

What do tribes, the land bridge and teams have to do with change?

Charles Darwin is famous for his work “On The Origin of Species” which has been summarised into one phrase: “survival of the fittest.” However, Darwin did not actually say this – his actual synopsis was quite different.

Through his research Darwin saw that evolution - change - was inevitable and what he actually said was “it is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change”

Our earliest ancestors were the most responsive or adaptive to change. Some of them travelled across the land bridge to occupy Asia and then Australia. Here in Australia the indigenous tribes adapted to the harsh, unforgiving deserts and found ways to divine water in one of the world’s driest continents. While other ancestral tribes walked north across the frozen and barren lands of the Arctic to settle in the America’s, battling an arctic desert and yet adapted ways to build shelters from ice and snow and find high-calorie oils and fats that were essential for survival.

No single person achieved these feats. The collective efforts, support, sacrifice, endurance and skill of the tribe enabled them to change and adapt. However, in modern times we seem to have forgotten that the tribes who discovered and settled these lands did so well before the famous expeditions of people such as

Christopher Columbus. Moreover, our history books seem to glorify, or hero worship the one great man and fails to acknowledge that it takes a tribe of men and women to achieve these feats. If you dig a little deeper you’ll find it was tribes of people working together enabling us to be adaptive and resilient, and change is part of our DNA.

Why then is change in organisations today so hard? Why is there a constant complaint of change fatigue? Let’s be fair, though, change is hard – physically, mentally and emotionally. It pushes us, challenges us and ultimately makes us different, stronger and more resilient, but only if we are supported and if we see the change as necessary and beneficial to our survival. Herein lies the dilemma for organisations. Many people do not see WHY they need to change.

Many leaders forget that they are leading a tribe and they are not the iconic solo ‘hero’ who can do it alone. If people are not connected to their leader, or one another, or to a compelling enough reason or need to change, they resist, and this is when change becomes draining, it becomes more effortful and more stressful.

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