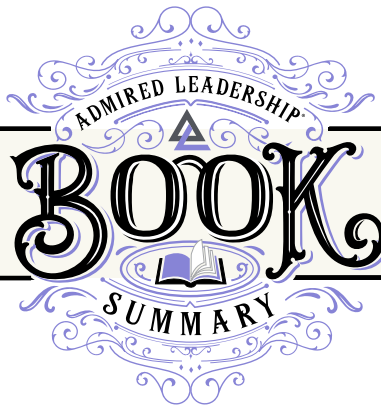




Eight Minutes, Not Eight Hours



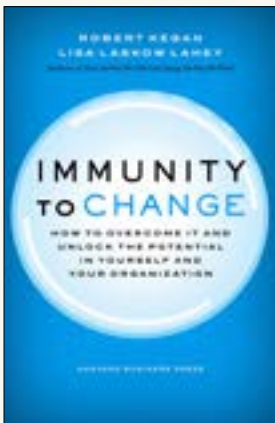
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Immunity to Change

How to Overcome It and Unlock the Potential in Yourself and Your Organization

BOOK AUTHORS: ROBERT KEGAN AND LISA LASKOW LAHEY

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Why is change so difficult? In their book **Immunity to Change**, developmental psychology researchers Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey lay the foundation for identifying and overcoming the tendency we all have to resist changes that would make us more effective at work and in private life. Their four-step process for uncovering what hinders perfectly capable professionals from working more effectively highlights how we simultaneously have our feet “on both the gas and brake pedals,” resulting in immobility. By providing testimonials from clients who work in a range of industries across the globe, the authors show how their theory comes to life and transforms individuals and organizations for the better.

Key Quote

“Our conviction is that there is no expiration date on your ability to grow” (p. 323).

Key Points

Reconceiving the Challenge of Change. Throughout life – even in adulthood– the healthy human mind develops in mental complexity (which is distinguished from both IQ and experience) in stages that progress from initially learning to be a “faithful follower” and “team player,” to taking on a more independent, “problem-solving” approach, to finally growing in the ability to see many sides of an issue and becoming an interdependent leader (p. 16).

Uncovering the Immunity to Change. Asking key questions and mapping the answers can help you see exactly where you are sabotaging growth in your life. These questions assess what your “behavior goals” are, what you are doing that might “work against the goals,” and the “hidden competing commitments” that are sabotaging your goals.

We Never Had a Language for It. It is important to **correctly** identify you or your company’s “one big thing” – the one thing that you need to change (p. 63). And it is important to acknowledge your negative assumptions about what will happen if you change.

Overcoming the Groupwide Immunity to Change. Entire communities, systems, organizations, and multiple departments can and have seen real change using the immunity-to-change process. But the first step to engaging groups in the exercises is to engage individuals so they can see how the process works.

Individual and Team Case Studies of Change.

First, we must be willing to change, then we need to understand the impact that change could have as long as it remains adaptive to people and situations. Very often, going through the immunity-to-change process causes people to identify and release burdensome assumptions they have made. Change eventually leads to more effective leadership.

Unlocking Potential. People who can engage with change on several levels are the most successful. Change happens most effectively if your intuition, emotions, intellect, and action are all engaged and aligned towards the goal.

Diagnosing Your Own Immunity to Change. First, identify the “one big thing” that you need to address. Feedback from colleagues can help you recognize the one thing to make your goal. Then begin to identify you’re the things you are “doing/not doing” to help your goal, the “hidden competing commitments” to your goal, and any of your “big assumptions” about your situation that may not be true.

Overcoming Your Own Immunity to Change. After you have set up your “immunity map” diagnosis (above), develop a baseline to measure progress on your goal. Then jump in and set up a chance to try your new approach in a relatively low-risk scenario, if you can. As you implement the new behavior, observe where your “big assumptions” are kicking in and confront them by behaving counter to them. Take stock and consider how to maintain progress.

Surfacing Your Collective Immunity to Change. Creating a group immunity-to-change diagnostic requires your group to **want** to do it. They should want to change, have at least a willingness to do “collective introspection,” and must be somewhat free from overt or covert hostility in group conversation. Start by brainstorming, then move into your diagnostic.


Growing Your Own. Good leaders understand that adulthood is a time of growth, not stagnation. To produce change, they must be committed to their growth and the growth of people in their organization.

Key Concepts:


THREE FOUNDATIONAL PROBLEMS

We have an understanding of what we need to change about our behaviors (for personal or professional gain), but a lack of understanding of what prevents change.

Every year, corporations invest billions of dollars and a considerable amount of time on leadership development training, performance reviews, and executive coaching, yet there is a deep-seated skepticism regarding bringing about real change in adults who seem to be “set in their ways.”



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Previous research in leadership development and learning organizations does not include a sophisticated understanding of adult development and the possibility of acquiring new abilities into adulthood (pp. 2-6).

PART I: UNDERSTANDING CHANGE

Mental Complexity

Rather than approaching this concept as if it were related to IQ, “mental complexity” is about adaptability. We now know that mental complexity can increase throughout life, and the development unfolds in an upward slope with plateaus along the way. Throughout life, the choice can be made to expand our mind and approach and thus increase our mental complexity (p.12).

Three Plateaus of Mental Complexity:

1. The “socialized mind” – This is the stage at which we develop into a “team player” and “faithful follower” whose thoughts, actions, and expectation are strongly influenced by the opinions of others (p. 16).

2. The “self-authoring mind”– This is the stage in which we learn to filter and assess the decisions of others by an “internal seat of judgment,” we are “problem solvers,” the person can establish a clearer voice of their own distinguished by self-codes, boundaries, and belief systems (pp. 18-19)

3. The “self-transforming mind” – This is the stage in which the person can step back and look squarely (and fairly) at their own ideologies and the ideologies of others. These people are highly self-aware and accept how meanings may shift and what made sense yesterday may not make sense tomorrow (pp. 19-20).

A good question for leaders to ask is, “What can I do to make my setting the most fertile ground in the world for the **growth** of talent?” Leaders who do this “put themselves in the best position to succeed” (p. 11).


This mindset will ultimately prepare leaders to distinguish themselves from other leaders because they believe people are constantly acquiring new talents and behaviors instead of seeing talent as a “fixed resource” (p. 11).

Technical vs. Adaptive Challenges:


Researcher Ronald Heifetz reports that one of the most significant errors leaders make is applying technical solutions to adaptive challenges. Heifetz explains that **technical challenges** are addressed by learning and acquiring new skills that do not fundamentally change who we are or how we think. **Adaptive challenges**, on the other hand, require a more concerted effort to address a behavioral change that will eventually allow us to work more productively and obtain lasting results (pp. 29-30).

CREATING AN IMMUNITY MAP

The first part of understanding change and creating an adaptive solution requires one to create an **adaptive formulation** of the challenge at hand. This process entails understanding the “emotional ecology” of the challenge and what currently limits our own mental growth (p. 31).



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When creating an X-ray, or what the writers call an “immunity map,” individuals are asked to think about:

1. What they genuinely desire to change.
2. The behaviors they currently engage in or fail to do that run contrary to that goal.
3. The “hidden commitments” or worries they might have about what will happen if they do accomplish the goal.
4. What “big assumptions” they might have – things they believe to be absolutely true, which, in reality, might not be at all true (pp. 33-35).

Immune systems are generally regarded as positive, and they are not necessarily different in this context. However, we may better understand how the highly effective anxiety-management systems that protect us from real and perceived danger may impede us from seeing what we can achieve. Kegan and Lahey write, “we run these systems – even highly successful anxiety-management systems – at a cost. Inevitably, they create blind spots, prevent new learning, and constantly constrain action in some aspects of our living” (p.48).

Toward a More Expansive Way of Knowing

“A way of knowing becomes more complex when it is able to **look at** what before it could only **look through**. In other words, our way of knowing becomes more complex when we create a bigger system that incorporates and expands on our previous system. This means that if we want to increase mental complexity, we need to move aspects of our meaning-making from subject to object, to alter our mindset so that a way of knowing or making meaning becomes a kind of **‘tool’ that we have** (and can control or use) rather than something that **has us** (and therefore controls and uses us)” (p. 51).


The **ability to look** at a way of thinking (object) rather than through it (subject) signifies expanded mental complexity.

PART II: WHY THIS APPROACH WORKS FOR INDIVIDUALS, TEAMS, AND ENTIRE ORGANIZATIONS


Being frank about the emotions involved at work helps to uncover possible limits or challenges with accomplishing the work goals as a team. Upon reflecting on the progress he and his team made with Kegan and Lahey, Harry Spence, former Commissioner of the Department of Social Services in Massachusetts, marveled at “the hidden role of emotion in meeting the challenge of change, the need for us to find a way to bring what we have tended to think of as private experience into the public realm of work” (p. 79).

Overcoming Individual Immunities to Help a Team Succeed

Immunity to change can apply to individuals and entire teams, communities, and organizations. But issues such as a lack of trust, poor communication, and lack of delegation often serve as road blocks in work team settings. To start with, these can be addressed by leaders and employees working to overcome their own immunity to change first.



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The self-awareness that comes with completing an immunity map is invaluable and enables the employee to identify how their own immunity to change affects the greater work team dynamic (pp. 87-124).


Success story – The Case of Nascent Pharmaceuticals:

Chet was chosen to lead a newly merged senior marketing team at one of the world's leading drug companies. His main challenge was figuring out how the two factions would work together – there was a substantial lack of trust between the two merged teams, which led to poor communication and dissatisfaction with leadership. Chet understood the issue at hand and selected Kegan and Lahey to help ameliorate team dynamics.


Kegan and Lahey helped this marketing team uncover the similarities in their goals and contradictory behaviors as a collective that prevented them from effectively communicating. A mixture of individual and bonding time allowed the employees to reflect deeply on their personal stories and professional lives and share them with the group.

The trust they built while being vulnerable with each other eventually led to the team developing explicit collective norms that would help get them on the same page in working toward their goals. As a result, work satisfaction, productivity, and communication all increased as measured on a 1-5 scale in individual pre- and post-training surveys (pp. 169-197).

The role of the leader is crucial throughout this entire process since the leader is the person to set the tone and example for achieving positive change as an individual and team member. The leader must serve as a champion of change and show that they are willing to put in the time and effort to make lasting changes for their team. By being the first to be vulnerable and lead the immunity map exercise, the leader sends a message to employees that this work is necessary to accomplish their goals, and it is permitted and encouraged to bring these emotions to work (p. 197).



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PART III: DIAGNOSING AND OVERCOMING IMMUNITIES IN YOURSELF AND YOUR ORGANIZATION

Unlocking Potential

Three “ingredients” help overcome immunity to change.

1. “The gut: a vital source of motivation for change.” This is instinctual – a sense in which one intuitively understands that the consequences of the status quo are greater than the consequences of attempting to change.
2. “Head and heart: the work must simultaneously engage thinking and feeling.” Due to the immunity to change serving as an anxiety-management system, the head and heart work fiercely in tandem to protect the body and mind from danger. Working through anxiety means learning that it is possible to move about the world while pursuing a change and still be safe.

3. “Hand: the work is simultaneously about mindset and behavior.” Mindset alone will not solve an adaptive challenge, nor will behavior alone do so. The two must coexist. Insight is not enough to create lasting change. One must take action. This last ingredient looks like testing one’s “big assumptions” (step 4 in immunity mapping, above). Changing different aspects of one’s behavior and observing differences in outcomes, reactions, and productivity from surroundings and oneself, free of judgment test assumptions about what will happen if the status quo is not maintained (pp. 210-221).

The Heart of the Process: Designing, Running, and Interpreting Tests of the Big Assumptions

The goal of tests is to collect information about the quality of the big assumption – those things you think you know to be true – to analyze the results and either confirm or revise the big assumption. “The test has not been successful until its result is connected to our work on the big assumption” (p. 257).

A good test conforms to the **S-M-A-R-T** criteria:

Safe and **modest**: any behavior alterations should be low-risk yet still helpful for confirming or revising big assumptions.

Actionable: the test should be easy to carry out and can be done in the near future.

Research and **test**: you should take a research stance, not one of self-improvement. You are running a test of your big assumption, which, if done well, will allow you to find data that either qualify the assumption or calls it into doubt (p. 261).

Identifying Hooks and Releases for Continued Progress


“Hooks” are events or situations or thoughts that grab you and pull you back into your “big assumptions” (remember, these are things you have wrongly believed to be true before you began to change). “Releases” are events and situations where you have successfully let go of these wrong assumptions. A series of questions can help you analyze where you are in terms of hooks and releases (p. 272).

Once you have identified your “hooks and releases,” use what you have learned as a personalized tip sheet to refer to when you notice yourself in a difficult situation.

HOW LEADERS CAN LEAD THE WAY

“How can your organization become a home for the continuing transformation of talent?”

1. “It recognizes that there is ‘life after adolescence;’ that adulthood, too, must be a time for ongoing growth and development” (p. 309).
2. “It honors the difference between technical and adaptive learning agendas” (p. 310).
3. “It recognizes and cultivates the individual’s intrinsic motivation to grow” (p. 314).
4. “It assumes that a change in mindset takes time and is not evenly paced” (p. 316).
5. “It recognizes that mindsets shape thinking and feeling, so changing mindsets should involve the head and the heart” (p. 318).



Being frank about the emotions involved at work helps to uncover possible limits or challenges with accomplishing the work goals as a team.



6. “It recognizes that neither change in mindset nor change in behavior alone leads to transformation, but that each must be employed to bring about the other” (p. 319).

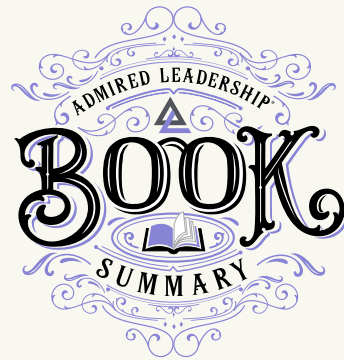
7. “It provides safety for people to take risks inherent in changing their minds” (p. 320).

“The best way to stay connected to all seven of these is to make sure you are working to overturn your own immunity. Knowing (and feeling) what the journey is like from the inside can only enhance your capacity to lead in a setting where others can successfully and safely unlock their own potential as well” (p. 323).

Kegan, Robert and Lahey, Lisa Laskow (2009). **Immunity to Change**: How to Overcome It and Unlock the Potential in Yourself and Your Organization. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press.



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The Latest and Greatest Books for Leaders

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