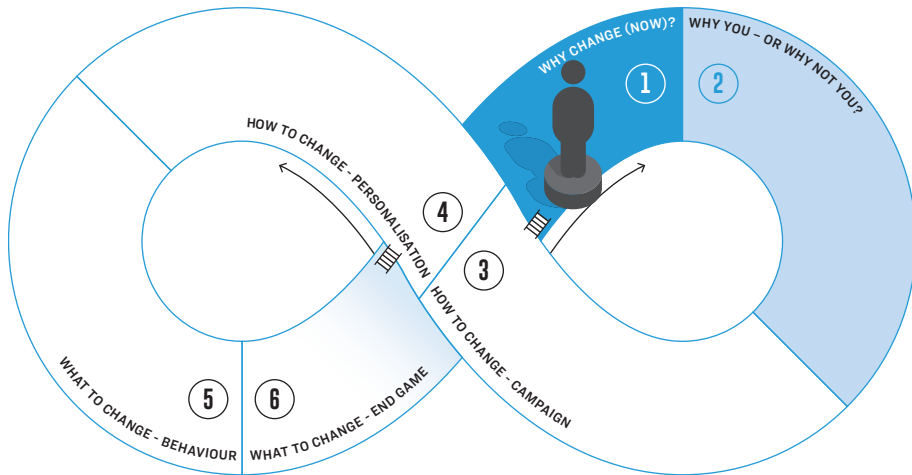
Richard Stengel, Kosmos, 2010

1

WHY



WHY CHANGE (NOW)?



- Can you explain to your mother(-in-law) why you want to change?
- What would you lose and what would you gain with this change?
- What parts of the system will you need to activate to achieve this change?
- Who, at this moment in time, is waiting for change and who is asking for it?
- Are the success criteria for the change clear or measurable?

THE BOX IS OPEN, the *Monopoly* board is spread out on the table and the pieces have been handed out. We can start the game. But why exactly do we play games? Perhaps to kill time? Maybe. A game of patience is useful for that and is marginally less boring than watching paint dry. Usually, however, we play games to entertain ourselves and to seek contact with others. Unfortunately, we often forget this question about why we actually do something. That is a pity, because the 'why' question is an important question, a point

that Simon Sinek has underlined in a brilliant manner. Sinek's Golden Circle is a simple leadership model consisting of three circles. These three circles each contain a single word: 'what', 'how' and 'why'. The core of Sinek's creed is: 'start with why'. Why? Because the 'why' lays bare the basic motivation of human action and forms the yardstick for everything that follows. Even so, Sinek argues that while all leaders know what they are doing and some of them know how they are doing it, remarkably few of them know why they are doing it. And in change management it is no different. Everything needs to start with the question of why you want to change. In broad terms, this can usually be explained with reference to external and internal factors.

” Everything starts with the question of why you want to change. In broad terms, this can usually be explained with reference to internal and external factors.

If a set of regulations changes, there is not much room for thought. You can have an opinion about the change, but in essence you have to accept that you have a certain amount of time to comply. That is a purely external reason for change. Of course, you can always use an external reason as an excuse for concealing other reasons. You will often hear it said, for example, that a competitor or a customer has 'forced' a company to do something in a particular way. While a competitor or a customer might be in a position to threaten, they are seldom able to force a company to do anything it does not want to do – although it can sometimes be convenient to use this as a justification to hide the real reason for the change. But if you want to offer a customer a completely new method of service provision, you are dealing with a very different form of 'why'. In this case, there is room for thinking about how you want to do this and what is necessary to make it possible.

When you are dealing with the 'why', there are two forces at work. The first is the 'must' factor. Every organisation has a certain hierarchy or power structure that can be used to push through a particular 'why'. This structure

– whether it is weak or strong – gives some people the possibility to say: ‘If you don’t do this, you will have to suffer the consequences’. In addition, there is also a ‘why’ that serves as a more positive force, a force that says: ‘We need to change in order to make a difference, to do something we can be proud of, to achieve success, to grow together...’

For me, it is difficult not to pass judgement on the nature of the ‘why’. Consider, for example, a company in the food sector. You might want to do your utmost to make the world a better place, but if you don’t have the necessary food safety certificates you won’t be able to produce or do anything. Because you are not in compliance with the relevant regulations. This is a kind of negative ‘why’ for initiating change. Why is the production process subject to norms and rules? Because that is what the law says: it must be so. And if it is not so, there is no production process. In this case, the ‘why’ has nothing to do with self-realisation: that is only the case with positive ‘whys’. There is also a difference between small ‘whys’ and big ‘whys’. A big ‘why’ relates back to the fundamental reason for the organisation’s existence. This can often be easy to determine, but does not always offer certainty. If Greenpeace asks itself the ‘why’ question, it is easy for them to find the answer. Their message about how they want to contribute to a better world is abundantly clear. For a bank, however, the situation is less clear-cut. What is a bank? It is an intermediary for the provision of financial services. You can build an attractive story around this *raison d’être*, explaining how the bank is there to allow people to realise their dreams in life, and this actually sounds quite good. But it fails to get to the heart of the matter, because it does not say that the bank wants to do this in a manner that will allow it a certain (and significant) margin of profit. In other words, the nature of an organisation’s activities sets a filter on the types of ‘why’ that it can propose.

To find the big ‘why’, I always like to look at the organisation’s complete system, a bit like an anthropologist looks at entire societies. Or the way in which a chess grandmaster has a complete overview of the game and does not just focus on important pieces like the king and queen. If an organisation has lots of managers, both senior and junior, that is generally because the organisation wants it that way. This is often the result of a cost-saving reasoning on the part of the CEO. Each manager is encouraged to save more than the manager