

Distinguishing and Moving with Transformative Moments

Transformative moments are those unique points in an individual, an organization or a human system's development, where the conditions for change are very ripe. A transformative moment is a particular confluence of conditions that make rapid, profound growth possible.

Although many have used this term informally, we might distinguish what constitutes a transformative moment in its historical significance, through the aspects of external conditions, internal capacities, and present-moment awareness.

External conditions – Sometime conditions are just poised for change. As Mezirow pointed out transformative learning occurs not just through shifting our perspective, but through disorienting dilemmas, which sometimes take the form of a life crisis. Transformative moments do not always involve a crisis, but constitute a poignant set of conditions, in which transformative change seems possible. The external conditions of a transformative moment present themselves in a variety of ways. We may be facing a major life event, career change, or new learning opportunity. Leaders may recognize their organizations face what Heifetz called an *adaptive challenge* – a challenge that requires significant growth to address, i.e., that we must become something or someone different to address it. Market pressures or social change may be making unique present or future demands on us. Like the bifurcation point described in chaos theory, transformative moments occur when conditions are present for a shift to a qualitatively new (higher or lower) level of functioning.

Internal capacity – Transformative development in human systems can be seen to occur in cycles of rapid or transformative shift, integration and maturity. It is in the integration and maturity that the seeds for future growth are sown. As our present capacity is fulfilled, we become primed for new growth, if conditions and awareness are right. In addition, each transformative moment demands certain internal capacities to meet it. When the conditions are ripe for change, do we have the interior strengths needed to meet it and move with it?

Awareness – Transformative moments are not simply people living with certain objective conditions. They also arise in the way we relate to them. We find ourselves in a transformative moment to a certain extent when we see our situation that way. As transformative change can be seen as interplay between the interior and exterior dimensions, i.e., the givens, what intention do we bring to bear that brings them to light? How do we enact them as a world through which we travel to a new being?

We may see that we face a major challenge or passage in our life or live of our organization. We are sometimes aware that what's being asked of us is far from what we seem to have available to give. We may feel discomfort, confusion, or incongruence between what we've thought was real in the past and how the world is working now. We may have a renewed sense of calling or higher purpose, while paradoxically feeling humbled with how we are able to respond to it. Sometimes, we see that things just seem to be changing in ways that are not fully clear, with a sense of wanting to move forward into the change, and make the best of it.

When we are able to be aware of these occasions as transformative moments, that is, to distinguish them as times of great potential, that potential becomes accessible.

In our work, we seek to identify, embrace and capitalize on transformative moments in ourselves and the systems in which we work. This is an approach to change that seeks to distinguish and address the needs posed by these transformative moments. Developmental frameworks, for example, reveal the possibilities inherent in some transformative shifts, i.e., those which precipitate developmental shifts. Developmental approaches allow us to see, not just a shift in perspective, but the deeper shifts in our perspective taking capacity.

Working with transformative moments, frames our work as change agents not as interveners, but defines a new ethics of change in which we seek to relate to the inherent emergent nature of change, the already evolving world. We are partners with its inherent and emerging greatness, which is real now.

Many of us sense that collectively we humans are facing a time of enormous potential. These transformative moments *are* situations of tremendous potential. Yet, like bifurcation points in complex systems, these situations inherently have multiple paths forward, only some of which fully realize this potential. Many of us sense this is a time of great potential, in our individual lives, in our organizational and social systems – in the human family. Are we ready to meet it?

Pacific Integral has developed unique, powerful approaches to help individuals and organization capitalize on the tremendous potential in *transformative moments*.

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