

## Guiding Change Journeys: A Synergistic Approach to Organization Transformation; Review by M. Laiken

**By Rebecca Chan Allen (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer, 2001, 229 pages)**

One of the greatest challenges an author can undertake is to write a book that is both theoretically complex and strongly pragmatic. Rebecca Chan Allen has accomplished this in *Guiding Change Journeys*. In combining the philosophical underpinnings and conceptual bases of a wide variety of organizational change strategies, with practical approaches, examples, exercises and illustrations, she skillfully supports change practitioners in integrating Eastern and Western perspectives. As Rothwell, Sullivan and Quade note in their introduction to the book: "(The author) tells stories of change leaders and facilitators, confronted by business volatility and burgeoning organizational diversity, who use scientific insights and timeless change techniques to transform impasse into innovation and conflicts into creativity" (2002, p. xix-xx).

Through her integration of stories from mythology and concepts from organization development, new science, and wisdom traditions, Chan Allen takes us on "Archetypal Change Journey" based on Jungian archetypes, which describe enduring patterns of transformation. Throughout this journey, she deftly manages the polarity of the classic Lewinian Organization Development model based on action research, referred to as the

"arrow" approach, with a Taoist/Confucian model that balances masculine and feminine energy, termed a "cyclical approach". In so doing, the author challenges the hegemony of Western assumptions based on a Newtonian scientific paradigm, making room for the Eastern assumptions of a world where yin and yang energies are in dynamic balance – a world where a harmony of opposites is possible. Consistent with this notion, Chan Allen's writing does not pit the Eastern and Western traditions against each other, but rather, carefully integrates the two in her Archetypal Change Journey approach, to access the strengths of both.

In this spirit of integration, the book implies throughout that successful organizational change is dependent upon individual and group psychological approaches conceptualized within a systemic framework. The author's intention seems ultimately holistic, in that she continually addresses issues of mind/body/spirit, whether individually or organizationally.

However, Chan Allen also introduces the paradoxical notion of differentiation, in weaving through all of her writing a focus on acknowledging and celebrating a variety of diversities. As she notes – "diversity affects the whole art of managing change" (p. 8). She points out that today's increasingly multicultural workforce encompasses a wide variety of assumptions that affect individual behaviour at work, requiring multiple approaches to organizational change. She therefore exhorts change leaders to help organizations

access the collective wisdom of different cultures to help them “connect disparate change events to universally understandable patterns.” (p. 11).

Finally, true to her “strength in diversity” principles, Chan Allen draws on multiple sources throughout the book, acknowledging at each step the wide variety of influences (with particular appreciation for Joseph Campbell) that have had an impact on her thinking, and she ends by providing the reader with a 5-page list of references.

Because the book draws on concepts that may be foreign to the Western reader, there are some who would find the writing esoteric and philosophically dense. The author addresses this issue in two ways. Although she boldly uses terms like “enlightenment” and “transcendence”, she clearly defines them, and then invites the reader who may experience them as too esoteric for business, to substitute such terms as “expanding awareness” and “creative adaptations”. Additionally, she carefully balances the more theoretical introductions to each chapter with a plethora of practical application examples and exercises, which bring the theory to life and make the concepts usable. As a result, the introduction of such tools as metaphor and mythology to illustrate her points, rather than seeming ethereal, adds interest and makes potentially difficult material seem more akin to story telling.

Despite a glossary provided in the Introduction, the many acronyms throughout the book at times added to my sense of being “lost” in an overwhelming array of ideas; however, the structure of each chapter makes the journey ultimately negotiable. Chapters 1 and 2

provide an introduction to Journey Mapping and an overview of the 8 cycles of archetypal change, while chapters 3-10 explore each cycle in detail.

The cycles are:

1. *Inertia and Awakening*: inertia is a state of being caught in mindless, self-organizing patterns, despite changing conditions. Awakening is the starting point of the change story – an incubating period.
2. *Call and Pathfinding*: an invitation to change which disturbs the normal routine – an indication that the organization is ready to embark on a change journey.
3. *Jump and Adventuring*: making a commitment to change – venturing into the unknown. In Chinese mythology this is referred to as a “dangerous opportunity”.
4. *Trials and Dancing with Dragons*: trials are obstacles that can distract from the change intention and derail change efforts (called “change dragons”). Chan Allen says: “organizations are tested physically, structurally, culturally and emotionally in the Trials Cycle” (p. 98)
5. *Dissolution and Compassion*: change that involves giving up familiar habits can generate fear and anxiety. The dissolution experience becomes a turning point for change (as in “the phoenix rising from the ashes”). An empathetic presence (compassion) is critical in supporting the change journey at this stage.
6. *Discovery and Epiphany*: the highest point in the transformation journey – an unexpected find or sudden recognition (in mythology, it is creation and rebirth). The result is new visions, goals and values.
7. *Integration and Synergy*: introducing the new patterns into a synergistic whole. This involves reconciling differences, sustaining the changed system and ensuring its survival, and creating a new vision for the emergent organization.

8. *Application and Community*: involves disseminating insights and innovations gained from the change journey into a larger community. It can include converting discoveries into practical strategies, or living out a redefined vision or culture.

The structure of these last eight chapters is consistent, beginning with an exploration of the theoretical concepts in that chapter, complete with definitions and mythological illustrations. Bulleted lists help to summarize the key ideas in the models being presented, followed by worksheets that provide templates for applying the concepts in practice. "Application" sections follow the unfolding story of several composite case organizations (notably, TCom and Linco), being guided through their various change journeys by fictional practitioners, Daryn, Arente and Hingram. The final sections of each chapter are replete with methodological advice on facilitating an organization through the processes outlined, along with pragmatic "tips", practice suggestions and a succinct summary of the chapter content.

The chapters are made more accessible through the use of actual scripts for introducing a process, illustrations, charts and summary tables. The overall impression is that of a treasure-trove of ideas. Taken as a whole it may seem daunting, especially to the novice practitioner, but when viewed as a resource from which to formulate one's own approach, it is an invaluable compilation.

In conclusion, Chan Allen refers in her book to the Chinese concept of "Wu Wei"

– roughly translated to mean "effortless achievement". This book is certainly an achievement – though I expect not at all effortless! However, the "center that is always still and unchanging ... just beyond terror and turbulence" (p. 215) shines through this work. She offers the many insights, methods and resources as gifts, as indeed they are. Probably the most significant is her invitation to "tinker and improvise" to fit the ideas to one's own needs, in a spirit of dialogue and collaboration. In this simple offering, Rebecca Chan Allen summarizes the heart of her book as a journey of discovery – which may well alter the life of the change practitioner, as well as the very nature of his or her organizational context.

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