A Practical Solution for Leading Change

By

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David Soock/ Brian Brennan, you-curve Inc., October 24, 2017
ACMP Change Management 2018
March 25-28, 2018, Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Introduction

We are no better at change than we were 20 years ago!

After almost 2 decades of monitoring large scale changes in organizations, the success rate is abysmal and the improvement has barely improved (30% or less).[1][2] There has to be a better way and increase the odds of a better return on investment and effort.

It is well known that people turn to their immediate leaders during times of intense change to help them cope and thrive during uncertainty. Front line and middle level leaders have a great deal of influence on the success of a change. [3]

This paper will present a practical approach to navigating major change that combines two well established "tools" in a new and unique way.

The you-curve Methodology combines the well-known concept of the "curve of change" with the long established tools of personal styles or behavioral assessments.

We chose to combine these two concepts and tools for several reasons. They are:

1. Founded on extensive research and validation.
2. Well established in the Change Management and Human Resources functions of many organizations
3. Easy for non-change management/ HR professionals to grasp and internalize.

Most importantly these concepts have been combined in a very visual manner that makes using them easy to incorporate into a leader's everyday practice. This visual management technique can be implemented using a simple accountability framework that will actually ensure leaders really do use the tools and skills effectively.

So given the above statements, here is the problem we are solving…

How do organizations reduce the disruption and time to adoption when implementing a major change?

Our solution is…

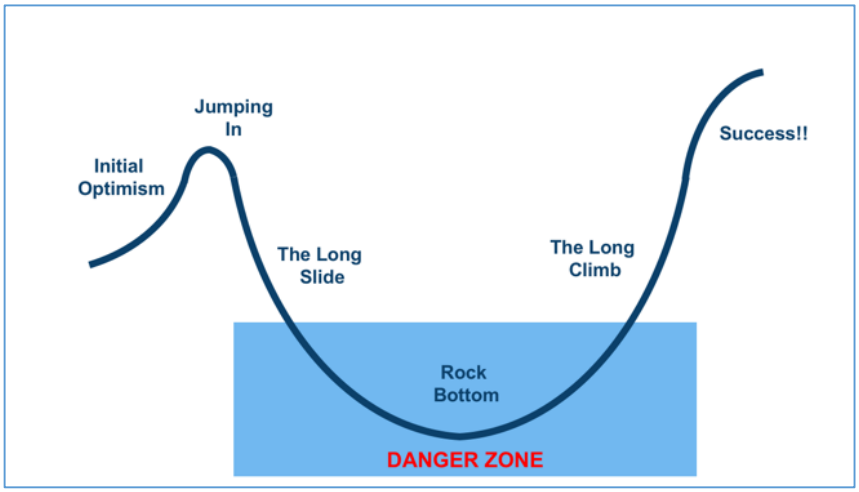
Provide leaders of those directly affected with a method of addressing each person's issues that is simple, easy to understand and easy to incorporate into their everyday work environment.

The Change Curve

You-curve is based on bringing together two concepts – the process of change and behavioral assessment tools. The first concept of change as a process has been well established. Over the past 20 years or more there have been many models to describe and validate this concept[4][5][6][7][8]. An illustration of these can be found in Appendix A.

We have chosen to use the Kubler-Ross change curve to illustrate our method. This model has been in use for many decades and is most recognizable to non-change management staff and leaders. People identify with it quickly and can relate to their own experiences.

We have adapted this model to best represent the change process in a corporate environment based on our own experiences working with clients. A simple graphic of the you-curve change process is shown below.



Listed below is a brief description of each stage:

Initial Optimism

- This is the first phase that is filled with excitement and broad statements about the future and how things will be fixed and better for everyone.
- It is typically short on details and big on promises. Real information is scarce because the organization is heading into uncharted waters.
- There may be some anxiousness but overall there is a lot of "selling" of the project and its outcomes.

Jumping In

- Next there is the realization that this change will happen and it is now time to dive in and start.
- Anxiety increases slightly but there is still an overall feeling of excitement.
- Comfort with the status quo is still high.
- There are some feelings of fear of failure.

Long Slide

- During this stage the status quo gets upset.
- Unexpected obstacles often appear.
- Things appear to be getting worse not better than the status quo.
- Frustration and suspicion increase.
- Scapegoats are sought and a "blame game" can develop.

Rock Bottom

- This is when despair sets in and it seems like nothing can make things move forward.
- Cynicism increases and leaders struggle just to keep the organization together.
- There is usually a re-trenching of the project scope and resources.
- The true negative impact of the change has emerged.
- Feelings of apathy and isolation can develop.

Climbing Up

- Creative problem solving and persistence results in small successes occurring and a positive momentum begins.
- Although the sense of being overwhelmed is still there it is diminishing as progress is made.
- Hope and even excitement start to build.

Success

- As the change becomes part of the everyday work environment excitement emerges.
- There is an acceptance of the change and a sense of accomplishment builds.
- Excitement is high as the benefits are experienced by individuals and the organization.

We also consider an important region called the **Danger Zone** shown in the graphic illustration of the change process above. This is a critical section of the curve where people can check out emotionally or even physically. Stress behaviors of people are heightened.

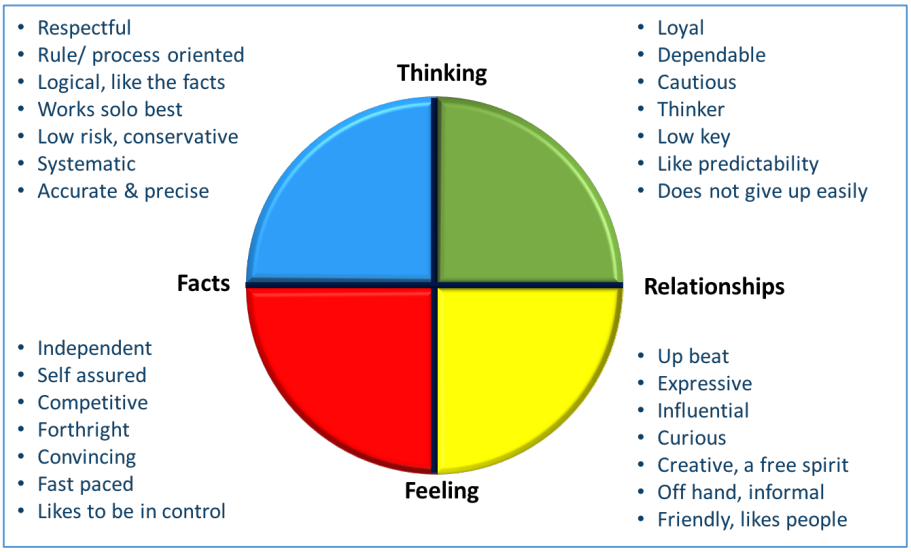
Leaders need to be extra diligent in being visible and seeing through the behaviors to the real issues.

Behavioral Assessments/ Personal Styles

Front line and mid-level leaders are often tasked with leading their teams through a major change while maintaining the demands of the "normal" business activities. Behavioral assessment tools can provide leaders with an easy, quick and effective way to connect with their team members as they experience the curve of change.

These tools will ensure a team member's core personal style and behaviors are considered for more effective ways of communicating and motivating them.

There are many behavioral assessment surveys in use in organizations *(See Appendix B for a sample)*. The vast majority are based on the foundational work of Carl Jung and have similarities in this respect. An illustrative example of 4 core styles (categorized as different "colors") is shown below.



As a leader, the way one coaches a "BLUE" team member should be different than the way one coaches a "YELLOW" team member to be most effective. Humans are complex beings and not one dimensional. We are a mix of each of these styles to varying degrees and can change slightly in different situations. However, there is always a core or "home base" people gravitate towards.

What leaders need is a simple mental model for applying these coaching adaptations with their team members. Leaders are not experts in behavioral assessment tools and do not have the training, background nor interest to master the subtleties of these robust instruments. The support they get from experts (Human Resources, Change Experts, Behavioral Assessment Analysts etc.) is there to ensure the models do not get misapplied while also ensuring the tools still actually get used.

Give leaders a simple model they will understand and use. Provide expert support to guide and coach them about the nuances and subtleties in order to increase their effectiveness.

We have chosen to bring together the Kubler Ross model of the stages of change with a behavioral style model that uses colors as a metaphor. It is important to note that any model

of change can be used with any behavioral assessment model for this methodology to be effective. It is the bringing of the two together that holds the effectiveness of the methodology.

Bringing the Two Together

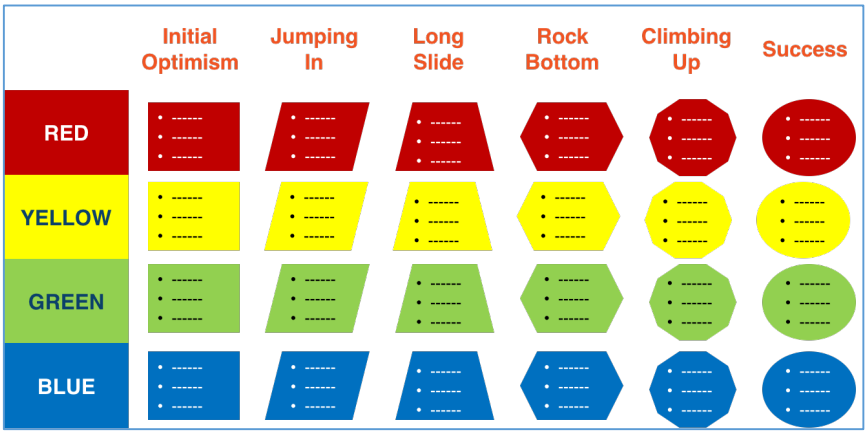
Change is a process with different stages. The effectiveness of connecting with team members is increased when leaders know the preferred style of their team.

What is needed is a practical way to bring these two concepts together that leaders can and actually will use. The result is a method a leader can use to navigate their team through change more effectively with less disruption and reduced time.

The implications are based on the fact that each team member:

- Will experience six stages of change.
- Has one of four basic personal styles.

So a leader must adapt to style and stage. This means there are a total 24 possible coaching approaches a leader can use to be the most effective for their team (with an additional 3 for each part of the Danger Zone). The graphic below illustrates this.



How do leaders accurately diagnose the exact stage or style of a team member?

We start from the assumption that leaders interact with their team members on a regular basis. Leaders will be able to identify the stage and style behaviors of their team members during these regular interactions.

While they may not be 100% accurate initially, they will be able to validate their assessment during coaching conversations and adjust their approach accordingly. The critical aspect of this is that they actually have the coaching conversation.

Formal structured assessment tools can also be used to identify style and also stage.

Making it Work – Accountability and Measures

How does a leader master all coaching approaches?

We suggest a 3-pronged strategy by using well established adult learning principles[9].

1. Conduct initial learning through instruction and role play.
2. Provide on the job coaching support and learning aids.
3. Establish an accountability framework to incent leaders to use the new techniques.

It is critically important is to get individuals and leaders to actually use tools and techniques. Leaders have many demands on their time so they need a compelling reason for them to change their practices. The adage “people behave in the way they are measured”[10] is the most effective way to get leaders to adopt new practices. This can be as simple as having to report progress with their immediate supervisors and peers at regular leader operations meetings.

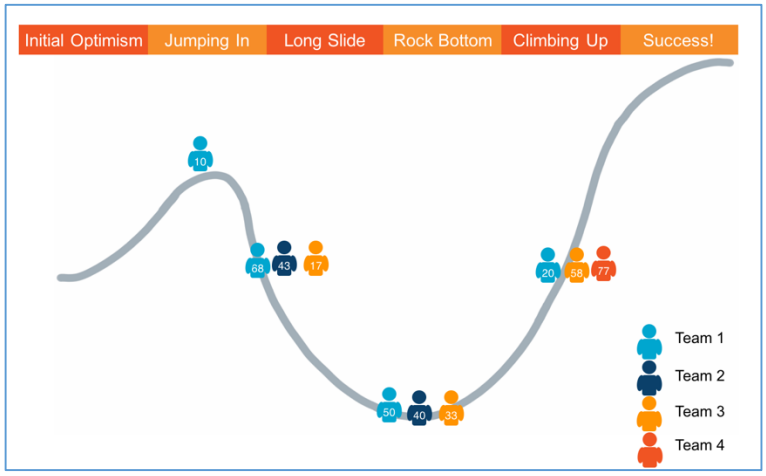
For example, a Director of Customer Care meets with 5 call center managers weekly to review performance numbers. The Director has each of the managers present their team curve. Each takes 2 minutes to state this week’s biggest success and biggest challenge. This extends the meeting by 10 - 15 minutes depending on the amount of discussion.

Large scale change initiatives will often conduct regular status or update meetings. Use these forums for leaders to report their progress.

Scalability

Change happens at the individual level and contributes to the change at the organizational level. As leaders coach their teams through the curve and provide feedback on progress to their leaders they are held accountable for their teams’ progress.

When multiple teams are impacted by a change it becomes necessary to track and measure the progress of these multiple teams through the change curve. A simple visual method for tracking this is possible using the you-curve methodology. The graphic below illustrates how to extend the you-curve visual measure to multiple teams.



Each colored icon represents a specific team. The numbers in each icon at each stage represent the number of people on that team at that stage. This creates an easy to understand and meaningful visual measure of the progress of a larger group as they progress through the stages of the curve. It is important to note that the colors of each icon do not relate to the styles previously discussed as styles are an individual metric. The different colors are only meant to differentiate one team from another.

Conclusions

Reducing the disruption and time to adoption of any major change happens one person at a time.

Team members look to their immediate leaders for resolving their issues on their terms.

A person’s reaction to major change is determined by the stage of the change they are experiencing and their personal style. Leaders

must adapt to style and stage to coach team members effectively through change to resolve their issues.

Leaders need a simple observational diagnostic to help them prepare for coaching conversations.

To master and embed new behaviors and coaching techniques, leaders need accountability that is easily measurable in a meaningful way. Use a simple visual dashboard to report on their teams' "people progress" through change.

Ensure any dashboard measures can be scaled up across multiple teams/ departments/ divisions while maintaining a simple but meaningful measure.

Implementing all of these aspects to a change initiative will ensure the disruption and time to adoption are reduced.

References

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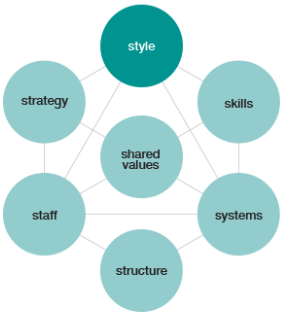
Appendix A – Common Change Management Models

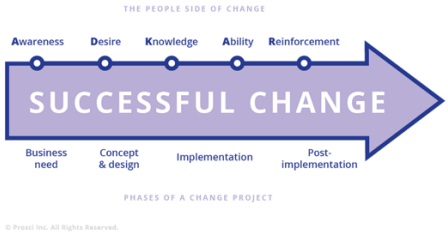
Unfreeze-Change-Refreeze – Kurt Lewin[5]

8 Stages for Change – John Kotter [6]

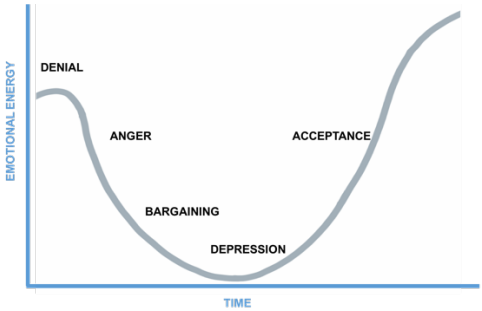
7S Framework – McKinsey[7]



ADKAR – Prosci[8]



Change Curve – Elizabeth Kubler-Ross[8]



Appendix B – Common Behavioral Assessment Tools

Name	Overview	Web site
Meyers Briggs	Uses dimensions of: • Introvert – Extrovert • Sensing – Intuition • Thinking – Feeling • Judging - Perceiving	http://www.myersbriggs.org
DISC	Uses dimensions of: • D – Dominance • I – Influence • S – Steadiness • C - Compliance	http://www.thediscpersonalitytest.com
Insights	Uses dimensions of: • Red • Green • Yellow • Blue	https://www.insights.com
Kolbe	Uses characteristics of: • Fact Finder • Follow Through • Quick Start • Implementer	http://kolbe.com