



DRIVING CHANGE REQUIRES COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP

Introducing the CO₄ Model

By Executive-in-Residence Kees van der Graaf - May 2011

IMD

Chemin de Bellerive 23
PO Box 915,
CH-1001 Lausanne
Switzerland

Tel: +41 21 618 01 11
Fax: +41 21 618 07 07
info@imd.ch
<http://www.imd.org>



Copyright © 2006-2011 IMD - International Institute for Management Development. All rights, including copyright, pertaining to the content of this website/publication/document are owned or controlled for these purposes by IMD, except when expressly stated otherwise. None of the materials provided on/in this website/publication/document may be used, reproduced or transmitted, in whole or in part, in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or the use of any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from IMD. To request such permission and for further inquiries, please contact IMD at pressroom@imd.ch. Where it is stated that copyright to any part of the IMD website/publication/document is held by a third party, requests for permission to copy, modify, translate, publish or otherwise make available such part must be addressed directly to the third party concerned.

Change is inevitable, and large corporations have the power to make the world a better place by embracing the opportunities that change presents. But many organizations waste the opportunity by not being prepared or willing to change. By standing still, they risk suffering from complacency and losing out to competition.

While leading a global organization as it faced a number of major challenges, I developed what I call the CO₄ Model, which consists of four key words all starting with the letters CO. Following are these four steps and the importance they represent in successfully driving change:

1. Establish a CO-mpelling Need

Nobody likes change, but you can overcome the fear of change by establishing a compelling need. Share the facts, the trade-offs and let them be part of the same journey you've been on. Once it becomes clear that there is no other alternative, the organization will rally around the need for change. Small incremental steps, though appealing to the risk-averse, may not get you where you want to be. In those instances, it is better to take bold decisions and drive the implementation quickly and pragmatically throughout the entire organization.

2. Embrace CO-creation

When driving change, you must develop options, scenarios and alternatives together with your team. One effective way to do this is through learning events. By taking your team away from the office to develop the strategy, choose the must-win battles and develop plans, you send the message that you value their input. Show that you are not afraid of constructive feedback, but insist on mutual respect. The key is bringing the team together. Together, you know more, together you develop better solutions and together you care about the collective successes.

3. Demand CO-mmitment

Team alignment, team commitment and team spirit need to be created, cultivated, nurtured and protected. There is nothing more important in achieving your objectives than a committed team. To get there, you must lead with courage and be willing to move beyond your comfort zone and confront issues. There will be times when you have to make difficult decisions after listening to inputs from your team members. It's important that your team agree that, in those circumstances, they trust and empower you to make the necessary decisions.

4. Leverage CO-mmunication

To keep the message clear and consistent, communication plans must be given the highest priority. Every time you and your team have reached a conclusion, you must design a powerful communications program and focus on a small set of key messages. Any meeting that does not end with a discussion and agreement of the key messages is a bad meeting. For both internal and external communications, you should agree who will deliver the messages, which audiences should be addressed, what will be done in writing, what will be done in person, and which media and communication vehicles will be used.

And, remember the importance of repetition. Messages only come across if they are received in a compelling and consistent way. It does not matter if you are tired of giving the same message over and over again. What matters is that you reach your target audience, the message gets internalized and it has impact.

Sometimes you have to adjust your leadership approach

While the CO₄ Model presents the essential elements needed to bring forth change in an organization, it's important to keep in mind that different leaders may implement it differently. Your leadership approach, whether it's autocratic or participative, may need to be adjusted in order to maximize change results. Despite your style, you have to do what is required for the specific situation. In every decision, a

choice must be made between going bold and going incremental. When necessary, do not be afraid to make bold decisions. If you want to reduce complexity, for example, go for daring targets; do not fall into the trap of “death by a thousand cuts.” Once a decision has been made, stop the debate and implement it with rigor.

Kees van der Graaf is an Executive-in-Residence at IMD and Co-Director of IMD’s Global CEO Center – Leading in a Connected Future. His new book [Defining Moments: What every leader should know about balancing life](#) highlights the kind of leadership that will be required to tackle the immense challenges facing our world.

The book examines how Kees navigated personal crises and professional challenges in his career with Unilever, which spanned more than 30 years. Net proceeds from the book will go to the [FSHD Foundation](#).

RELATED PROGRAMS



ORCHESTRATING WINNING PERFORMANCE - <http://www.imd.org/owp>

The global business program for individuals and teams

Program Directors Bettina Buechel and Dominique Turpin

- For individuals and teams who seek the latest management thinking and practical, innovative solutions for their business
- Anticipate global business trends
- Boost your performance, broaden your perspectives and expand your global network
- Design the program that suits you