



Change and Uncertainty: Lessons from the Business World

Author : Mike Smith

Categories : [Organizational Change](#), [Strategic Planning](#)

Date : May 20, 2009

We are not a private business, of course, but we can learn things from the business world that are helpful to the School. There is a feature called *Corner Office* in the Sunday business section of the *New York Times*. It consists of a short interview with the head of a company—last week [the interview](#) was with James Jr. Schiro, C.E.O. of Zurich Financial Services. The questions tend to revolve around leadership, communications, recruiting, and corporate culture. I was struck by part of Schiro's answer to a question about the most important leadership lessons he has learned: "People don't like change, but they can manage change. They can't handle uncertainty. I think it is the job of leaders to eliminate uncertainty." I've never thought much about this distinction between change and uncertainty, and it seems obvious that some amount of uncertainty is inevitable in organizational change. It is not possible to eliminate uncertainty, especially in these economic times, but it may be important to minimize it to the greatest extent possible. Or is it more important to help people understand and respond to uncertainty and ambiguity, especially in a decentralized organization like this one? Any thoughts about this distinction between change and uncertainty?