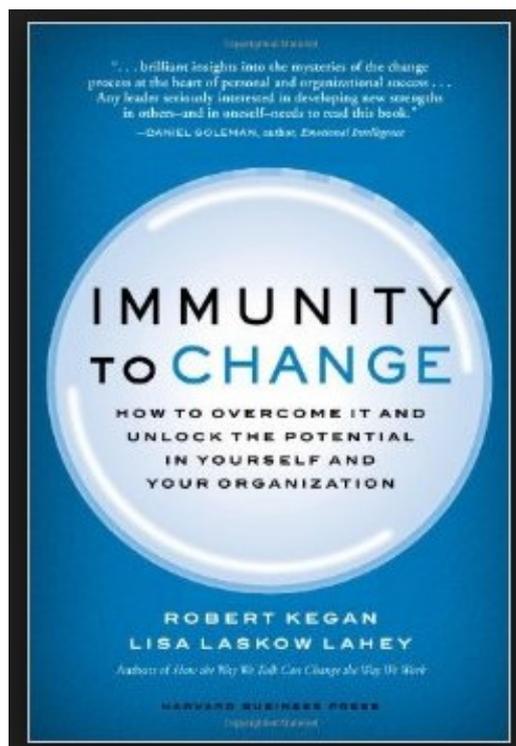




IMMUNITY TO CHANGE

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Book Introduction

Robert Kegan
Lisa Laskow Lahey

How to Overcome It and
Unlock Potential In Your-
self and your Organisation.



Preface: This book has literally taken the whole professional lives of both writers to write. The writers used an entirely novel but thoroughly “road-tested” approach to bringing about significant improvements in individuals and groups in the workplace. We all know that change is hard, but we don’t know enough about why it is so hard and what we can do about it. Most of the favorite explanations, while true in some cases, turn out to be weak answer to why the changes that are called for today are so difficult. The change challenges today’s leaders and their subordinates face are not , for the most part, a problems of will.



1. Reconceiving the Challenge of Change

What distinguish your leadership from others' in the years ahead will be your ability to develop yourself, your people and your teams. Human capability will be the critical variable in the new century in the global competition.

An updated view of age and mental complexity.

- Mental complexity tends to increase with age, throughout adulthood, at least until old age;
- There is considerable variation within any age. For example, six people in their thirties could all be at a different places in their level of mental complexity and some could be more complex than a person in her forties

Three plateaus in adult mental complexity

- **The socialized mind:** We are shaped by our personal environment
- **The self-authoring mind:** We can self direct ourselves and take stands of our own voices.
- **The self-transforming mind:** People make space for the modification of their agenda or design

Shifts in the demands on followers and leaders

In the world we used to live, it was enough in most cases if people were good team players, pulled their weight, were loyal to the company where they worked and could be counted on to follow conscientiously the directions and signals of their boss. However, nowadays, Data suggests that the gap between what we now expect of people's minds and what our minds are actually like is quite big.

Mental complexity and “technical” versus “adaptive” challenges

The change challenges you face today and will face tomorrow require something more than incorporating new technical skills into your current mindset. They are the adaptive challenges which can only be met by transforming your mindset, by advancing to amore sophisticated stage of mental development.

2. Uncovering the immunity to change

Immunity Maps

In this chapter, Kegan and Lahey present and illustrate their notion of immunity to change. The first step is to learn how to formulate challenges as adaptive, and they use detailed examples from their work with leaders over the past few years which show the development of their four column map. By contrasting maps of the immunities to change from these examples, they show how the underlying structure of immunity can be so similar even though the particular challenge or issue is different.

The then make three premises about overcoming this kind of immunity.

1. Overcoming immunity does not mean needing to get rid of all our anxiety management systems.
2. Anxiety is produced not merely from the onset of change, but from feeling defenseless in the face of it.
3. Immunity systems we have developed can actually be changed.

They link this to how it shows up in the stages of development, and then identify the concept of optimal conflict as the condition that best supports the kind of development being sought. Optimal conflict is made up of persistent experience of frustration, that allows us to feel the limits of our current way knowing in some area of life we care enough about and

David's initial immunity map

Commitment	Doing/not doing instead	Hidden competing commitments	Big assumptions
<p>To better focus on a few critical things:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delegate • Clarify outcomes desired • Accept different approaches • Support small failures as learning • Challenge the thought process and logic 	<p>I let new opportunities distract me, adding to my list.</p> <p>I accept more tasks and sacrifice non-work-related things.</p> <p>I don't consistently balance time commitment to urgent and important rankings.</p> <p>I don't ask people to help me.</p>	<p>(I fear missing a good opportunity. Falling behind.) I'm committed to being independent and capable of anything.</p> <p>(I fear letting my team down. If I put myself first I feel guilty and selfish.) I'm committed to being selfless.</p> <p>(I dislike leaving boxes unchecked—it's harder to drop something than just to do it.) I'm committed to always finding a way to get it done.</p>	<p>If I am dependent on others and unable to do many things well, I lose my self-respect.</p> <p>If I put myself first I'll become what I dislike in others—superficial and trivial.</p> <p>If I don't find a way to get things done, I'll stop being valuable.</p>

Then the authors look at the three dimensions of the immunity to change:

1. Prevention systems
2. Feeling systems
3. Knowing systems
4. Big assumptions

It is the clearing identification of the big assumptions that allows for the complete picture to be seen and these assumptions link up the three dimensions of the immunity to change.

3. We never had a language for it

In this chapter, Kegan and Lahey share, again through examples, how they learn from their clients, Peter Donovan, the CEO of the expanding financial services company and Harry Spence, who work for the Department of Social Services. They learned the need to put the right issue in the first column. This is called the “one big thing” that each person identifies, usually with the help of others. This is designed to include people’s private lives as well. The need to link personal and organizational development becomes clear through further illustrations. They also describe the need to have a champion at the top, or to have the leader truly committed to acting on this work.

The authors then showed how their concentration on individual development has been supported and fulfilled by learning from clients who have a much better understand of how to look at thing systemically and organizationally. This enabled their work to not only address the adaptive growth of individual’s meaning making system, but also of the emotional life of the organization.

“Our clients are our teachers.”

“

It is of the utmost importance to get the right improvement goal in the first column. It doesn't matter how great your learning technology is. To figure out your immunity to change around some improvement goal that isn't the most important thing for to change is a waste of everybody's time and money”



4. Overcoming the group-wide immunity to change

Work teams, leadership groups, departmental units, whole organizations unknowingly protect themselves from making the very changes they most desire. This chapter takes a collective approach to the immunity to change work. In line with the concepts of learning organizations, this chapter presents three brief and three more detailed examples of how groups of various sizes and from various sectors of society were able to make use of the four column process to create organizational learning. Some of these groups began with individual immunity maps, while others applied the process on a longer term scale by making use of surveys to get input into commitments, and pilot projects to test out



Kegan and Lahey make an important distinction that the third column work, which can prove the most challenging, “simultaneously provides a cognitive awareness of a change prevention system at work, and the emotionally unsettling insight that the true barrier to change come from within the system. This is similar to what Schrmer(2007) describes as third stage or reflective dialogue. In both descriptions, the critical insight that allows shifts to happen come when those involved in reflecting on the challenges faced realize they are actually sustaining the very system they wish to change.



“ Seeing the whole forest— an inevitably tangled forest—rather than being immersed in the trees almost always provides something novel to think and talk about. “



5. David doesn't delegate

Being an effective delegator is crucial to using everyone's time, skills, and knowledge appropriately. Skillful delegation gives everyone a greater chance to grow, and the quality of the work reflects the many talents that have drawn into its production along the way.

This chapter goes into depth of the story of one leader's work of using the immunity to change process to actually change behaviors. This is accomplished through taking his initial big assumption and seeing an even bigger underlying core value and assumption about it, and then trying out actions that tested the assumption. The use of some further tools to support this process are introduced, and the successful outcome are detailed. An additional benefits of this chapter is that the example used also illustrates some of the core issues facing leaders as they face challenges of

Besides this vivid and instructive illustration, the authors show how the question of changes of mind and or of behavior is not a chicken or egg which comes first question, but a dialectic interplay that takes the explicit challenge being faced and uses working on it to facilitate development. In this way the immunity process is used along with our work and life challenges to help us see the picture of what has been authoring us. This central proposition of moving from being held by assumptions to self authoring a new relationship to them is well served by the illustration in this chapter.



6. Cathy can't contain herself

In this chapter, we hear the story of how Cathy worked through her immunity map. Instead of a step by step, gradual process, her story shows that sometimes a very intense experience can test our big assumptions to the core all at once. The chapter provides a second example of the many forms this work can take, and at the same time the core pattern that run through the immunity work.

Here are some quotes from the text which are so inspiring:

“There is some flaw in me, and I must do my self-authoring the way I do—I must do my world regulating the way I do—to protect myself, to keep the world from discovering this flaw and taking away what is precious to me.”

Cathy's change is an enormous one (“a whole weight lifted from me”, “no longer live in fear”, an ability “to see things in my work I would have missed before”, “to see the forest and not just the trees”)

“If you do not need to stand a continuous post in your own personal watchtower— to insure that the world does not discover your shameful secret— then you can scan the world for more promising possibilities and bring to your own living a deep restfulness that you may never before have known. “

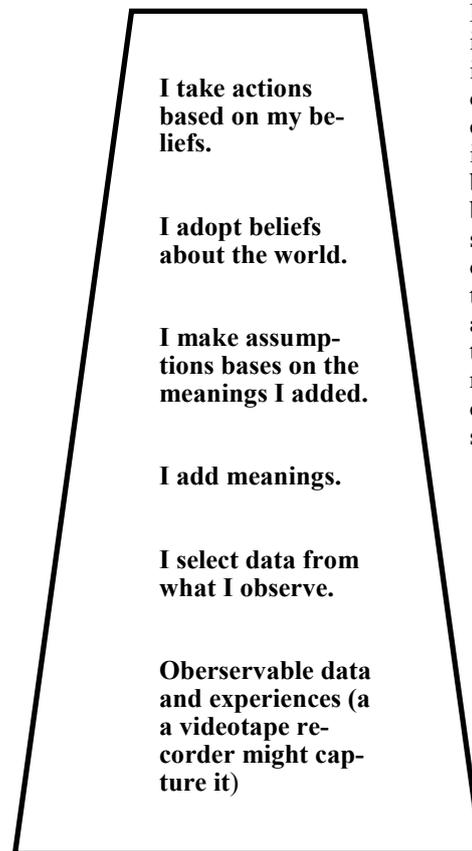




7. The case of nascent pharmaceuticals

Overcoming individual immunities to help a team succeed

In this chapter, Kegan and Lahey bring together the power of doing the individual immunity work within a group context. They go into depth on the process they used with the team that Cathy was part of. Three workshops over six months, individual coaching, and the use of various survey and assessment instruments enabled the team to make significant progress on their goals. These goals, trust and communication, are good illustrations of common issues teams everywhere often face.



Ladder of inference illustrates our tendency to adopt inaccurate beliefs based on selective observations, false assumptions and misguided conclusions.

In moving from individual to group work, the additional complexity of the dynamics involved becomes clear. The tendency to avoid bringing personal issues to the group setting because of tendencies to pathologize individual problems is nicely dealt with through the use of framing and processes that enable each team member to see the strengths that are one end of a continuum related to those weaknesses. The coordination of the various tools used to support the process, the timing of the work and the importance of the leader setting the tone and acting as an example are all well illustrated.



8. Unlocking potential

This chapter describes three necessary ingredients to successfully take on the work of unlocking your immunity to change: a vital energy source of motivation for change, both cognitive and emotional aspects working together and action or behavioral work.

The gut level, or vital energy is required to help us go beyond feeling that something is important, to feel it is absolutely necessary to address the adaptive changes revealed.

- **Ingredient #1: The gut—A vital source of motivation for change**
- **Ingredient #2: Head and heart: The work must simultaneously engage thinking and feeling**
- **Ingredient #3: Hand— The work is simultaneously about mindset and behavior**

Engaging the thinking and feeling together is required as no amount of thinking about the work will get it done, as also no amount of emotional effort by itself will either. It is a combination of “thinking about our feeling our way into new thinking” simultaneously that moves us along in the adaptive or developmental work. Finally, action must be taken, the hand put to the wheel so to speak to generate the experiences and experiments that can test our assumptions and move the insights into reality. The power of doing something that reveals the assumptive nature of our deeply held beliefs is what can enable us to take a perspective on them rather than being held by them.



9. Diagnosing Your Own Immunity to Change

This chapter talks about how thousands of professionals construct their own X-ray immunity maps. It provides the benefit of adding clear criteria by which you can evaluate if your column entries are sufficient to the task of helping create a robust x-ray map of your immune system. Kegan and Lahey describe how they learned over time how to help the people for whom the original four column exercise was only interesting and not deeply moving produce a better map.

The begin by looking at the importance of generating the right first column commitment. If it is not something sufficiently important, and more to the point, something that aims at a personal adaptive change, it will uncover an immunity system that does not really matter to us, wasting the potential the exercise has. In the second column, the fearless inventory, the need to describe specific, concrete behaviors is stressed so that later on you will be able to better see why you do these things. The third column, hidden competing commitments, is generated through the simple question of what is at risk if I do the opposite of these behaviors? These “worry box” fears are then redefined to make the competing commitments of the third column. Again, criteria are provided to enable you to evaluate if you are getting sufficient depth in your entries here.

The fourth column big assumptions are generated next through a simple process of thinking what must be thought of as “true” for the third column competing commitments to make sense. The power of this is that it reveals territory that we have previously been subject to, and that our immune systems have acted as guardians of. They protect us from venturing into what is assumed as unsafe territory. The simplicity, power, and elegance of this process comes through quite clearly in this one chapter.



10. Overcoming your immunity to change

In this chapter, the authors lay emphasis to the immunity map, and use very vivid metaphor to illustrate why people are so resistant to changes. “You see yourself with a foot on the gas (genuinely and urgently wanting more success with the goal you have entered in column 1) and a foot on the brake (actively and continually producing exactly those behaviors most likely to prevent any progress on that goal). You can see the very good reason why you are holding yourself back: You want to save your life as you know it” (p. 253).

How to overcome this immunity to change?

1. Read through and get a sense of road map.
2. Decide whether you want to take the trip alone or with company
3. Find your own combination of exercises to overturn the immunity.

The work of testing big assumptions is set out in clear stages. First is designing a test. Here they make an important distinction between an event focused approach and a process or learning focused one. Our tendency to take immediate action to solve the problems identified in column two leads to thinking that if we can simply do something that goes against our competing commitments or big assumptions, we will have overcome them. Kegan and Lahey point out that the point of the test is to learn something about our big assumption – to see if and to what degree it might be true, false, or more nuanced than we imagined. They again provide helpful criteria for guiding the design of the test, and examples of how it might look.

The second step is running the test you have designed. Here it is important to make detailed notes on what actually happened, both about how you felt during the test and how others responded or acted. They emphasize directly observable data, and warn against allowing interpretation to sneak in. The third stage is the actual interpreting of your test, and here again examples illustrate the points made and a guide sheet keeps us on track.

Once these steps are completed, they show how to strengthen the learning by identifying how you get linked into activating the big assumption and do this in the entire immunity system. In addition, you learn how to find new practices you develop that help release you from the control of the immunity system. All of these are shown to be repeatable, and they can help evolve and even develop new immunity maps over time. (p280)



11. Surfacing your collective immunity to change

This chapter is designed to assist readers if they would like to join their colleagues in creating a group diagnostic of a collective immunity to change. The conditions for doing this is clearly identifiable:

1. You are part of an improving group who is looking at better performance.
2. Your group has willingness and tolerance to engage in a collective introspection
3. The group does not have to be highly collegial but it cannot be an active battleground.

There are several steps by which you can change the collective immunity

Step 1: Identifying your collective improvement goal

- Do we agree we are not doing well enough at this?
- Is the problem here external to the boundaries of this group?
- Are there big payoffs if we get better at this?

Step 2: Taking a fearless inventory: “What are the things we collectively do, or fail to do, that work against this goal?”

- List concrete behaviors
- Take a deep dive and be honest to tell.
- Provide a picture of how the group working against its own goal.
- Just tell the behaviors themselves in all their embarrassing glory.
- Acknowledge collective ineffectiveness

Step 3: Uncovering your collective column 3 competing commitments

Create powerful, often provocative, third-column commitments that make visible a bigger range of social motivations than our group has previously been able to acknowledge.

Step 4: Uncovering your collective big assumption

Step 5: Preparing to test your big assumptions: SMART design

They should be Safe

They should be Modest

They should be Actionable

They should constitute a kind of Research

The plan should be evaluated for the benefits as a Test of big assumption



Harvard Business Press
Boston, Massachusetts

Reference:

Kegan, R., & Lahey, L. L. (2009). *Immunity to change: How to overcome it and unlock potential in yourself and your organization*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press.