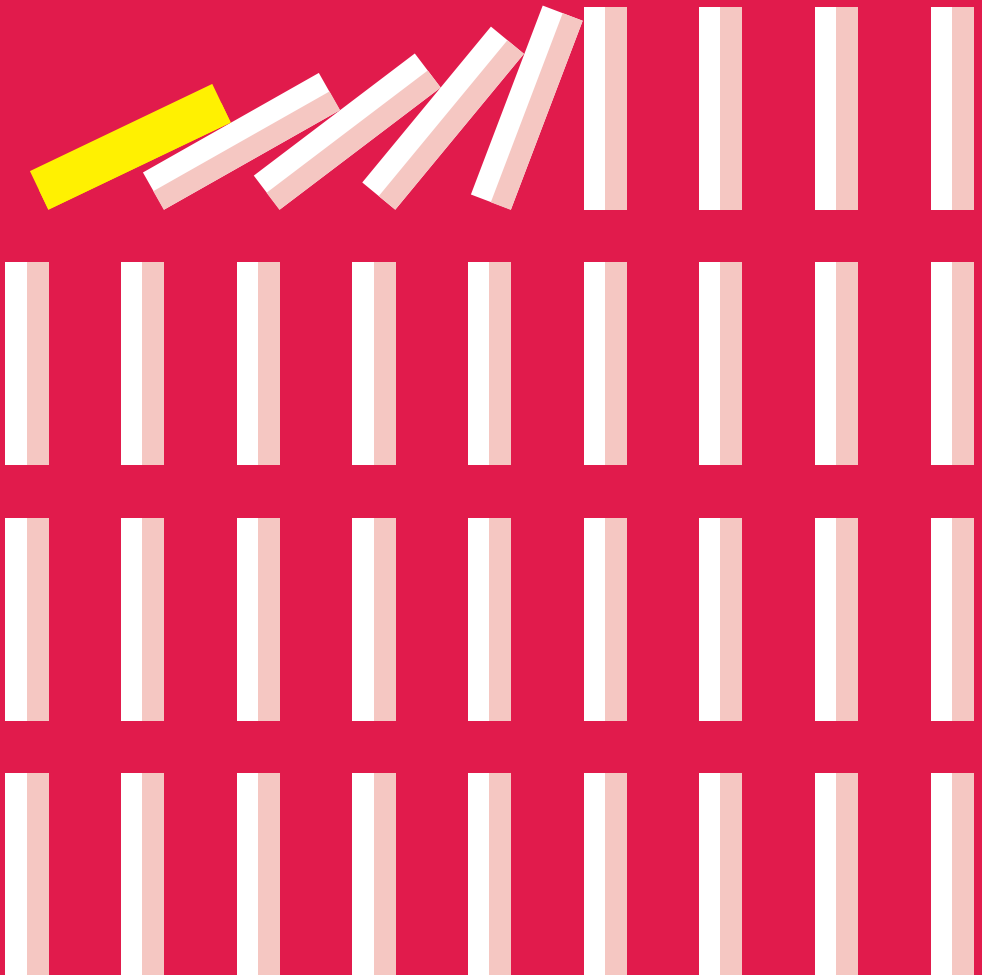


A how-to-guide  
to **change** within  
your organisation.





“ Change is about perspective more than it is any physical shift in context. ”



# Insights around successful change

## 1 Know how to overcome the mental hurdles:

People have to first accept there is a need for change. Even when they are dire, numbers alone are not a compelling argument. The situation needs to be humanised and made real. Make both the need and the benefits very clear. Watch for fatigue. Sometimes a bit of consolidation is required before the next push.

## 2 Do the proper analysis:

You need to have a clear, well-informed view of the situation. Quick fixes and tactical fire-fighting will not help long-term. However, if you're on a platform that is actually afloat, you may need to fix that first – then plan what's next.

## 3 Step around resource constraints:

Do not strip down a plan if it will undermine its potency. Equally, do not fight for increased resources if it will

deflect attention from the real issue. Instead, focus the resources you have on the areas most in need of change. Prioritise and deliver one thing at a time to achieve the larger change being sought.

## 4 Set clear directional challenges:

Goals need to be prioritised, tangible, attainable and measurable. Create your compass.

## 5 Build buy-in strategically:

You won't win everyone at the outset. Instead, you need to focus on 'pivot' people in the organisation: key influencers with multiple connections. Start with a stakeholder map that identifies the community you're dealing with and discover and highlight their drivers. Who are the likely champions? Who is more neutral and who are the potential detractors? Who has common concerns that are likely to unite them?

## 6 Manage oppositional forces:

Listen to them. Sometimes people simply need to be heard, and they might have something for you to learn. Either way, dissenting voices are a signal you haven't yet completed the engagement stage. Consider putting a respected senior staff member who is oppositional on the change leadership team. Involve them. They may have important things to say about risks and mitigation and you need them close and involved. They can become a key champion if you work with them.

## 7 Accept responsibility:

Learn to apologise. Be guilty as charged. It diffuses tension and sets the ground for authentic engagement. And don't call repeated mistakes 'learnings' – name them for what they are and avoid them in future.

## 8 Have a one-page roadmap:

Give people a sense of where they are coming from and heading to. Make the journey and the progress very visible.

## 9 Bring diversity into your mix:

Hire people with rich experiences. Collaborate with customers. Create multi-disciplinary, agile teams.

## 10 Get a mentor:

It's lonely at the top and good thinking requires rigour. There are people with experience who can help.

## 11 Keep connected:

Stay informed, collaborate, have conversations, look outside, seek fresh thinking and never stop getting educated.



# Build your toolkit

## Tool 1: Your mental model

### Work out your framework

Define your way to think about and guide the work. It is having a guide that is the important element, not which one.

- Change must lead to tangible benefits if your employees and/or customers are expected to buy into it.
- Change must be 'sold in'. Forcing change, while on occasion is unavoidable, is rarely effective.
- Change for the sake of it winds people up. Avoid this.
- The bigger the change, the more difficult it can be, so strong leadership is essential. Get your own support in place.
- Implementation should be time-bound and measurable. If it is dragged out or uncertain it will only be disheartening.
- Define and communicate clear implementation plans, ensure promises and deadlines are met, and progress is communicated as you go.
- Show and communicate the benefits as early as possible in the change process so people can see the value.
- Offer lots of support and guidance as people work through change, and monitor and learn from their experiences.
- Recognise that change processes will elicit negative responses from some team members. Pay particular attention to the influence they are exerting and manage the risk.
- Include your employees and your customers in decision-making, where appropriate and possible.



## Gear up to lead accountably

The general up-skilling of a senior team is critical to success – change initiatives should not be delegated to consultants or an individual; they should be used to support it. Nor should it sit in one part of the business. The horizontal nature of change means it should run across departments and roles. And as part of governance the board should be aware of key change projects and require measures of their effectiveness and progress to be reported on by leaders as things progress.

Change can be small or large, incremental or sudden. Whatever you are hoping to achieve the most useful tool in the box is your own understanding of how to manage the human element. Hold the following in mind:

## Learn about useful methods you can draw on

Use established methods to plan. Whether through storytelling, drawing, videos or games, use forms of creative ‘play’ to open space in which to think and debate about what you are planning. A ‘built object’ [for example, a drawing of the future state of a business, or a Lego model] is a particularly helpful tool because of the way a picture or story can create a separate ‘thing’ people can discuss – offering a method of externalising ideas about a business or people, so those involved can engage with greater depth and less sense of threat. Methods that help people become critically aware of values, culture and/or behaviours are essential to help take them on the journey in change processes.

## Stakeholder mapping is an essential activity. Not only internal stakeholders but your external ones too.

It’s crucial to consider carefully all the players that may be affected by any changes; indeed, have opinions about them (media, watchdogs, consumer bodies etc.). Customers are key stakeholders in the mix and early engagement with them to explore ideas and test thinking can create opportunities to refine, or even collaborate on solutions.

A slightly different (but still creative) alternative is a ‘sentiment heat map’. This can be a very simple page of faces communicating visibly different sentiments. When meeting about a proposed initiative, people can circle the face that most closely aligns with how they are feeling.



This will give you a heat map of sentiment. As well as providing a heat map it represents a tool for opening conversation about emotions – creating a different level of dialogue to the rational, and offering visibility to some challenges and risks that might not otherwise surface easily.

A critical step in the process of learning new skills is ‘gradual familiarisation’: the breaking down of a procedure into smaller steps to enable a team to become familiar with a new process or technology before any live use is required. This might involve setting up a test environment, which can be used repeatedly to play with situations (role-playing customer interactions) or software (with data that can be reset each day). Or, it might involve using one piece of the technology required, such as giving a smartphone to a service team in the months prior to a new

customer system arriving, so when the new system is implemented the service team isn’t struggling with the basics of the phone itself. A benefit of breaking down the process and desired learning is to ensure stages are mapped and gateways set up to assess genuine progress. A real risk with new technologies is that if people are not trained well in key features they will simply find ways to use the new technology to run old processes – leaving you with a different version of the previous state with no optimisation achieved. It is a trap to avoid.

“ Paul Nutt’s *Why Decisions Fail* (2002). A careful analysis of 400 strategic decisions. Nutt finds that half of the decisions ‘failed’ – that is they were not implemented, only partially implemented or otherwise produced poor results – in large part because decision makers failed to attend to interests and information held by key stakeholders. ”

---

Bryson, 2004



## Tool 2: Use an assessment framework

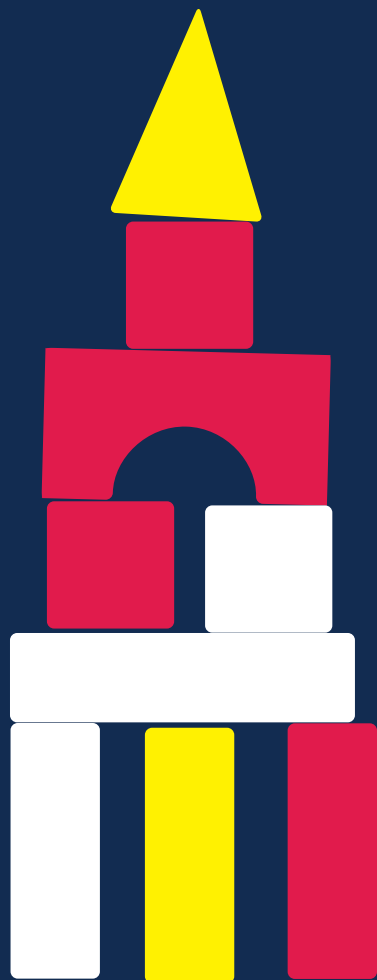
Having understood some of the potential biases and blind spots to seeing a need for change, and the very human hurdles to enacting it, it is also important to recognise that change isn't always needed, or that the conditions or timing may not be right to achieve it. In planning to create change, it's essential to be clear about the real reasons behind the idea, what will be achieved by the proposed changes, what will happen if nothing changes now, and how ready stakeholders are to actually

make any change. There may be major skills gaps, training or resource requirements to consider. It is critical to do the spadework up front: map out all the potential impacts that can be imagined, as well as the risks, costs, opportunities and benefits. In reality, most change is messy and there will always be unexpected consequences, but thinking things through carefully at the beginning can identify a lot of potential problems and their equivalent mitigations. In the early stages, when your data may be incomplete, going to

stakeholders to get more information offers a good way to test your thinking – as well as an opportunity to begin building a coalition of key people. Talking and listening to others at a primary stage can also reduce the risk of wrong assumptions and unearth unknown factors that may affect planned outcomes.

As a process it also builds connectivity and encourages trust, which will be required when the going gets tough.





There is a balance to be struck between revealing everything, and planning behind the scenes to avoid setting unrealistic expectations, or causing anxiety or even panic.

But people appreciate honesty, and having their voices heard. It is possible to have conversations with a wide spectrum of stakeholders, which if handled with care, give a chance to really understand the implications and feasibility of what is on the table,

without creating too much unrest. Consulting generally throws up some good ideas. It also offers the chance of locating champions who can be recruited to the planning, communication and management of the change if it goes ahead.

A framework for this stage of the process can be as simple, yet effective, as a checklist. It should include processes of internal and external assessment, vision planning, vision testing, stakeholder mapping, scenario planning (benefits and risks), and decision gateways.





## Tool 3: Use a change management model

If your process of planning and review says, 'go ahead', then a model for that process is the next tool required. The ROI-linked effect of taking a planned approach using a high quality model for this stage is worthy of attention: a reported six-fold increase in likelihood to succeed. The challenge is which model to choose. Once a field with little in the way of robust frameworks,

there's now a slightly overwhelming array of options. The good news is that research suggests it is not so much the specific model used that makes the critical difference. Instead, the crucial advantage is in being able to draw on an external framework to guide what is being done and using it to create your own checklist to set and monitor progress for activities.

### The main elements that identify a good quality model are:

- 1 **Pathway:** They provide guidebook, defining activities, roles, language, processes, tools (including templates) and assessments.
- 2 **Repeatability:** They provide a replicable process through the systematic nature of what is set out, so it can be used on an ongoing basis.
- 3 **Logic:** They provide clear structure and step-by-step processes with good communication of the motives and drivers behind those steps to provide direction and reasoning as well as transparency.

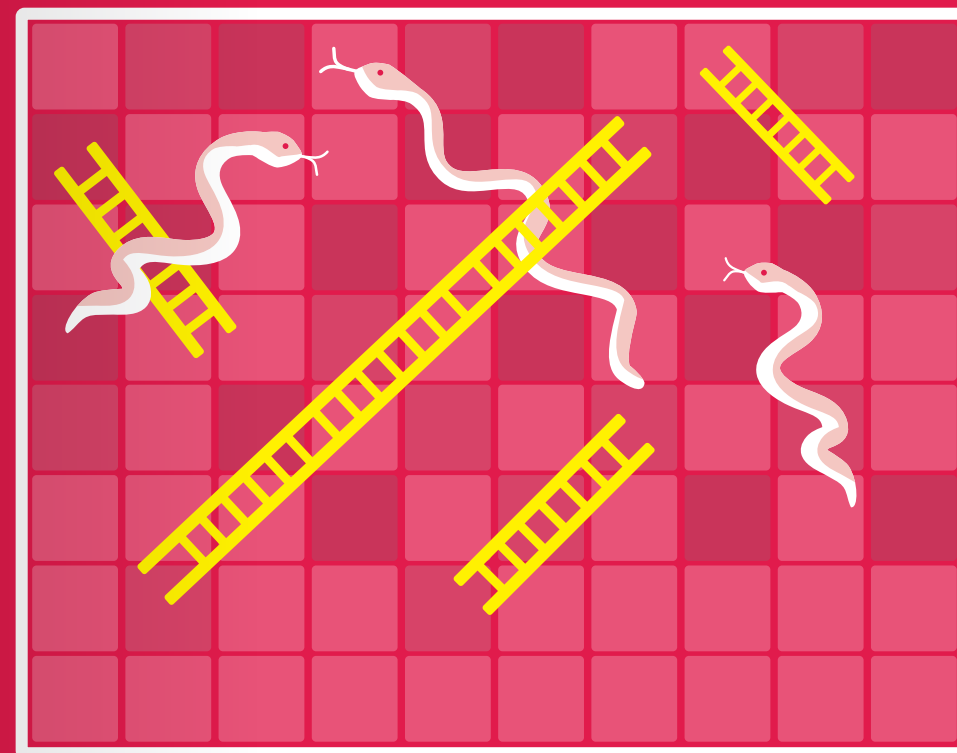
### The advantages this offers are:

- 1 **Explanation:** Becoming educated through a well set out framework supports good explanation when taking the approach to others.
- 2 **Value:** Having a structured and recognised external model to guide the work of change adds credibility and legitimacy to the work. This in turn increases confidence and buy-in and dispels the idea that change management is 'soft' or vague.
- 3 **Risk:** In addressing the process so comprehensively, good change models reduce risk through encouraging anticipation of gaps and resistance, enabling missteps and mistakes to be better avoided.



Essentially, work with the model that fits your thinking; that makes sense to you. Look for one that describes a journey over time for the people involved. It should set out stages and the way to manage stages. Of course, humans are not straightforward and real life can be frustratingly non-linear, particularly when change is attempted and fails, which can see an old state resumed and thereby reinforced. If you get stuck in a change process you may have to return to an earlier stage, because it was not properly accomplished, in order to then move forward. This insight may sound overly simple, but it really does highlight the pathway to better outcomes. To increase the overall probability of success in managing change, understand each stage and set up a plan that addresses

each in turn. If managed well, the outcome will also be greater linearity of progress. Management of a stage depends on the preparation levels for each phase that are achieved before any shifts are attempted; preparation with the resources, learning and skills required to make the new way of doing things possible and probable. Like any recipe, frameworks are there to guide, not be absolute. In the kitchen, variability in oven type and temperature, ingredients, and equipment will produce variability in results. In a live organisation – and they are very live – results will always vary through differences in conditions and participants. The better informed you are as to the logic of the process, the better the process will work – whatever the model.

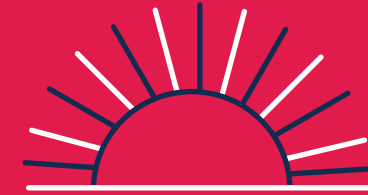


## Tool 4: Acquire expertise

Education around change is required at an internal executive level.

However, external support can be an invaluable tool in change initiatives, particularly major initiatives with large human and economic implications. A thorough knowledge of change principles and how to apply them is a key reason that Change Managers exist as a distinct professional group. They can help bridge the skills gap and contribute training and support to reduce that gap over time. The experience and perspective they have on change enables them to contribute by:

- Advocating appropriate and effective change management practices.
- Defining change, placing it in context.
- Engaging people to the extent necessary for the change initiative to succeed.
- Helping manage the benefits of a change for both a project and the wider organisation.
- Supporting development and execution of comprehensive plans for change initiatives.
- Facilitating the process for individuals, teams and the wider organisation.
- Ensuring that change becomes embedded – the new ‘business as usual’.
- Advising, training and coaching senior executives who are sponsoring or leading change initiatives to be able to repeat the logic of change processes going forward.



Sustainable change



Is built in



To your ecosystem



## Understand how to engage those experts

The role of an external expert can be a high value investment. Their role should be one of facilitation – to enable your business to develop the culture and skills that will leave them with adaptive capability within the fabric of their operation. But when you are new to the subject it can be hard to determine what to look for when seeking outside help.

### The following guidelines can help:

- 1 Ask about their methodology. If they can't describe a process to you, they are either insufficiently clear about it, or they don't have one. This does not mean they have to have a fixed model – good practitioners shift easily between models depending on what suits the client best. But they should have a sound working knowledge
- of different models and describe a clear process to which they work.
- 2 Ask to hear about four of their success stories. If they can't describe four stories easily, they probably don't have enough of a track record to understand the critical factors driving success.
- 3 Ask for references and follow them up. Stories alone are insufficient proof. It will give you a chance to ask other executives about challenges and opportunities as well.
- 4 Look for flexibility. If they do have a fixed model, that suggests a potential lock-in that is best avoided.
- 5 Ask them to set out their handover framework. How do they work to achieve sustainable change that can be owned by the business going forward?

# Beliefs



# Values

## Tool 5: Set your metrics

Tapping into all of a company's intelligence requires clear feedback loops. Overall, the metrics in place should reflect and support the various strategies for all aspects of the organisation, including finance, marketing, competition, standards, customer requirements and expectations, employee sentiment and engagement, and effectiveness of any activities – including change programmes. Metrics provide a window on performance, can help set priorities and create learning.

### Ultimately, metrics will help tell the team:

- Where they have been
- Where they are heading (and headings can be set and re-set going forward)
- Whether something is going wrong or veering off course
- When the organisation reaches a target (identifying stages as wins to celebrate)

### The key to getting benefits from metrics:

**Simplicity:** To get the most benefit from your metrics, it is important to keep them simple. Defining a metric is similar to telling a joke – if you have to spend too much time explaining then it won't work. For example, it's clearer to state that a target is to reduce complaints to two per month, than to state a 50 per cent reduction. It is crucial that employees have a good sense of what success looks like.

**Relevance:** Employees and executives need to understand the measure involved, how they can directly influence it and what is expected of them in their role to

help achieve it. Reducing complaints will have different implications for different roles. For example, at an executive level it might require establishing a programme of work to improve infrastructure. At a divisional level it might mean inviting key customers in to help with a review of existing processes to identify opportunities for improvements. At an individual level it might mean a salesperson contacting every customer the day after a sale to ask how things are and if there is anything they need help with. Each will have their own targets and each should be able to see how those targets roll up to contribute to the wider organisational metric.



## 5 Characteristics of a Good Metric

- 1 Easily measurable: A good metric should be relatively simple to measure. If you have to build a new system or implement a complicated process just to map the metric, it's probably not worth doing.
- 2 Directly correlated to business performance: The metric should be tied to the stated goals of the business. The right metrics will tell you if you are successfully executing on the basics.
- 3 Predictive of future performance: The best metrics do not tell you just how well you've done (your financials tell you that); they tell you how well

you're going to do - in the next month, quarter, or year.

4 Isolated to things controlled by the team/unit/activity it is measuring: It's sometimes difficult to do, but identifying and breaking out the fundamentals linked to performance will tell you much more about your strengths and weaknesses.

5 Comparable to competitors' metrics: It's helpful to track your progress against competitors. This will help you judge how well you're building or maintaining an advantage, holding on to top talent, and retaining your top customers.



## Tool 6: Continually learn and improve

As with anything created to monitor or manage performance, follow-up is the key. A dashboard not looked at is just a set of lights. Regular review, and then action based on learning from that review, is required to get actual value. All too often post-implementation reports are delivered to an executive with no learning opportunity mapped into the process.

Is the right information getting into the right hands? Management reports are not the place for metrics based on customer feedback. Those belong with people who are customer-facing, who can learn from the feedback and implement changes. Management needs a metric on effectiveness of responses to customer feedback – on how well the teams are learning what works and implementing that learning to effect positive change.

Part of a review process requires examination of the tool itself – are the right questions being asked, the right things being measured and the key insights being made available? With the right measures in place, the next review question is time-based. Are the measures in real time, or as good as? If not, you are potentially finding out that you crashed some time ago.

The goal should be to embed learning into the organisation's very fabric. Not only through mechanisms to enable it, but also through a culture and attitude that has a relentless appetite for it. It is this combination of culture, policy and process that can break the faulty dualist logic of company as machine and humans within it, to re-conceptualise the organisation as whole – as a living thing.



“ The goal should be to embed learning into the organisation's very fabric. ”

## Tool 7: Use the power of communication

### Story

Stories are essential tools we have for understanding our worlds, for making sense of who we are and how we should behave. They are a critical part of change management, used, amongst other things, for creating awareness, for designing space for questioning and exploring new ideas, for motivating, for celebrating, and for generating a sense of community.

As a first step in practice, asking people to tell their own stories about a time they have been involved in a major change; to think about why it worked (or did not work) and to draw out the things that made success most likely and the mistakes they'd learned they need to avoid is very useful. By engaging with their own stories change becomes real, human

and personal for your people, not an abstracted idea. Often within a single session with a team all the factors that are required for success can be revealed through this sort of work. The process of revealing them in this way connects and commits the team to the things they need to highlight and check going forward. It is a deceptively simple way of using story to create a powerful tool.

Story is something to listen for, as well as to relate to. Listen when employees talk about change to the language used to describe what's happening. Close attention can reveal how people 'see' the company and understand their roles. What are the implications of the stories and language being used? One story that is a problematic part of the

corporate vernacular, is that "change is now always on and people just need to get used to it". This can lead to the excusing of poor change management processes and some pretty dehumanising practices. The opposite story is where, if there is a failure of engagement or teams are struggling visibly, the executive team asks itself: "What have we not yet done to make this work?" This can be a really powerful shift and, once made, as being something that can release the brakes to enable more productive work. By paying attention to language and ideas it becomes possible to create a recognisable story framework about planned change and to open up space to question current logic and ask if part of the change needs to be the way in which the business 'sees' itself.







## Communicate with your teams

In the global research on failure, poor communication is the number one cause identified. Effective communication starts with stakeholder engagement that is well thought through, and that continues throughout a project and beyond it, in multiple layers. An email heads-up about what is happening – or worse, what has already happened – is not good communication, yet it is a common misstep. While emails and messages can support a communication programme, there is no substitute for human engagement and real conversations. Talk to people and let them talk about their concerns – give space for them to engage and to catch up with what you may have been processing for some time. Be willing to engage and be open to feedback. And use alternative methods of communication to emails – pictures, videos, infographics, stand-ups, Q&As on internal social media channels –

anything that has more human and emotional quality to it, in order to improve impact and uptake. And don't forget the importance of involving and communicating with your wider stakeholders through change processes.

## Directly connected to the need for effective leadership is the way in which a leader communicates.


Don't farm out your communications work. Think deeply about what you are trying to say, and work through your content fully so you understand not just what you are trying to do and why, but can talk about it to anyone else comfortably as well. Then, when questions are asked, you can answer them authentically. "I don't know", is not sufficient. It is okay to acknowledge there are things yet to be learned and that some of what lies ahead will be learned on the way, but it is not okay to not know through lack of preparation.



## Last words: Sustain the change

---

Change takes time – and culture change takes lots of time. For major changes think timeframes of years, not months. No project of change stops in a project timeframe. It stops when the desired behaviours are measurably embedded, which means it holds months and years after the end of any project. If you cannot make the new world comfortable and part of routine then people will quite naturally find ways of reverting. If you still have dissenting voices months (or even years) on, then you still need to go back and sort it out.



“If it’s temporary,  
it isn’t change...”



# Draw on good resources

---

## Ted Talks

Jeffrey Brown: “How we cut youth violence in Boston by 79 per cent” An architect of the “Boston Miracle”, Rev. Jeffrey Brown started out as a bewildered young pastor watching his Boston neighbourhood fall apart around him, as drugs and gang violence took hold of the kids on the streets. The first step to recovery: listen to those kids, don’t just preach to them, and help them reduce violence in their own neighborhoods. It’s a powerful talk about listening to make change. A story about the tremendous power in recognising community.

## Change Activation

Change Activation is a business that develops learning materials and implementation tools that help organisations to communicate and initiate change. Their resources include a Change Activation Toolkit, and a very useful comparative overview of the most popular models of change. The Director Gavin Wedell has contributed to our research on change.

[changeactivation.com/change-management-model-comparison](http://changeactivation.com/change-management-model-comparison)



# STRING THEORY

You are free to copy, distribute or use String Theory publications in any way.

You are also free to credit the authors, treat your fellow humans with respect, tread lightly on the planet and reap the karma benefits with which all these courses of action will inevitably shower you.