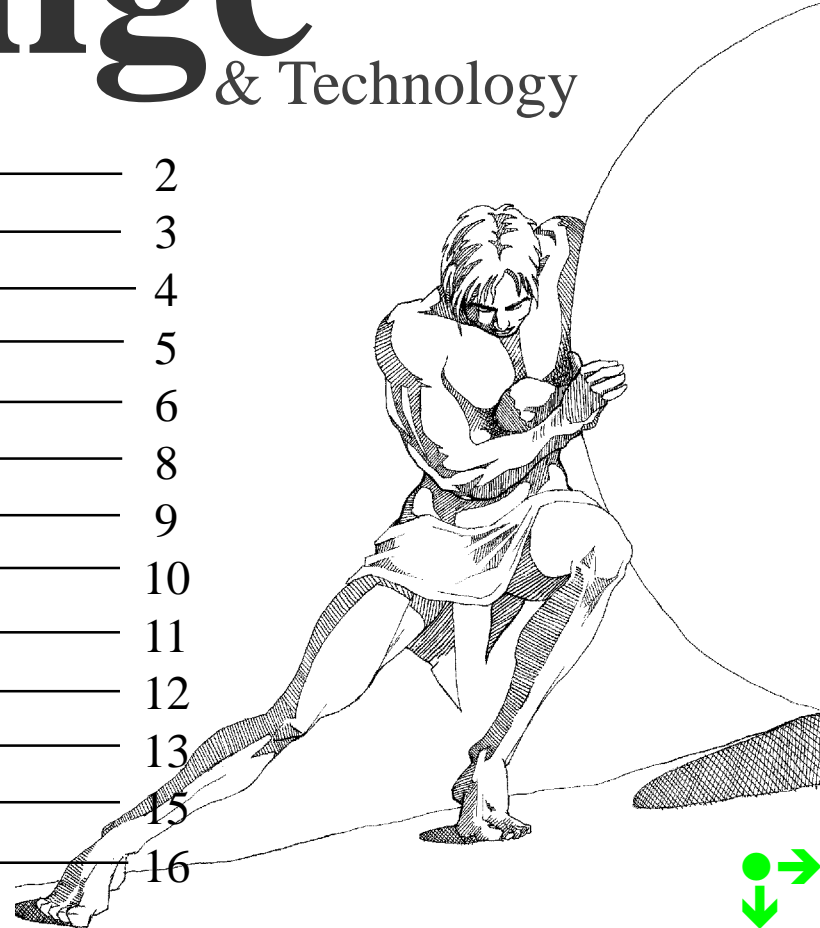


Managing Change

& Technology

Mid-May 2000
Vol. 1 No. 3

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Greetings!

No... It's not the end of the month yet. This is a special treat, if not for you... then at least for me! I hope you find it useful.

The style and format I've chosen in MC&T works well, but it poses some constraints. The articles are long enough to present single ideas, but too short for longer discussions.

While MC&T is obviously my 'marketing' tool, it loses both usefulness to you, and effectiveness for me, if that's what it 'feels' like when you read it. Hence each regular issue contains different voices with other ideas and perspectives.

Single theme issues will be rare, no more than 3 per year. My goal is to make each one a 'keeper' worthy of passing to a friend and saving for yourself.

This time the 'theme' is the *Virginia Satir Change Process Model* upon which I base all my Change presentations and consulting.

Virginia Satir (1916-1988) was an early pioneer in family therapy and was respected worldwide for her warmth and insights on self esteem and communication. She is a role model to countless consultants and therapists.

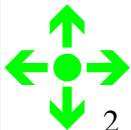
I was introduced to her work in the Mid 1980's by Gerald and Dani Weinberg. Out of all they taught me, I've focused my attention on the Change Process Model.

A note of caution. I have inevitably transformed her ideas in various ways to match my observations and experiences. If you wish to hear her original thoughts, then her books are a good place to start.

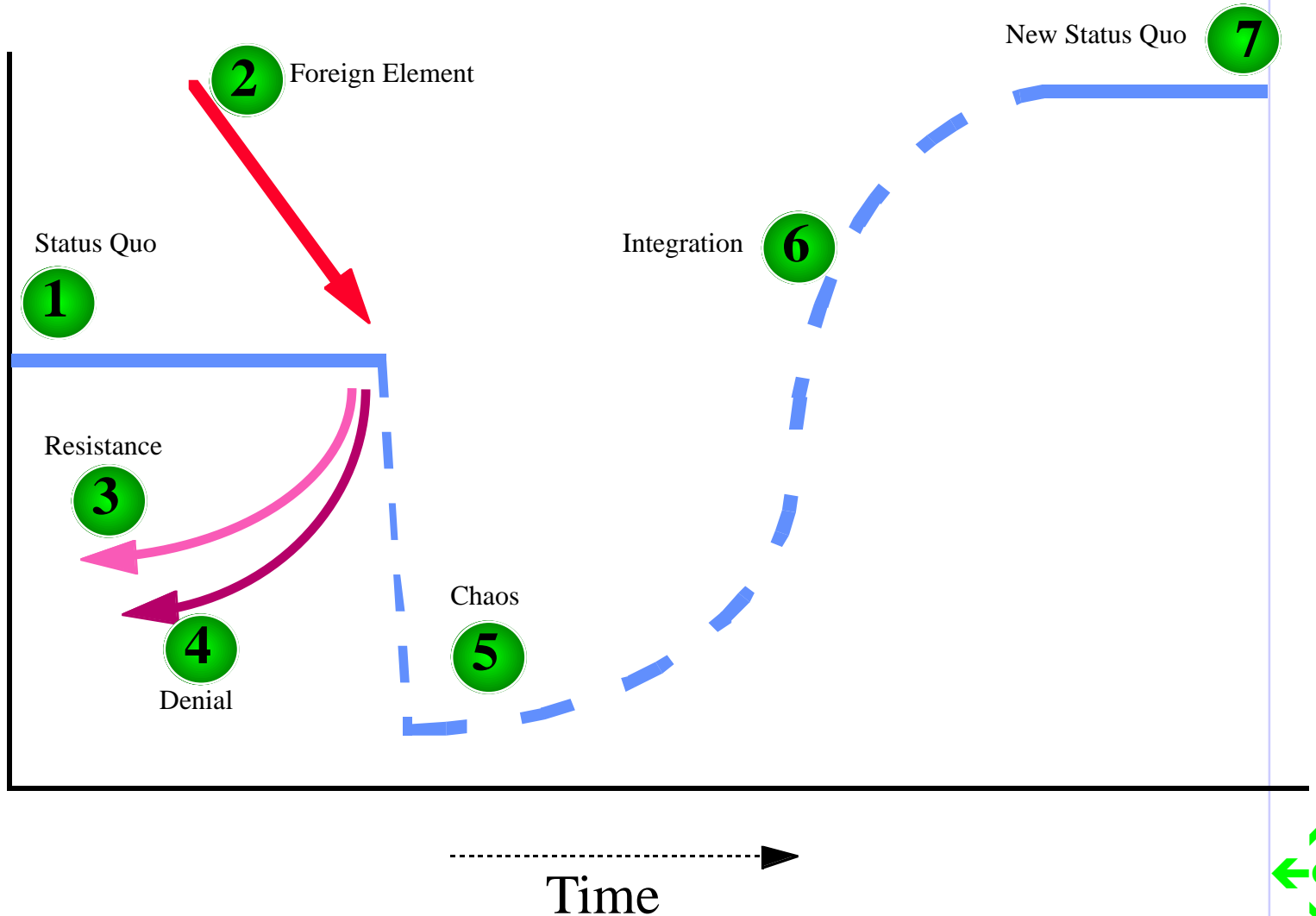
I hope you find this issue especially useful. One of the strengths of the model is that it is incredibly easy to communicate and what's more important, it's equally easy to understand and put to immediate use.

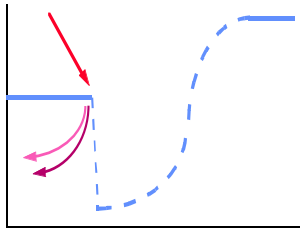
Enjoy
Peter de Jager

*Bureaucracy
is a hardening
of the
hierarchy.*
PdJ



The Virginia Satir Change Process Model





It's a Process

Ask practically anyone for a definition or description of change and they'll offer you something along the lines of 'When things become different.' Or 'When they're no longer the way they once were.' Fair enough, for a start, but if you try to get them to expand on those thoughts, they come up empty.

Now, that's not a problem if nothing is changing, but if things are changing on a daily basis, if the changes are extreme, then a mere handful of words is a poor tool with which to face the future.

The basic premise behind Satir's work is:

Change is not an event, it's a process.

The more we understand this process, the more adept we become at changing and implementing change.

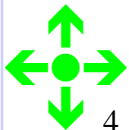
Take a look at the graph. Along the horizontal axis we have the passage of time. The vertical axis can plot several concepts. I find it best to

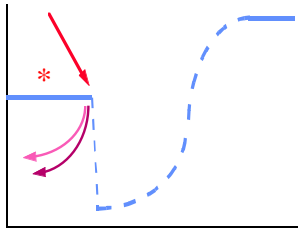
think of it representing 'Competence,' although you could argue it represents 'Productivity' (a second cousin to competence) or 'self esteem'. Or some combination of all three.

So far, the model is conveying that during a time of Change, competence will start out level, drop to practically zero, slowly rise according to the familiar 'S' curve, also known as the 'Learning Curve', and then level off again.

It's important to note two things about the graph. It's not drawn to 'scale'. You can't take a ruler and determine that someone should respond in a certain way for a specific period of time. You can however, predict in what sequence a person will adapt to the change.

Next? The level portion to the right is higher than the starting area on the left... That's not always the case. Sometimes Change does not ultimately get you to a 'better' place. Sometimes it just gets you to a different place. It depends entirely on the Change and your response to it.





The Status Quo

This is where the Change Process starts, because this is what we leave behind. Most Change models pay little attention to the Status Quo (SQ). That's an oversight.

What is SQ? It represents the sum total of all the investments you've made. The key word is 'investment'.

Do you own a home? A car? To ensure no-one takes these possessions from you, we've created entire institutions. The military, the police, the judicial system, they exist to protect your investments. We wouldn't have it any other way.

Well, we've made other investments to acquire skills, self esteem, a way of life, a good job etc. etc. These investments represent possessions no less important than our homes and cars.

While we have not created formal institutions to protect our SQ, it should be obvious. We'd be foolish, if every time something 'new' came along, we threw away everything we had, and started from scratch.

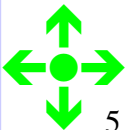
That's what change is ultimately all about. You've acquired this thing called SQ, are you willing to give it up in exchange for something else?

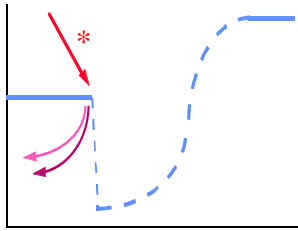
Well, that depends. Doesn't it? Do you like your current SQ? What specifically do you like, or dislike, about the current situation? How does this compare to what you're being offered in trade?

If you're implementing this change, do you understand the SQ? I cannot count how many Change projects I've observed, where the person trying to implement a significant change was totally clueless as to how the target audience perceived their current situation.

The SQ does not always hold you back from change. Sometimes the SQ is so intolerable, you'll do anything to get to some other place, any place, as long as you can escape the SQ. The Status Quo can be both obstacle and motivation, sometimes paradoxically, at the same time.

*Security is a kind of death.
Tennessee Williams*





Foreign Element

The Foreign Element (FE) is the event which triggers the change, it is not the change itself. The FE is defined as ‘the event which threatens the SQ’. It can be imposed on the SQ by external forces or generated internally by either the individual or organization contemplating the ‘change’.

The distinction between an ‘external’ vs. ‘internal’ FE is a useful one. Asked to define ‘change’, one reasonable response is ‘Doing things differently’.

Funnily enough, that exact same phrase ‘Doing things differently’ also describes ‘Creativity’... Personally I find it interesting that ‘change’ and ‘creativity’ generate the same definition, and yet are generally perceived differently. ie. Change is bad vs. Creativity is good.

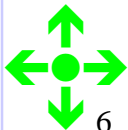
I’d suggest this puzzling observation comes about because ‘bad’ change is usually perceived as being externally imposed, while ‘good’ creativity is internally generated.

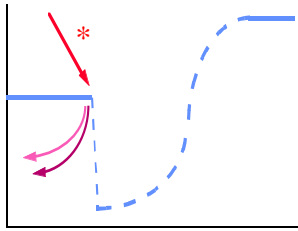
To come at this again from a different direction, consider the following. There is a popular myth about Change which leads to some fuzzy thinking: “People hate Change”. The correct response to that thought is mild invective. What people hate, is being Changed without their consent or with no control over the process.

When people have control over the change process, they willingly undergo all types of wrenching change. They seek promotions, get married, have kids, learn new languages etc. etc. All huge changes, all sought after eagerly. So much for the notion people ‘hate’ change.

A powerfully effective strategy when implementing change is to make the FE as internal as possible. In other words, give as much control to those who must undergo the change as you can. This concept is not that unusual anymore. It’s called empowerment.

One form of control over change is simply





access to information. If the target audience knows their SQ, (they usually do,) and IF they know everything there is to know about the FE... they're usually smart enough to know that "if things are to remain the same, then things are going to have to change."

(While that quote sounds like a funny contradiction it does contain a hidden truth. The real core of the SQ is always 'security and comfort.' People are smart enough to realize that that is what they'd really like to protect.)

One of the mistakes we make as organizations is to try and keep things simple. We choose to give our folks the minimum amount of information necessary to keep 'them' quiet, rather than giving them all the information required for 'them' to take action.

In any change, the more information you can provide, the better.

Click to order

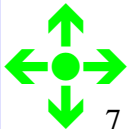


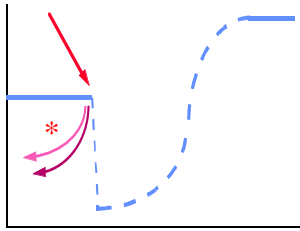
QUOTORIAL

Never take a fence down, until you know why it was put up.

Robert Frost

...all procedures and policies were put in place for a reason; sometimes forgotten. Ignoring these reasons, increases your risk of failure.





Resistance

Resistance and ‘denial’ are brother and sister in the family called ‘Rejection’. One’s active, the other passive, and both are seen as obstacles to Change.

I have heard time and time again, from otherwise astute managers that they want to hire people who don’t resist Change.

I understand the desire for Change to go as smoothly as possible, but I’d hate to have a staff who willy nilly throw away their competencies just because something new is available.

I want people to fight to retain their hard earned productivity levels, until they’re convinced the Change is a positive one. I want people to resist Change that doesn’t provide a solid payback. I want people to resist a new product just because it’s neat and cool.

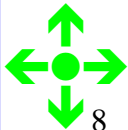
When someone is resisting Change, they are usually only asking the legitimate question: “Why should I throw away my hard earned SQ?” “Because I said so!!!” is the response of a fool.

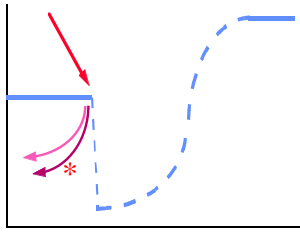
At least 90% of any Change ‘problem’ is due to a lack of information regarding the necessity of the Change in question. Organizations not only provide non-informative answers to reasonable questions, they create environments where concerns never see the light of day.

Here is a phenomenon most of us have experienced which supports this view of ‘resisters’ as active and positively involved in the Change process. How many times has the person most against your Change process, become your greatest supporter once they saw the light?

Which leads us to a powerful strategy. In any target audience, there are people who are ‘actively against’, ‘neutral’ and ‘positively for’ the proposed change. Who, in light of the above observation, should you spend a lot of your time with? With whom do you do everything to ensure the lines of communication remain open? The fact is that the most active resisters are potentially your most positive backers.

Questions shouldn't be a pain in the asking!
PdJ





Denial

No matter how long you work at this thing called the ‘Management of Change’ I’m willing to predict ‘denial’ is the one reaction to Change which will have you climbing the walls in frustration.

First what is ‘Denial’? Let’s examine a definition most people would offer. “Denial is the act of refusing to accept a Change has occurred.”

In one sense, this is accurate. A person in ‘denial’ IS ignoring that their world has changed in some manner. So far so good. The problem with the definition is a subtle one. The word ‘refusing’ strongly implies the person in ‘denial’ is choosing to ignore what has happened to their Status Quo. I’d like to suggest, that those in ‘denial’ are literally oblivious of the change.

A more accurate definition is the following; “Someone in denial uses effective and efficient behaviours no longer appropriate to the task.”

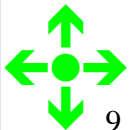
An example might prove useful here. When I facilitate Change workshops I use an exercise

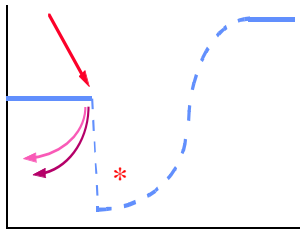
where a blindfolded person has to sort a deck of cards into a particular sequence with the non-verbal assistance of their team.

During this amusing little exercise, a curious phenomenon plays itself out time and time again regardless of who makes up the team members, whether they be clerical help or upper level management. The team members will **point** to where the **blindfolded** person should place the next card!

What is even more instructive is this... when I loudly and very sarcastically, (but in a kind hearted and deliberate manner) bring this to the attention of the ‘pointer’ in question, they nod their head in agreement and cease their useless behaviour.

*F*or about 5 minutes... then they start pointing again... totally oblivious that this behaviour is no longer appropriate to the task. How do you ‘solve’ this obstacle to Change? Patience... sooner or later they get it...





Chaos

In the beginning there was a Status Quo built upon the foundation of hard earned competencies. Then along came the Foreign Element which destroyed those competencies and thrust the faithful into the depths of 'incompetence' henceforth known as 'Chaos'.

Well the language is a bit flowery, but that's pretty much what happens. The Foreign Element (FE) eradicates competencies and makes us 'incompetent'.

Throughout my career as a 'techie' I've been confronted with this peculiar world view. It is not uncommon for someone sitting down with an application for the first time, to expect to use it properly and then get frustrated when they can't... They feel 'stupid' because they don't already know how to use the product. (Which explains the success of the line of self help manuals for dummies.)

Of course, some techies aggravate the situation by treating a new user as 'stupid' just because they don't immediately know how to use an

application which took a gazillion hours of work to create and contains several thousand functions and not a single useful error message.

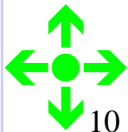
This fear of incompetence or being perceived as incompetent is endemic in the corporate world. Proof? How many of your executives attend public courses on computer usage, versus those that demand, and because of their position, receive one on one private training?

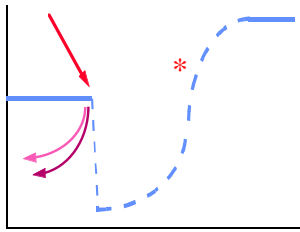
While this perception, that we should always be 'competent', is unreasonable, unrealistic and just plain silly.. But it IS a reality we have to cater to if we wish to manage change. On the other hand, at a personal level we can try to change our own response to incompetence.

The first step towards that goal is to pay attention to our own feelings when we undergo change (and recognize we're not that different from others) and constantly ask ourselves if these feelings are reasonable and appropriate.

For the things we have to learn before we can do them...

*We learn by doing them.
Aristotle*





Integration

There's no other word to describe this phase of the change process except 'sneaky'. No matter how often you go through change, no matter how cautious or observant you become, chances are Integration will get you time and time again.

To explain that statement, it's important to know what I mean when I refer to this thing called 'integration'. Consider the following. You lose someone in your life, and go through a period of grieving. After a time, the pain begins to go away and you become conscious of getting your life back together.

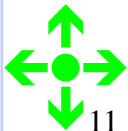
You've not arrived at a 'better' place, because you still miss your loved one, but you feel back in control, no longer buffeted by the uncontrollable sense of loss. You feel much better and there's a sense of regaining either your 'strength' or your 'power'.

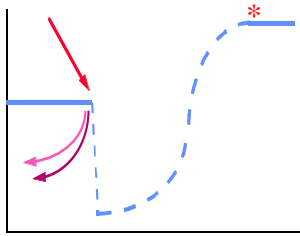
Then one morning you wake up, and without thinking, roll over and reach for your companion...

I could describe the emotions you feel at this point... but is it necessary? You thought you were through this, and now find out you're not. There's a deep sense of despair amplified by your earlier sense of success when you thought you'd put it all behind you.

Another less emotional example. You've been learning to use a word processor now for several months. You're feeling pretty good because you now know the product pretty well. You're doing a mail merge of several hundred letters and as you're stuffing the last one into the last stamped envelope you notice a typo... aargh! Same emotion to a lesser degree. Same sense of going from finally achieving competence, to discovering you still have a ways to go.

Integration is that short emotional phase in the Change process, where once we get a sense we've finally achieved the desired Change we overreact to tiny, inconsequential upsets.





New Status Quo

Finally. We're here. Back, in terms of competence levels, to where we began. Take a breather. Relax. Don't get too comfortable. The next Foreign Element is just around the corner and then the roller coaster ride will start again. Admission? Free.

As we rest in this temporary oasis, let's examine the one competency which hardly ever changes. Your ability to learn a new skill. In my experience most people tend to underestimate their ability to learn new skills.

Here's a question for you. Could a nine year old perform the tasks you do every day to earn your living? Could this mythical nine year old drive a car, write an article, program a computer, till the field, file a document, create an ad, and fix a furnace?

Of course the correct answer is yes. With training. The same training you've been receiving since you were nine years old.

I know it sounds like motivational claptrap, but it also happens to be true. The ability to learn is our strongest talent and it's the skill which makes it possible to change, to move from competency to incompetence and back again. We underestimate this strength again and again.

Is learning to use a new application or way of doing business really more difficult than learning how to swim or ride a bicycle? In one you run the risk of drowning and in the other the risk of falling off and breaking your face. Using Windows 2000, while difficult, never really threatens any body parts.

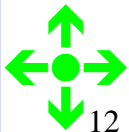
As you get better at a thing, it gets less interesting.
Jim Slater

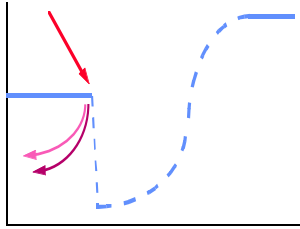


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An Application of the Model: When to Change Voluntarily?

That's an important question, what a pity it's so incredibly difficult to answer. It seems reasonable to start with the current Status Quo. What do we value, and equally important, what do we dislike about the current situation?

If we can come up with answers to that multi-part question, then and only then, are we ready to graduate to the next phase. Will the New Status Quo we're contemplating, reinforce what we value? Or subvert them?

Will it reduce the annoyance of the things we dislike? And how will it transform those other things? The things we neither like nor dislike... will they change? For better? For worse?

While we're attempting to answer these questions we owe it to ourselves to accept the sad fact we seldom know what we really value. That we obsess over things just not worth bothering about. That it's difficult, if not simply impossible, to predict what will happen when we

make any sort of change. And finally, that often we have no feelings, good or bad, about something until it changes irreversibly.

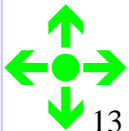
With the above warning firmly in mind we can compare our Current Status Quo, with the contemplated New Status Quo and decide which scenario is more desirable.

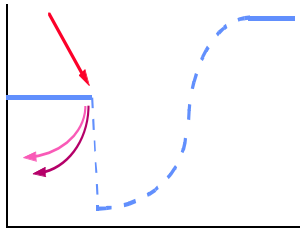
If we assume for the moment the New Status Quo is desirable, then we might yield to temptation and say 'Yes! The Change is Good!' and move forward.

If we yield with no further analysis we're making an error in judgment. There is something else to consider. The cost of moving from A to B. It's seldom, if ever, zero.

So... the next to last question is: What does it cost in terms of personal commitment, dislocation, energy and oh yes... money to go from 'here' to 'greener pastures'?

*You might be on-line, bug-free, upgraded, converted, and plugged in, but what good is it if your back is killing you?
Michael Thomsett*





Application Continued

Finally? Are the perceived benefits worth this cost? If yes, then we change voluntarily.

All of this is just theory, even ‘fluff’, unless we can use it on real life changes. We could cheat and apply this fledgling methodology to a significant, important change where the issues are easily quantified, qualified and equated, but instead we’ll examine a boring and mundane example. Moving from one version of a word processor to another. (*I’ll examine the not so obvious and leave the mundane details to the reader.*)

Examination of Status Quo:

We value: The ability to ‘know’ how long it’ll take to perform a certain task.

We dislike: The inability to read 10% of the documents sent to us.

Examination of New Status Quo:

Value increased? Once we’ve relearned the application... we’ll regain the ability to estimate a task.

Dislikes diminished: Yes... until the next cycle of upgrades happen... then we’re faced with the same problem.

Other changes? None we can foresee.

Cost of Transition:

Potentially significant...

Dollar cost for upgrade

Time cost in training

Lost productivity in transition

SQ vs. NSQ

Yes or No? It’s your choice.

By fleshing out all the details in all three sections... you might be able to make a rational decision. The key is properly understanding what you have, in relationship to what you might acquire after the costly phase of transition.

Good luck in your upcoming Change...



Final Thoughts

Managing Change is not easy, and it's not something you can do well unless you learn a bit about people and how they react under certain circumstances.

Here's an example of how some people respond to wrenching change. It's an exercise I've performed on dozens of occasions. Always with pretty much the same results.

Picture a situation where someone is presented with an entirely new way to do their job. Take it as a given, this person is a good performer and has achieved their current position based upon their past proficiency.

When faced with this new way of doing things, even with an appropriate amount of training, what do they feel the first time they are left alone to do their 'new' task.

They're obviously afraid... but of what? The new task? Or something deeper?

If you take the time to ask a few questions you arrive at a very 'unincorporate' like place. Follow these questions for a moment.

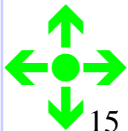


What are you afraid of? *Not being able to learn the new task...* **What happens if you don't learn it?** *I'll get fired and might not find another job.* **What then?** *I won't have money to pay the mortgage and buy food.* **What then?** *I'll be out on the street.* **What then?** *Winter's coming and without food I'll die.*

Sounds stupid right? Rational people don't think that way, right? Well, I've gone through that series of questions with all types of audiences and when asked if they've had those feelings... 30-50% raise their hands.

So... the question to us as inflictors of Change is this... do we ignore that Change hurts? Or do we manage Change with this in mind, regardless of our own personal responses to Change?

Peter de Jager, May 2000



Managing Change & Technology

Subscribers:

As of Mid-May 2000: 4,400

Publisher:

de Jager & Company Limited
22 Marchbank Crescent
Brampton, Ont
L6S 3B1
(905)792-8706

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