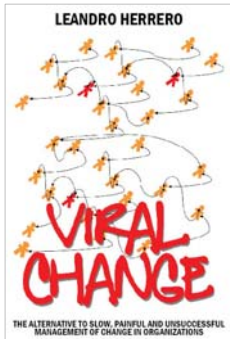


Viral Change: the alternative to slow, painful and unsuccessful management of change in organizations

► By Dr. Leandro Herrero
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Every so often a management book comes along that rocks your world, in every sense. It's clear, lucid, free of ego and compelling – and it also radically shifts your thinking around a familiar concept, a concept you thought you had all sewn up.

Dr Leandro Herrero's *Viral Change* is one such book. No cow is too sacred to be slaughtered here, and the book progressively and compellingly convinces you that many of your most dearly held beliefs about change have always been wrong. Moreover, it shows that the way companies fail at change is as a direct result of these often intuitive (and therefore understandable) but incorrect (and therefore destructive) ideas of what change needs and does: That "big change" must require "big actions"; that it needs simultaneous adoption by the whole company; that it must be driven from the top; or that it is slow and expensive to implement.

Two challenged truisms in particular struck this reviewer as stark. First, that if you put in place processes to change the culture (i.e., "a culture change program") you can create behavior change; when, in fact, Herrero shows that it's only effective the other way around – behavior change is the engine, not the product of culture change. Change the individual behaviors, no matter how minorly, and you'll have your "culture change".

Second, and perhaps most controversially, he tears apart the oft-quoted aphorism that "people are just naturally resistant to change." In fact, he shows in compelling detail that people are welcoming of change and are, in fact, accustomed to change in every aspect of their lives. Resistance to change at work only shows that they're nervous that the change will be bad – because it will be, or because they've had experiences of it being so. People don't resist out of an inevitable "natural impulse", but out of a simple lack of information and/or control over the situation.

So where does all this lead? Not surprisingly, to Herrero's own take on how change should be implemented to be successful – in entirely the opposite way to the manner in which it's usually done. Identify small behaviors that will represent the change you want. Have them championed by a small group of people in one team within the firm, looking at the operational instances when they're not being met. Allow the natural influence of social networks to begin embedding and spreading that behavior virally. At the tipping point, it will become adopted by the whole group and you will have your culture change.