

Book Snaps™

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Move Fast and Fix Things

The Trusted Leader's Guide to Solving Hard Problems

By Frances Frei and Anne Morriss

Frances Frei is a professor at Harvard Business School. She served as Uber's first Senior Vice President of Leadership and Strategy, helping the company navigate its crisis in leadership and culture. Frei regularly works with companies embarking on large-scale organizational transformation. Her TED talk on the topic of building trust has had over six million views.

Anne Morriss is an entrepreneur, leadership coach, and founder of the Leadership Consortium, a first-of-its-kind leadership accelerator that works to help emerging leaders thrive. Her collaborators have ranged from early-stage tech founders to Fortune 50 executives to public-sector leaders building national competitiveness.

A Book Review by Soundview

Reinventing the Playbook for How to Lead Change

In their book, *Move Fast and Fix Things: The Trusted Leader's Guide to Solving Hard Problems*, authors Frances Frei and Anne Morriss use the standard five day work week as a template for solving difficult problems in an organization. They begin by asking their readers to evaluate their own organizations and to determine which of four quadrants their organizations belong to. These quadrants help explain the level of trust within an organization as well as the speed with which things move. Ideally a company can move fast and fix what needs fixing, but many organizations end up either stagnating or moving fast recklessly, breaking things along the way. Frei and Morriss want organizations to move fast, but they want them to do so responsibly and strategically. In their book, they lay out a five step process for identifying and fixing problems with each step representing a specific day of the week.

Monday

Monday represents the first day of the change process. While some organizations prefer to wait until symbolic moments arise to initiate change, like the start of a new year, Frei and Morriss believe that any Monday is a good time to start the process because Monday represents a new beginning built into every week. On Monday, leadership's job is to define a problem and gather the information needed in order to solve the problem. Frei and Morriss advocate using the word "problem" because "it carries a sense of urgency." They believe that most organizations have stories they tell about themselves that are frequently untrue and can lead to stagnation and other issues. The job on Monday is to weed out these false stories so the stories can be corrected. Curiosity is mandatory on Monday, and part of opening up curiosity is to shut down judgment because judgment always inhibits curiosity. Frei and Morriss find that most often leaders find it most difficult to stop judging themselves. They write, "Your organization isn't perfect, and you probably had some role in its imperfection." All this means is that leaders are human.

Once judgment is ruled out and curiosity is opened up, leaders must then assemble a team to complete the Monday activities. They advocate for choosing people for this team who are empathetic and observant and who are comfortable dealing with other people's emotions. They call these people empathy anchors. It is important that people on the team hold different perspectives and represent different areas and levels of the organization. These people are tasked with having difficult conversations about what is really happening rather than focusing on what everyone just assumes is happening in the organization. Every aspect of the organization must be open to discussion. The group should be tasked with answering certain questions, and one particular place where emphasis should lie rests in when the organization has to say no to either employees or to customers and then find out what opportunities are missed because of this no. This leads to questions such as "Who are the organization's gatekeepers, and are they truly serving the interests of the business? What are the fears and anxieties underneath their resistance?" It is important to select a skilled facilitator for this discussion because people will often disagree at this stage. Once problems have been identified, the team needs to select a problem to work on this week. Other problems can still be dealt with as early as next week. To find this problem, it can be helpful to make short summaries of each problem. The team can vote on which problem is most pressing.

Now that the problem to be addressed this week is clearly identified, the group needs to gather Sunday night data. This is data that the organization already has. This data can come in any number of forms including the organization's mission statement, strategy documents, customer surveys, and employee achievement records. It is important for the team to learn all that the company already knows. Then the team can go out and find information they do not know. New information can be gathered by talking with stakeholders both formally and informally with the main goal being to listen to what the stakeholders have to say. It is important to pay attention to both large and small issues because the smaller issues can lead to large effects. By the end of Monday, the group should be in agreement on the problem that needs to be solved.

Tuesday

On Tuesday, "you'll stop pretending that you know how to solve the problem without first testing your ideas and finding out if they work." Frei and Morriss call Tuesday a sandbox day. This is because they want their readers "to get into the organizational sandbox and play." This should be a joyful process, and it requires a willingness to embrace failure. An organization that is not facing failures is not trying enough new things. This attitude requires an experimental mindset. Frei and Morriss suggest trying to experiment with anything that has a decent chance at success.

These experiments should have stakeholders at the center. The focus should be on ways stakeholders have lost trust in the organization. Frei and Morriss believe trust breaks occur because of authenticity, logic, or empathy. Problems with authenticity occur when what the organization says it does is not the same

as what it actually does. Problems with logic occur when the organization does not meet stakeholder needs in a reliable way, and problems with empathy occur when the stakeholders do not believe that the organization cares about them. When stakeholders lose trust in an organization, it is likely because the organization wobbles in either authenticity, empathy, or logic.

Once trust wobbles are identified, the reader is called to find good enough plans to fix these problems. The authors suggest looking at logic wobbles that are problematic at the basis of the business model. These wobbles commonly occur when employees cannot meet the needs of stakeholders. Situations like these can be solved by training current employees, changing the way employees work, or finding new employees. Frei and Morriss suggest first looking to develop current employees. This helps build loyalty and makes current employees more satisfied with their jobs. When it becomes necessary to hire new employees, Frei and Morriss suggest first trying to hire within, again to help build loyalty and trust among employees. When a company must turn down a current employee for a new position, it becomes important for the company to do so in a way that builds trust by speaking directly to the rejected employee and helping them grow their career in other ways. Otherwise, "even when you've led a good-faith internal search, there is a risk that a hiring process destroys more trust than it builds." Sometimes it will be necessary to lay off current employees that are bringing the company down. They recommend doing this in a way that minimizes humiliation. Poorly executed separation decisions can actually bring profitability and the job satisfaction of remaining employees down. Still, when an employee is acting in bad faith, these decisions must be made.

Wednesday

Wednesday is focused on inclusion in the workplace as the authors instruct their readers to "make new friends" in their title for the chapter. Inclusion is important as Frei and Morriss state that "Whatever problem you're tackling this week, you're going to be better at solving it with people who don't already think like you do – people with different perspectives, different assumptions, different experiences of moving through the world." They explain that in inclusive companies, people do not just tolerate other people's differences; rather they are celebrated. Inclusive environments help curb the wobbles of inauthenticity, lack of trust, and lack of empathy discussed on Tuesday.

Frei and Morriss list ten benefits inclusive organizations earn. One of these benefits is that organizations will find it easier to recruit high quality candidates if they are inclusive. This is because many talented people seek out inclusion in the workplaces they choose to enter. They also note how inclusive organizations are often more resilient organizations. To demonstrate this, Frei and Morriss explain how during the years between 2007 and 2009, there was a 35% decline in stock performances, but there was actually a 14% increase in performance in inclusive companies. They attribute this difference to the ability inclusive organizations have to be adaptable and to be comfortable with change. Among the other nine benefits inclusive organizations reap is the money more inclusive organizations make. Because inclusive organizations make better decisions and are more



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highly productive, they often see increases in revenue. Frei and Morriss see “no other distinction that can deliver these kinds of advantages” making inclusion a key facet of organizational culture that leaders should foster.

Despite all of the benefits inclusive organizations reap, it can be difficult to achieve true inclusion as it requires more than just a diverse workforce. Frei and Morriss insist that creating a diverse group will not help the organization unless the environment is truly inclusive. In fact, homogeneous teams perform better than heterogeneous ones do unless the teams are truly inclusive, honoring the unique contributions of all members. One reason diverse teams may struggle is because of the common information effect. This effect explains how people tend to focus on what they have in common with other people. When people in a group have little in common, they have little common information to focus on. Inclusion overcomes this common information effect because inclusive groups celebrate what it is that makes everybody different, opening up more areas for exploration. Frei and Morriss note that “inclusion does not mean exclusion.” Every person’s perspective should be considered in inclusive groups, not just opinions coming from people in traditionally underrepresented groups.

Frei and Morriss discuss an inclusion dial. There are four distinctions on the inclusion dial: safe, welcome, celebrated, championed. Each step on the dial must be met before an organization can move on to the other steps on the dial. For example, people cannot feel championed unless they are first celebrated, welcome, and safe. In safe environments, people feel safe not only physically but also psychologically and emotionally. In welcoming environments, people feel they can be themselves, and in celebrated environments, people feel celebrated “because of who they are.” Finally when people feel championed, an entire organization’s culture is inclusive, and inclusion is seen as a moral imperative.

Frei and Morriss urge organizational leaders to survey people in different parts of an organization to determine where people feel the company falls on the dial. Oftentimes leaders are surprised to find that those they lead do not feel as included or even as safe as they previously believed. Furthermore, it will be likely that those who feel the most inclusion will tend to center around good managers and leaders who are particularly good at fostering an inclusive environment. Frei and Morriss go on to explain how they want everyone to move up the dial. In some organizations, men start to feel more insecure about making missteps as women and nonbinary people become more included. This is not ideal as an inclusive environment should make everyone feel more included and secure. “The higher up we find ourselves on the Inclusion Dial, the greater our imperative to reach down and help pull others up.”

Thursday

On Thursday, the focus of the organization will change to the story leaders tell about changes to be made. Human beings are story-centered individuals, so the way a story is crafted and shared is of the utmost importance. This story should focus on both the why and the how of the intended changes, and it is based on all that was learned earlier in the week about problems the organization is facing. Crucial to effective storytelling is the ability to tell a story in simple terms. “The objective of change storytelling is to understand the story deeply enough that you can describe it simply to the people you want to act on that story.”

First, Frei and Morriss advocate for honoring the past, both the good and the bad. It is important to honor the good because almost all organizations have people who serve as gatekeepers who respect the past history of the organization and do not want to see changes erode what it is they respect and honor about the organization’s past. This requires people to focus on the parts of the organization that they do not want to see changed. This will help ease the anxiety of the gatekeepers. These gatekeepers are so important that Frei and Morriss recommend keeping one near so those in leadership can understand the anxieties people face as they attempt to move the organization forward. A sense of continuity is important if leaders want people to get on board with proposed changes. Once the good parts of an organization’s history are acknowledged, it is important to then move on to the not so good parts of an organization’s history. These are generally places of wobbles found on Tuesday. At this stage, leaders need to focus on both honesty and optimism.

The next step in the storytelling process is to project a tone of both rigor and optimism as leadership lays out the plan for needed change. This can be done by appealing to logic, and data can be a useful rhetorical tool. But when it comes to data, Frei and Morriss urge readers not to inundate people with too much data, instead choosing to focus on what is most important or compelling. The story then needs to be told with optimism because optimism is an important tool because of its highly infectious nature.

All of these points of the story then need to be put together. Frei and Morriss recommend using a three part structure utilizing the following headings:

1. “The Good Ol’ Days”
2. “The Change Mandate”
3. “The Optimistic Way Forward.”

This story should be practiced and read aloud, and once it has been finely tuned, it should be repeated frequently. Most people do not share the story enough and likely need to at least double or triple the number of times they share the story. Feelings do not need to be ignored. In fact, they can help build both trust and a sense of authenticity.

Friday

On Friday, Frei and Morriss advocate for speed. They start out their exploration of speed by making the assertion that “There is such a thing as being too late” as they believe that when an organization does something matters as much as what it is that it does. Not only is speed important, but if the steps outlined in Monday through Friday have been implemented, the authors believe that a right to speed has been earned. Because the steps have been taken, breaking things is far less likely had action just been jumped into.

Frei and Morriss believe there are ten beliefs that get in people’s way of moving fast. The first of these is people’s perceptions that change happens slowly. Frei and Morriss believe that “history lurches forward when changemakers decide that the moment that matters most is right now.” Frei and Morriss further believe that a belief that things can be done later can lead to a reticence to change. This desire to push change into the future can come with a high price. Another problem people run into is a belief that they need more information in order to make changes. Frei and Morriss counter this belief by sharing Jeff Bezos’s belief “that most decisions should be made with about 70 percent of the information you want.” Part of the problem of waiting for absolute certainty is that the company is vulnerable while leaders wait to make a necessary change.

One stumbling block organizations come across when trying to implement change at a fast pace is that they have too many systemic stumbling blocks. This often means that decision-making capabilities are confined to too few individuals. This can cause change to get stuck in a pipeline. A solution is to teach people how to think, giving people the required authority to make decisions once they are fully informed about the criteria necessary to make the change.

Another stumbling block organizations face is a reticence to do some things poorly. Frei and Morriss discuss the impossibility triangle. The three points of this triangle are speed, quality, and cost. At most, two of these criteria can be met. Therefore, if speed is important, either quality or cost will suffer. To cope with this reality, leaders are tasked with deciding which tasks can be done poorly. Frei and Morriss use the example of Southwest Airlines. In order to keep costs low while also prioritizing speed and efficiency, they must compromise on service. This can make people uncomfortable at times, but the only way to get people where they want to go at a low cost is to compromise in that manner. When leaders refuse to acknowledge the reality of this triangle, “the alternative is to pretend you can be great at everything and lose trust as you go.”

The goal Frances Frei and Anne Morriss set out to achieve in

their book is to help leaders analyze their organizations, recognize problems, create solid plans quickly, and implement these plans with a sense of urgency. Frei and Morriss’s book focuses on the people in an organization as it attempts to help readers create environments that are conducive to the flourishing of all stakeholders. Underlying their book is the premise that when stakeholders are respected, progress can be made. This is because empathy, logic, and authenticity are all keys to successful organizations and effective change. Along these lines, the authors end their book discussing the weekend. This is a time of rest and replenishment that comes at the end of a week of change and that can lead to recovery. Part of the reason they chose a week as a framework for institutional change is because weeks have built in weekends that can allow for this recovery.

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