

DAY

6

Accept: Change as the Nature of Things

Mission: to look at change in all systems and processes as normal

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I'm at the Blue Sky Hotel in Ulan Bator, with Fredrik Härén, Esso Khulan Baljinnyam, and Batgerel Bat, and a few other urbanized Mongolians, and I ask them how nomads deal with change in Mongolia. They look at me with a slightly perplexed facial expression. Then Esso says matter of factly, "If something doesn't work out, then we try something else, and we don't spend a lot of time deliberating over it. We just move on."

Just move on . . . after I leave this meeting with my team of Fredrik, Esso, Orgil (my photographer), and Baddy (our driver), we head off in a fancy Mercedes 4×4 to the Mongolian steppes outside the city to stay with Namjildorj Oyun and Ravdan Sanduijav in their yurt. It is getting dark, and the instructions for getting to their yurt are a bit obscure. Esso is on the phone to Namjildori (the wife of our host family), and she says, "At signpost 273, you will see a billboard; turn off there," and that's about it. Baddy continues driving on the highway in the pitch black, and we see signpost 273, but no big billboard, and he turns off the highway onto the fields. There are no lights anywhere, just the stars in the sky.

"If something doesn't work out, then we try something else."

Baddy swerves and drives fast across the land, changing freely from one direction to another, searching for the yurt. No one really knows where we are headed, but we remain in good spirits. The whole adventure is humorous. After a while, we decide to return to the highway. Esso gets back on the phone with Namjildori to check for directions again. Baddy decides to go further along the highway and search again until we know we have gone too far. At this point, we don't know what to do, so the only thing to do is laugh, really. Again Esso calls, but this time he calls Raydan, the husband.

Baddy changes direction again, and we head to where we just came from. Finally, we see a billboard and signpost 273. Baddy turns off the highway on a bumpy, rolling kind-of-a-road, again swerving here and there. Esso again speaks to Raydan, who says he will turn the lights of his truck on as a guide for us in the vast black. Back and forth, up and down, swerving here and there, Baddy changes direction back and forth. We are searching for two lights in the distance.

At this point, we have no clue where we are heading, but the Mongolians in the 4×4 are calm and just keep moving on; me, I am getting a bit worried. Finally, after a long journey, Esso spots the lights, and we swerve in another direction to head towards them. We arrive at the yurt, and Raydan greets us, though now there is only time to sleep as it is so late at night.

What has this to do with change? This is an example of Esso's earlier statement, "If something doesn't work out, then we try something else, and we don't spend a lot of time deliberating over it. We just move on."

As Batgerel says, referencing a Mongolian proverb around change, "If a lake is not changing the water, it will go stagnant; change is important." That's a powerful word isn't it: stagnant?

What is stagnant in your leadership or your company that needs to be changed? Do you ever get the feeling you are going around and around on a subject or you keep making the same decisions on projects by using the same old processes you have for years? In many ways, like our adventure into the country, stagnancy invites change—you just need to realise it before it happens.

How do you view change?

Change as Process: The “Seed of a Calling”

As Dr. Sheila Patel, an medical director at the Chopra Centre for Well-Being, said, “change is natural and the only constant in life.” She further suggests that, when considering the nomadic mindset, it is comparable to “a seed of a calling and a time for change.”

That “seed of a calling” is the way you perceive and interpret change in your life, leadership, and institution. It is in many ways like the Foie Gras. It takes a bold and courageous mindset to see the interconnected ecosystems that surround you and change when it is time to change.

“change is natural and the only constant in life”

If so, then change can be thought of as not one singular event but a process made up of a string of interconnected events that creates a continuum. When a corporation goes through a period of change management, it is not one singular event, it is many events making up the change process within the different organisational systems. The events are interconnected in different ways.

Change in Organisations

You are confronted with change in your company on a daily basis, from simple functioning processes to potentially complex, hostile mergers or take-overs. Change runs the size gamut (in micro or macro events) and certainly comes with varying amounts of stress, uncertainty, and insecurity.

“Change is necessary for creation, and it is important to realise that it is all ok; uncertainty is okay,” says Sheila. Most of us know of this intellectually; however, it resonates in varying degrees in everyone and in every corporation as it does in nature.

On the subject of change, Cristian Jonsson, Managing Director at Standard Charter Bank in Singapore, notes how frequently he has witnessed the same type of conversation between employees and CEOs:

Employee: ‘Are there gonna be any more changes this year?’

CEO: ‘Have you endured change every year in the past 5 years?’

Everyone: ‘Yes, I have.’

CEO: ‘Why do you think it will be any different this year, the next year? Or the year after?’

“It is okay to recognize different ways of doing, being, and thinking”

Sometimes fear increases in people when they hear about change. It can be open-ended fear for some people; for others, it’s tentative; and for still others, this is just normal. This is due to the fear of the unknown, and this goes back again to survival.

Sheila recognizes this fearful reaction to change and says, “It is okay to recognize different ways of doing, being, and thinking. Yes, change is a constant, and it is simply the nature of things that are now, to come, and that will be.”

Nomads do not flinch with change; they experience it fluidly as the natural occurrence of life and nature. It is just part of life, no matter if you lead an organisation, a country, a family, an employee, or an animal, just as in the song from *The Lion King*, “The Circle of Life.”

Nomads Can Teach Us about Change

How Does Change Come About?

Since the beginning of time, there has been disruption, and people have adjusted; yet today, many of us have lost that nomad within us and the natural fluid ability to accept, change, and adapt to the disruptions constantly confronting us.

From dealing with traffic, to pollution, to hostile mergers, to downsizing, to the death of another person, you name it—disruption is happening everywhere, all the time.

Disruption shakes up your proverbial comfort zone, and that can be good and bad. Not all change is good if it is not handled wisely. For individuals to grow and change, you need to have that primal sense of hunger for something new and fresh (the Foie Gras and Follow the Rain).

“It is okay to recognize different ways of doing, being, and thinking”

Nature teaches you that change is normal. For example, look at the seasons. In many parts of the world, you have four seasons. But when disruption occurs, like pollution, a volcano erupting, earthquakes, burning forests, or using coal for power and heating, this, over time, puts stress on the natural order or the nature of things, as we are seeing today. These events can affect seasons and climate change, which we are experiencing around the globe.

The early nomads, because they were interconnected with nature, felt and experienced

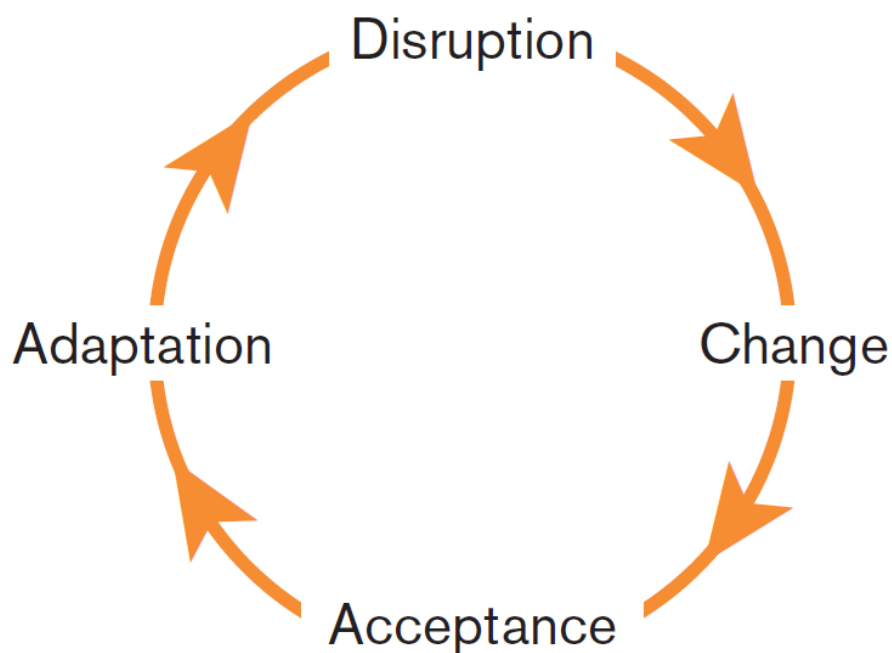
disruptions on multiple levels. Due to their innate intelligence and insight, they knew they had to change or perish.

I met Nergui Sandagjav, CEO of ReachFinance MFI in Mongolia, which supports and offers microfinancing to Mongolian nomads, at Fredrik Härén's book launch in Ulan Bator. She supports this thought of nomads' innate intelligence and their unique qualities. She says,

“Nomads have a ‘trust-and-try-it’ mindset whereby if it doesn't work, just leave it, move on, and if it works, go for it.” She also mentions another quality of nomads: “They won't think so long and carefully about something; they will try, change, and adapt very rapidly.” Nergui finds this quite opposite to the west, where, as she says, “They will think about all the consequences and problems and think about it too much, too long, and take too much time; we just try it.”

Maybe then, we need to listen to the nomadic intelligence—the nomadic mindset within us. The innate resilience of the nomad, which resides in all of us, is what allows them to flow with the nature of things (disruption), to change, accept, and adapt with a sense of fluidity and calmness.

The Change Cycle



Nomads' Ability To Adapt to Change

One of the great attributes of the Mongols is their ability to rapidly adapt to change. There are a few reasons they are able to adapt so quickly. One is because they are more generalist in their

skills and thinking (although today they are becoming more specialized), and another is curiosity. They have less boundaries or borders in their minds, allowing them more freedom.

Nergui says, We allow adaptation. In our culture, we like trying new things. I think we are very good at this, and like our culture, it is one of the forces for development. It is something in our mindset, and it is still really existing. We are quick to adapt. This comes from the nomadic mindset.

How do you allow adaptation to happen in you and your leadership? Mongolians have earned a reputation, even outside their own country, for their ability to adapt easily. Nergui mentioned that South Koreans like to hire Mongolians because, They work hard, adapt easily, and their productivity is high. I think this is because they are not afraid of change and take on responsibilities because of their nomadic independent mindset. Even though there is some low level of complaining, they accept, adapt to new things, and change faster than most.

Change: The Fear Quotient

This disruption, change, acceptance, and adaptation cycle all circles back to something else Esso, one of my Mongolian team, said to me when I asked how Mongolians deal with fear. She said,

We don't do fear. We are not driven on fear. We are driven on trust and how we can keep this nomadic mindset during the changes to urbanization. The balancing of adaption to new things brings the positive of the new things, which is important.

With any disruption or change, fear is generally the natural default system. The fear of the unknown and uncertainty. I found Esso's statement quite insightful and revealing of the Mongolian people and their culture.

I asked Nergui, "Where does the inner drive come from?" She responded with, "the nomadic mindset, I think; yes, that's it."

Mongolians and other nomadic cultures, with their nomadic mindset and outlook on life, have a lot to teach everyone, especially visionary leaders as civilisation moves forwards into the future.

Consider these words from Benson Kipolonka Muntere, a Maasai from Kenya: Being a human-being, you must go undergo different stages; you must change because change is a rule of life and is always adaptable. When you were child, you were small, and then you are not. It is a rule of life and is always adaptable.

So true. I invite you to take a few moments to muse upon some of the changes you've experienced in your life. There's likely too many to remember, so pick a few.

1. What was the disruption that triggered the need/want to change?
2. What was the change?

3. How well did you accept and adapt to the change?

What do you think you can do within your company to assist and smooth over the change process and dispel fear, so that others are able to adapt more easily while staying engaged?

How Nomadic Thinking Can Influence Change in Organisations

Cristian Jonsson works for a multinational bank (Standard Charter Bank in Singapore), and you would think banks are the least nomadic organisations because their whole premise is to be settled. I had the opportunity to talk to him at length about his experience, viewpoints, and opinions around disruption, change, acceptance, and adaptation—the change cycle—in the banking industry and its relationship to mindset. He starts off with how nomads equate to change:

I think change is a must in today's corporate life, whether you work in a bank, whether you work in retail, in a corporation or whatever you do, so unless you embrace change, you get left behind. I do think banks are becoming more nomadic, but they are probably quite settled. In the next five or ten years, they are going to have to change.

Change in many corporations can go sideways at times if you aren't careful. Cristian suggests some possibilities why:

When you've settled in a place, you get very comfortable where you are, and, at least from what I've experienced, rather than embrace change, you'll always look for negatives of why change is not a good a thing for either you, individually, or for your team.

Or . . .

When people feel that this change will lead to job insecurity, less reward, no recognition, if what they are doing means nothing, whether it is good or bad, that's when you get disillusionment, lack of energy, and you don't get results.

Or . . .

Changing pastures to me is not a negative, but it becomes negative if you develop a fear that something's going to happen to you or the team that you are in.

Or . . .

If I were to sit around and constantly demean the group decision to make a change, or the chief's decision to make a change, then I'm not sure they would want me to be part of that nomad group, which would lead to insecurity.

I feel that when I look around, and it is like this in all organisations, in my view, there's always individuals who just don't embrace decisions or changes, and unfortunately, they do get left behind. It doesn't mean that they lose their jobs, it is just that they don't grow.

“Insecurity is okay”

The qualities mentioned here are those often commonly associated with the settler mindset: comfort, security, and fear. Yet Dr. Sheila Patel believes “insecurity is okay.” And, for those who have challenges with coping rapidly with disruption and change, the settler mindset could be a limitation. When an institution has too many employees (at all levels) with this mindset typology, there is potential for it not to move forwards, change, and grow, hence possibly leaving it vulnerable to losing shareholder value, its position in the marketplace, and trust with its employees.

What might be an answer to this?

Cristian thinks it is important for leaders to be able to communicate to all people well, and more specifically, to those with a dominant settler mindset in a way that is clear, clean, and supports them while also addressing their multiple fears. Most of those fears or “false expectations appearing real,” can be a primal response linked to survival. On the other hand, if you think of change from a nomadic mindset, Cristian suggests,

Nomads think differently around change. I don't think the whole group just packs their houses up and moves aimlessly without everyone thinking. That would be stupid. I think they all buy into it. I feel for nomads it is probably not change because they move as a group, and there's a kinship in the group. There is a positivity around the group and a real systematic, rational approach to why they do things. Everyone is communicated with, people feel secure in the move, they see the positives; there's clearly risks, but they understand the risks.”

Nomads have to be strategic and focused for the survival of the community, as any leader ought to be. When a nomad moves from one location to another, they must secure the road by identifying the risks to their best abilities, and the same goes for a leader in a corporation or in politics; you need to secure the road ahead, so everyone will buy in and follow. Cristian continues, To handle very rapid change, you need to feel you own it, you need to like it, and the way you like change is if you can feel secure in it, right? And you feel somehow protected. At the end of the day, most people that I know have families, they need to pay bills, they want to get rewarded for good work, and they need to understand if I do this then that yields a specific result for them and the team, both on a social and financial level.

You need to communicate sincerely and be responsible for whatever happens (no passing the buck, no blaming). Choose a positive way forwards. Disruption, change, acceptance, and adaptation is normal and natural. Bring this to the forefront, and do not shy away from it. When you want to influence people, be simple in your communication, as Cristian suggests. Go slowly at first and lay out the whole systemic change process. Remember, settlers are the vital glue of your company and can make it run smoothly or not. Therefore, when managing teams, understanding their mindset typology is important.

“I don’t think the whole group just packs their houses up and moves aimlessly without everyone thinking”

Cristian believes,

If you don’t manage change within the group, then I think that the group you have can disintegrate, people can leave, and people can get disenfranchised because they don’t understand why there’s a requirement to embrace change or, in terms of this research piece, to be nomadic.

In organisational teams or tribes or clans, it is important to find out what binds your employees besides the project they might be working on or the overall purpose of the company; it could be friendship, culture, or interests. With this bond, the risks become less as they are all in it together. Yes, there can be dissenting independent voices, which is normal; however, it is the bond of kinship and belief in the direction that will inspire them.

This takes a leader who has a will composed of independent, expansive, and inclusive thinking, feelings, and perspectives and delivers this through, I repeat, communication that is simple and clear, not complex and muddy. If you view change as a positive thing, rather than something to fear, you open yourself (and your corporation) up to opportunities: the Foie Gras. This is a nomadic mindset.

Cristian explains it like this:

I think a nomad, from a corporate standpoint, is someone who always looks for the positive reasons to make a change, balancing the risks and rewards, rather than always looking at it from a negative standpoint, and then having the energy to do that.

You need to communicate clearly down and ensure you have people who are positive around the team, even if you don’t always know exactly the end game. You need to encourage, looking for the positives, and then I think that yields positive results.

The cascade of information needs to flow downwards, all the way down, without missing any level of the institution, just like in the tea ceremony. It cannot be vacuous information but real information that will encourage disbelievers and support those on board. It is not just words but actions by the leadership walking their talk with deep respect for everyone else that create positive results. This is a nomadic principle of governance, ensuring support and the positive ways forwards while still understanding the risks.

Being Nimble Helps Secure Change

Imagine you develop and create nimble, fast-moving, interconnected small clans or tribes who are given more autonomy. In addition, you have a small tribe of innovators in each department rather than just one large innovation hub within the company. Allow each small tribe access to

the smaller innovation hub, so they can directly interconnect and share information and work together; this allows for more collaboration, faster-moving information, and the ability to adapt more easily.

Considering this idea, Cristian says, Companies that are very nimble, able to adapt, and who may be viewed as extremely nomadic, can allow for jumping from one place to another and always looking for the next place to go. One of the reasons they are able to do that is that they are either working [in] small units where their chiefs (managers) allow them to jump around, and if they do that, they get rewarded and they can feel secure in that change. They also allow people to be entrepreneurial or intrapreneurial. Unless you are very nimble, unless you are investing in that change or trying to understand that change, then I do think your pasture is going to dry up.

Naturally Moving Forwards

Cristian says that people don't always agree with the change, and he cites his situation: In the latest change, I didn't necessarily agree with it. I made those points, but once a decision has been made, I think the positive nomads embrace the team, the decision, and get behind it. Once a team has decided to change, if you are part of the team, then you back the team even if you didn't agree with everything that was decided.

Embracing a nomadic mindset can certainly assist you in looking at the change cycle—disruption, change, acceptance, adaptation—in a more powerful way to naturally move forwards.

There are obviously many different factors that can go into creating an organisational ecosystem that will flourish in these rapidly moving times. One factor that can assist you is understanding the qualities of the nomadic, builder, and settler mindsets. Cristian reiterates it very simply, “It comes down to clear and exact communication.”

“It comes down to clear and exact communication”

Habib El Bellayni, from the Casbah Museum in Tighmert, Southern Morocco, shared this wise nomadic Arabic proverb with me, which I sense fits this conversation around change:

If you like honey, you must support the bite of the bee.

What do you think this means?

In the desert,
 nomads follow their life.
 Their animals lead the way.
 They eat;
 they have family;
 they have community;

they trade;
they save for the hard days;
and they Follow the Rain.
Even though change is slow,
they adapt rapidly because this is inside them.
This takes adapting to the environment that is ever changing
and the circumstances of life that are thrown at you constantly.
You must accept and adapt to the challenges of life with your eyes fully open.



From the craziness of the drive to the steppes the night before and the pitch-black sky full of stars to the next morning, I awake in the yurt; natural change has happened. The day is a new day. I look outside and can't believe my eyes. The expansive nature of the rolling, light brown, grassy steppes in the soft morning light, in places looking like velvet, the animals grazing off in the distance, and the sweet silence in the air, has me disbelieving that just hours before we had travelled over this beautiful land. Change is normal: it is time to migrate to your new day.



LEADERSHIP RETHINK

Essential nomadic leadership qualities to embody:

- Positivity
- Disruption
- Security
- Healthy
- Clarity
- Adaptation
- Flexibility
- Nimble
- Communication
- Change
- Listen
- Fear
- Bonds
- Support
- Solidarity

FINAL QUESTIONS

1. How can you communicate the disruption, change, acceptance, adaptation change cycle for better results?
2. What if you were to understand that each mindset typology responds differently to change. How would you communicate then?
3. What are some innovative ways you can lead a change management or reshuffling process?

RETHINK



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