Elephant And The Rider Change Framework

Idea In Short

In today's Digital Transformation era, managing change remains the most important challenge that leaders grapple with today. By our very nature we resist change and lean towards sustaining the status quo. Being a leader who can be flexible and lead the way forward in times of change, showing their adaptability and inspiring others to do the same, is no easy feat. Understanding the psychology behind what motivates us to change is important to determine how to trigger change in your staff.

The framework

Jonathan Haidt originally introduced the Elephant and the Rider concept in his bestseller book, 1:

> The image I came up with for myself, as I marveled at my weakness [of willpower], was that I was a rider on the back of an elephant. I'm holding the reins in my hands, and by pulling one way or the other I can tell the elephant to turn, to stop, or to go. I can direct things, but only when the elephant doesn't have desires of his own. When the elephant really wants to do something, I'm no match for him.

The Rider represents our rational side whilst the Elephant represents our emotional side. Perched atop the Elephant is the Rider, who holds the reins and appears to be the leader. However, the Rider's control is precarious because the Rider is so small relative to the Elephant. Anytime the enormous Elephant and the Rider disagree about the direction to take, the Elephant may easily topple the Rider and the Rider may to lose; the Rider is outmatched. In their book Switch – How to change things when change is hard, Chip Heath, a Professor in the School of Business at Stanford University, and his brother Dan Heath, a Senior Fellow at Duke University's Centre for the Advancement of Social Entrepreneurship, suggest a straightforward, step-by-step framework for changing people and organisations. The Heath

brothers elaborate this metaphor into a great way to make change happen.

> The conventional wisdom in psychology, in fact, is that the brain has two independent systems at work at all times. First, there's what we call the emotional side. It's the part of you that is instinctive, that feels pain and pleasure. Second, there's the rational side, also known as the reflective or conscious system. It's the part of you that deliberates and analyzes and looks into the future.

According to the Rider-Elephant framework, the key to effective change is to get the Elephant and the Rider moving together in an agreed direction. The rational Rider can plan, while the Elephant is driven by emotion and instinct.

> Most of us are all too familiar with situations in which our Elephant overpowers our Rider. You've experienced this if you've ever slept in, overeaten, dialled your ex at midnight, procrastinated, tried to quit smoking and failed, skipped the gym, gotten angry and said something you regretted, abandoned your Spanish or piano lessons, refused to speak up in a meeting because you were scared, and so on.

The Elephant [Doer]

This is the overpowering emotional element to decision making. It almost always wins, and almost always looks for the quick payoff. But, it also provides the energy to get the job done. Remember, the elephant is emotion: sympathy, love, loyalty, and compassion. **Strengths:** Energy, drive, determine, instinctive, compassion, sympathy, loyalty, get things done, love **Weaknesses:** Desire for instant gratification, lazy (can cause exhaustion), skittish, does not respond to the rider, impulsive As a manager, you have a variety of great ways to appeal to the Elephant:

- **Build Rapport:** Show you care about who they are as a person, not just a set of qualifications or list of skills to fill an open role.
- **Learn what's important to them:** There's a reason that people will often take pay cuts or choose lower offers; find out what is interesting to them about the role, your company, and their goals and you can tap into what excites the Elephant to come your way.
- **Create a good work environment:** Is your team filled with tension and conflict, or

> friendly and collaborative? The former will drive the Elephants in your employees crazy, while the latter, will have them hungry to work for you for a long time.

The Rider [Planner]

This is the logical decision maker, who takes care of all the analysis and thinks about the long term. It usually plays second fiddle, no matter how much we want to believe we are logical beings. **Strengths:** Analytical, Long-term planner, direction, strategy, problem solver **Weaknesses:** Overly analytical, indecisive, thinks he is leading and in control because he is holding the reins, slow to act. No workplace is perfect. It is human nature for there to occasionally be problems, conflicts, and disagreements. Many of these issues will affect the Elephant most, because they tap into our feelings and emotions. As a manager, you can help keep them from becoming lasting issues.

Beware Of The White Bear

One of the challenges of the Elephant is that it has a tendency to dwell on issues. The Elephant can't help itself. Haidt calls this the white bear problem. If I tell you, Don't think about a white bear, there's a very good chance that in fact that's all you can picture now. In the same way, if something captures the Elephant's attention, like a problem with a coworker, it's hard to focus on anything else. Think about the last time you had a coworker you weren't getting along with. I bet there were many times you were upset at them even when you weren't directly dealing with them. If you were particularly frustrated with them, it probably made any work related to them much more difficult to complete. The key to effective change is getting the Elephant and the Rider moving together.

> Changes often fail because the Rider simply can't keep the Elephant on the road long enough to reach the destination. The Elephant's hunger for instant gratification is the opposite of the Rider's strength, which is the ability to think long-term, to plan, to think beyond the moment (all those things that your pet can't do.) ... To make progress toward a goal, whether it's noble or crass, requires the energy and drive of the Elephant. And this strength is the mirror image of the Rider's great weakness: spinning his wheels. The Rider tends to overanalyze and over think things. ... A reluctant Elephant and a wheel-spinning Rider can both ensure nothing changes. But when Elephants and Riders move together, change can come easily.

Initiating Change

It's important to distinguish between knowing how to act and actually being motivated to act a certain way. For leaders to trigger the change and reinforce the desired behavior, they need to appeal to both, people's rational side and most importantly, their emotional side. When we feel something on an emotional level, we are more likely to change. Whilst appealing to both, the rational and emotional sides is vital, leaders also need to chart a clear way for them to succeed. In short, leaders need to do three things to get the Elephant and the Rider moving together:

1. Direct the Rider
2. Motivate the Elephant, and
3. Shape the Path

Direct The Rider

Often what seems like resistance is simply a lack of clarity. Our rational selves tend to deliberate and analyze situations. If the Rider isn't sure where to go or how to get there, he / she will sit atop the Elephant going around in circles. The Rider needs a crystal-clear vision of the outcome and how to get to it. Providing as much clarity about the change as possible is the main aim of appealing to the rational self. Change is always easier when everyone knows where they are going and why it's worth it. If you want to make sustainable, meaningful change, you have to get the elephant and the rider to happily go on the path together. First, direct the rider. Don't get paralyzed by how to figure out how to measure something as intangible as knowledge-sharing. In the book, How to Measure Anything, Douglas Hubbard talks about a three-step clarification chain:

1. If it matters at all, it's detectable / observable
2. If it is detectable, it can be detected as an amount (or a range of possible amounts)
3. If it can be detected as a range of possible amounts, it can be measured

Don't get paralyzed by overthinking how to measure knowledge-sharing success. How about a simple test? Randomly survey customers who have gone through the traditional process for support as well as those who go through a knowledge-enhanced process. See what the outcomes are for each: Has their customer satisfaction, NPS, or customer effort score improved? Has employee engagement improved? How about revenue and repeat

customers? If you haven't already, start work on aligning your measures with that of the business. You can direct the rider by:

1. Finding bright spots
2. Scripting the critical moves, and
3. Point to the destination

Finding the bright spots

Change is different for all of us. Some people just embrace it faster than others or have a different mindset to change. A simple tool to direct the rider is finding bright spots. There are always employees, processes or systems that are already working towards the wanted changes. So, start looking for what's already going well, no matter how small the sample size. What looks like something normal or an anomaly might just be the solution to the problem.

Script the critical moves

Focus is the keyword in this process. Change can be overwhelming, and people can already be exhausted just by thinking of what they all need to do and change. It's about making decisions and about making the right decisions. Saying YES to something means NO to something else but that is just fine. Just ask yourself in every situation what your make or break is. In your business it might be superior research in development. In your personal life, it might be making it to the gym 4 times a week, so you'll have the energy to work as hard as you do. Whatever it is, make sure that you script the critical moves in the process and do first thing first! Remember, however, that you can't script everything. So, focus truly on what's important and what will generate the results you need.

Point to the destination

One of the Rider's greatest weaknesses is the over reliance on logic and analysis. We need to grow our business next year in order to stay up with the competition, and here are some fancy charts that show us why. The Rider loves this kind of stuff, because he can dive into the analysis and endlessly debate the veracity of your numbers and conclusions. In fact, the Rider will typically enjoy this much more than actually doing the things that are necessary to work towards the goal. The cure for this is to point to a compelling destination – to send a

destination postcard.

> destination postcards do double duty: they show the Rider where you're headed, and they show the Elephant why the journey is worthwhile

Make sure you send a destination postcard that sends a message about where you are going, and make sure the destination is an attractive one.

Motivate The Elephant

Having satisfied the Rider, you now need to make your audience feel the need for change by appealing to their emotions. Knowing is not enough. To motivate people to embrace the change and to stay on track even when they feel exhausted and limited in their rational thinking, they need to feel it, to believe in it and to be emotionally invested in it. Furthermore, they need to believe in themselves and their ability to reach the outcome. Often breaking down the change until it no longer scares the Elephant is important in maintaining drive, determination and engagement. Cultivating a sense of identity and embracing a growth mindset also helps you and your staff feel emotionally satisfied, connected to the bigger picture and motivated to get there. For transformation to stick, leaders should motivate their teams. In this context, motivation is about the team understanding the benefits of the practices and receiving the right incentives (performance measures, recognition, rewards) for that behavior. Document the what's in it for me and provide training that shows both why and how they should change. You can motivate the Elephant by:

1. Finding the feeling
2. Shrinking the change, and
3. Growing your people

Find the feeling

Motivation is the drive of everything, by bringing feelings into the equation, results will change dramatically. Change brings a lot of feelings and it is important to understand what these feelings are. The famous Kubler-Ross change curve helps understand where people are in their own change process and adapted the communication and support based on where they are in this change curve. This will also allow you to focus on and deal with the emotional response of those who are affected by the change. It's very important to keep the

Elephant motivated when you found the feeling. A very good example to do is to celebrate small wins and reward the employee. The Elephant is lazy and can become exhausted if we don't reward him regularly.

Shirk the change

The hardest part to change is taking the first step. For most people the change is big and overwhelming and can easy turn into chaos. As it turns out, people find it more motivating to be partly finished with a longer journey than to be at the starting gate of a shorter one. When you need to motivate somebody towards a goal, make them feel that they are closer to the finish line than they previously might have thought. Below you can find a fascinating example from a car wash company:

> A car wash ran a promotion with loyalty cards. Get your car washed, get a stamp. Come 8 times, get a free car wash. They did a little test with this promotion, however. Half the customers got an empty card with 8 spots to fill in. The other half got a card with 10 spots to fill in, but 2 stamps were already placed on the card. The same action was required (8 car washes), but one group was given a head start. The results were very enlightening. A few months into the promotion, 19 percent of the first group had earned the free wash, while 34% of the second group had earned the wash. On top of that, the second group had earned it faster.

Grow your people

I believe that the essence of life is to grow. All things grow and if you grow you will be motivated to move on and to change. In every change situation people will ask themselves three questions: Who am I? What kind of situation is this? What would somebody like me do in this situation. In any situation, you can either give people a new identity to live into, or even just remind them of somebody they already know they are. Tap into their identity, and you tap into their action. It's very important for people to have a growth mind set. In her book, 2, the renowned Stanford psychologist Carol Dweck says that it's not intelligence, talent or education that sets successful people apart. It's their mindset, or the way that they approach life's challenges. According to Dweck, people either have a fixed or a growth mindset, and the one that you adopt can affect every aspect of your life.

The Fixed Mindset

A fixed mindset is the belief that your intelligence, talents and other abilities are set in stone. You believe that you're born with a particular set of skills and that you can't change them. If you have a fixed mindset, you will likely fear that you may not be smart or talented enough to achieve your goals. You may hold yourself back by engaging only in activities that you know you can do well. Worse still, a manager with a fixed mindset may fear that their team members' achievements will surpass their own expertise. Or they may feel threatened if someone else spots an opportunity that they missed. To avoid being found out as lacking skills, the manager may discourage a star team member's development, and ignore their people's needs. Dweck and her colleagues examined the brains of people with different mindsets. The brains of those with a fixed mindset showed higher activity when they were told that their answers to a series of questions were right or wrong – they were keenly interested to know whether they had succeeded or failed. But, they showed no interest when researchers offered them help to learn from their mistakes. They didn't believe they could improve so they didn't try.

The Growth Mindset

If you have a growth mindset, you believe that, with effort, perseverance and drive, you can develop your natural qualities. Neuroscientist Gilbert Gottlieb asserts that intelligence is determined by a combination of genes and environment, and that your environment influences the activation of genes during your lifetime. Whether your personality is determined by nature or nurture is still heavily debated, but, according to Dweck, you can develop your own skills, abilities, talents, and even intelligence through your experiences, training and effort. You use feedback and mistakes as opportunities to improve, while enjoying the process of learning and becoming more productive. This is what Dweck calls purposeful engagement. You also believe that you can overcome obstacles. You choose to learn from the experience, work harder and try again until you reach your goals. In her research, Dweck built on the theory of neuroplasticity, which is the brain's ability to continue to form new connections into adulthood, after it has been damaged or when it is stimulated by new experiences. This supports the idea that you can adopt a growth mindset at any time of life. You may not become another Thomas Edison, but a growth mindset can help you to realize your own potential through learning and practice. This is why Dweck says that offering praise when someone does well reinforces a fixed mindset, while praising their effort encourages growth. When you focus on an individual's results, they learn that trying doesn't matter. But praising their efforts rewards their process of learning, so they become more motivated to keep striving toward their goals.

Shape The Path

Finally, you need to shape the path to make it easy for everyone to embrace the change and reach the desired outcome. Tweak the environment to ensure the path is cleared for success. Focussing on this aspect of the framework, you could create relevant training, peer support groups, step-by-step guidance and new or improved procedures to make for an easier path. Also try to build new habits. When behaviour is habitual, it's free i.e., it doesn't tax the Rider. Importantly, embracing the principle that behavior is contagious, focus your efforts on rallying the heard. In short, leaders can shape the path by:

1. Tweaking the environment
2. Building habits, and
3. Rallying the herd

Tweak the environment

Although people will usually act consistently with who they believe they are, sometimes it's the situation they are in that dictates the behavior. Most of the time, we miss this subtle point. Stanford psychologist Lee Ross calls this Fundamental Attribution Error because our inclination is to attribute people's behavior with who they are rather than the situation they are in. As a company in change it is vital to make sure the environment is clear and there are little to none obstacles during the process. You'll be amazed what happens when you remove even the smallest amount of friction in the process.

> When situations change, behaviors change.

When you are faced with a situation where people seem to just be a certain way, ask yourself how you could make the behavior you are looking for a little bit easier to do.

Build habits

We all have habits. These habits become behavioral autopilot that happen without the Rider taking control. Unfortunately, we are not very good at understanding how to build and sustain these habits over time. When you find yourself wanting to generate behavior out of yourself or another person, give them an action trigger. Make it very specific. Studies have shown that the harder the goal, the more effective these triggers become. What you'll be

doing is creating instant habits, and that's a powerful outcome. However, action triggers aren't going to work if you aren't motivated to do something. What you've essentially done is turn control of the situation over to the environment. The Rider has nothing left to analyze and can't interfere with your decision any longer. A powerful tool is creating checklists. Before a plane can take off there are a lot of checks pilots needs to do to safely board the air. With this example in mind, build check lists to create the wanted habits.

Rally The Herd

People are just like herd animals. We want to belong to the herd and we follow the herd. Peer pressure (or peer perception as the Heath brothers discuss) is extremely powerful. This is in line with finding the bright spots because in a challenging change situation there is always a herd mentality at play and employee will follow the ones that are showing the wanted behavior. As a leader, the key is to find a way to make the behavior you are trying to create contagious by showing the people you want to motivate how to follow the herd.

Summary

Next time when you are facing a hard time changing or transforming your organization, don't forget that change is hard for the employees. With this framework, position the employees at the centre of the change. You will eventually have a better chance succeeding in your change program or transformation.