

THE SMALL ACTS PHENOMENON©

William A. Guillory, Ph.D.
Innovations International, Inc.

Introduction

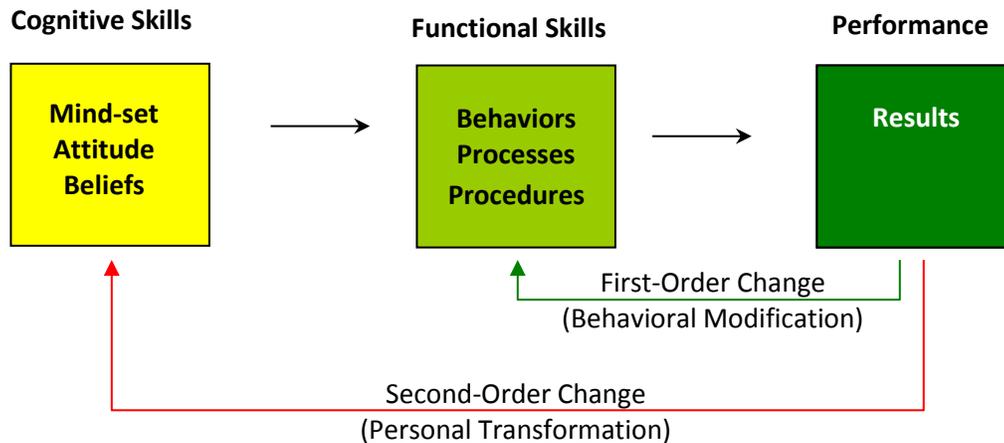
In 2008, I wrote a white paper (booklet) and Innovations established a program titled, **Small Acts of Inclusion©—Creating Cultural Transformation**. In the last five years, this phenomenon has become very popular, not only in the U.S. but also Canada, South America, and Europe. The basic premise of the paper is that every day human interactions (in the workplace and life) provide a “naturally-occurring” process for influencing, not only interpersonal behavior and relationship, but also personal transformation, where there is no subtle or overt expectation in return. More specifically, the premise of the Small Acts idea is that,

“Authentic human interaction is the most powerful phenomenon for invalidating perceptions that have no basis in experiential reality.”

First, I make a clear distinction between *change* and *transformation*. The latter term is rarely used in the implementation of organizational initiatives—although it is a necessity for their full success. For example, a transformation in an organization’s thinking was as equally important for the successful achievement of the most recent quality initiatives of the 21st century, and certainly for initiatives involving safety and security; without compromise. These examples represent the level of commitment necessary for a successful diversity and inclusion initiative.

Change is basically *external* in terms of events, process, and procedures, whereas transformation is one’s internal adaptation to the circumstances of change. It has the potential for *provoking* transformation—but only where it directly challenges the existing culture enough to create “irreversible change” in structured beliefs, attitudes, and mind-set. The State of Mind Diagram we designed in 1986 shows the discontinuity *and* relationship between mind-set, behaviors, and permanent results.

STATE OF MIND DIAGRAM



The discontinuity means that by merely changing processes, procedures, and behaviors, personal and organizational transformation does not necessarily occur. In most cases it does not, which leads to French expression.

“The more things change, the more they stay the same.”

The point is, we should probably pay as much or more attention to the nature of the culture rather than assuming transformation has occurred because we observe “comfort-zone change” all around us—which in the long, will probably be reversible, without cultural transformation. The Small Acts approach is a way for everyone in the organization to participate in bringing about cultural transformation; not just management and leadership. The following sections provide a stepwise process for implementing a serious Small Acts initiative, with the intent of creating cultural transformation—not just change.

II. Getting Serious About Cultural Transformation

Step One

The first step in transforming a culture (for which change naturally occurs) is making it clear in communications and in writing that you are attempting to *transform* the culture—the permanent invalidation of beliefs, attitudes, and mind-sets that serve as a basis for both conscious and unconscious actions, processes, and procedures of discrimination—by specific, definable, and measurable results. In other words, the test of the observable changes in activities is, “Do they push the boundaries of the organization’s comfort zone—both personally and professionally?” If they don’t, then the overwhelming probability is that little change of a lasting nature will occur, as evidenced by a well-designed inclusion survey.

Step Two

The second step is defining the goal of cultural transformation—in this case, inclusion—in a way which is specific, definable, and measurable. In addition, it is clearly understood by middle managers who are the critical link in its achievement. If they are to be enrolled, there must be an explanation of “why should they be committed?” “What is expected of them in terms of operations?” “What measurable results are expected; and in what time frame?” All stated in language of which *they* understand and are most likely to be persuaded and/or convinced. If inclusion is not defined in a culturally measurable way, then most programs or initiatives turn into a series of reversible activities and goals, over the long term.

Step Three

The third step is to make it clear that the broad-base workforce is most critical by their active participation and support—or it won’t happen. ***Leadership cannot transform a culture without the complicity of the workforce!*** This step begins with everyone becoming educated with steps (1) and (2). In addition, providing them specific instructions about how they can participate. Their participation takes the total responsibility off of leadership and management, and provides the opportunity for everyone to participate in transforming the culture to achieve inclusion. This step involves both live and online education programs so that everyone can participate in the shortest time-frame with least amount of expense.

Step 4.

The fourth and vital step is creating an inclusion survey to measure the nature of the culture—based upon the definition in Step One. One common mistake is to select a few questions from an existing survey that “look inclusive” and define it as an inclusion index! This is hardly the way to define an initiative which permeates every activity in the organization. Some organizations use as few as five questions! There are two ***overall*** questions associated with inclusion: One, “What’s it like to work here?” and Two, “What are my chances for personal success, without undue or unfair barriers of exclusion?” Usually, an excellent inclusion survey is derived from an in-depth definition of inclusion as well as an in-depth understanding of diversity and inclusion, as an organizational initiative. Most of all, it is vital to comprehend that diversity, as an initiative, goes beyond composition in the 21st century. As an initiative, it really involves how differences, which are in large part existent, are leveraged to achieve exceptional performance.

Step 5.

The fifth step is establishing an infrastructure to support the success of the Small Acts Initiative from the beginning to successful completion—wherein, the initiative goes into maintenance mode. Most of all, not taking the approach of pushing a car with a low tank of gas (money), having ignition occur, and then walking away assured that it will reach its destination! We’ve *all* have enough experience and frustration

The Small Acts Phenomenon—The Crucial Element for Cultural Transformation

with this approach. There are several organizations we have worked with who have achieved various degrees of success. A major global organization is presently implementing the Small Acts program with considerable success—both in the U.S. and globally. They are also implementing all five steps.

The most telling fact of this conversation is that diversity has been around since 1985, as an organizational phenomenon, and inclusion, circa 2000. Compare these time durations with *any* serious business or performance initiative.

William A Guillory, Ph.D.
President
Innovations International, Inc.
bill.guillory@innovint.com

P.S. I look forward to comments and/or clarifications; and most of all, successful permanent actions of inclusion of which I am unaware. If anyone is interested in the original booklet, free of charge, drop me a request.