Deep Change: Discovering the Leader Within
Robert Quinn
Summary by Mark R. Elliott*

Deep change differs from incremental change in that it requires new ways of thinking and behaving. It is change that is major in scope, discontinuous with the past and generally irreversible. The deep change effort distorts existing patterns of action and involves taking risks. Deep change means surrendering control. (p 3)

Sometimes, however, we need to alter our fundamental assumptions, rules, or paradigms and develop new theories about ourselves and our surrounding environment. When this need emerges, we try to deny and resist it. (p 7)

There is an important link between deep change at the personal level and deep change at the organizational level. To make deep personal change is to develop a new paradigm, a new self, one that is more effectively aligned with today's realities. This can occur only if we are willing to journey into unknown territory and confront the wicked problems we encounter…This tortuous journey requires that we leave our comfort zone and step outside our normal roles. In doing so, we learn the paradoxical lesson that we can change the world only by changing ourselves. (p 9)

Excellence, however, never lies within the boxes drawn in the past…To bring deep change, people have to "suffer" the risks. And to bring about deep change in others, people have to reinvent themselves. (p 11)

A colleague once told me about a group of executives in a large state government who were interested in leadership training. They were particularly interested in teaching transformational leadership. They wanted to develop public administrators who would take initiative, who would make deep change in their organizations. Given the negative stereotype of public administrators as resistant bureaucrats, they wondered if there were any transformational leaders in any agency of their government. They decided to investigate and find out.

Their analysis revealed a number of cases of people who had made dramatic transformations within their various organizations. One person took over an office renowned for long lines and offended citizens. A year later, it was the best office in the system. Another person took over a hospital where conditions had long been scandalous. Two years later, it was a nationwide model. Eventually, they decided to make a video about some of these transformational leaders. Teams went out to interview the leaders. They returned with bad news. The video could not be made. In every single case, the transformational leader had, at least once, broken a state law. To transform the ineffective organization into an effective one, required forms were not turned in, regulations were ignored, and directives were violated.

Does this mean that to be a transformation leader and make deep change in an organization, one has to break the law? No, it does always require, however, that someone must take some significant risks.

Organization and change are not complementary concepts. To organize is to systematize, to make behavior predictable…The process of formalization initially makes the organization more efficient or effective. As time goes on, however, these routine patterns move the organization toward decay and stagnation. (pp 4-5)

*Mark R. Elliott served as a Director of Missions (Associational Mission Strategist) in western Iowa and eastern Nebraska for almost three decades. He is a strong advocate for obedience and Biblically based disciple making. As such, he knows that making healthy disciples requires Christian leaders to be constantly pursuing spiritual maturity—be lifelong learners. Because of the time constraints of ministry, most pastors focus their reading list on resources that assist them in teaching and preaching the Word of God. As such, books focusing on church health, leadership development, and church growth tend to find their way to the bottom of the stack. With that reality in mind, Mark has written discussion summaries on several books that have helped him to personally grow in Christ and that tend to find themselves on the bottom of most pastor's stack. Many pastors have found them helpful as they are able to more quickly process great insights from other pastors and authors.