

Leadership in



Driving Change

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Problems with realising the benefits of change are persisting

This paper focuses on leaders and their role in leading change. The importance of defining the 'why' of a change and defining and communicating what needs to change and why. Leaders are required to communicate the vision, benefits and urgency for a change.

This paper is not for project sponsors or leaders who are introducing the change. This is for leaders who are the recipients of change who need to be aware of what they will experience and what they need to do, to effectively lead their teams through change.

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A 2008 IBM global study on change initiatives, which surveyed 1,500 change management executives from 15 countries, found that nearly 60 percent of change projects did not fully meet their expectations. People and corporate culture were identified by the respondents as major obstacles to implementing change, with nearly 60 percent of respondents saying changing people's mindsets and attitudes was the biggest challenge. Forty-nine percent of respondents said that corporate culture was the next biggest challenge

"

Source:
Making Change Work - UNC Executive Development 2013

There is a whole industry around change management and yet change continues to be one of the hardest things to manage and there is no one process or one answer to ensure change is successful.

Change is about moving from where we are now (present state) to where we want to get to (desired state) and identifying the gaps between those states and the actions required to close those gaps.

Change by its nature is a moving beast.

Leaders are instrumental in leading others through change and a key to ensuring change success.

There are many challenges leaders face when tasked with leading change

Challenge #1	Comparison to previous changes that didn't work	<i>"We've tried this before and it didn't work. My team will be opposed to this change."</i>
Challenge #2	Lack of leadership experience or failure to understand the change initiative's relevance and lack of skill to lead teams through change	<i>"Our leaders don't have the experience or confidence to influence others and bring them on the change journey."</i> <i>"Our leaders aren't skilled at leading change or know how to bring their teams along the journey"</i>
Challenge #3	Lack of support or buy-in by leaders	<i>"We're not convinced that this change is the right thing to do; we don't believe in it; and don't want to go make our teams comply."</i> <i>"Our teams will resist this change and the planned benefits will not be realised."</i>
Challenge #4	Perceived or real lack of time to comply	<i>"We're already so busy, we don't have time to learn how to do this. In fact this means we will have to work harder than ever."</i>
Challenge #5	People are becoming change fatigued because there has been so much change	<i>"Our people have had so much change to absorb and adopt over the past few years and there is even more to come - we're not sure how much more they can take on board."</i>
Challenge #6	Lack of confidence / trust / faith in the real motives of leadership introducing change	<i>"Our leaders are not being transparent about why we are doing this change. They are hiding the true reasons behind other perceived secondary benefits. Our people can see through this."</i>

We are hardwired to change so why is it so hard to succeed?

Andrew O'Keeffe, author of *Hardwired Humans*, describes how the avoidance of loss is a far greater motivator to humans than the opportunity to gain. He says we are wired to first screen for pain and danger rather than seek pleasure. If we were wired for pleasure above pain we would not survive at all, as screening for pain and danger keeps us out of harm's way.

He explains how we screen information for loss versus gain; we support change if we detect a gain, we resist change if we detect loss. And in the case of uncertainty, the default is to assume a loss.

Think about a time when you have been confronted with a change – maybe a new team structure, a new way of doing something or a new role – how have you responded - from the perspective of a gain or a loss?

We often hear that people don't like change. However, it's not change itself that is the problem, it's the risk of personal loss from that change. When we first hear about a change we instantly decide at an individual level, filtered by our immediate emotional response, whether this change should be classified as gain or loss. Once we have made that classification, it's difficult to alter.

We tend to assume loss at times of change, and we are most concerned about 'what's in it for me' and:

- Will my job be secure?
- Who will I be reporting to?
- Will the membership of my team change?

Loss aversion explains why employees get annoyed over things like losing their permanent desks and having to move to flexi-desking. This is perceived as loss as they are losing the certainty of whom they sit with and where.

Change is about moving out of our comfort zone

As human beings we crave certainty, so while we may be hardwired for change otherwise we would never have climbed down from the trees, we like to stay in our comfort zone.

From a neuroscience perspective maintaining certainty reduces the use of our Executive Brain (the Pre-frontal Cortex). When we are out of our comfort zone and in a state of uncertainty we can feel anxious, uncomfortable, afraid, frustrated or even excited. Our whole brain uses more energy than any other part of our body combined; with the Executive Brain being the most energy intense and literally drains our brain of energy when overused or used intensely. So from a survival perspective, maintaining certainty reduces our brain drain.

Moving out your comfort zone and embracing uncertainty can feel like jumping out of a plane and hoping your parachute works

Change creates uncertainty and moves us out of our comfort zone. Leaders need to be able to *create or increase certainty* during a change to reduce the impact on the individual.

Change is confronting when you are moving out of your comfort zone and not sure where you are going. Change is more accepted when people can see what they are moving too and that they are moving to something good.

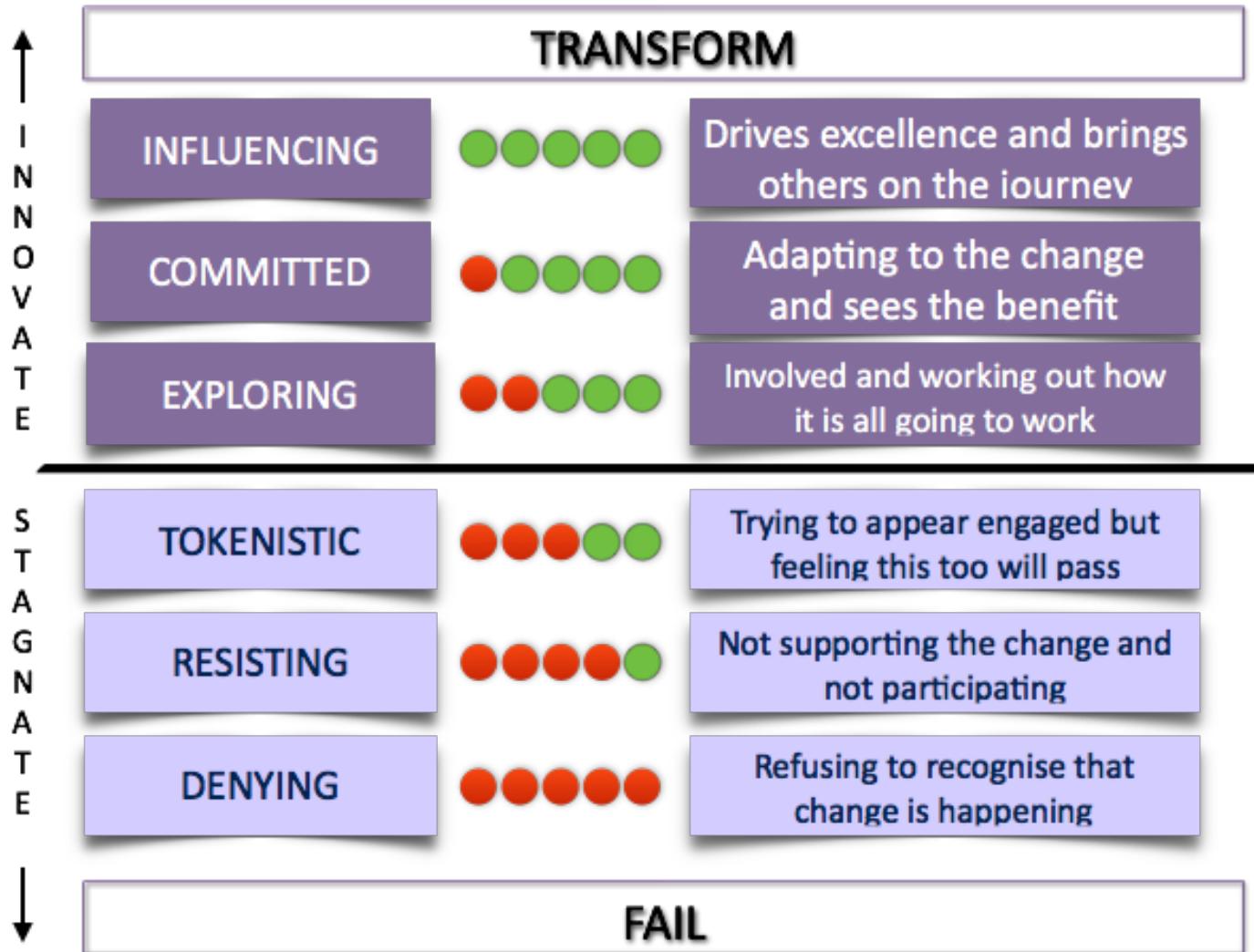
Ways of increasing certainty and reducing the 'brain drain' can be achieved by communicating well, and build or maintain a high level of trust with the team.

Leaders of change need to be aware that every person responds to the change in different ways and if the change is too extreme or not lead well, they can become change fatigued quickly (as their brains run out energy, they can start failing to cope, and their decision making ability may be affected).

Change that is not lead well will usually not succeed. Leaders, as will be discussed later in this paper, need to be aware of where they fall on the change ladder; and the impact of change on themselves, on their team, and the organisation.

Identifying where leaders are on the change ladder

Figure 1 - The Fail and Transform Change Ladder



The 'Change Ladder' shows a significant difference between a leader who is influencing and drives excellence and brings others on the journey; to a leader who is in denial and refusing the recognise that change is happening.

Above the line, the leader is supporting and leading innovative thinking.

Below the line, the leader is supporting a team and environment that is stagnatory; which has stopped developing, growing, progressing, and advancing.

When a leader is ...



Above the line the leader leads and supports innovative thinking

- Influencing** ... they are driving excellence, engaging with their team and stakeholders in pushing the boundaries of the change to discover what else can be achieved. They are bringing others on the journey. There is a trusted relationship with their team and they understand what drives each team member and is able to adjust their behaviour to provide individualised support to assist their team in committing to the change.
- Committed** ... they support the change. They engage their team and stakeholders in problem solving and planning. There is a focus on development and learning, and outputs and outcomes are linked to organisational performance. They understand the benefit of the change and willingly adapt to it. Communication is frequent, open and transparent about why the need to adopt this change and what is going to happen.
- Exploring** ... they involve themselves in understanding the change and working out how it is going to work. The team is likely to be industrious and pull together to adopt the change. They are all in the communication loop and work collaboratively. The leader is active in including the team and there is clear direction. They keep their team updated however they may delegate the responsibility of managing the change to a team member, as they don't feel they need to actively lead the change.

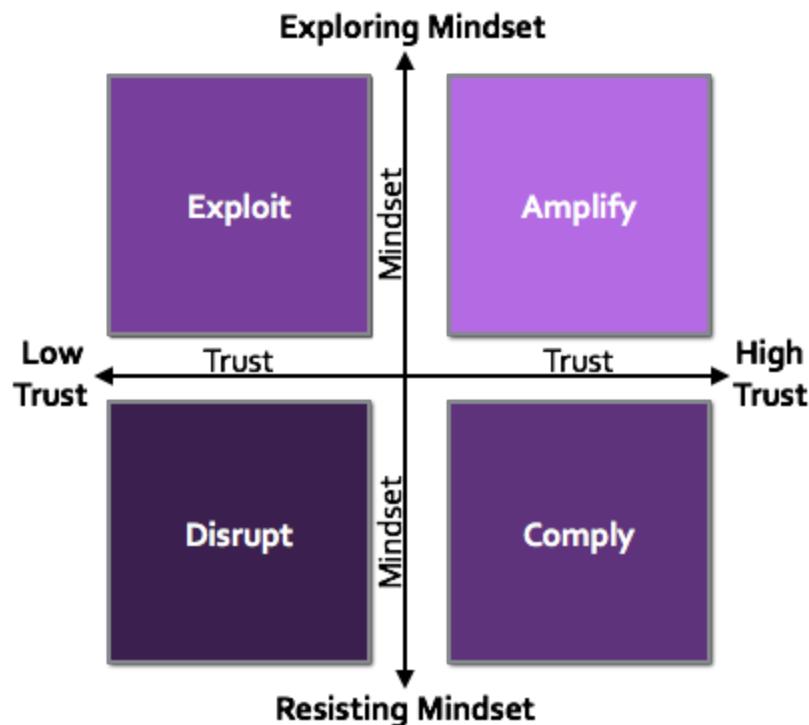
When a leader is ...

Below the line the leader is supporting a team and environment that is stagnatory; which has stopped developing, growing, progressing, and advancing

- Tokenistic** ... they are doing the bare minimum to ensure success of the change. They attend meetings if they have to, though are more likely to delegate to someone else without necessarily delegating authority. They are trying to appear engaged, however there is a part of them that believes 'this too will pass'. They may say they support the change but secretly feel that this has been done before and didn't work so put in the minimum effort. There is no regular communications with their team or they may actually discourage frequent communication from the project team to minimise the impact on their team's time.
- Resisting** ... they are not supporting the change and are not participating. They actually resist any efforts to implement the change and can be sabotaging any efforts to succeed. They will try to get others to agree with their thinking and build a coalition of resisters. The chances of the change succeeding is low.
- Denying** ... they are refusing to accept that change is happening and avoids engaging with the areas proposing it. They may use various excuses for not recognising the need to commit to the change. They don't engage with their team, and don't necessarily understand the change they are being asked to adopt. The team doesn't feel supported or trusted and feel they are being kept in the dark about what is going on which may lead to team infighting. It can be like 'putting their head in the sand' and behaving as if this change doesn't exist.

Mindset and Trust

Figure 2 - The Trust and Mindset Model



Having a team with an exploring mindset* is about being curious, willing to explore and try new things and being open to change. A resisting mindset is fixed and unable think nimbly or flexibly. It resists change.

When trust[†] in a leader and the team is high there is a willingness and openness to try new things.

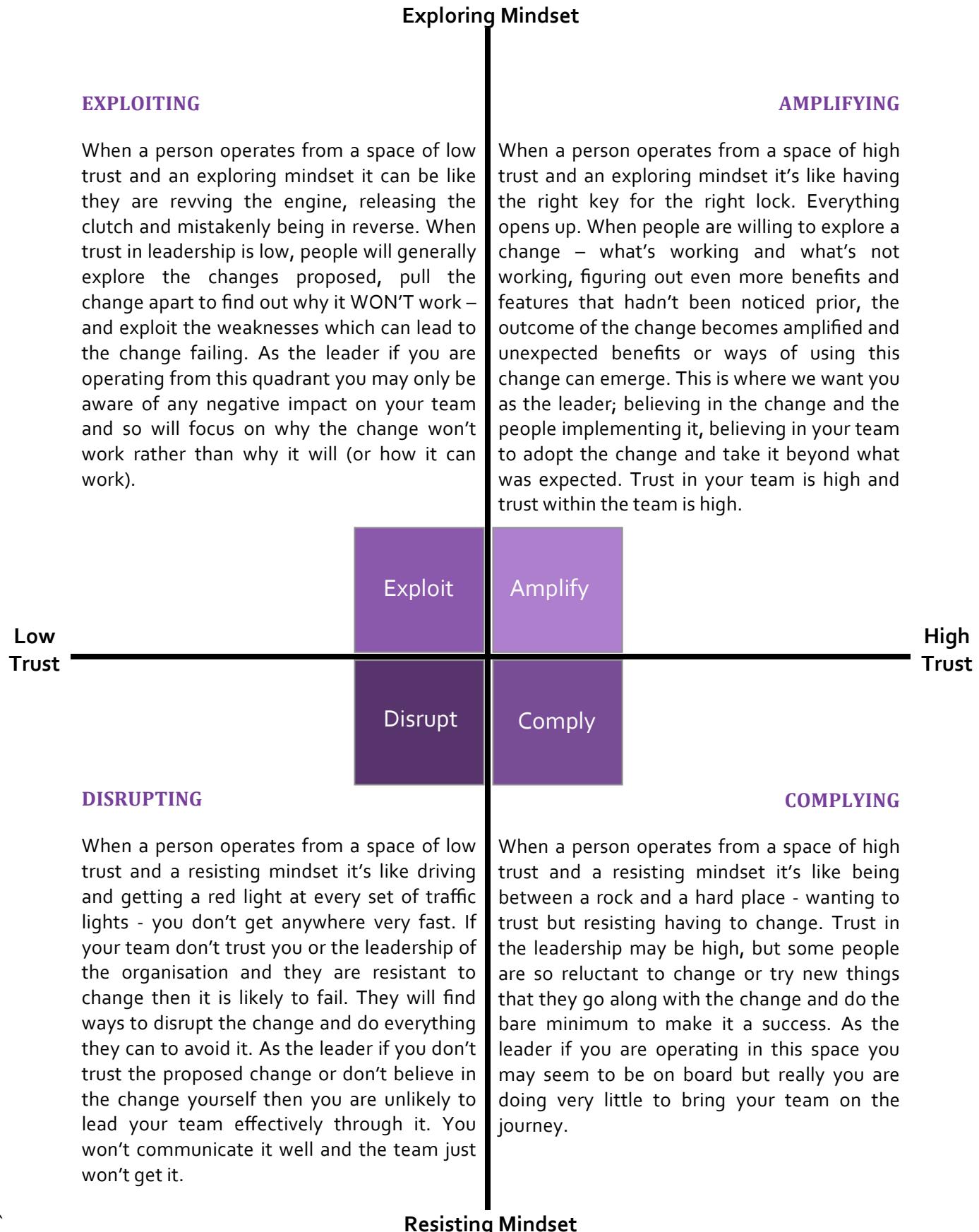
When trust in a leader and the team is low there is a reluctance to try new things and experiment.

Wonderful things happen when we have an exploring mindset and high trust: in our leader, our team, and ourselves.

When a leader is aware of their impact on change success or failure, the ability to bring their team on the journey is essential.

* Carol Dweck in her book: "Mindset", uses the term growth or fixed mindset. Dweck explains why it's not just our abilities and talent that bring us success-but whether we approach them with a fixed or growth mindset.

[†] Judith E. Glasser in her book "Conversational Intelligence" use the acronym 'TRUST' to described the components of building trust with others: Transparency; Relationships; Understanding; Shared Success; Testing Assumptions and Truth Telling.



Leaders cast long shadows

Leaders

"overestimate how much they can force big changes in an organisation. They underestimate how hard it is to drive people out of their comfort zones"

Leading Change - John P. Kotter

The shadow a leader casts, or the example they set, is crucial to good leadership and when leading others through change.

What we do, not what we say, stays in people's minds and influences our behaviour.

A few years ago a leader of a corporation stated that anyone in the company would now fly economy and not business class. The next time a team flew somewhere together everyone moved to their allocated seat towards the back of the plane and then realised that their leader was sitting at the front of the plane!

The contrasting example is the leader lining up with his team at an airport check-in when the attendant stated that the leader was being upgraded to business class. The leader gestured to a junior team member at the back of the line and asked if they had ever flown business class - and when the answer was 'no' - provided the upgrade to them.

Be mindful of what example and the shadow you are casting as a leader and be careful with where it lands. Even if you think you're not being watched, somebody is seeing what you're doing and they're drawing conclusions from that.

The level of trust and respect your team has for you are directly influenced by what you do.

Change is more likely to succeed with a leader who leads by example. Three attributes that successful change leaders have are:

- Commitment
- Accountability
- Capability

The Commitment Curve

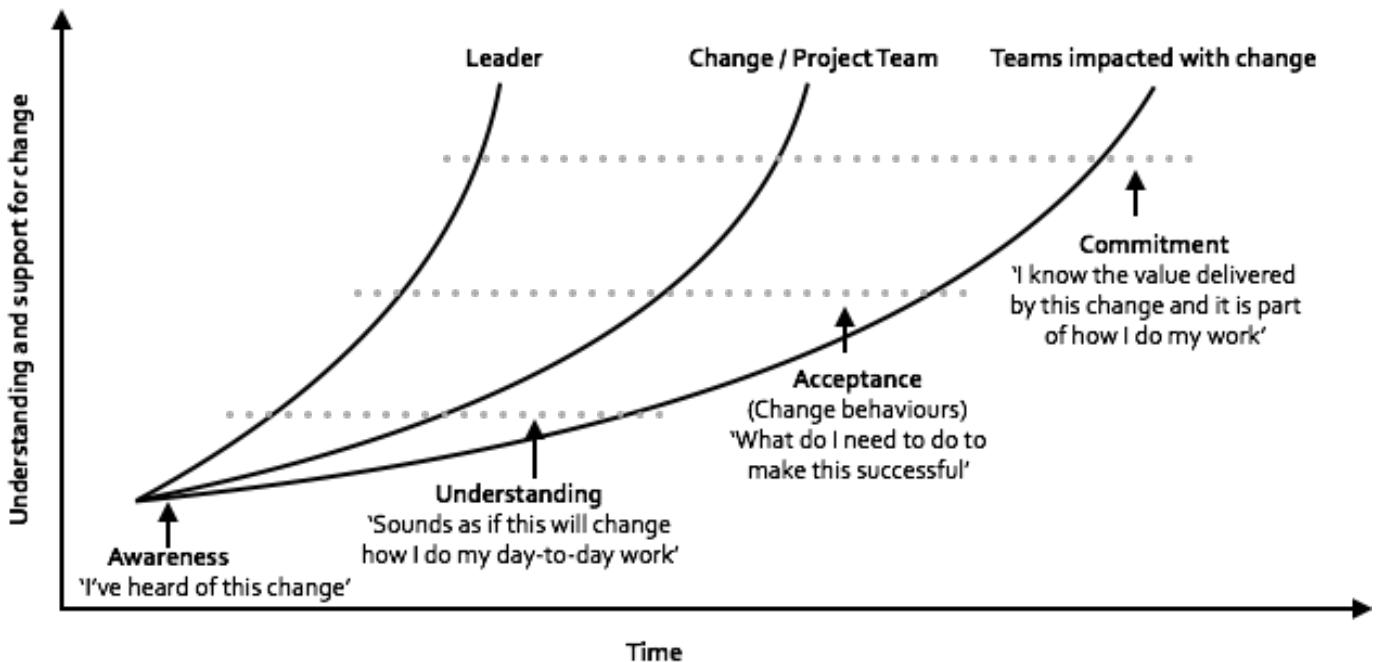


Figure 3: The Commitment curve

Leaders control how they lead and manage their teams, by first committing to the change themselves. Effective change strategies are designed to move people along the commitment curve. Leaders should arrive early and set the tone.

The counter point to be aware of is when our leaders to arrive early and set the tone, they need to remember what they experienced when first presented with the change. They need to lead their teams through the change and not race off too far ahead or have unrealistic expectations due to rushing ahead and expecting their team to follow.

Otherwise teams can feel abandoned and unsupported.

Leading change

Figure 4 - Leading Change Attributes



In today's rapidly changing environment, a leader **capable** of leading their team, **committed** to embracing change, and **accountable** to deliver that change is a must, not a nice to have!

Without these attributes a change initiative is often doomed to fail.

An effective change leader has the ability to inspire, motivate and develop their team to have the flexibility to deal with change and rise to the challenges that may emerge.

The ability to lead a team through change is a critical requirement for today's leader.

Commitment

Means the leader understands the reasons and vision for change and communicates this effectively to their team. They are personally committed to the change and get their team on board by supporting, involving and building confidence about how things will be managed in the transition to the new ways of doing things.

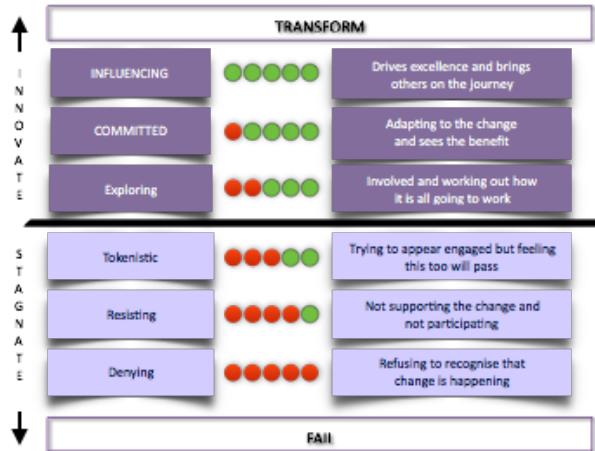
Capability

Is about both the capability of the leader to lead the team through this change, as well as the capability of the organisation to change. It requires an openness to change and learning new knowledge and skills. Developing capability in the leader, and in turn the team, is a key requirement to establishing confidence to adopt the change.

Accountability

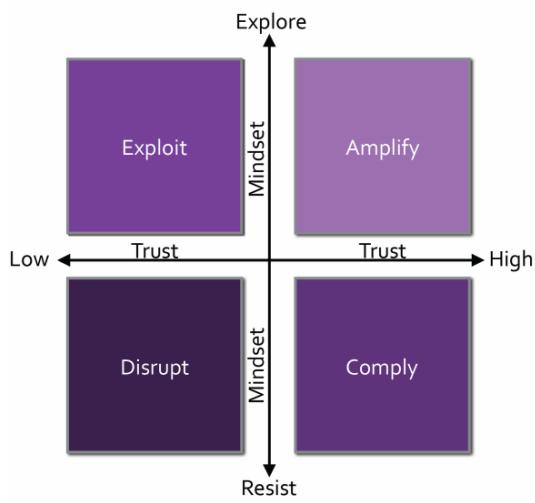
Is the act of putting 'a stake in the ground' and standing by it. Owning the change, being able to provide specific content, facts and a clear explanation about the reasons for the change. Being able to articulate the compelling 'why', the vision of where this change will take the team and organisation. Being able to influence the team to want to participate, commit and adopt the change.

Putting it all together and questions to consider



The change ladder shows a significant difference between strong leadership and weak leadership and whether a change is transformative or a failure.

Where are the leaders in your organisation on this ladder and where do you want them to be?



The trust and mindset model signifies the benefits of having a team that trusts their leadership and has an exploring mindset to amplify the effects.

What do you need to do as a leader to develop these traits in your team and create a trusting environment?



These leading change attributes are core competencies for a change leader - being accountable, capable to lead change and committed to the change.

What does your organisation need to do to ensure your leaders understand and have the competencies required?

Next steps for leading change



Leaders are instrumental in leading others through change.

They need to operate out of the top half of the change ladder.

Developing trusted relationships and exploring mindsets is key.

Understanding how they personally respond to change and understanding how each individual team member responds to change is an essential requirement to ensure change success.

If you would like to learn more about leading others through change please send me a note or give me a call.

My program '**Leadership in Driving Change**' is all about what has been discussed in this paper and more and gets leaders ready to lead with commitment, capability, and accountability and help them to create more certainty for their teams to move through change.

Thank you!

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About the author

Maree Burgess

Maree works with leaders, leaders of leaders, experts and anyone else looking to increase their skills in leading change, sponsoring projects, or building their confidence to step into more senior roles.

Maree focuses on two key areas:

1. Making Change Happen: Training and coaching for leaders tasked with leading their teams through change.
2. Project Success: Project coaching for senior business leaders tasked with sponsoring projects; working with project teams who need to become high performing fast; facilitator of project workshops to create compelling business cases and high level requirements.

Maree also has a passion for improving the diversity of thinking in the workplace with a focus on gender diversity. Maree works with women to improve their confidence to step into more senior roles.

She is the author of 'The XX Project - Giving women the skills and confidence to step up in corporate'.

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