

1.8: UNDERSTANDING CHANGE AND IMPACTS OF CHANGE OVER TIME

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Change is hard for people. Even positive change is hard. Change presents an unknown, different and uncertain way forward – even if it might be a better way forward than what you have right now. And that unknown can cause resistance, consciously and subconsciously. Research has shown that approximately 70% of change initiatives fail (*Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail; John P. Kotter, Harvard Business Review, On Change Management, 2011*). That failure rate has much more to do with people’s reaction to the potential change than it does to the problem being resolved.



There are two kinds of change we need to think about in public engagement:

TECHNICAL CHANGE – This is where we can take a current problem and apply simple, clear, problem-solving processes based on what we already know in order to address the challenge. Problem definition is clear and responsibility for implementation resides with the organization or technical expert. In many circumstances, these are situations where you might want to, but aren’t required to, do public engagement because they are simple, clear and uncomplicated technical solutions.

ADAPTIVE CHANGE - When the problem definition is unclear, or viewed differently from many different perspectives, and when new learning, understanding and options or alternate ways forward must be created. Responsibility for implementation or impacts of change will be distributed to many people or organizations, and will require collective support and contribution to be effective and sustainable. Adaptive change happens for problems not easily solved, where the path forward is uncertain or unclear. This is adaptive change, and this type of change is directly linked to public engagement processes.

When the potential for change is presented, there are a number of common reactions:

1. To deny the problem exists and attempt to marginalize those who have presented the issue or who are supporting it
2. To avoid the problem and situation and disengage
3. To defend the status quo and seek to protect it, sometimes resorting to personal attacks and shifting debate to “good” versus “bad”
4. To become aware of the potential for change and to seek to understand it

The first 3 choices relate to the aversion to change that comes from the uncertainty presented by the potential for change.

People strive to restore order and maintain what is familiar to them, and even deny that change is required. This provides comfort, stability and security.

Some people cling to the status quo far beyond the time that the signs of change required become noticeable. This provides comfort and certainty, and sometimes the things you know and understand are easier to cope with than the things you do not know.



We must work with people who are in all 4 positions in response to change, but it is people who are in the fourth place who will act as early adopters, supporters and contributors to the change process and who will help us affect change for everyone else.

Some people step strongly and courageously into the future seeking to understand or to even act because they see the potential the future might hold, but fail to notice that others are not coming with them and while they break ground for all of us, their path is bumpy and hard.

Others step into the change with curiosity and possibility, looking for ways to understand the situation, and possibly act with compassion towards those who are uncertain, while fostering support for those in the new, until the new path has emerged.

We need everyone to make effective change. It's a violent revolution without those standing in the middle or those who act as guardians of the status quo. If we all stand in the middle it becomes hard to find the future with no guides, and if we all stand in the past we get stuck clinging to the old ways even when they no longer serve us.

We are in this together. To address the realities, complexities and challenges of our time, we need the courage to work together, to have challenging conversations, to be curious and compassionate with each other, with participants, and with organizations so that we can step into the future and make our practice, and therefore our communities better.



**What contributes to resistance to change?
What builds support for change?**

Drawing on the research on leading change initiatives (*Tipping Point Leadership*, W. Chan Kim and Renee Mauborgne, *Harvard Business Review*, *On Change Management*, 2011), best practices in public engagement in situations of high impact change, and contributions from participants over the years, identified below is a chart that categorizes factors that contribute to either resistance or support for change.

WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO RESISTANCE TO CHANGE?	WHAT BUILDS SUPPORT FOR CHANGE?
Presenting the benefits or opportunities of the change and “selling” the options for moving forward as positive	Openly acknowledging the impact of change and the potential loss that may be experienced by some
Wholesale, broad and widely impacting change all at once	Focused, targeted, priority based change in manageable pieces over time
Distrust in individuals or organizations presenting the change	Trust in individuals or organizations presenting the change
Sense of isolation or marginalization in terms of negative impacts	Mobilization of diverse groups or individuals speaking out about need for change
Sense of “everyone thinks this” and “we all agree”	Inclusion and diversity of views and perspectives
Limited information, explanation or opportunity to understand the “why” and “what” is happening	Transparency and openness with information, including challenges, concerns and potential solutions
Limited, closed or adversarial consultation process	Candid, open, welcoming and constructive conversations
Inflexible, rigid or reactionary responses to concerns or contributions	Modeling of behaviours and attitudes you are seeking from others (caring, compassion, understanding, openness)
Fear of failure and uncertainty about the future	Freedom to explore uncertain options or solutions and to “freely fail”
Loss of control or feeling coerced	Feeling of ownership and being valued
Rapid pace or short timeframes	Pace of change allows for understanding

What is happening in your project?

Review the factors contributing to support or resistance to change and identify:

1. **WHO** may be experiencing this factor? Remember to think of this factor through the eyes of a variety of participants as different people will be looking at the situation from different perspectives and perceptions. Recognize that their perspective may be one of perception, but that perception is the foundation of their reality in your engagement process.
2. **WHAT** might you do differently or need to consider in order to reduce the resistance to change or to build support for change? Your approach may need to be different with different stakeholders, and the approach may need to consider internal and external stakeholders.

What contributes to resistance to change?	WHO might be experiencing this factor contributing to resistance to change?	What builds support for change?	WHO might be experiencing this factor building support for change?
Presenting the benefits or opportunities of the change and “selling” the options for moving forward as positive		Openly acknowledging the impact of change and the potential loss that may be experienced by some	
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Loss of control or feeling coerced		Feeling of ownership and being valued	
Rapid pace or short timeframes		Pace of change allows for understanding and is manageable	

NOW, think through what this means for your project:

Who will you do this with?	1 thing you should do to address resistance to change	1 more thing you should do to address resistance to change	1 thing you can do to leverage support for change
Insert Stakeholder or group	Identify one way to address challenges	Identify one more way to address challenges	Identify one way to leverage support



This TEDX Talk “Three Myths of Behaviour Change” by Jeni Cross of Colorado State University provides some insight into approaches that build support and action for changing behaviours and attitudes.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l5d8GW6GdR0>





Watch the video and ask yourself these questions:

- How can you take the insights and suggestions in this video and apply it to your public engagement project?
- What might you need to change or adjust in how you are approaching stakeholders and the public on your issue?
- What creative ways can you think of that will build awareness, understanding and **EXPERIENCE** of this issue under discussion?
- What tools and tactics could you use to support participants in seeing the impacts of change on them in ways that build support for that change?