Announcing a Foundational Partnership

Published on Apr 29, 2025 by Niko Canner

Building on our longstanding collaboration and increasingly significant work together over the past year, Incandescent and Minds at Work have committed to a new and deeper chapter in our partnership. Minds at Work was founded by Bob Kegan and Lisa Lahey of Harvard Graduate School of Education, co-authors of *Immunity to Change* and *An Everyone Culture*, to help individuals, teams, and organizations make those personal and collective changes that are most important to them—but have proven resistant even to thoughtful plans and heartfelt intentions. Incandescent has made a minority investment in Minds at Work and will be a full partner with Bob, Lisa, and the team they've built in the further development of the firm. We will work together to ground Incandescent's work on strategy execution in a deep understanding of how organizational strategies require individuals to grow and change. Our aspiration is not only to overcome barriers to change, accelerating performance gains, and reducing risk, but also to harness organizational change as a catalyst for individual development.

I remember feeling a little lightning beneath my skin when I read the title of Bob and Lisa's first book together: *How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work*. It was early 2001; I was just shy of thirty, and we were still early in the journey of building Katzenbach Partners into what would become the leading boutique focused on organizational performance. Near the end of the third

chapter, Bob and Lisa wrote:

> No matter how hard and genuinely we may work on behalf of our commitment (the vision, the public heaven we are trying to bring to earth) is it possible we are also working—and with more effective results—in service of a competing commitment (to self-protection, to a private hell we are trying to keep from earth)?
>
> There is a critical piece too often left out of the organizational change process. It rests on a simple premise with a single corollary. The premise: it may be nearly impossible for us to bring about any important change in a system or organization without changing ourselves. The corollary is that for every commitment we genuinely hold to bring about some important change, there is another commitment we hold that has the effect of preventing the change. If the stories of organizational reform and change we continue to create are such partial stories, stories that tell only half the truth, we cannot expect to succeed. (1)

I passionately believed Bob and Lisa's premise; their corollary changed the way I talked, and the way I worked.

Bob and Lisa founded Minds at Work after they published that landmark book. They developed a powerful coaching process and trained a generation of practitioners. They built a practice with particular focus on working with organizations whose success depended on operating at the frontiers of human knowledge – for whom the questions of how people grow and develop are existentially important – in fields from professional services to biotechnology. They worked extensively, as well, on how to apply their ideas in their home field of education.

Much as Bob and Lisa's ideas influenced my thinking, it was only a decade later that we met. After selling Katzenbach Partners to Booz & Company and integrating our team into the larger firm, I joined Ray Dalio and became a member of the Management Committee of Bridgewater Associates, the world's largest hedge fund and one of the most ambitious experiments ever undertaken to create a learning organization. My friend, Graham Duncan, reached out to share that Bob and Lisa were interested in studying Bridgewater as part of their research into deliberately developmental organizations, which led to spending time with them as part of their immersion.

The conversation that began at Bridgewater deepened over the years. From the beginning, I conceived Incandescent as a deliberately developmental organization ("DDO"), very much along the lines described in *An Everyone Culture*:

> The intention of every DDO leader in these pages is crystal clear: he or she is working hard on the culture every day as much to enhance the business as its employees. These leaders do not see two goals or two missions, but one. The relationship between realizing human potential and organizational potential in these companies is a dialectic, not a trade-off.

As Bob and Lisa have increasingly focused on the question of how to apply their ideas at enterprise scale, we've experienced great power in how our work comes together.

At the heart of the partnership between Incandescent and Minds at Work are three fundamental patterns we see in our work:

1. The strategies we see organizations adopting in the current business environment require that people, across a wide range of roles, embrace work of greater intellectual and emotional complexity. Change management, as it has been traditionally practiced, is no longer sufficient when strategies require elevated thinking and elevated action. The only path forward is one that invites people to develop and supports them to grow.
2. The impasse leaders encounter isn't so much resistance to the changes that they're seeking to drive. The most common prescriptions for addressing resistance are persuasion and alignment, the two pillars upon which the change industry has been built. Rather, leaders are experiencing that often their people agree wholeheartedly with the direction they're being asked to travel, perhaps as wholeheartedly as they believe in the rightness of their own New Year's resolutions. However, even as the people whose engagement is most critical tentatively place their "foot on the gas," another part of them puts their "foot on the brake" and holds them, resolutely, where they were. Unless the internal immune system applying the brake can be made visible and purposefully reshaped, people stay stuck, and strategy execution falters.
3. Enterprise leaders need to hold and navigate a staggeringly high level of complexity. The accelerating impact of AI and the breakdown of the established geopolitical order are intensifying the demands on those responsible for shaping and evolving the enterprise. This applies to top executives, certainly, as well as those who hold a widening array of strategic and entrepreneurial roles critical to how organizations adapt to the forces swirling around them. Even the most capable individuals in these roles find themselves "in over their heads."(2) In fact, a sign of the most capable is that they can perceive the gap between what they've mastered and what their context demands — rather than just going on as they know how and assuming that's enough.

   At the core of Bob's and Lisa's work is a theory— a very practical theory! —of adult development, which provides a powerful framework to understand the specific nature of the demands that this extreme complexity places on leaders. The most effective executives have made a developmental advance to become what Bob and Lisa call self-authoring. These leaders can step above the surroundings of what others want from them and what others think, in order to come to their own, independent beliefs and goals, and program of action. That's a great developmental achievement. Self-authoring leaders are like masters of two-dimensional chess, who suddenly find themselves right in the middle of one board of a three-dimensional game, with boards above them and below them that are hard even to observe, let alone to play in concert. The three-dimensional game requires a whole new order of thinking and feeling—a new operating system—which Bob and Lisa call the self-transforming mind.

As our team at Incandescent and the team at Minds at Work deepen our focus on how our capabilities and perspectives come together, these three patterns guide us. We are together focused on how to use Immunity to Change as an organizational x-ray, enabling leaders to see the immune

system that applies a foot on the brake against the changes required for their strategies to be realized, and as an approach to change acceleration that can be applied at scale. We are experiencing that not only do organizations achieve greater success in driving specific, business-critical change efforts when they apply these methods, but they also develop capacities in their teams that will equip them to see and adapt to the new challenges they encounter every day. Bob and Lisa have had a scale of influence far beyond the small size of the team they've built at Minds at Work, and we'll be investing together to widen the team and drive impact at scale.

Alongside that, we are investing in innovation together. A part of that innovation agenda is harnessing Gen AI to help people apply the Immunity to Change methodology. We are committed, as well, to innovate at the cutting edge of leadership practice, in response to the challenges and opportunities that flow from the third pattern observed above. The team at Minds at Work have built a powerful set of methods that support the developmental advance to arrive at the self-authoring mind. We have begun the journey to develop the thinking and methods to support developmental journeys onwards and beyond, toward the self-transforming mind.

---

(1) Quoted with a few words removed for clarity, standing alone.

(2) In Over Our Heads is the title of Bob Kegan's prescient 1994 book about the demands that contemporary society places upon individuals in every facet of their lives.