

THE PROCESS OF CHANGE:  
WHY THINGS STAY THE SAME

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Creating the type of change that springs from President Bednar's idea that we are going places in higher education where no one has ever gone before is exciting and at the same time mystifying. I do not know where, when, or how the chaos of change will come together in the creative act, but I do know that it will take a tremendous amount of energy to get it right.

With change thick in the air, knowing a little about how change occurs could be of value. The purposes of this paper are to explain the first and second orders of change and to explore the homeostatic tendency of any system to fight changes of a substantial measure. I also want to analyze the concept of the "fantasy bond" and its neutralizing effects upon second order change when the necessary skills or energy for change are nowhere to be found. The well known adage, "The more things change the more they remain the same" may have application here. Resistance to change comes in a myriad of forms—some obvious and others well camouflaged. Facilitating the right kind of change is always risky, and the challenge of unintended consequences is always a concern.

TWO ORDERS OF CHANGE

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There are two orders of change, and each has to do with the assumptions behind it. In first order change, thousands of changes may occur within the system with no changes to the system itself. The boundaries of the system remain undisturbed so no substantial change materializes. In second order change, the system itself changes. The boundaries are transformed so the change is real and profound. These changes are more than business-as-usual changes. Paradigm shifts invite new and introspective discoveries.

Problems arise if the two orders of change are confused for each other. Enmeshing and mixing up the two orders of change creates confusion and dissonance. C. S. Lewis articulates the confusion that can exist between first and second order change. He describes first order change:

For what we are trying to do is to remain what we call "ourselves," to keep personal happiness as our great aim in life, and yet at the same time be "good." We are trying to let our mind and heart go their way—centered on money or pleasure or ambition—and hoping, in spite of this, to behave honestly

and chastely and humbly. And it is exactly what Christ warned us you could not do.

With first order change, one could behave in a different way, but still no real change would occur. As Lewis goes on to explain,

A thistle cannot produce figs. If I am a field that contains nothing but grass-seed, I cannot produce wheat. Cutting the grass may keep it short: but I shall still produce grass and not wheat. If I want to produce wheat, the change must go deeper than the surface. I must be ploughed up and re-sown (154).

This plowing up and re-sowing is what second order change is all about. It is a paradigm shift of epic proportions. It is the difference between being created in the image of God and being begotten in the image of God. First order change has to do with form, and second order change has to do with substance. First order change is about reorganizing the furniture in the house; second order change is about remodeling the house. To confuse the two orders invites misunderstanding. Transformation is the business of second order change, not accommodation, adjustment or compromise.

#### FIRST ORDER CHANGE

The most common problem of first order change is that it is often labeled “more of the same.” It is a first order dilemma that things change but in a way that provides no relief from the problem. In fact, attempted solutions can sometimes become problems themselves.

Here is a well known but simple puzzle that illustrates the limitations of first order change. Connect the nine dots using four straight lines without lifting your pencil from the paper.

Normal attempts do not work because they are within the first order of change. A person who cannot escape the first order is doomed to the confines of these original attempts. He or she may think that just trying long and hard enough eventually will solve the problem (i.e. more of the same). The attempted solution becomes the problem, and if the person does not awaken (re-frame, shift paradigms, etc.), there will be no hope for the solution, regardless of time or effort. Self-imposed boundaries make it impossible to resolve the dilemma. (The solution is found at the end of this paper.)

Other problems of first order change are 1) over-simplifying, 2) being grandiose, and 3) self-created paradoxes, all of which contribute to the static dysfunction of change at the first order. Over-simplifying the problem, by being dishonest or ignorant about its origins and depths, can be

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camouflaged by platitudes that solve neither the problem nor the dishonesty and ignorance. Being grandiose and pontificating a solution based upon naiveté and dogma solve nothing. And finally, the formation of self-created paradoxes, as when we polarize a person as in “You will respect me.” Since respect cannot be demanded but only freely given, the demander paradoxically prevents the very respect he/she demands.

## SECOND ORDER CHANGE

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To engage in second order change, a person must be aware of the nature of a problem’s formation and solution, or be doomed to become part of the problem. To be awake to the assumptions that lie beneath our perception is the paradoxical nature of understanding second order change. How can one be aware of that which one is not aware of? Practice? Education? Introspection? Experience? Inspiration? Luck? All of the above.

The following story illustrates the seemingly contradictory nature of second order change and is taken from the book *Change*:

When in 1334 the Duchess of Tyrol, Margareta Maultasch, encircled the castle of Hochosterwitz in the province of Carinthia, she knew only too well that the fortress, situated on an incredible steep rock rising high above the valley floor, was impregnable to direct attack and would yield only to a long siege. In due course, the situation of the defenders became critical: they were down to their last ox and had only two bags of barley corn left. Margareta’s situation was becoming equally pressing, albeit for different reasons: her troops were beginning to be unruly, there seemed to be no end to the siege in sight, and she had urgent military business elsewhere. At this point the commandant of the castle decided on a desperate course of action which to his men must have seemed sheer folly: he had the last ox slaughtered, had its abdominal cavity filled with the remaining barley, and ordered the carcass thrown down the steep cliff onto a meadow in front of the enemy camp. Upon receiving this scornful message from above, the discouraged duchess abandoned the siege and moved on (xi).

The nature of second order change can seem irrational at times and certainly paradoxical. The act of surrendering, of trying less hard, of shifting paradigms that allow new realities to form, may be wisdom that bears the fruits of second order change. Wisdom comes from seeing the whole, and in this fragmented world, that is no small task.

Change for change’s sake is no good, and many times change can be negative in outcome, especially for those enjoying the status quo. The

“back to zero rule” applies to paradigm shifts that upset the status quo. Those in power typically enjoy power and are threatened when the rules of the game are changed—which is what happens when paradigms shift. The rules change and the advantage is gone, so to speak, back to zero. Who wants to invest in creating one paradigm, only to see it change, and then lose the advantage of all that effort, influence, and work?

Changes in the hopper at Ricks College, soon to be BYU-Idaho, capture much anxiety, anger, ambivalence, and inconvenience, whether of first order or second order change. The talk of new wine in new bottles is the rhetoric of second order change. To me, it is exciting and stimulating to explore implications of creative, paradoxical, irrational thought. It challenges us to see beyond the mundane and conventional paradigms. But in another way, it is threatening beyond belief to disengage from familiar territory. The mechanism of resistance is in full play and power when new ideas are suggested.

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#### HOMEOSTASIS

The theory of systems has application here. One of the best known concepts of system theory is that of homeostasis: the tendency of any system to resist change when energy is brought to bear against it. Since we are all creatures of habit, any disequilibrium or change will result in the system trying to keep itself the same. An example of the power of homeostasis can be seen any time we attempt to institute a behavior change in our personal life, say starting to exercise, or going to bed earlier, or eating healthier, or studying the gospel more. Our intentions are good but the homeostatic energy of our own systems is often more powerful.

This phenomenon of resistance is what I think Elder Packer was referring to in a talk entitled “Let Them Govern Themselves.” When referring to over-programming plaguing the church he said, “It has been virtually impossible to affect any reduction in programs.” And later in the same talk he states, “In recent years I have felt, and I think I am not alone, that we were losing the ability to correct the course of the Church.” The tendency for any established system to fight change is a powerful dynamic of that system.

For a system to experience the irrational and paradoxical nature of second order change means to stretch and disturb the system in ways that often overwhelm the attempts. To bring about the kind of transformation implicit in second order change requires a level of disequilibrium that challenges us all. It will not happen with name changes and divisional realignment and integration. It will only happen with new visionary eyes, new

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paradigms that bring into focus realities now hidden from view, and the courage and faith to see with those new eyes. The system will fight the change. That is the nature of systems—to maintain balance and prevent change (i.e. disequilibrium) from disturbing the system.

Let me use the Family Science Department as an example of the drama being played out between the first and second orders of change. Members of the department have spent hours in workshop discussions and brainstorming. The demands placed upon the chair to meet deadlines and create curriculum are planted deep in first order realities. Where in this process is the time to create the vision of new wine in new bottles, especially where disagreements and tensions arise over the nature of the changes? The energy required to push past homeostasis is enormous, requiring more patience and stamina than can be mustered. Our dilemma seems to be: create a program that will fit nicely into existing transfer programs and familiar academic concerns, staying pretty close to old wine in old bottles; or create a vision that would necessarily tear the fabric of the department due to the chaos, stress, and turmoil of creating new wine in new bottles.

Tensions between the old and the new are very real. The advantage may lie with homeostasis since first order change is much easier to satisfy. The allure of the familiar is seductive and strong, while the challenge of the unknown is distressing and unsettling, not only to ideas but to relationships as well. The romance of change is destroyed by the demands of realistic work and the discomfort of change. It is difficult, demanding, and stressful labor.

#### THE FANTASY BOND

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One last idea is the concept of the fantasy bond. The term originated from the work of Robert Firestone. It originally had application to the lack of intimacy (i.e. sharing of feelings) found in many marriages even though from the outside the relationships looked healthy. The fantasy bond is a mutual role play, where the man and woman act and treat each other the way they know they are supposed to according to the rules of society. They lack an intimate relationship, but it would be too painful and shameful to own up to the fact that their feelings have died for the other, so it is just easier to pretend their way through. To break a fantasy bond would require risking the entire relationship, so it is often just easier to go on acting.

The idea of a fantasy bond is also applicable to the relationship we have with ideas. In other words, we can have a fantasy bond with the idea of changes coming at this institution. We act as if we are excited; we talk as

if we are excited, especially with someone in power. We are not dumb; we know it is smarter to not drag our feet. Some would call it being passive aggressive, but that is only for the devious ones who know what they are doing. Many others, through a fantasy bond, might manifest genuine and sincere feeling until confronted with the realities of second order change. Then the fantasy bond will be exposed the same way it is exposed in marriage, when the crisis of change hits the proverbial fan.

The pretense would be exposed for what it is. The resistance of the homeostatic system would arise in full power, and many would be subdued into passive acceptance of the inevitable first order change with its business-as-usual routine. Ricks would become a four-year institution much like the two-year institution but with new classes and a new name. Teachers would pretty much continue as in the past with individual efforts waged in individual classrooms, consistent with proposals sent to the administrators and returned with modified instructions.

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The vision may be lost simply because the energy to confront the existing paradigms and those in power who preserve them would take a heavy toll (fatigue makes cowards of us all). Our fantasy bonds with change would be stripped of pretense and stand exposed and lame. First order change would multiply and another chapter in history would be repeated.

#### THE WILL AND THE GRACE

To preserve the vision, second order change with its transforming powers will have to confront head-on the homeostatic properties and personalities of the status quo and back-to-zero rule. If the vision is successful, people will be ripped from their comfort zones. The resulting energies will immerse everyone in messy and disturbing grips. Boundaries will collapse and anxieties will sky rocket as new directions develop. The forces of first order change will array themselves against the forces of second order change.

Now, giving it your best guess, what do you think the outcome will be? There is one final reality of BYU-Idaho that needs to be acknowledged. On some level the will and grace of Christ is going to be played out here, in ways that will be made manifest, with or without our help. It is a comforting/disturbing thought. ∞

## SOURCES

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The solution to the nine dots:

