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DEEP CHANGE: 3 DRIVERS, 2 AMPLIFIERS AND 1 GAME CHANGER



BIG IDEA In A Few Words

Deep change has been characterized as major in scope and largely irreversible. Three specific drivers of deep change affecting North American missions are punkification, disintermediation and commoditization. When something is punkified it is democratized. Disintermediation is an economic term referring to the removal of the middle man. Commoditization describes the results of increased competition that lowers price and makes it harder to differentiate. Risk and loss aversion are like amplifiers, turning up the volume of deep change. All this is creating once in a generation opportunities for church and mission leaders to reinvent structures and systems for the future.

In May of 1991, Soviet cosmonaut Sergei Krikalev went to the Mir Space Station, where he spent three hundred eleven days in orbit. But what makes his story remarkable is not what happened in outer space, it's what happened on earth. While Sergei was in orbit the nation that sent him into space went out of business. Sergei Krikalev has been referred to as the last citizen of the USSR, because while he was making them proud on the Mir Space Station, the Soviet Republic disintegrated. He launched from the USSR and landed in Kazakhstan, which by the time he returned had become an independent country.



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This is a picture of what Robert Quinn described as deep change, which is different from incremental change in that it is “major in scope, discontinuous with the past and generally irreversible.”³⁶ Recent geopolitical changes in North Africa remind us that it doesn’t take three hundred-eleven days to produce deep change. Fueled in part by rapid advances in technology, deep change is happening faster than any of us could have imagined.

3 Drivers of Deep Change

I have been reflecting on deep change for some time, with special emphasis on the implications for North American mission leaders. While I believe there are many complex factors in play, three specific drivers of this deep change moment are worth highlighting: punkification, disintermediation and commoditization. I realize these terms are rarely used in a conversation about North American missions, but I’m confident I can put these cookies on the bottom shelf and show how they are impacting every church and mission leader.

The idea of punkification is drawn from the impact of punk music that intentionally blurred the line between the musician and the audience in live shows. When something is punkified it is democratized. I’ve already done an entire video blog on the punkification of missions, which you can see in our archives or read in the chapter of my book *While You Were Micro-Sleeping*, so I’m not going to devote any more time to it here. Suffice it to say the mantra of punkification is “everyone gets to play.” Anyone involved in the world of missions knows that grass roots, bottom-up initiatives now outnumber those associated with the professional mission force with no end in sight. The floodgates are open and in the words of Robert Quinn, this is “major in scope...and generally irreversible.”

The second driver of deep change is disintermediation, which is an economic term referring to the removal of intermediaries in a supply chain, or what we commonly refer to as eliminating the middleman. Customer initiated disintermediation is often the result of increased market transparency, where customers gain access to information about wholesale pricing and the layers of added cost or red tape associated with bringing a product or service to the market. This deep change driver raises

questions about the usefulness or even legitimacy of established systems that have controlled the supply channels and it catalyzes the exploration of alternate pathways that circumvent intermediaries.

Perhaps no industry is being “disintermediated” more powerfully than the publishing world. Not very long ago publishers had an absolute stranglehold on what books were published, how much they cost as well as when and where they would be sold. But that world is gone forever. If you don’t believe me just ask Amanda Hocking. This twenty-six year old fiction writer from Minnesota was fed up with attempts to attract the attention of a traditional publisher so she “disintermediated” them, going directly to the e-book format with amazon.com. In January of 2011, she sold 450,000 copies of her nine titles. Yes, you read that correctly, 450,000 in one month. Some have estimated Amanda made more than \$1 million in 2011 and she didn’t share any of it with an agent or a publisher or a brick and mortar book store. That is disintermediation on steroids.

The mantra of disintermediation is “don’t get in my way.” Champions of disintermediation say, “I want to make a difference and I’m prepared to, no actually I prefer to, circumvent existing structures.”

I don’t think I have to connect the dots more explicitly than that to help you see the impact this has on mission structures.

The third driver of deep change is commoditization, which is an economic term describing the results of increased competition that lowers price and makes it harder to differentiate. When the cost of entry in a market decreases, competition increases and price becomes the primary differentiator.

The cost of entry for missions related activity has plummeted primarily as a result of technology. In the early 1980’s if you wanted to have a live video conference call with multiple people on different continents the technology existed to make it happen. But it was so expensive only huge multinational companies or government entities would ever consider it. Now anyone can conduct a video conference call for free. Virtual mission organizations are springing up by the hundreds with very few assets beyond a smart

phone, a lap top, a broadband connection and a database of facebook friends.

We don't think of other mission structures as our competition but the fact is people have many more choices than they did even a decade ago. And one of those choices is to start something new. This increase of choice, which is exactly what competition means, shines a spotlight on cost, which helps explain why you hear people ask questions about why they should support a western missionary family when they could "get more bang for their mission buck" by working with a national. The mantra of commoditization is "that's more than I want to pay."

Three drivers of deep change, punkification – everyone gets to play, disintermediation – don't get in my way, and commoditization – that's more than I want to pay. But that's not all. There are two deep change amplifiers that are impacting the mission establishment whether we know it or not: risk aversion and loss aversion.

2 Deep Change Amplifiers

Every leader is familiar with the idea of risk aversion but the discipline of behavioral economics has shed new light on this important principle. Behavioral economists have demonstrated people will accept one thousand times more risk in a voluntary activity than they will in an involuntary activity. This research is rooted in the work of Chauncey Starr, an electrical engineer and early expert in the field of nuclear power. He wrote a seminal paper called *Social Benefit and Technical Risk*, where he divided a variety of human activities into two basic categories – voluntary and involuntary. He then gathered data showing the fatalities per hour of exposure to the activity. His data proved people would tolerate much more risk (one thousand times more to be exact) in voluntary activities than they would in involuntary activities.

Behavioral economists have also studied loss aversion and demonstrated the fear of losing something is stronger than the joy associated with gaining something. This is the psychology behind a trial offer or money back guarantee. Once we take possession of something, unless there is a serious defect, the negative emotions associated with not having it overpower us. But it is important to understand loss

aversion applies just as much to ideas, one's point of view, as it does to material possessions.

What do risk aversion and loss aversion have to do with mission in a context of deep change? Here's the critical point: the deep change moment in which we are leading is largely playing out as involuntary loss for the mission establishment, and I'm not using establishment in a negative context. Leaders are facing what could easily be perceived as the involuntary loss of control, influence and loyalty, just to name a few. Risk and loss aversion are like amplifiers that turn up the volume of deep change.

One Game Changer

But please hear my final point: all this deep change does not spell doom and gloom. On the contrary, it is opening once in a generation, game-changing opportunities for leaders who want to push the reset button and rethink the way forward at this moment in redemptive history. Leaders in this context will have the chance to make structural reforms and systemic overhauls that would have seemed impossible a decade ago.

So let me ask you a few closing questions. What game-changing, perhaps once in a generation opportunities, should you be exploring in this reset moment? How might a bold rethinking of your structures or systems or strategies position you to positively exploit this unique window of opportunity?

NOTES

³⁶ Robert Quinn, *Deep Change* (Jossey-Bass, 1996) page 3

Sieze the Vuja de is a compilation of transcripts from *Learning @ the Speed of Life*, the video blog of *Missio Nexus*, by Steve Moore. *Missio Nexus* was formed out of the merger of *CrossGlobal Link* and *The Mission Exchange* and is the largest network of Great Commission oriented evangelicals in North America. For more information visit www.MissioNexus.org.

Other books by Steve Moore

