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What It Takes To Change To The New Normal

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Introduction ▶



**I'm in favor
of progress;
it's change
I don't like.**

- Mark Twain

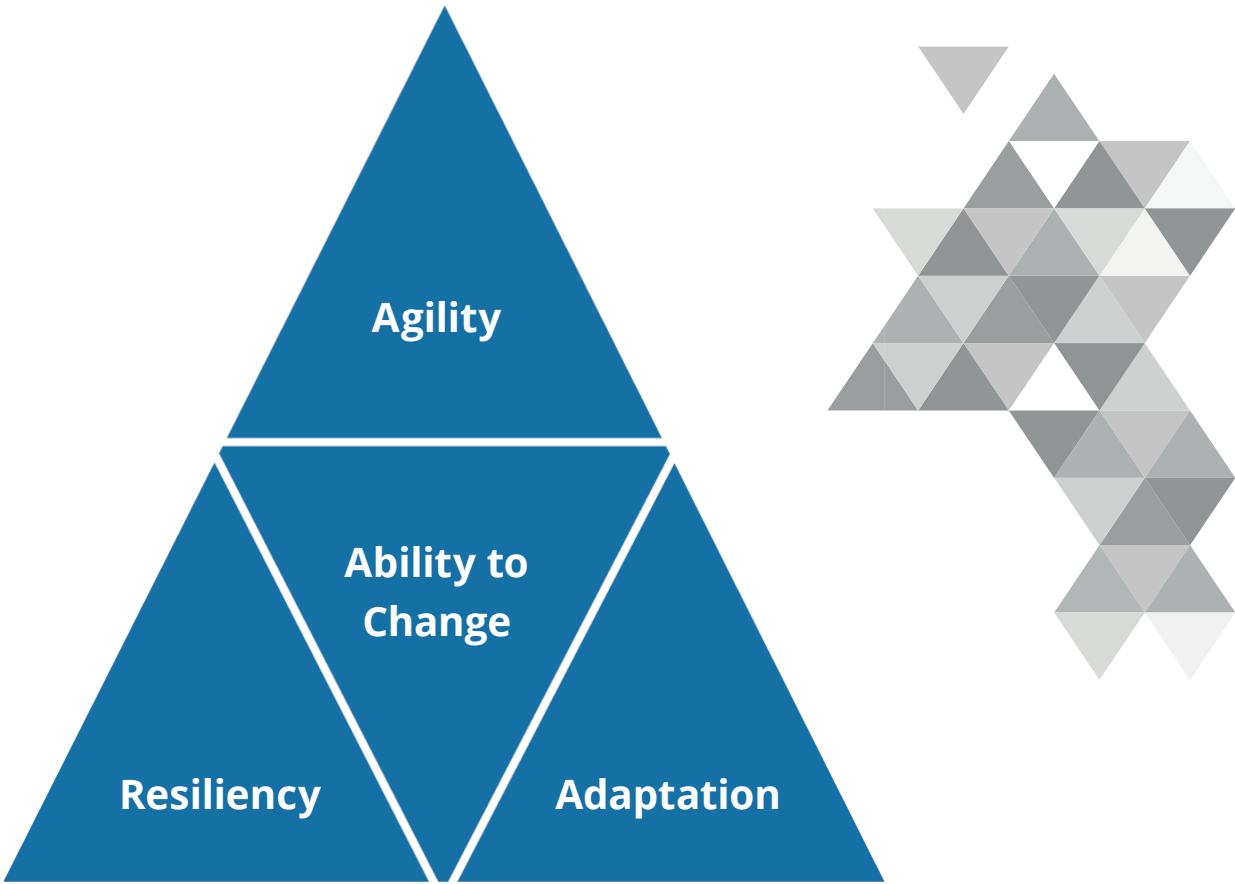
The “new normal” is what we are hearing more and more that we need to favor as we face the changes in our organizations and personal work-life balance post the COVID-19/Economy/Environment crises.

Truth is that all change is disorienting at best and downright objectionable at the least. Currently, I have been teaching my Columbia Business School EMBA Executive Leadership course in a “hyflex” mode which means about a third of the students are in the classroom and the remainder of the students are virtually in the room during the class sessions. Since I have been teaching online for over half dozen years, it wasn't the dual mode of delivery that bothered me, but I am still reserving judgment if this “new normal” is something I or my students really like. The verdict is still out and science will be more of a determinate than opinion, but change will continue.

At Columbia, we have a depth of research and scholarship on change. Warner Burke's work on Organizational Change: Theory and practice is in its 5th edition (2018) and his doctoral students continue to augment his work on Learning Agility with their dissertation studies. I have served on a couple of those students doctoral defense committees. In addition, Columbia University News (April 8, 2021) is highlighting the research on “a genetic basis for why most people are resilient to life's worst events” co-authored by: George Bonanno with his former post-doctoral student Katharina Schultebrucks, et al. The good news is their research indicates that “most people are resilient to life's worst events.”

What It Takes To Change ▶

Along with the good news on resiliency and Burke’s research findings on agility, I then offer an Integrated Leadership Model, The CEO’s Boss (2019), which calls for executives to adapt their leadership agenda, practice and style for each stage of the organization’s lifecycle. With this combination a visual depiction of our Ability to Change emerges.



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The logic of this Change model is that Resiliency, Agility and Adaptation are distinguishable, but not separable, in What It Takes to Change. Having an ability to “snap back” from adversity, being versatile in one’s thinking and doing, will then enable a person to adapt to a new normal. Easier said than done, but doable. Let’s explore each element of the model.



Equation for Successful Change ▶

A formula I have applied to Change in our teaching at Columbia Business School is that **DxVxP>C**. I attribute the origins of this work to Beer at Harvard and Burke at Columbia.

KEY

- D**= Dissatisfaction with current state
- V**= Clear vision for change
- P**= Process for getting it done
- C**= Cost of change



For a leaders of change, the insight is to know which one is missing for their followers to help them “snap back” and overcome their natural resistance to change. I would add that dealing with the C (Cost of Change) is equally important in the change journey. When I first began my full-time teaching at Columbia some 25 years ago, I presented a session at the Business School titled Leading Change: It’s more than Death and Dying. I was emphasizing that the DxVxP>C elements were all important, but the C (Cost of Change) was an essential element--where the death and dying comes in. In order for followers to be resilient, their tension needs to be managed. Again, Kubler- Ross (1969) is due the attribution for her first work in this area.

C –LEADERSHIP REMOVES INDIVIDUAL ANXIETY

Reaction to Change	Countering the Reaction to the Change
Denial	Provide contradictory evidence
Emotions	Allow venting and explain
Sadness	Provide time to disengage
Registration	Get on with it

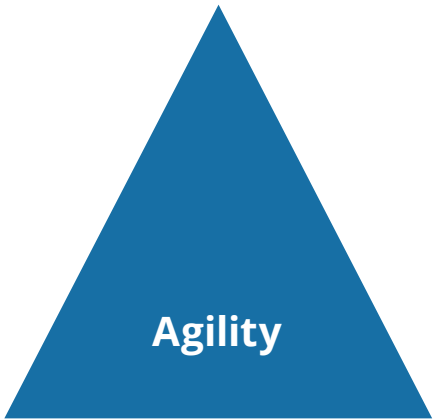
As was noted in the onset of this paper, it should be noted that George Bonanno, Professor of Clinical Psychology at Columbia University, in his book The Other Side of Sadness: What the New Science of Bereavement Tells Us About Life After a Loss (2009) summarizes peer-reviewed research based on thousands of subjects over two decades and concludes that a natural psychological resilience is a principal component of grief and that there are no stages of grief to pass.

However, it would be wise to revisit the work of Kubler-Ross if anxiety surfaces in those few followers that are exhibiting a lack of resiliency in the midst of change.

Equation for Successful Change *continued...*

We live and learn in a changing world. I'm reminded of the quote attributed to Ariel DeGaus of Shell Oil: The ability to learn faster than your competitors may be the only sustainable competitive advantage (1997). Our ability to learn is directly related to our learning agility. Burke's doctoral research team at Teachers College, Columbia University, has developed the Learning Agility Assessment Inventory (LAAI) to measure what we believe to be the five main facets of learning-agile behavior. Of these five facets, there are four that enable one's learning agility (Innovating, Performing, Reflecting, and Risking) and one that frustrates or impedes it (Defending).

- Innovating:** They are not afraid to challenge the status quo
- Performing:** They remain calm in the face of difficulty
- Reflecting:** They take time to reflect on their experiences



- Risking:** They purposefully put themselves in challenging situations
- Defending:** They are simply open to learning and resist the temptation to become defensive in the face of adversity (CCL April 2012)

Versatility requires a thinking and doing combination. In our Executive Education work with practicing executives we often assess their individual Learning Style as developed by Honey and Mumford (1982) based on the earlier work of Kolb. The learning styles are based on the learning cycle:



Equation for Successful Change *continued...*

Mumford in his Effective Learning (1995) publication defines further the individual learning styles.



The learning pyramid is then offered as a perspective on the levels of learning.



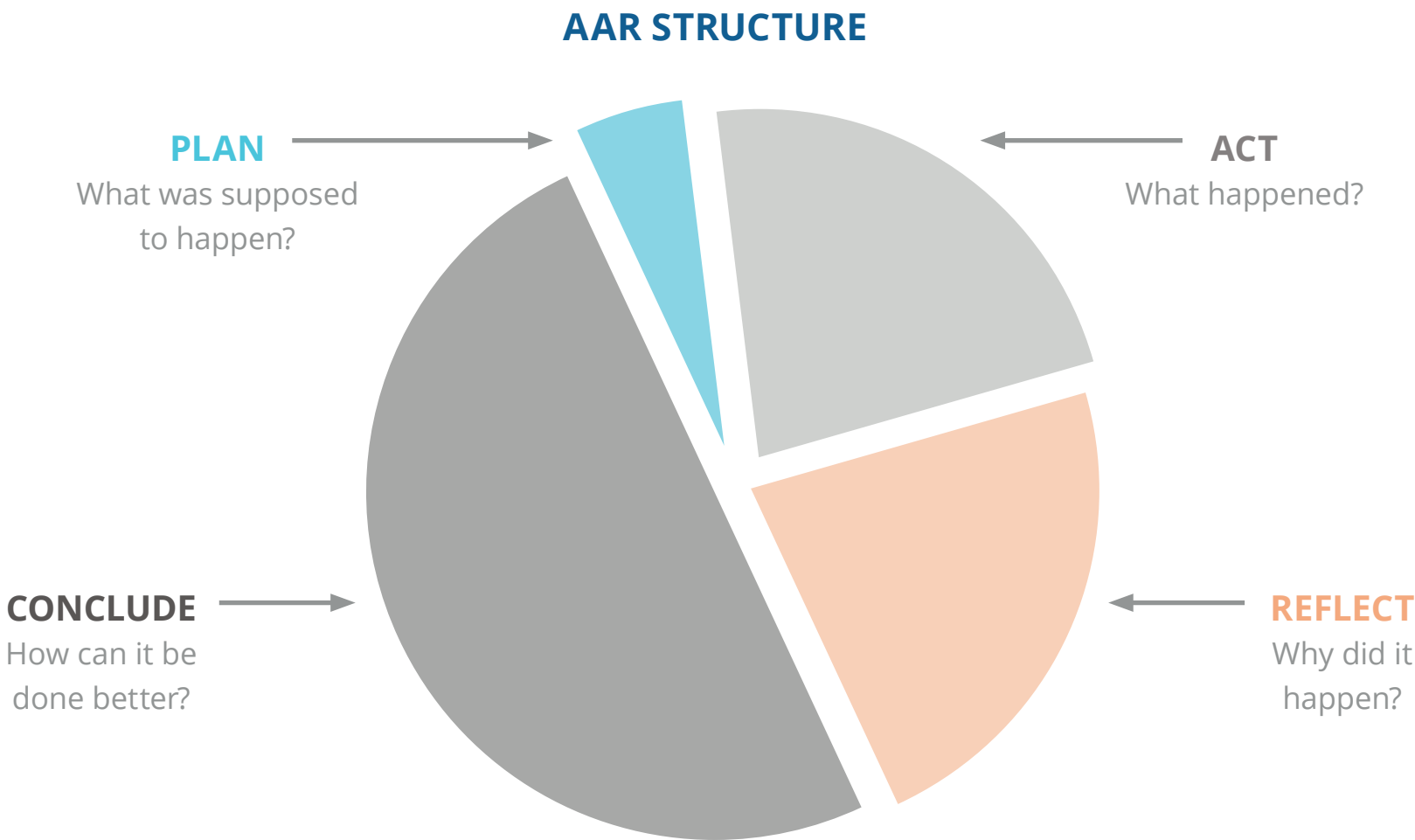
Equation for Successful Change *continued...*

In my teaching of Teams courses online, I then employ the After Action Review (AAR) process to optimize the learning at that level



...a structured process for reviewing and improving performance, a process which has become the basis for a learning culture and empowered leaders. Today the AAR process is widely regarded as a benchmark for effective team learning and is being implemented by many commercial and private organizations.

- Sullivan and Harper (1996)



The Learning Agility of Burke, et. al. and the individual learning styles of Honey and Mumford, when combined with the AAR process necessitates that a leader-of-change be versatile. In other words, applying the facets of learning-agile behavior is necessary to complete the learning cycle. However, this agility must be continuously applied throughout the change—learning is both cyclical and hierarchal.

Einstein said,



I have no special talent. I am only passionately curious."

Burke in a recent email exchange with me wrote,

We are not Einstein, but we can emulate one quality about him. Number 1 on his list of living his life was curiosity. He was curious about everything irrespective of simplicity or complexity. In other words, he was not just interested in his theory of relativity. One can develop curiosity, at least to some extent. And in your next lecture, mention Einstein. He was a role model for learning agility.

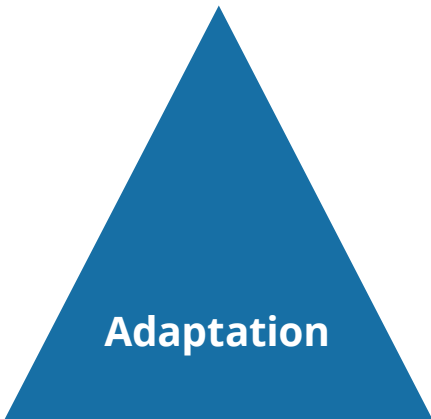


Since I am now on a soapbox, I would offer that Einstein was a role model for learning agility because he employed the learning cycle and Burke's facets of learning-agile behavior in all that he was passionately curious.

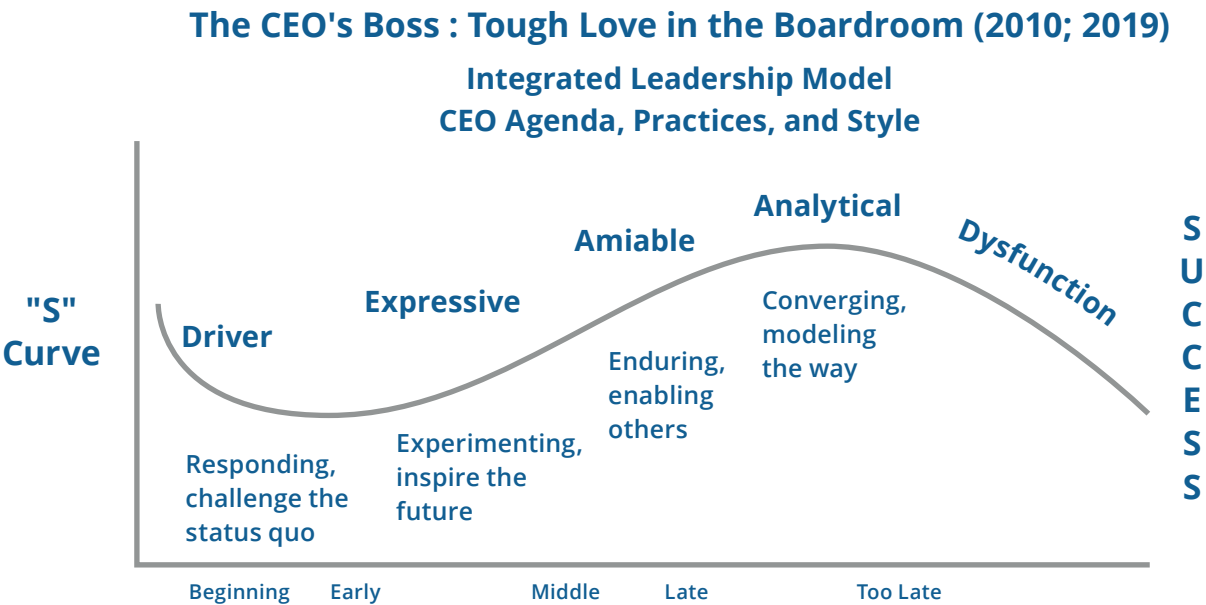


Equation for Successful Change *continued...*

We’ve all heard the ominous omen to “adapt or die.” Let’s not go there for now. Executive leaders have always had to face the realities of the changing business cycle and the need to adapt to the new realities. My Integrated Leadership Model that is featured in my book, *The CEO’s Boss*, 2nd edition (2019) offers a path to survive the change.



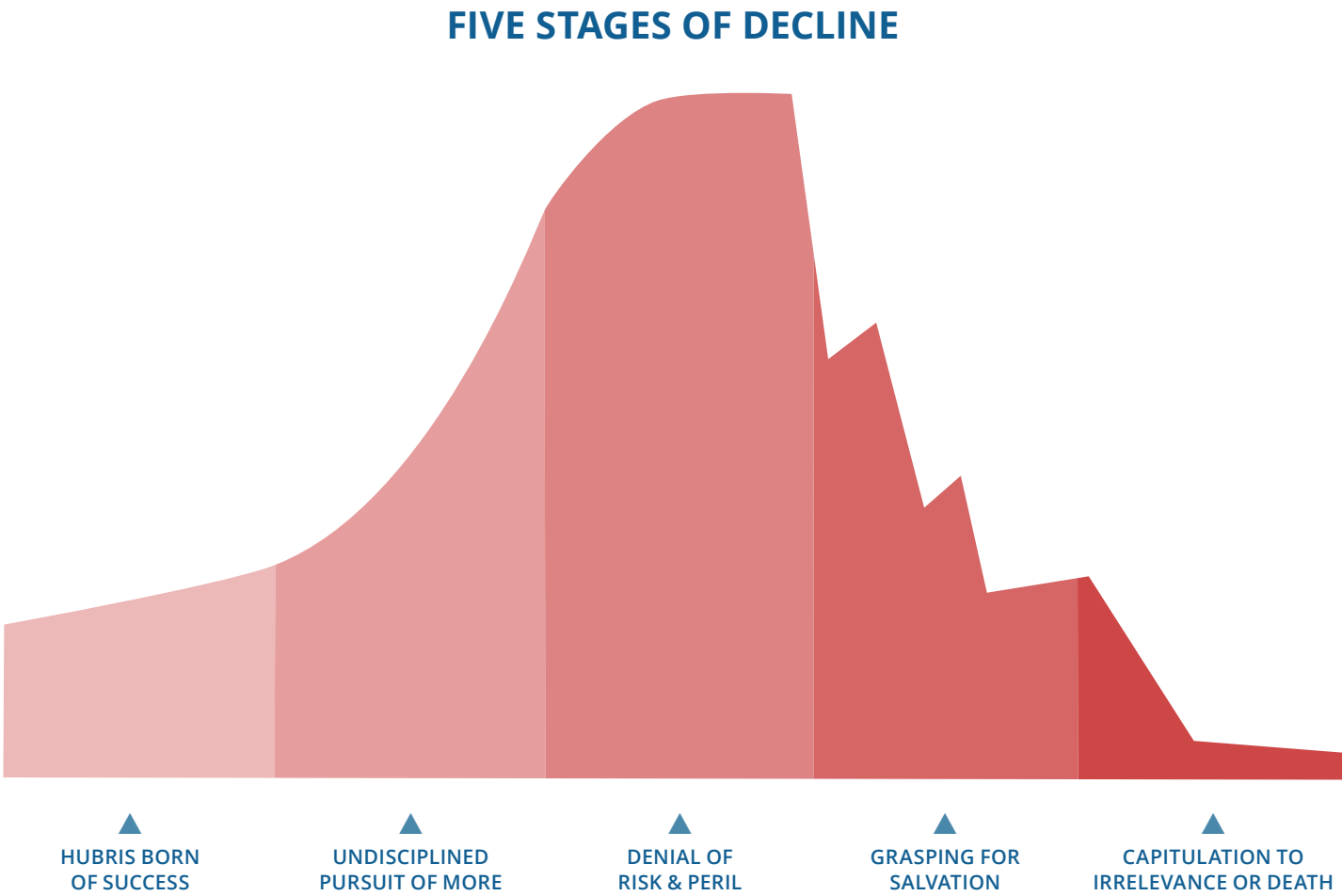
The model depicts the classic “S” Curve of a business cycle. Hambrick and Fukutomi (1991) were first to explore the sign curve in regards to the tenure of a CEO. In short, a CEO, or any executive leader, needs to adapt to the phase of the business with the appropriate agenda. Kouzes and Posner (1987) offer the leadership practices of effective executives which I have adapted to the business cycle in this model.



Finally, the original work of Merrill and Reed (1981) on behavior styles which TRACOM developed as a Social Styles model. I cobble their four Social Styles to four leadership strengths (Drivers/Change Leaders; Expressive/Visionary Leaders; Amiable/Team Leaders and Analyticals/Strategic Leaders). To be a little bit more specific, the Driver style is comfortable challenging the current status quo and embraces change when needed. The Expressive is more of a future state thinker, what are the possibilities or opportunities that can fulfill our vision. The Amiable is a people-person who builds meaningful relationship with others as a team leader. The Analytical is a fact-based thinker who does the hard situation analysis that is the starting point of a strategic thinker.

Equation for Successful Change *continued...*

A final mention on the model. Note that at the highest inflection point a second wave begins. The reason for this addition to the model is that it represents the need to challenge the status quo and innovate to a new future state. A leader of change must plan for this change concurrently with the organization’s continuing success. In other words, the leader needs to be ambidextrous, on the one hand continue to do what you are doing because it is providing the superior return and with the second hand to invest in the future. The alternative is to keep doing what you are doing until the success declines to a point where the organization cannot reinvent itself. Collins describes this in *Why the Mighty Fail* (2009) in his Five Stages of Decline—hubris born of success, undisciplined pursuit of more of what you are currently doing, denial of the risk and peril of not assuming your success will eventually be at a downward inflection point, resulting in dysfunction—grasping for salvation and capitulation to irrelevance or death.



The integration of one’s leadership agenda, practice and style for each phase of the “S” Curve is how to adapt to the ever-changing business cycle. In addition, the points of inflection are also another key consideration. There are two inflection points on the classic “S” Curve. One at the beginning bottom where the slope of the curve changes upward at its lowest success point. The second inflection point is at the highest success point when the slope of the curve changes downward. McGrath (2019) writes about “seeing inflection points before they happen—and how to harness these disruptive influences to give your company a strategic advantage.” The alternative is not to adapt to this ever-changing business cycle and, as a result, dysfunction.

Equation for Successful Change *continued...*

Mark Twain wasn't in favor of change, but we have a choice to embrace the change or become a victim of it. Embracing change is disorienting, but need not be debilitating. By leveraging our resiliency, agility and adaptation we have the ability to change. Columbia Teachers College Resilience Center for Veterans and Families research supports, the majority of us are more resilient than we might think. If bouncing back from adversity is a problem for some, there are interventions leaders can employ with their followers to lessen their anxiety amidst the change. If they are in denial, offer them facts. If they are angry, let them vent and explain why. If they are sad, let them disengage for a while. If they have finally resigned themselves to the change, get on with the change.



Columbia's Learning Agility research provides a set of facets of learning-agile behaviors that are essential when employing and completing a team's and organization's learning cycle. If you are planning for the change, you need to be innovative and not be afraid to challenge the status quo. Once you move to action, you are now in performance mode and need to remain calm in the face of difficulty. After you act, take time to reflect on what happened. Finally, conclude from the risk you've taken so you can purposely put yourself in challenging situations, i.e., strengthening our learning agility for future change.

The Ancient Greek aphorism got it right, "Know Thyself." Moving to our current times, the Emotional and Social Intelligence literature would support to "Control Yourself, Know Others and Do Something for Others." This syllogism offers a formula for success in adapting to the new normal. Knowing yourself, including your limitations, is key to our adaptation to change.

Knowing Yourself is the starting point to examining our ability to change. Knowing Others has a logical link to Knowing Yourself, but before going there Control Yourself. As we adapt to the needs of others, we first have to suspend our own needs. If we only focus on our needs, we become myopic in our view of change, and are unable to build a coalition of support for adapting to the change. In addition, as we control our focus on ourselves, we are then more able to see what others need—Doing Something for Others. The logical pairs are Know Yourself/Know Others and Control Yourself/Do Something for Others, but the complete syllogism fulfills the emotional and social intelligence needed to adapt to change.

Equation for Successful Change *continued...*

Goleman (1998), in his Working with Emotional Intelligence, list Knowing Yourself and Controlling yourself as well as list Motivation as a third aspect of one's personal competence. Another way to look at it is that change leaders have to have a passion about the desired future state they are pursuing. If they are not motivated, their followers won't be either. Feedback is a gift from our followers and as leaders we ignore it at our own peril. Remember that Social Intelligence requires us to move from “me” to “we” or from personal to social competence. Knowing Others and Doing Something for Others, includes motivating others by first being motivated ourselves.





Summary

In closing, our ability to change will vary on how our resiliency lets us bounce back from adversity, we are agile learners, and are able to adapt to the new normal. These three elements together form the model that depicts our ability to change. It is important to emphasize that these abilities—resilience, agility, and adaptation—can be learned and developed. TRACOM's research shows the benefits of developing these skills for individuals and organizations.

As we explore each of these three elements, the existing research and scholarship provides guidance to our understanding and successful employment of these elements to not only being in favor of progress, but also liking change.

Acknowledgments

As you can read from my direct reference to their work, I am grateful for the Columbia Teacher's College for Warner Burke and his associates' research and scholarship, as well as, those scholars outside our academy, notably Casey Mulqueen, TRACOM Senior Director of Learning and Development. Within Columbia Business School, I have continuously collaborated with a team of Executive Education faculty to refine my thinking and this model for Change to the New Normal. Bob Bontempo, Rita McGrath, Willie Pieterse and I have been teaching in parallel for over 25 years, and I can only distinguish not separate my work from theirs. Collectively, we have produced a portfolio of programs and publications where attribution is assigned. In that spirit, closing kudos go to Columbia University Press/Columbia Business School Publishing and Columbia CaseWorks for memorializing my contribution to our scholarship.

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His teaching and research interest are in the areas of Executive Learning, Strategic Leadership and Corporate Governance. His most recent book, *The CEO's Boss: Tough Love in the Boardroom* (2010, 2019) Columbia University Press/Columbia Business School Publishing, was ranked as one of the Top Five Books by The Wall Street Journal's *livemint.com* in December, 2010. The 2nd edition includes his Columbia CaseWorks published governance case studies. He is faculty director of Columbia/ExecOnline's Leading Strategic Growth and the Building and Leading Effective Teams, and Executive Education's Developing and Leading High-Performance Teams both on campus and online. Dr. Klepper received his Ph.D. from St. Louis University in 1975. In his home community, he has served as President of the School Board, Mayor of the Township and President of the County Legislature.