

# 3 Vital Questions<sup>®</sup>

## A Foundation for Change Leadership & the Human Dimension of Change

By David Emerald and Donna Zajonc MCC

### BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Many industries and organizations are undergoing unprecedented change in an era where Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity (VUCA) prevail and challenges leaders and their cultures.

It is because of this environment that incremental change is no longer sufficient. What is needed to meet these challenges is nothing less than strategic and cultural transformation.

Such an undertaking requires not only effective change management, with its focus on dealing with systems, processes and structures, but it must also cultivate a culture of change leadership that engages the “hearts and minds” of everyone involved in the change process. To choose to change, individuals need a sense of where the process will lead them; understanding of the means of change; and an appropriate understanding of the insufficiency of the status quo.

Bainbridge Leadership Center (BLC) provides a framework for change leadership to support a culture as the foundation upon which sustainable transformation – change management – can most effectively take place. This framework is BLC’s “3 Vital Questions<sup>®</sup>”

### OVERVIEW OF THE 3 VITAL QUESTIONS<sup>®</sup> (3VQ)

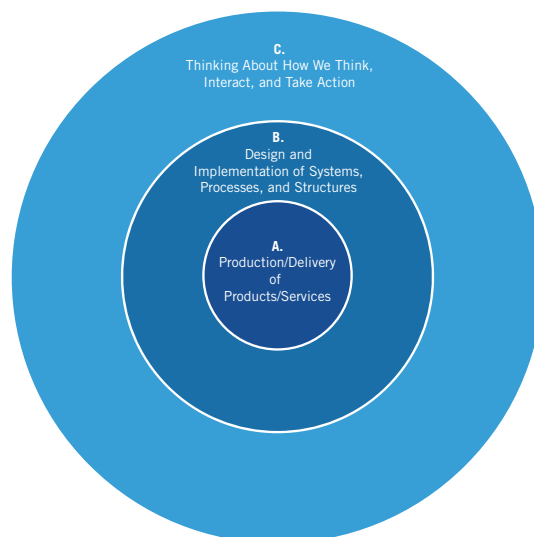
When faced with challenges, many organizations focus on making changes, typically in their product or service offerings and in the design and implementation of systems, processes, and structures to deliver them (as illustrated in dimensions A and B in Figure 1 below).

However, research has found that a large percentage of change efforts fail – or are less effective and efficient than originally envisioned. A primary cause of ineffective change efforts and the overcoming of challenges is because the organization does not consciously engage in the work of the outermost “C dimension” – the human dimension of change – which is where the work of change leadership takes place. In addition, in the process of change every individual has a leadership role to play, if only in the area of their expertise.

The 3 Vital Questions (3VQ) focuses exclusively on that human side of change and powerfully complements and sets a “people context” for implementing the B-dimension of work to transform the A-Dimension of work. It is important to explore and address the patterns of how leaders and people with whom each works, thinks, interacts and takes action with which to achieve sustainable change effort.

Figure 1.

*The Three Dimensions of  
Work – A, B, C*



*Adapted from: “Building Learning Organization” by Peter Senge; Journal for Quality and Participation: March 1992*



It is the interaction between human beings that matters and, ultimately, how the work gets done. People need a chance to make progress together in navigating change and enhancing organizational environments to combine both high fulfillment and high effectiveness.

This C-Dimension of work needs to occur at all levels of the “human system” in the organization: individuals, teams, and departments. Often derided as the “soft stuff” in an organization’s culture, as Roger Enrico, former CEO of Pepsico, so aptly affirmed, “When it comes to leadership (and change), it is the soft stuff that’s hard.”

Establishing a people-centric process that sets shared context, language, methods and expectations will expedite the change process and enhance the engagement of the vast numbers of employees and stakeholders in the challenges of transformative change. It also leads to higher trust and trusting relationships contribute to fast-track results, problem-solving and decision-making.

3VQ establishes a context for ways of thinking, relating and taking action – the C-Dimension of work. This context is derived from BLC co-founder and author, David Emerald (Womeldorff’s) books, *The Power of TED\** (*\*The Empowerment Dynamic*) and *3 Vital Questions: Transforming Workplace Drama*, to support sustainable change and transformation.

The following is a brief summary of the **3 Vital Questions**:

**1. Where are you placing your focus? Do teams or individuals focus on reacting to problems or on creating outcomes/results?**

Human beings operate from two different mindsets or Orientations. The first—and predominant default one—is a Problem Orientation. In this mindset, the focus is on the problems and issues that employees and the organization don’t like or don’t want, which then drives reactive behaviors. While this mindset can reactively spark change, the change is not sustainable in the long run. The second mindset is the Outcome Orientation, where organizations, teams and individuals focus on outcomes and what they do want and care about. This Orientation leads to engagement, sustainable change and results. Understanding these two Orientations and how they act as human “operating systems” allows a deliberate “upgrade” to more resourceful and effective ways of working.

**2. How are you relating to others and organizational realities? Does the way of relating for teams or organizations produce or perpetuate “drama” or do they empower others, teams and the organization to be resourceful, resilient and innovative?**

The Problem Orientation tends to foster and perpetuate ways of relating described in the Dreaded Drama Triangle (DDT)<sup>™</sup> and its interplay of the roles of Victim, Persecutor and Rescuer—all roles that cause associates to become disenchanting and disengaged. Interactions are primarily problem-focused, anxiety/fear-based and reactive in nature.

In the Outcome Orientation, there is an increased capacity of individuals, teams and the organization to relate through the roles of TED\* (*\*The Empowerment Dynamic*), which are the roles of Creator, Challenger and Coach. This results in new and engaging ways of communicating, nurturing trusting relationships and relating to one another that are co-creative, resourceful, resilient and innovative.

**3. What actions are you (and the organization or team) taking? Are actions merely reactions to the problems-of-the-day or are they generative in creating outcomes and results, while solving problems in service of the organization’s mission and vision?**



When associates live and work from the Outcome (Creator) Orientation, and relate to others as Creators, Challengers and Coaches, the actions they take are small, incremental steps—Baby Steps—in service to what they want to create. The Dynamic Tension planning process is introduced in this third Vital Question as a structure for learning to take action that provides momentum toward moving closer to—and getting clearer about—envisioned and desired outcomes. They learn to tackle problems and choose their response to obstacles when they arise, while always keeping their focus on the outcomes.

## **TOGETHER, THESE 3 VITAL QUESTIONS LAY THE FOUNDATION FOR A CHANGE PROCESS THAT INCLUDES THE HUMAN DIMENSION IN CHANGE LEADERSHIP**

### **Praise for 3 Vital Questions: Transforming Workplace Drama and The Power of TED\* (\*The Empowerment Dynamic):**

**“This book illuminates the secret ingredient in change leadership—the human dimension. With its laser focus on outcomes, the 3 Vital Questions will revolutionize the way you think, relate and act to create sustainable change in times of rapid transformation.”**

*—Alison L. Ferren, MBA, Senior Vice President, Integration and Performance Improvement,  
Thomas Jefferson University & Jefferson Health*

**“Like many of us, I have encountered several change management approaches over the course of my career. I’ve found none as helpful and practical as those in David Emerald’s The Power of TED\* and his new book 3 Vital Questions. It is a vital read for any leader looking to inspire breakthrough change throughout their organization.”**

*—Robert T. Green, Senior Vice President, GE Healthcare Partners*

**“Creators change the world, but victims suck. They suck time, energy and momentum out of challenges desperate to become great opportunities. David Emerald has mastered helping leaders move from being victims of circumstance to creators choosing the brilliant futures they want. His new book, 3 Vital Questions is the roadmap for how to make this happen.”**

*—Mike Maddock, Founding Partner and CEO of Maddock Douglas and author of Free the Idea  
Monkey and Plan D*

**“Applying (the TED\* frameworks) will help you become truly proactive as you develop high trust in yourself and healthy relationships with others.... make the shift that creates true effectiveness!”**

*—Stephen M.R. Covey, bestselling author of The Speed of Trust and co-founder of Franklin Covey’s Trust  
Practice*

