The Moment You Can't Ignore: Using Culture to Drive Strategic Change

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Topics for today

1. What is an unignorable moment and why does it matter?
2. Sharing your unignorable moments
3. Ideas for using culture to get unstuck
Change sometimes begins with an unignorable moment.
The APA encountered an unignorable moment last year.
What is an “unignorable moment?”

A crunch point—a matter of minutes or a period of months—when something happens that is so dramatic and disruptive it demands the attention of the entire organization.

What happened? Why? What does it mean?

An unignorable moment often signals a profound cultural shift, when the traditional ways of doing things crash into the requirements of a new strategy.

The result? Organizational paralysis? Or a release of incredible productive energy?
Unignorable moments have four recognizable features

**Public**

News of an unignorable moment spreads quickly, often through informal networks inside the organization—and outside as well.

**Systemic**

Not only about the individuals involved. It opens a doorway into the organization’s culture as a whole.

**Irreversible**

“You can’t unring that bell.”

**They challenge our identity**

They raise fundamental questions: “Who am I, and how am I expected to act in this new world?”
Identifying your unignorable moments

Working in pairs or trios for five minutes:

- **Identify** an unignorable moment in your organization or one you are familiar with, that either happened in the recent past or that you are in the midst of.
- **Share** it with one or two others.
- **Discuss** ways in which it was or is...
  - Public
  - Irreversible
  - Systemic
  - Challenges the identity of the organization
We’re facing a big shift in the way organizations function

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<th>From...</th>
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<td>Command and control (&quot;I&quot;)</td>
<td>Distributed decision-making (&quot;We&quot;)</td>
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<td>Process and compliance</td>
<td>Creativity and autonomy</td>
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<td>Hierarchy</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
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<td>Extrinsic motivation</td>
<td>Intrinsic motivation</td>
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<td>Obedience</td>
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The Industrial Age model no longer fits the emerging reality of twenty-first century organizations.
These trends create increased turbulence

**Turbulence** = Pace x Disruptiveness of change

**Result:**

- A fundamental disruption in the way many industries operate
- Stress in the organization and for the people inside
In times of turbulence and change we can get stuck...
The value of being stuck

- In the midst of continuous, turbulent change, it’s guaranteed that you’re going to get stuck.
- For many of us, “stuck” is considered a bad place to be.
- We often rush to get unstuck
  - ... by pushing change through.
  - ... or by trying to avoid or postpone it.

What if you see stuck as a place of energy and opportunity?
Can we learn how to tap into the value in being stuck?

Being stuck:
- Can be a time of learning
- Building capabilities
- Restaging for change

Building a capability to get stuck and unstuck can help you navigate change.
Leverage the power of stuck by “slowing down to speed up”

1. Pause—then begin to “listen in.”
2. Go toward resistance and use it as feedback.
3. Don’t rush outside the organization—look inside for the people who already know how to work differently.
1. Listening in

- Observe like an anthropologist.
- Go beyond what people say to observe the actions and behaviors that show how they are thinking:
  - How they see the problem through their lenses.
- “Listening in” will help you understand how your culture can help or hold you back.
2. Go towards resistance

- Resistance is not a reaction to change—it’s a part of every change implementation.
- Resistance is usually not about the person—it’s about the system.
- Resistance provides useful feedback about how to work through it.

Working **with resistance** is more productive than working against it.
Use “pull”—it is stronger than “push”

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<th>Push</th>
<th>Pull</th>
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<tr>
<td>We make an assignment</td>
<td>You see an opportunity</td>
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<tr>
<td>We convince you</td>
<td>You want to commit</td>
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People may be compliant, but they often do just the minimum.

People aim higher because they’re doing something they care about.

If you create “pull,” others will do the work of change for you.
3. Find the future inside

- Your organization almost surely has **hidden assets and strengths** to move in the direction you want to go.
- And the beginnings of the change you want to make are **already emerging** in your organization.

Your organization’s culture is a "**renewable resource**."
We call these “found pilots”

People, projects, and efforts where behavior is moving in the direction you want to go.

“Found pilots”

because you discover them.

because they are piloting the behaviors you want to see—and you can learn from them and use them as a resource to make things happen.

Found pilots help you change the culture by working with it, not trying to replace it.
Back to your “unignorable moment”

- Return to your pairs or trios. Select *one* of your unignorable moments to focus on.
- Take five minutes to discuss:
  - How could you have used or can you use any or all of these three practices?
    1. Listening in
    2. Moving towards resistance
    3. Locating found pilots to find your way forward
  - What are your takeaways from being stuck in that moment?
Summary—Use the power of stuck

1. "Listen in" to learn.

2. Go towards resistance ... then create "pull" for the change you are trying to create.

3. Find the places where the culture is already beginning to change—locate found pilots.
Questions and Comments
For more on strategy and change...

Book website: www.themomentyoucantignore.com
CFAR is a private management consulting firm that helps leaders create *superconducting* organizations in which talent and innovation flow freely across the enterprise. People own the changes they need to make, and behavior is aligned with strategy.

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Our clients are mission-driven organizations—including health systems, academic medical centers, family enterprises, life science companies, universities, foundations and associations.

We partner with our clients to understand obstacles to their success and offer ideas, tools and approaches that improve outcomes and performance.