

CREATING EXTRAORDINARY ORGANIZATIONS

Volume 3, Letter 3
March 11, 2005

FINDING BELIEFS

I write this letter for those pioneers who want to move beyond the ordinary to the Extraordinary in creating business organizations.

*Welcome to Letter 3-3 of Creating Extraordinary Organizations. In the last letter, I talked about how essential creating Extraordinary Organizations is to creating a **world** not just an organization that works for all. However, to have either we have to be able to create these organizations.*

In this letter, I am going to start looking at the issues one must address and solve in order to do this. The Freedom model derives from a different set of beliefs or paradigm than the Command and Control model. Therefore, the first issue is changing the beliefs through which we see the world.

I want to make a special request for this series of eletters. I know many of the issues we face in creating the new organizational model. However, I do not know all of them. I also do not know specific issues that are important to specific situations. Therefore, I ask you to communicate with me any questions that come up for you. Also, let me know any problems you see that would make this shift difficult in general or for your specific situation. If you do this, I can address them in future letters. This will give us a considerably richer and more useful journey on this leg of our trip to Extraordinary. Thank you!

Why are beliefs so important?

Your beliefs become your thoughts.
Your thoughts become your words.
Your words become your actions.
Your actions become your habits.
Your habits become your values.
Your values become your destiny.

— Mahatma Gandhi

As you can see from this quote, beliefs are the starting point for everything we think or do. Our behavior derives from, a belief. We either do or do not do something based on our beliefs. If I believe man cannot fly, I will not. If I believe it is possible, I may at least try. If I think the world is flat, I will not sail too far for fear of dropping off the edge.

Many times our beliefs are wrong. Those who would not try to fly based their decision on an incorrect set of beliefs. In his *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* Kuhn showed that down through history scientific breakthroughs came when someone questioned the current beliefs and replaced them with others. He called these sets of beliefs *paradigms*.

Progress came only when there was a *paradigm* shift. Astronomy moved forward when Copernicus moved from the earth to the sun. Flying came into being when the Wright brothers moved from impossible to possible.

Kuhn said a paradigm shift has three stages: 1) Someone questions the current paradigm; 2) That person proposes a new paradigm; 3) People learn how to use the new paradigm.

This is true for the design of work organizations. The set of beliefs generally called Command and Control has been in place since the Industrial Revolution. Although there have been many attempts to make major changes in it—MBO, TQM, Quality Circles, etc. — all have failed. This is because they all started from the same basic set of C&C beliefs. No change in the basic paradigm foredoomed them to failure.

Beliefs are important because changing them is a necessary condition for changing paradigms thus making progress possible. In the case of organization design, I believe the C&C paradigm was never valid as a view of human behavior. However, like many other invalid paradigms it has worked for various reasons for many, many years. The five core beliefs I have put forth in prior eletters is my definition of a new paradigm, which I call the Freedom paradigm, to replace the C&C paradigm.

Finding your beliefs

A necessary condition for changing your beliefs is knowing what they are. You cannot change what you do not know. Nor can you compare a set of beliefs you do not know with a proposed new set. Unfortunately, most of us never question our beliefs usually because we are not aware of them. This is unfortunate because it means we cannot change our behavior even if we want to. Once we know what our beliefs are, we have the possibility for changing them. If we do, we have the possibility for changing behavior.

One of the best ways to find your beliefs is of repetitive questioning. You can start with a belief you know you hold. “I believe the purpose of business is to make a profit.” Alternatively, you can start with something you do and look for the belief that leads to it. “Why do I carry out orders with which I do not agree?”

The simplest way to question is asking *why* or *why do I/you believe that* repeatedly. Ricardo Semler says in his book *The Seven Day Weekend* that you have to do this at least four times. “I believe organizations must be hierarchical.” **Why?** Because there would be chaos without a chain of command. **Why?** Because people are unable to understand what the need to do without direction. **Why do you believe that?** And so on.

If you keep this up you will arrive at a belief that you realize does not make sense to you. Now you ask yourself if you really believe that. Generally, you will find you do not. In fact, it may now even look ridiculous to you. When you do this, you will usually see, or can find an alternate belief on which you can build.

There is another way to start a belief exploration. You can use this when confronted with a belief contradictory to your current one. Assume for the moment that the proposed belief is true. Then visualize what would happen if you acted using it instead of the old one. This picture might be so positive that you will accept the new belief right away.

However, this is not likely to work for organization beliefs. We have acted so long under the C&C paradigm that we cannot even assume the Freedom paradigm beliefs are true much less visualize what they might lead to. Unless you can accept the possibility of something, you cannot realize it. On the other hand, if you can visualize it you may see that it makes sense. In fact, you may realize then that it is a better definition of your reality, and you will switch to it.

Challenging your beliefs

By stating a new paradigm, I hope to unsettle you enough so you will start exploring what you really do believe about organizations. Each of the Freedom beliefs contradicts a C&C belief. I hope that you will explore each of these pairs to see which belief is the one you want to guide your actions.

Conclusion

This only scratches the surface of the issue of beliefs. I hope, though, that this has been enough to help you see why the first issue in creating a new organizational model is that of beliefs. You cannot even consider new ways unless you have new beliefs. You have to find and change your current beliefs by either discovering them or accepting some proposed by another. Finding and changing beliefs is seldom easy. However, it is essential.

Until next time

Finding your beliefs is only the first step in dealing with them. We have to change them to move forward. I will address changing them in my next letter.

Be Well, and
Be Extraordinary!

Don Yates
Extraordinary Organizations

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