CIO Insight

The culture of change and the ultimate asset

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INTRODUCTION

On occasion I can be perceived as stubborn. I don't believe I am but I can see why people may consider me that way. I'm not turned off by someone who is confident, even borderline arrogant. What really turns me off is arrogance mixed with ignorance and humility nowhere in the cupboard. That's a meal to gag on — no fingers down the throat required.

Change is extremely difficult. As flexible as I would like to think that I am, there certainly are areas in my life where I'm inflexible. There are situations where no matter how reasonable a set of circumstances is presented to me I am unreasonable.

Standing up for what logically and rationally is correct isn't what I'm talking about. It's those areas in our lives that for no rational reason we are irrational, that despite all of the evidence presented to us, we continue to stand unmoved, maybe slightly shaken, but remaining firm in our state-of-being.

One situation for me is walking into a room full of strangers and starting a conversation. I get frozen. A rush of anxiety fills me, drowns my brain in irrational thoughts, a clamp comes down on my mouth and my own skin makes me uncomfortable. Now I could see the rationale in that if I were in a room full of people who despised me and didn't even want to hear me breathe, but this typically happens to me at conferences and events where you are encouraged to interact with one another. These interactions are designed for you to learn, to network and very possibly create unrealized

opportunities together. Illogical, irrational fear? Yes. Yet, put me in front of 1000 people to speak and not a problem. Why?

Implementing digital asset management systems (DAMS) into a company can be a scary thing. Yes, for the person who's doing it but even more so for the person who is being impacted by it. That fear can have a logical basis, particularly if the person sees their job going away. But the vast majority of individuals who are affected by a digital asset management (DAM) implementation don't have to worry about losing their jobs. The change DAMS will bring is positive; it will bring direct benefits to them and their company. Yet they don't want to change. Some would say the reasons for this are mostly fear based and some of it is based upon being comfortable with the way things are; some may not be willing to change an area that they don't consider significant; still some would say that it is none of the above, just a difference of opinion.

I would argue that reluctance to change and the denial of the need to change are always fear based and this fear is always destructive and counter-productive, individually and collectively. Moreover, only a clearly defined vision that embraces the collective down to the individual parts of an organization can keep people from falling away into the pit of irrational fears where progress halts.

Let's explore the culture of change and slightly touch upon something that I believe has to be at the summit of change: the "ultimate asset".

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THE FEAR OF FEAR

In the 1930s the Great Depression had reached its peak and the USA was in a terrible state of affairs economically, socially and psychologically. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, at his first inaugural address, forever coined the words “... the only thing we have to fear is fear itself”. We’ve heard that quoted over and over again in different speeches and presentations, even in a song, “Cult of Personality” by Living Colour. Unfortunately, that quote is only a portion of the original statement. The full impact of what he meant can only be understood by reading the entire statement:

So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself — nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.¹

Nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance ...

Wow. Pretty heavy. Let’s just think about that for a moment.

Nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror ...
That terror results in what?
It “*paralyzes needed efforts ...*”

That are required to “*convert retreat into advance ...*” Or bring about needed change, move the complacent into the progressive, the mediocre into the excellent, get us to a better place than where we’re today.

Now fear is not a bad thing; it does have its place — that’s why taking Roosevelt’s partial statement is misleading. It’s irrational fear that presents the greatest threat to progress and achievement.

Now obviously, there is a difference between going through the Great Depression and implementing DAM in your company. Let’s not be silly. But the fundamentals of fear in both scenarios relating to the culture of change are identical. People get so used to a certain state of affairs, or doing things a certain way — often causing great harm to themselves — that change is avoided. Change in the past has brought disruption and hardship to them. We have a tendency to remember the hardships and not the successes since we are raised in a culture of fear fueled by the messenger of fear: the media.

Therefore, since I am more inclined to remember the hardships that change has brought upon my life and others, I am afraid of change.

Some say that the older you get the more difficult it is to change. For many that’s true. The snowball of fear gets bigger and bigger as we get older and unless a person turns on the heat lamp of confrontation and begins anew they are destined for extinction.

Henry Miller, the American writer, said it perfectly:

The thing is to become a master and in your old age to acquire the courage to do what children did when they knew nothing.²

Two thousand years ago, Jesus Christ, speaking to people who tried to keep children away from him said, “You need to change and become like little children. If you don’t, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven”.³

Isn’t that so true? To have the openness to learn, soaking everything in like sponges; to have an unquenchable spirit of discovery; to get bored of the same old shit; isn’t that life worth living? And if most of my life is spent in the workplace, shouldn’t it be a place of fulfillment, achievement, creativity, newness?

Sadly, for most of us it is not and instead of “... [being] the change you wish to see in the world”⁴, as Mahatma Gandhi put it so basically, we blame our misery on someone else or an institution and pass the accountability on to them for changing our state of being. Yet, when sensible attempts to change are presented we resist, often without being aware that we are resisting.

I have three children, all under ten years old. And I learn more from them daily than all the books I’ve read or the people I have spoken with. I learn what I am, what I am not and what I need to become.

BBDO’S DAM STORY

In December 2002, BBDO NY implemented a comprehensive digital workflow system that covered everything from a digital archive, to online legal clearance with the networks and a virtual space to manage works in progress. We’ve learned much from this experience and continue to learn. Russ Stanton is, literally, BBDO’s Digital Workflow evangelist. He

spends a significant part of his day spreading the message and working directly with the offices to assist them in understanding the why and the how of DAM. Tom Kehn is our Digital Media Specialist who has worked in the trenches of implementation. His knowledge and endurance are motivated by his passion for digital media and its future. Recently, I asked them to discuss some of the challenges around the culture of change with BBDO's DAM implementation.

Q: Looking back, in everything that it takes to implement a DAM system, would you say managing cultural changes got enough attention at BBDO?

Russ Stanton (RS): I think most people looking for DAM solutions concentrate too much on the cool factors, you know like “look what you can do with this thing”. In our experience, this was not necessarily the case, although I'm sure it played in the back of our minds. We tended to pat ourselves on the back that we were concentrating on the workflow elements that existed — how do our people do their job and what software would best fit in. That's great, better than most, but looking back, we missed something critical at the onset, and that was truly trying to understand how this would impact the emotions and the lives of the grassroots worker. How did they feel about making this monumental leap...excited, insecure, apprehensive?

We didn't pay enough attention to the human element and give them concentrated one-on-one face time, showing them how this truly relates to what they do day in and day out — instilling some confidence. So in that cultural respect, I don't think nearly enough attention is given to managing this kind of change. Fortunately for us, we have recognized this now and the adoption is taking root much quicker.

Tom Kehn (TK): Managing cultural change, at least at BBDO, has been a key element in implementing our DAM system. In any institution where a radically new system, especially digital in nature, is introduced to replace an entrenched and familiar way of working, there naturally will be resistance.

Q: What were some of the cultural challenges you went through at BBDO, internally and with outside vendors who were part of your workflow?

RS: The longer you've worked at something, doing things a certain way, the harder it is to accept something new, especially as daunting as DAM. At BBDO, the longevity of the employees is legendary, so dealing with 20–30 year tenured senior management people was probably the toughest hurdle. Mainly, because there was no sponsorship from them to their people, you know the trickle down mandate . . . This is probably one reason that we hit the grassroots folks after hitting the brick wall.

Younger, more computer savvy people tend to get it quicker. I remember a Broadcast Technology seminar I went to and in every single presentation, this was echoed repeatedly, older workers are harder to adjust than the entry level college grad, but it can be done with the right approach. Also, I think a certain amount of complacency exists with people that have been doing the same job for so long. It takes getting them excited, but first making them understand you're not a threat.

An environment that weighs so heavily on being creative can be an obstacle as well. They see change or trying to be more efficient as circumventing the creative process that will make them successful, so they reject it at face value. At BBDO this has been my experience at every single agency in North America, so it is not geographic. It is incredibly difficult to even get them to show up for demos.

Vendors have been less of a problem since they have a vested interest in keeping their client happy. In BBDO's case post production houses are more willing to adopt new procedures than our own people.

However, back to the creatives...since the vendors are working closely with producers and creative directors, they are more likely to take their orders from them than from this guy who's trying to implement a new way of doing things, who's not even at the edit session. It can vary depending on the vendor because there are some that want to do things your way just from the sheer efficiency aspect, and they get it. So, if there are those vendors out there who can become an ally, you may have an offsite evangelist to your cause.

At BBDO we had such an ally at one post production house we prototyped our system and procedures with. BBDO does a tremendous amount of business with them too, and this

helped get our message across because they were promoting it too.

TK: There was major resistance to using the system by our audio visual (AV) department because the analog method of performing their tasks was more familiar to them and they felt as though we were shoving this new system down their throats.

Certain persons feared that the system would somehow make their jobs obsolete instead of enhancing their ability to do them.

Q: Are there any anecdotes that you would like to share?

RS: The anecdote that continues to play out is within our Creative and TV Production groups. The comments, 'I hate this system' and 'this system does nothing for me' were common in the early days of getting it adopted and used. We knew then and now that this had to do with fear of change. We conducted weekly meetings to talk, candidly, about what their problems were, and frankly the conversations got pretty heated at times.

The problem in most cases had to do with what they understood how to use, or what was actually there. However, we also found that things that were reported were manufactured to take the emphasis away from using the system and delay what we had proposed.

Today, two years into the implementation, that same group swears by the system as if it were their idea in the first place, the meetings have since been discontinued and the level of fear is gone. It was a slow painful journey to this point, but we've found that with some patience and non-defensive tactics all arguments can be put aside in time.

TK: There have been a limitless supply of entertaining anecdotes over the years as a result of people's fear, misunderstanding and just plain incompetence. Countless closed-door bitching sessions on both sides of the playing field have been held. I'm sure you could fill an encyclopedia from each side.

I remember in the beginning of the implementation, I went to configure a set-top box that was connected to the DAM system in the AV department. When I asked one of the guys where he wanted it, he said, "Over there by the garbage can where it will end up

anyway". Today, he is one of the leading proponents of the system.

Q: What were and still are some of the challenges . . . and mention some of the tactics you use to overcome them?

RS: Amnesia. It seems that after getting a group up and running on the system that constant attention has to be given to make sure they continue to use it because senior management, especially, will get an email from a vendor selling a similar solution and then you get copied on an email saying, "Hey, this looks really cool, have you guys looked into digital asset management?" Then, you have to start almost all over again and remind them that our system is there and you get some of them into a room and refresh their memories with a demo until the lights go on. It can seem like a waste of time, but to truly have the system adopted this has to be done.

We're trying to be proactive about this condition in several ways. We have instituted stats that will allow us to see what users are logging in, how frequently they login, what facility they are with, exports per user, what type of asset they export and much, much more. This will allow us to monitor the usage and query users that aren't logging in as frequently as they used to or should. Also, since turnover with new hires coming on board can be an issue, we are making training on the system part of the Human Resources orientation for new people. It also reminds senior management of how many people, who do the work, actually do use the system.

We average over 18,000 queries a month so it definitely is part of our culture and AV, one of the original resisters of change, exclusively uses the system. Instead of searching for those tapes on the shelf and assembling a reel in the old way, AV now searches the database, finds the spots, assembles them on line, and exports them to whatever format and destination they want. Time is collapsed and physical media is eliminated.

TK: Within our AV group there was a lack of understanding in using most of the software necessary to work within the new system. This was solved through repeated training sessions held with each member of the group. Training

DVDs were also purchased and distributed to each member as well.

Ensuring that account groups are up to date on the use of the system as new features are added or when there is a turnaround of personnel continues to be a problem. This will be overcome by integrating training with new user orientation and creating a comprehensive database of all employees at BBDO documenting their level of involvement with the system.

Q: What percentage of your time, relatively speaking, is spent on managing cultural changes and do you see a direct correlation between time invested in managing cultural change and successful DAM implementation? Where does it fall on the priority scale?

RS: I would say that at least 60 percent of my time is spent on cultural changes and the remainder on new implementations at other facilities. Eventually when all the North American facilities are on board, that percentage could go up, because there will be eight different facilities in which the cultural change is a factor, although I should have a counterpart in those locations to take up the cause. That 60 percent relates to things like reinforcement of the system, getting people to think differently and training of the users.

However, that being said, any successful DAM implementation must put this kind of attention to the culture change or it will fail. Don't forget that you're dealing with human beings with human feelings, human fears and technology simply does not have an answer for how to deal with that. You're changing a life that in a lot of cases doesn't want to change and will fight tooth and nail to keep things constant.

If you simply roll out the system and walk away, you might as well admit failure right away, or don't even attempt it in the first place. I really see the culture changes as your number one priority in anything that changes the way people work so dramatically.

TK: The more time you spend on managing cultural change with the people who need it, the bigger the payoff will be once you have achieved acceptance with these people. Typically once they have been "converted" they begin to

influence others around them to become even more involved.

Q: Any advice that you would give to other people?

RS:

- Grow acceptance from the people that do the work day-to-day...management will give you lip service, but will do little to help promote it. Viral marketing within the ranks works.
- Get to know how people feel about what you're promoting. It can be threatening to some. Don't let it be, keep it light. Humor is always a good way to win people over and help them feel comfortable
- Study body language. Look for the blank stare behind the nodding of understanding; those people are probably going to do what they want anyway.
- Do more one-on-one concentrated promotion in the person's space. Demos in conference rooms are fine for getting the initial idea out there to a group, but there's nothing for them like seeing it working on their desktop in the same environment they inhabit day after day.
- Become the mayor of your office where you make daily rounds and check up on people even if it's just to talk about the game or their kids and throw in something about, 'Oh, have you had a chance to try what I showed you the other day?.'
- Stay on top of everything going on in your office and become a facilitator, in other words, if you hear that a client is asking for some material immediately and someone is lamenting that it can't get done in time (they're doing it the old way), you say, 'Have you tried this...here let me show you'. You and the system become the hero and this opens the door for you to say, 'You know you can do this yourself'. You become the go-to guy next time and a convert becomes an apostle.
- Empower the users. Create as many self-service possibilities as you can. This can take away a lot of the stigma of change, and, back to the emotion part of the culture, makes them feel good about themselves.

TK: The most important piece of advice I have is that all aspects of your implementation should be as close to flawless as possible in their execution. People's awareness of even the smallest problem is heightened when they are skeptical to begin with.

The culture of change is a challenging space to work in. I think Tom Kehn wraps it up nicely when he says, "... a lack of cultural change management is certainly the Achilles heel of many failed DAM implementations". Now, that doesn't mean that you go on endlessly coddling people who don't want to change. It means that you don't ignore that they exist because they won't go away easily.

OK. So we've philosophically and illustratively shown that fear is ever present in the culture of change. Well, I can't tolerate drawn out explanations of the dynamics of how something works within some nicely crafted framework without making an attempt to engage a solution, which is the main reason I despised academia - it induced the gag reflex.

FEAR'S REMEDY: VISION

"Where there is no vision the people perish."⁵ How many companies today provide little or no vision to their employees? Or if they do, no one buys it because the only ones that reap the rewards are those who are part of the bonus pool. And the visions that they provide are typically bullshit feel good words that focus on making more money at all cost — emphasis on *at all cost*. Cutting headcount is always a nice alternative if they can't meet the numbers since it's the easiest way to make the numbers. Sad to say that is why the US has evolved into a society that has crumbled in industries where it led at one time. There is no real loyalty to the employee; therefore, no loyalty is reciprocated. Fear is perpetuated; thus, progress is thwarted and chugs along at a snail's pace. We've lost the lessons that people like Henry Ford taught us:

A business that makes nothing but money is a poor kind of business.⁶

And despite all the claims in the media about Wal-Mart, when Sam Walton was around, his drive toward excellence at serving the customer and his understanding of the need to establish vision throughout the company, not just for select groups, are the reasons they stand at the head of the retail market. And that's not just in sales but in how their supply chain operates. The value of vision was paramount to him: "Capital isn't scarce; vision is."⁷

So why is vision so scarce? Why is the word

such a cliché, almost like love? Everybody believes they need it; everybody wants it but few really have it or know how to get it.

John Wooden is the most successful college basketball coach in history. Yet his primary focus was never on winning the game. His focus was on instilling in his players, individually and collectively, the need to perform to the best of their abilities. To know that they finished a game, and after finishing the game win or lose, they gave it their all. So the focus wasn't on the trophy but on producing the best they could individually and collectively. And his success was doing the best he could to join together the best group of individuals he could to achieve the best they could. In Wooden's own words:

Success is peace of mind that is the direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you did your best to become the best that you are capable of becoming.⁸

Even though I am a believer in the John Wooden philosophy, I have always been afraid of promoting "just do the best you can". Often it is a cop out as opposed to truly doing the best you can, and a prescription for mediocrity. But as I get older, I'm discovering it is the only way. And just like Roosevelt's phrase, "... the only thing we have to fear is fear itself," is taken out of context, so is John Wooden's "best" principle. John Wooden developed a system called the Pyramid of Success that supports and keeps in check the axiom of being the best you can.

Focusing on being the best one can be is the way to overcome fear. Getting others to focus on being the best they can be so that they can be part of producing the best that can be, is the way to conquer fear. It builds healthy pride in what you do and what your company produces, even if the heads of your company don't get it. In the best case scenario, being the best you can be has to permeate the entire company, not just the so-called creative people who "create" whatever your company produces. It starts with the individual. But if your company doesn't have the right vision, make your own. It is infectious.

Those who settle for mediocrity, even in daily life, become a faceless cog with no passion, no life, an empty void in the community, exemplifying all of the traits of a pebble, an

inanimate object unknown by the other pebbles even though they rub shoulders daily.

ENTER THE ULTIMATE ASSET

So, what is vision relative to DAM? To successfully implement a digital asset management system? If that's what you think don't bother reading any further, you're lost. Go wander around for a while until you get your wits back. DAM is just a medium to achieve something greater. And when you realize that, you've taken the first step. Begin with finding the ultimate asset.

What is the ultimate asset?

The ultimate asset is what your company produces and what every DAM system should be built upon. In book publishing it's a book; in advertising, it's an ad . . . Understand what the ultimate asset is; what the workflow is that produces it; what the ancillary pieces are, what the costs are and what opportunities there are for efficiency in the production of that asset.⁹

Well, that sounds simple. But what if you work for an automobile manufacturer and you work for a department that produces marketing materials for just one car line out of fifteen? Even though in your world your ultimate assets are marketing materials, they are not the ultimate asset. The ultimate asset is still an automobile. You may have a need to improve your workflow by implementing DAM but you should not implement DAM with that small minded mentality. Your need to integrate a DAM system in your department should promote discovery in other areas and ultimately a design at the highest level of the production chain to develop a digital workflow practice, not a one dimensional application.

A typical response might be "OK, that sounds lofty and unrealistic and why should I care about other departments when I have my own deadlines?" That is a recurring sentiment particularly in large corporations. It's startling how a culture that is about self at the top breeds self throughout. Remember to "be the change you wish to see!" There are so many stories of great change coming from the "insignificant" individuals in an organization and it is valuable

to the success of a company to have those who will push all the wrong buttons for all of the right reasons. Start by being an evangelist of DAM, not a builder and you don't have to be a CIO or department head to do it.

And what should be your vision, since I didn't really answer the question of what vision is, relative to DAM? The vision of DAM is really simple as I see it. Build a system that enhances the human experience, creating a medium that allows people to perform at their best, so that collectively they can perform at their best and, as a result, the ultimate asset can be the best.

So as you climb that DAM mountain and you finally reach the summit, a bit short of breath, tired and ragged, hungry and thirsty, what you should find glistening in the sunlight is the most spectacular work you could imagine. It should radiate as far as the east is from the west. It should fill you with pride and a sense of sacred satisfaction, make you stand up tall and breathe in the fresh air of accomplishment, which is the seed for new beginnings. You will find a rock to sit down on, but only briefly, and you will humbly thank the DAM gods and for a moment it will be just you and your creation and they will be the best.

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