The Moment You Can't Ignore: Using Culture to Drive Strategic Change

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Topics for today

1. What is an unignorable moment and why does it matter?

2. Sharing your unignorable moments

3. Ideas for using culture to get unstuck
Change sometimes begins with an unignorable moment.
The Veterans Administration encountered an unignorable moment last year.
What is an “unignorable moment?”

A crunch point—a matter of minutes or a period of months—when something happens that is so dramatic and disruptive it demands the attention of the entire organization.

What happened? Why? What does it mean?

An unignorable moment often signals a profound cultural shift, when the traditional ways of doing things crash into the requirements of a new strategy.

The result? Organizational paralysis? Or a release of incredible productive energy?
Unignorable moments have four recognizable features

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Systemic</th>
<th>Irreversible</th>
<th>They challenge our identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>News of an unignorable moment</td>
<td>Not only about the individuals involved. It</td>
<td>“You can’t unring that bell.”</td>
<td>They raise fundamental questions:</td>
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<tr>
<td>spreads quickly, often through</td>
<td>opens a doorway into the organization’s culture</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Who am I, and how am I expected to</td>
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<tr>
<td>informal networks inside the</td>
<td>as a whole.</td>
<td></td>
<td>act in this new world?”</td>
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<tr>
<td>organization—and outside as</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>well.</td>
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Identifying your unignorable moments

Working in pairs or trios for five minutes:

► **Identify** an unignorable moment in your organization or one you are familiar with, that either happened in the recent past or that you are in the midst of.

► **Share** it with one or two others.

► **Discuss** ways in which it was or is...
  
  • Public
  • Irreversible
  • Systemic
  • Challenges the identity of the organization
We’re facing a big shift in the way organizations function

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From...</th>
<th>To...</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Command and control (&quot;I&quot;)</td>
<td>Distributed decision-making (&quot;We&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process and compliance</td>
<td>Creativity and autonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchy</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extrinsic motivation</td>
<td>Intrinsic motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obedience</td>
<td>Negotiation</td>
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The Industrial Age model no longer fits the emerging reality of twenty-first century organizations.
These trends create increased turbulence

**Turbulence** = Pace x Disruptiveness of change

**Result:**

- A fundamental disruption in the way many industries operate
- Stress in the organization and for the people inside
In times of turbulence and change we can get stuck...
The value of being stuck

For many of us, “stuck” is considered a bad place to be.

We often rush to get unstuck
• ... by pushing change through.
• ... or by trying to avoid or postpone it.

What if you see stuck as a place of energy and opportunity?
Can we learn how to tap into the value in being stuck?

Being stuck...
- Can be a *time of learning*
- Can *build capabilities*
- Can *set the stage for change*

Building a capability to get stuck and unstuck can help you navigate change.
Leverage the power of stuck by “slowing down to speed up”

1. Pause—then begin to “listen in.”
2. Go toward resistance and use it as feedback.
3. Don’t rush outside the organization—look inside for the people who already know how to work differently.
4. Build a coalition for change.
1. Listening in

- Observe like **an anthropologist**.
- Go beyond what people say to observe the actions and behaviors that show how they are thinking:
  - How they see the problem through their lenses.
- **“Listening in”** will help you understand how your culture can help or hold you back.
- Listening in involves:
  - Deliberately taking a pause
  - Listening to individuals and groups about what’s going on—often as they go about their daily lives
  - Asking questions, and recognizing signals when your own assumptions are getting in the way.
Listening in takes practice but pays off

- After hearing a great deal, thinking about causes, and talking about courses of action, you are ready to explain how you have incorporated what you’ve heard from people into your strategies and initiatives.
- Be prepared to be surprised.
- Use feelings as data.
- Capture content in context.
No “one” version. There’s no complete or correct version of “what’s happening.” Seek out multiple perspectives.

Seek a mix of sources. Imagine if all your information came from a disgruntled employee, a union president or an overstressed manager.
2. Go towards resistance

- Resistance is not a reaction to change—it’s a part of every change implementation.
- Resistance is usually not about the person—it’s about the system.
- Resistance provides useful feedback about how to work through it.

Working with resistance is more productive than working against it.
Use “pull”—it is stronger than “push”

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Push</th>
<th>Pull</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▶ We make an assignment</td>
<td>▶ You see an opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▶ We convince you</td>
<td>▶ You want to commit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

People may be compliant, but they **often do just the minimum.**

People **aim higher** because they’re doing something they care about.

If you create “pull,” others will do the **work of change for you.**
3. Find the future inside

► Your organization almost surely has hidden assets and strengths to move in the direction you want to go.

► And the beginnings of the change you want to make are already emerging in your organization.

► “The future is already here, its just unevenly distributed.” William Gibson, science fiction writer.

Your organization’s culture is a “renewable resource.”
We call these “found pilots”

People, projects, and efforts where behavior is moving in the direction you want to go.

“Found pilots”

because you discover them.

because they are piloting the behaviors you want to see—and you can learn from them and use them as a resource to make things happen.

Found pilots help you change the culture by working with it, not trying to replace it.
Be careful or you’ll miss them...

<table>
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<tr>
<th>What found pilots are...</th>
<th>What they aren’t...</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building blocks</td>
<td>Complete models, ready “as is” to replicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raw material to create buzz and attract others</td>
<td>Perfect examples of the best</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fragmentary early efforts</td>
<td>If this is what you expect found pilots to be, you’ll miss them</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Sweep people in to build your coalition for change

To build a coalition, you need....

- The passionate few to provide energy.
- Friendly skeptics to challenge your assumptions.
- People with strong and wide networks into the right parts of the organization.
## Engage stakeholders systematically

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>More Powerful</th>
<th>Less Powerful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>For</strong></td>
<td><strong>Against</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>◀ Build coalitions among members of this group</td>
<td>◀ Listen carefully to sources of resistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>◀ Link them with others</td>
<td>◀ Find common interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>◀ Find common interests</td>
<td>◀ Reframe where possible (e.g., through a strategic theme)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>◀ Convert, if possible, or ignore</td>
<td>◀ Prepare to manage and respond to road blocks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>◀ Prepare to manage and respond to road blocks</td>
<td>◀ Keep them informed</td>
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</table>
**STAKEHOLDER MAP:**
**Building Your Coalition for Change**

**State the Change You Are Trying to Create**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List of Stakeholders</th>
<th>Stakeholder’s Interest in Your Change Project</th>
<th>Stakeholder’s Power</th>
<th>Coalitions</th>
<th>Use Pull</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholders</td>
<td>Behaviors that help you understand their interests</td>
<td>Their ability to support or resist the change you are trying to create (+/-)</td>
<td>Who influences them?</td>
<td>Whom do they influence?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Back to your “unignorable moment”

- Return to your pairs or trios. Select *one* of your unignorable moments to focus on.
- Take five minutes to discuss:
  - How could you have used or can you use any or all of these four practices?
    1. Listening in
    2. Working with resistance
    3. See the future inside
    4. Building a coalition for change
- What are your takeaways about how to lead in this new environment?
Questions and Comments
For more on strategy and change...

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About CFAR

CFAR is a private management consulting firm that helps leaders create organizations in which talent and innovation flow freely across the enterprise. People own the changes they need to make, and behavior is aligned with mission and strategy.

CFAR spun off from The Wharton School in 1987. We leverage our academic roots in strategy, management and the social sciences to help clients work through complex organizational issues.

Our clients are mission-driven organizations— including health systems, academic medical centers, family enterprises, life science companies, universities, foundations and associations.

We partner with our clients to understand obstacles to their success and offer ideas, tools and approaches that improve outcomes and performance.