

The Power of Embracing the Unknown for Personal Growth

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ABSTRACT

In an ever-changing work environment, leaders face the challenge of navigating uncertainty while fostering personal growth within their teams. This presentation dives into the concept of embracing the unknown as a catalyst for resilience and innovation.

By stepping outside comfort zones, individuals can develop new skills, gain diverse perspectives, and enhance their adaptability. Practical strategies from recent and ongoing changes within Biometrics at Novo Nordisk such as agile ways of working, use of R, and full-service outsourcing will be presented.

Focus will be on how to cultivate a positive mindset, support teams in facing uncertainties, and transform challenges into opportunities for development while acknowledging the individual level of curiosity as well as resistance to change. Through real-life success stories, the presentation aims to inspire and empower leaders to embrace change as a pathway to growth, ultimately benefiting both individuals and organizations.

INTRODUCTION

At Novo Nordisk, recent organizational changes have challenged leaders and teams to navigate uncertainty and foster growth. The theme of "embracing the unknown" has become especially relevant. This paper explores how personal and team development can thrive in times of change, focusing on strategies for resilience, innovation, and cultivating a positive mindset. While the context is Novo Nordisk, the insights are broadly applicable to any organization facing transformation.

FACING THE UNKNOWN

Change is constant, but not everyone feels curious or courageous every day. Leaders must recognize and support varying emotional responses to change. The "Wastebasket Story" illustrates how a seemingly minor change - removing individual wastebaskets - triggered strong reactions. Through communication, empathy, and highlighting benefits, acceptance was eventually achieved. This story demonstrates the importance of guiding teams through the change curve, which includes denial, anger, depression, experimentation, and acceptance. Leaders should listen, communicate clearly, and tailor support to each team member's needs.

LEADERSHIP DURING CHANGE

Change comes in many forms - large and visible, like mergers or downsizing, and small but impactful, like new systems or team members. Leaders must notice early signals and prepare teams by mentioning changes multiple times in different contexts. This helps to avoid surprises and fosters buy-in to the change ahead. Leadership is about helping others navigate both the visible and invisible aspects of change to help the team adjust and avoid surprises.

UNDERSTAND UNKNOWNNS

- **Unknown Unknowns:** Things we don't realize we don't know, surprises we cannot anticipate – out of the blue surprises
- **Known Unknowns:** Things we know we don't know – we know we miss some of the puzzle pieces

Conceptually, known unknowns can be:

- **Situational:** New jobs, environments, or hobbies.
- **Cognitive:** Gaps in knowledge or understanding.
- **Emotional:** Unpredictable emotional responses.
- **Strategic:** Decision-making under uncertainty.

Recognizing and acknowledging unknowns is the first step. Many people try to eliminate uncertainty, but doing so can limit possibilities. Adopting an "uncertainty mantra"- seeing discomfort as a learning opportunity - can help individuals and teams grow.

STEPPING INTO THE UNKNOWN

Are you curious to try something new, or do you prefer the comfort of routine? Like the movie 'Groundhog Day,' repetition can feel safe but may limit growth. Knowledge workers often seek new ways at their own pace, and new approaches bring challenges, successes, and insights. Stepping into the unknown and embracing uncertainty is essential for personal and organizational growth.

The risk depends on what's at stake – whether the risk is seen as a finite game (win or lose) that you really wish to win/demonstrate you know it all or as part of an infinite game that we are part of for the long haul. The latter encourages experimentation and learning from experiences, regardless of outcome.

We can't always control the degree of change and uncertainty. By embracing discomfort and adopting a "learn it all" mindset, we improve our ability to learn, grow, and navigate complexity. For example, when agile principles were introduced in a GxP environment, it was initially frightening, but over time, employees embraced the flexibility and critical thinking.

EMBRACING AGILE WAYS OF WORKING

The agile principles (agile manifesto) prioritize individuals and interactions, critical thinking, and fit-for-purpose plans. Novo Nordisk introduced agile mindset courses to foster flexibility and value creation. Experimentation and risk-willingness became central, with pilots and initiatives encouraging teams to try new approaches. Award shows recognized risk-willingness, and timelines for deliverables were shortened through innovative practices. Leaders promoted a learning culture, encouraging dialogue, transparency, and support for experimentation.

BUILDING A LEARNING CULTURE

A learning culture requires trust, curiosity, and a willingness to experiment. Organizational focus should be on inspiring and empowering individuals, supporting any outcome, and sharing experiences to implement best practices. Recent changes - such as new roles, outsourcing models, and expanded responsibilities - offer opportunities for growth. Facing the unknown challenges individuals to step outside their comfort zones and develop new skills and perspectives. Trust is foundational for daring to make mistakes and moving ahead with energy.

CONCLUSION

Embracing the unknown is essential for personal and organizational growth. Leaders play a crucial role in guiding teams through change, supporting emotional responses, and fostering a culture of learning and experimentation. By adopting strategies that encourage curiosity, risk-willingness, and continuous improvement, organizations can turn uncertainty into opportunity. The journey at Novo Nordisk demonstrates that with the right mindset and support, individuals and teams can thrive in the face of change.

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