

Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey “Immunity to Change” Harvard Business Press 2009

1. **IMMUNITY TO CHANGE.** The cover of this book gives the following description:

“A recent study showed that when doctors tell heart patients they will die if they don’t change their habits, only one in seven will be able to follow through successfully. Desire and motivation are not enough: even when it is literally a matter of life and death, the ability to change remains maddeningly elusive. Given that the status quo is so potent, how can we change ourselves and our organisations ? Kegan and Lahey show how individual beliefs - along with the collective mind-sets in our organisations – combine to create a natural but powerful immunity to change. They maintain that by pinpointing and uprooting our immunities to change, we can bring our organisations forward with us.”

2. This model allows individuals to surface their limiting beliefs and then to change their perceptions, their concepts and so their actions. They have researched this model in the field of leadership where they make a distinction between Leadership Techniques, which deal with strategies for doing external things and Leadership Development, which refers to developing individual personal change in CEOs and their staff. Similarly they distinguish between Technical changes, which are often incremental additions of knowledge or skill, like putting on extra or new vestments and Adaptive changes that require that we change because it is about having a different mind-set.

“If you are leading any thing at any level you are driving some kind of plan or agenda but **some kind of plan or agenda is also driving you**, and it is out of your awareness.”

3. The model is referred to as the Immunity X ray and it covers four parts

COMMITMENTS: improvement goals	DOING/NOT DOING INSTEAD: behaviours that work against the goal	HIDDEN COMPETING COMMITMENTS: Worry Box: anxiety management	BIG ASSUMPTIONS: how we understand ourselves and the world, our mental constructions.
What is the most important improvement you want to make? What do you really want to get better at?	What are you doing/ not doing instead ?	Answer these questions about every item in your second column. If I imagine myself trying to do the opposite of this, what is the most unpleasant or scary feeling that comes up for me? You need to get to some fear so add “And what would be the worst about that?” You need to get to a place where you feel at risk: where you are unprotected from something that feels dangerous to you.	What are you assuming? About ourselves, the world and the relationship between us and the world?

4. THE IMMUNITY MAP and THE GROWTH OF MENTAL COMPLEXITY

This **IMMUNITY TO CHANGE** process can be thought of as containing two parts.

1. The first allows us to pinpoint our natural way of defending ourself against possible dangers to our identity and our situation in the world. We have seen that what is stopping us is an « immune » reaction that believes it is protecting us. An immune system is intelligent and acts to protect our lives. It has a lot of vital plusses in its functioning for us.

But it can also reject new material, whether from inside or outside the body, yet which the body needs to heal itself and to thrive- and then it puts us in danger. It thinks it is protecting us but it is making a mistake. It doesn’t understand that it has to alter its way of being. It is actually putting us at risk. We protect ourselves from accomplishing our goals in order to « save our lives ».

In fact we need to make our immunity map explicit so we can update our assumptions about ourselves, others and the world. The first part of this process follows the tableau above with the four stages of enquiry. And it allows us to recognise our most powerful source of ability - our capacity (and that of people we work with) to overcome, at any age, the limitations of blind spots in our current ways of making meaning.

2. FOLLOW-UP PROCESS:

DESIGNING, RUNNING AND INTERPRETING TESTS OF BIG ASSUMPTIONS.

You can see how you have one foot on the accelerator and one foot on the brake and you can see the very good reason why you are holding yourself back even when you really want to change.

Then you give the next process your attention across time. It is not a quick fix, it may take months but not years ! You may need help from outside resources.

QUESTIONS:

- Which big assumption jumps out at you as the one that most gets in the way ?
- If you could choose just one, which would have the biggest impact ?
- How can you test it ? What can I risk doing or resist doing, on a small scale so I can test my assumption ?

OBJECTIVE:

To produce actions that give you information that you can use as feedback. The questions to keep asking yourself are :

- During the test « What am I thinking ? What am I feeling ? What am I doing ? »
- After the test « What have I learnt ? » « What counter-example have I got now to dissolve or shift my assumption ? »

NB. The objective of designing and organising tests for yourself is that you involve other people by asking for their feedback on your choice of a Commitment to Learning and on the effects they see happening. It is also for your on-going learning, not just to get quick technical results. You are into Adaptive Change that will allow you to transform and dissolve old assumptions that have blocked you for so long ! The objective is also to construct an enjoyable pathway to creative participation in your own goals and those of your teams. ENJOY !

ROBERT KEGAN and LISA LAHEY “IMMUNITY TO CHANGE”

ASSUMPTIONS on ADULT DEVELOPMENT

Kegan comes from an Adult Education perspective in Harvard University’s Graduate School of Education and he is proposing the frame of Adult Development and Mental Complexity in the service of leadership development. He maintains that we are aware of the growing complexity of the world and believe that we have to learn to “cope” with it. In fact our own capacity to handle this world is in our minds. And we need to remember that our Minds can develop and that our Brains are plastic.

“We are experiencing a mismatch between the world’s complexity and our own at this moment. There are two logical ways to mend this mismatch – reduce the world’s complexity or increase our own. The first isn’t going to happen. The second has long seemed an impossibility in adulthood. We (Kegan and Lahey) have spent a generation now studying the growth of mental complexity in adulthood.”

Today we talk of neural plasticity and the phenomenal capacities of the brain to keep adapting throughout life.

THREE PLATEAUS IN ADULT MENTAL COMPLEXITY

THE SOCIALISING MIND

- We are shaped by the definitions and expectations of our personal environment.
- Our self coheres by its alignment with, and loyalty to, that with which it identifies.
- This can express itself primarily in our relationships with people, with “schools of thought” (our ideas and beliefs) or both.

THE SELF- AUTHORIZING MIND

- We are able to step back enough from the social environment to generate an internal “seat of judgment” or personal authority that evaluates and makes choices about external expectations.
- Our self coheres by its alignment with its own belief system/ideology/personal code; by its ability to self-direct, take stands, set limits, and create and regulate its boundaries on behalf of its own voice.

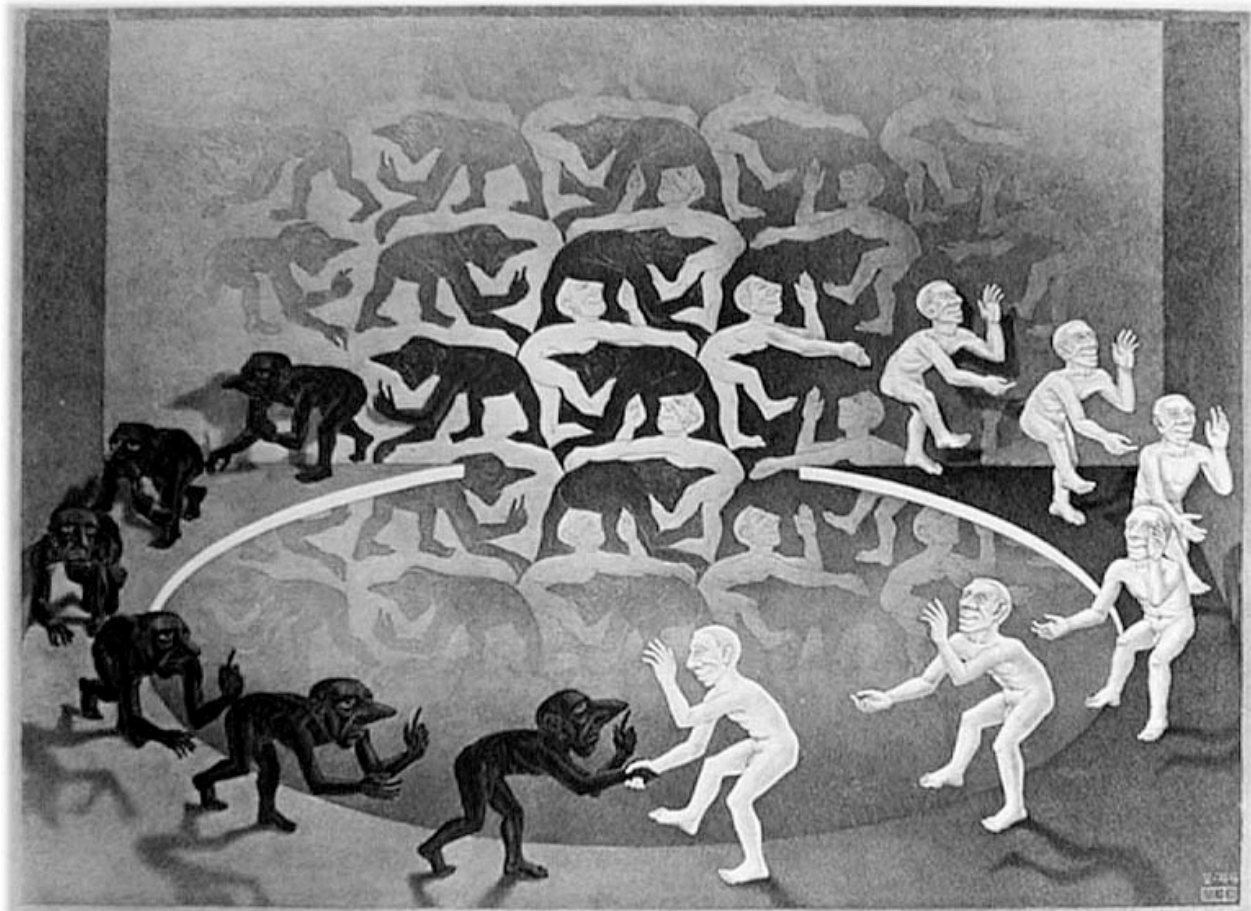
THE SELF-TRANSFORMING MIND

- We can step back from and reflect on the limits of our own ideology or personal authority
- We can see that any one system or self-organisation is in some way partial or incomplete
- We can be friendlier toward contradiction and opposites
- We can seek to hold on to multiple systems rather than projecting all but one onto the other
- Our self coheres through its ability not to confuse internal consistency with wholeness or completeness, and through its alignment with the dialectic rather than either pole.

3. HOW WE SEE OPPOSITES



EITHER/OR



BOTH / AND

The opposites are in a different relationship. Here the opposites are in a dynamic relationship which is always shifting. This Escher picture won't let you see the black as a background, it reverses and dances with the white. The opposites meet and shake hands before our eyes. Our own meaning-making minds hold this picture in a different metaphysical space from the earlier Gestalt space.

There is a story about Gandhi which illustrates that rare minds have always been able to do this. The story is that Gandhi told a Hindu man mourning for the loss of his child in a Muslim riot to heal his pain by taking a Muslim child from the street and to bring him up as his son but as a Muslim. This ability to embrace and include the opposites in a transformative frame, can become not such a rare phenomena. The Public Conversations Project in Boston, which experimented with meetings between ideologically opposed parties on the issue of abortion, resulted in no change of opinions but a change in relationship - they found they could respect each other and be friends !

In other words, the human development line shows that we can leave behind the socialising mind and its tribal passions, and the prideful sovereignty of the self-authorising mind with its warring ideologies, for a self-transforming mind set with a friendlier attitude to opposites.

Kegan is also suggesting that we could see the phenomena of our increased life span as a sign that evolution is pushing us to develop the self-transforming mindset in a larger number of Elders.