

Change Philosophy: Stretching the Mind to Create New Organizational Habits

By Dr. Chance T. Eaton

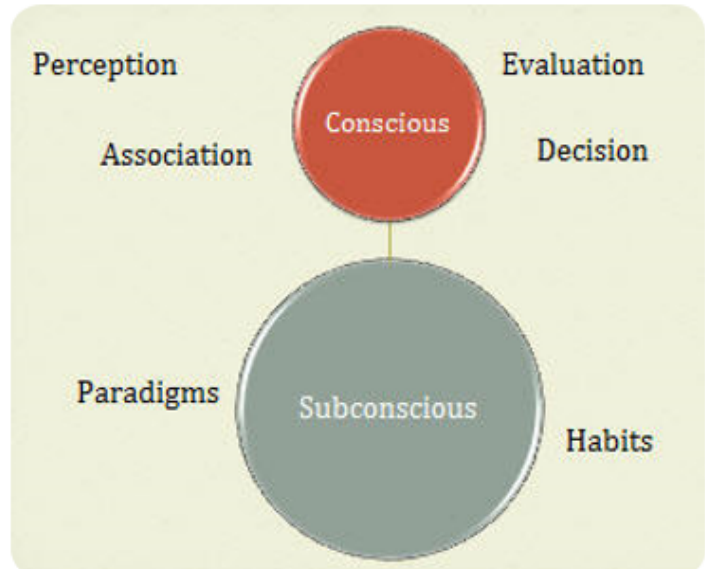
With the continued compounding growth of technology, increasing global ethnic diversity, economic and political turmoil and adjustments and climate changes, I think it is safe to say that the world is changing. As it changes, so does how we do business on a day to day business. Those businesses that can't adjust with the times will be replaced with ones that are adaptive, unique, and innovative. For this reason, I find that the topic of change management is one of the most important, but least discussed in today's business chatter.

The Yin and Yang of Change Philosophy

Growing up as a farmer and rancher, I was mesmerized by binary aspects of the business: the birth of an animal and its eventual death, planting of seeds and the eventual harvest, capital improvements in business assets and their eventual depreciation. It appeared to me that everything operated around this binary activity. This binary activity is not a new topic within the world of philosophy; in fact, the Taoists speak at great lengths about the yin and yang energies of life.

Yin is considered the feminine energy and yang being the masculine energy – where the two halves complement each other and together define a construct. Change is a constant construct and therefore also contains two halves: a feminine and masculine side, neither of which is better. The feminine side of change is protective, secure and nurturing. From a change-management perspective, the feminine solution to change takes a chapter from chaos theory and builds strange attractors during change initiatives. Strange attractors are the deeply encoded structures within chaotic systems that allow for self-origination to occur. In organizations, the strange attractors create change definition and answer the what, why, where, when, how and who of change. By answering these questions, employees reduce their psychological fight-or-flight discomfort and bring change back to the comfort zone the mind so desperately needs. Akin to the feminine energy, the strategy creates tranquility within the chaos. For more about change management, read the *Trillions* article titled, "[Tranquility within Chaos](#)".

The yang approach, on the other hand, is a proactive one where change is encouraged, versus the yin approach of safety and comfort. To better describe the techniques for activating the masculine side of change,



I find it helpful to understand how the mind is built.

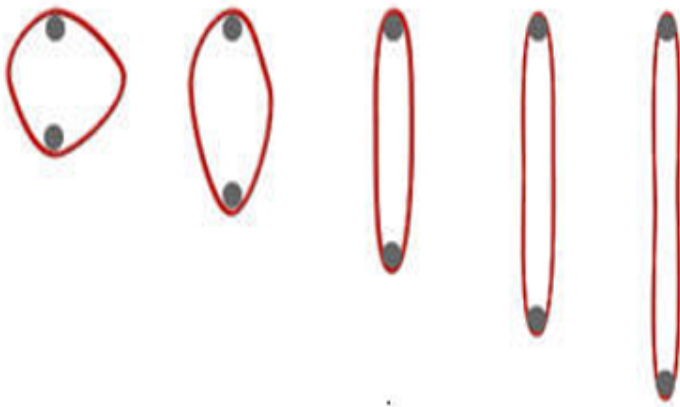
There are a myriad of ways to describe how the mind is structured. One rather abstract but useful way is to see the mind having a conscious and subconscious role. The conscious mind does four very specific activities: perceiving, associating, evaluating and deciding. Perception is simply absorbing the world and all its stimuli through our five senses. Second, the mind must associate what it is sensing and compare it to memory banks for familiarity. Third, the mind interprets and evaluates the association and makes a judgement or attitude. Emotions are the result of evaluation, where associations that match paradigms and schemas result in positive emotionality and associations that do not match result in negative emotionality. Finally, the mind decides and takes some behavioral action.

The subconscious mind is a bit more mysterious as it structures how we filter the world through paradigms, and most importantly, it houses our programmed habits. Once the conscious mind has enough experiences, neural pathways are formed to create shortcut cognitive processing. As an example, the first time I learned to drive, I was activating my conscious mind as I learned to push in the clutch, place the transmission in gear, give the accelerator a little gas and slowly release the clutch. This was hard for me as a six-year-old – so I used to sit in the middle of the truck seat, and my mother would get in the driver's seat and place the truck in first gear, start driving, and then dive out. Then I would scoot over to the driver's side, and I was on my way to school! Learning to drive took some time, as I

also had to deal with shifting through the gears, braking, watching gauges, speedometer, and of course, change radio stations. Eventually, I became so used to this routine that I no longer utilized my conscious mind because the subconscious mind habitually took over. Now, when I drive to work, I don't even think about the thousands of stimuli that come at me on my 20-minute drive to work. The subconscious mind is so powerful that some have suggested that it is capable of processing 40 billion bits of information per second, whereas the conscious mind is capable of processing only 2,000 bits per second.

Building New Habits: The Mind Stretch

For companies to embrace change proactively and activate the yang energy of change, they need to build habits for change. And here lies the challenge: How do we activate the secrets of the mind to create a stretch so it becomes comfortable with and even craves growth? The entire goal is for companies to create a change culture to where the subconscious mind takes over and habitually looks to change as a normal business practice. The secret to building such cultural norms is to actually teach employees how to activate the creative subconscious mind to "stretch" the mind.



When we activate and stretch the mind, we are essentially creating stretch goals. Such goals are specific and difficult to attain, are accepted by the culture, utilize feedback mechanisms and are time line oriented. When this occurs, we are literally 'stretching' the mind. Visualize a rubber band; when you stretch the rubber band, you create tension, or stress. The mind doesn't desire stress and wants nothing more than to get to a new state of comfort. The mind, if visualized like a rubber band, cares not if the tension is relieved in one direction or the other. If it is easier to reduce the tension by resorting back to the original state of status quo, the mind will easily present sabotaging thoughts and result in behaviors to keep you, or your organiza-

tion, right where it started. If it is easier to reduce the tension by moving in the new direction of the desired state, the goal in this case, the mind will open up and find solutions to achieve the new state of the mind. What the mind does so interestingly well in the goal state is it will create greater energy and awareness.

Let's start with energy. We've all had the experience where we started a home project with a goal in mind and seem to find the energy and vigor to accomplish the project. Upon completion, our bodies catch up with the exercise, and exhaustion finally sets in. The next morning you wonder how you possibly had the energy to complete the goal. I remember when I was doing my doctoral dissertation; I would stay up to the wee hours of the morning analyzing and performing research. As I look back now, I have no idea where I got the energy, but the mind does. It knew that the desired state was my new comfort zone, and the tension of the goal of becoming a doctor provided all the needed energy to get there.

Regarding increased awareness, the mind's reticular activating system (RAS), part of the upper brain stem, acts as a filter against all the stimuli for all the information available to the mind. There is simply too much data available for the mind to absorb, so it filters out what is not important and lets in information it thinks is important. For example, when you first begin to wear a wristwatch, you are very cognizant of the new stimuli on your wrist, but in a short amount of time, your mind filters out the sensation and you simply forget that it is attached to your wrist. In order to make it past the filter, the information must simply be important enough for you to focus on. Another example is car buying. Once you have your mind set on purchasing a certain type of car, you begin to see just how many of them are on the road. They were always there; it's just that prior to searching for a new car, you filtered out the unnecessary stimuli. Now that you are goal bound, you begin to see "your" desired car everywhere. By creating goals, the creative subconscious, and in particular the RAS, creates purpose and focus on new possibilities and realities.

Case Study: Building Strange Attractors (Yin Energy) and Activating the Mind Stretch (Yang Energy)

Here is a simple example I recently used with a company. A company was building a new billing system that was expected to drastically change how employees would manage and process all billing activity. Management assumed that the change would create a considerable degree of stress and resistance by many of the employees. Before the software build, a yin, or

feminine, change approach was utilized. All employees were taught to build strange attractors around the process. This meant continued conversations and meetings around what the changes were, why they were occurring, where the changes would take the company, when the changes would take effect, who would be involved, and how individuals needed to contribute to the process. Though this didn't eliminate the stress response, it calmed the psychological distress considerably to the point where the change could be accepted. Just as a mother calms her child prior to a potentially stressful event, the strange-attractor questions bring a greater degree of assurance and peace to the child.

Next, the company had individual work groups activate the yang side, the masculine side of change management. Each work group built certain team goals around the software build that needed to be met. Next, each employee created individual expectations and stretch goals that were pertinent to their role in the business. In cases where the stretch goal was reached, a merit pay reward was given. As a result of each employee owning and focusing on their goal, they not only created a higher degree of energy in accomplishing the task, they opened up their mind with an increased awareness. This awareness activated employees to come up with new work-arounds and present creative and innovating approaches to the new processes. As a result, the employees developed tranquility within the chaos (yin energy) while stretching their mind to meet and exceed the expectations of the process (yang energy). Now the change initiative had cultural momentum and most important, a habit for innovation.

Building New Organizational Habits

Yin represents the female energy of a system. In change initiatives, it is the backward lean that creates safety and comfort for the individual psyche that creates tranquility within the chaos of change. The change solution is to simply build strange attractors within the chaotic change process by answering what the change is, why it is occurring, where the change is taking the group, when the change will occur, how individuals become involved and who the change impacts.

Yang represents the male energy of a system. During change initiatives, in addition to strange attractors, a forward lean is required to create momentum and drive. The change solution is to simply develop strong shared visions and goals around the change to the point where individual minds are stretched toward the desired end point. This releases new energy and awareness to drive your team into new organizational habits.

From the masculine side of change philosophy, companies, departments, work sections, work groups, and individual employees need to utilize goal-oriented thinking in their day-to-day business thinking. In other words, let the mind stretch of goal work become a basic habit of how you do business. It is critical that not only the vision and change be well established but that the entire work group, or in large change initiatives, the entire organization shares in the vision and goal process. When an entire group of employees actively stretches their mind in a similar direction, greater energy is released and increased awareness is stimulated. When an entire group helps to engineer and drive a change initiative, the forward lean creates sheer momentum for new organizational habits. This is when change becomes exciting, as work groups collaboratively work together to create solutions and build company legacy.



Dr. Chance Eaton has over a decade's worth of experience working in the field of education & organizational development. Due to his unique educational and work experiences in finance, psychology, leadership & management, education, noetic sciences, and agriculture, Dr. Eaton provides his clients with relevant business solutions grounded in theory and research. To learn more about Dr. Eaton's services, please visit www.HRSolutionInternational.com.