Thank you for resisting the change!

The importance of understanding responses to change as instrument to make change happen

Adaptive Change
Reimagining Change with Adaptive Solutions

Patrick Verdonk

"When we see resistance to change, get curious, not furious."

– Jason Little

Prologue

This document is a write out of my thinking on understanding and helping people cope with and find a way through Change. It explores the "**Individual Reaction Models**" in the Classifying Change Models diagram you can find on the last page of this document called "Placing this document in perspective".

Individual Reaction Models

Process models tend to assume that recipients of change are rational in their responses. Communication and information focus largely on cognitive processing and the explanation of the change process. Individual Reaction Models describe how individuals respond to change.

Evolving from research in the areas of neuroscience, mental models and biases, grief and loss, individual reaction of transition models places the emotional reactions of change recipients at the heart of their frameworks – identifying why individuals respond to change the way they do and the stages they go through during change.

Central to these theories is the hypothesis that matching the organizational change journey and interventions to the requirements of individuals at each stage of the response and adaptation, and implementing appropriate support, will lead to more successful change outcomes.

A very short introduction

Contrary to many (popular?) opinions, I don't believe change resistance is the biggest problem to successful change. In general people don't resist change, they resist being changed. And guess what, we [change agents] are people too.

The fact that we, change agents, are also people is what often lies underneath a much bigger problem: the unwillingness to find out why people respond to a change the way they do. Being curious about people's responses to change provokes a feeling of 'giving away control'. A feeling that we become the subjects being changed because "they" don't follow our strategy or plan and want "us to change". And that feeling is what in many cases makes us call any different opinion or perspective 'resistance'.

(told you: "very short")

Saying 'thank you'

Of course, there are always (a few) people resisting change for the sake of resistance, and that isn't helpful.

However, in many cases people that resist change can help us learn and grow. It can make us question why we want to change in the first place and whether it is the right change at the right time for the right people. Change resistance can help us evaluate our options and make a more informed decision.

What if to those who 'resist' change, we say thank you? "Thank you for standing up for what you believe in and your willingness to speak up about what your concerns are. We understand that change can be overwhelming and scary, and we appreciate the courage it takes to say no." What would change?

We should not be afraid of responses to change, but at the same time, we should not blindly accept them. We need to evaluate them and determine what the impacts are on the change. Change can be a positive thing, but it can also have negative consequences. It is up to us to have the dialogue with people and decide together whether the benefits outweigh the consequences.

If we have the courage to say thank you and discover why there is resistance to a change, we can learn what holds us back and prevents us from moving forward.

Understanding change responses

Understanding responses to change requires a combination of effective collaboration and a willingness to listen and be open to different perspectives. By working together and focusing on the concerns about and benefits of change, it is possible to align people and achieve success.

We need to learn to read the signs in people's behavior and responses. Their verbal and non-verbal communication so that we can learn to understand and enter into meaningful dialogue. And that is not a simple learning process... a very simplified view into some parts of our brains can help understand the difficulty we face.

People 'resist' change because of the brain's innate desire for safety and comfort, the brain's tendency to stick to familiar patterns, and cognitive biases such as the status quo bias and confirmation bias. Understanding these neurological factors can help individuals and organizations better manage and navigate change.

The brain perceives change as a potential threat, and the amygdala, which is responsible for processing emotions and encoding memories, becomes activated. This activation of the amygdala triggers a fight-or-flight response, and based on recorded memories the brain may go into survival mode. The prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for decision-making and planning, can become overwhelmed by the amygdala's activation, making it difficult to think logically and objectively.

Additionally, the brain has a tendency to stick to familiar patterns and habits, which can make it challenging to adopt new behaviors and ways of thinking. This is because the brain has developed neural pathways that are reinforced by repetition, and it takes effort and time to create new neural pathways.

Unconsciously the brain 'constructs' cognitive biases such as the status quo bias and the confirmation bias. The status quo bias is the tendency to prefer things to stay the way they are (thank you amygdala), while the confirmation bias is the tendency to seek out information that confirms our existing beliefs and attitudes (thank you prefrontal cortex). These biases can make it challenging to consider new perspectives and ideas that challenge our current views.

Reality, and our brain, is much more complex than this brief overview, but I'm no brain, neuro, or behavioral scientist. However, this short overview can help us to understand ourselves and therefore be more open to the responses of others to change.

Exploring responses to change

To help ourselves, and others, understand our status quo and confirmation biases we can use models and then apply tactics to overcome them. For any of these there are many models and tactics, let's focus on some that are a bit better known outside of the specialists' areas.

Disclaimer. Often, popular models are simple and easy to understand, but therefore may be less thorough and in some cases make things a little too simplistic. Nevertheless, they serve the purpose of learning to understand where people's responses to change come from.

The status quo bias

To understand status quo bias, we can consider David Rock's SCARF model. The SCARF model is a framework for understanding how people's brains respond to social situations. The model is based on the idea that five core social domains - Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness (hence the acronym SCARF) - activate reward or threat responses in our brains, which can either support or hinder our ability to perform well and collaborate with others.

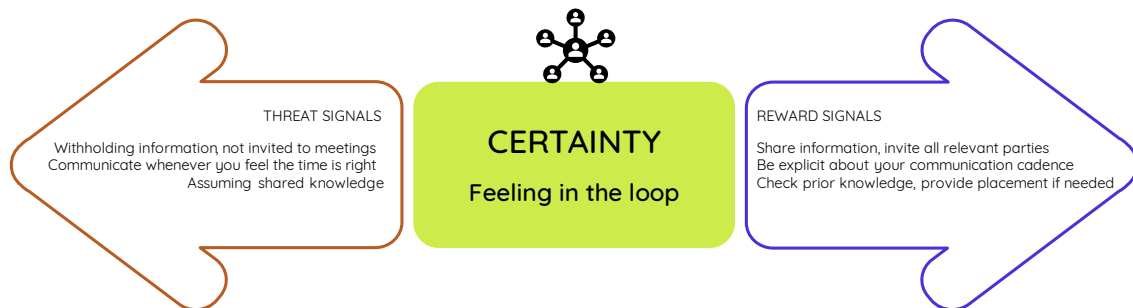## Five Social Domains of Threat and Reward

AWAY FROM THREAT
Threat is stronger

STATUS
CERTAINTY
AUTONOMY
RELATEDNESS
FAIRNESS

TOWARD REWARD
Reward is better
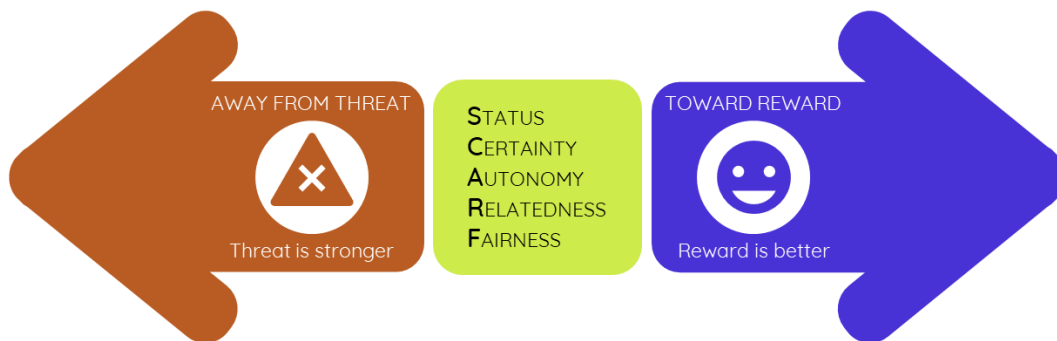
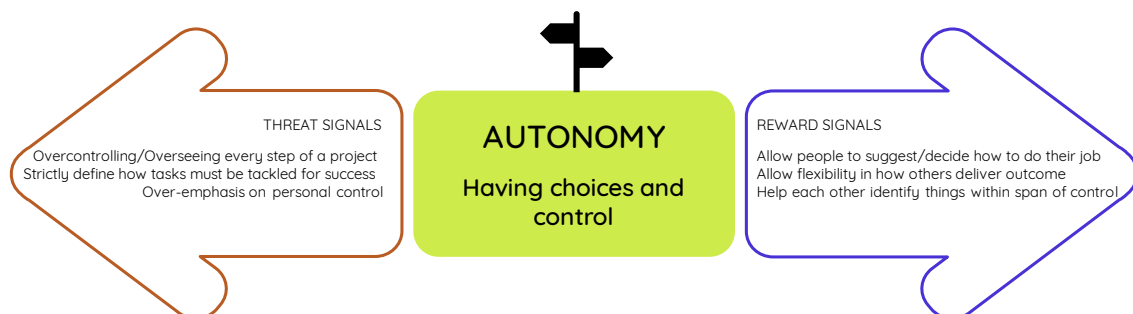Here's a simple explanation of each domain (images adapted from: NeuroLeadership Institute)

Status: This is the sense of importance or social standing that we feel in relation to others. When we feel that our status is threatened, our brain goes into threat mode and we may become defensive or competitive.

THREAT SIGNALS
Ignore achievements
Start telling people how you think things should be
No personal contact, people are one in a crowd

STATUS
Feeling respected and valued

REWARD SIGNALS
Celebrate wins and progress
Ask people's thoughts on how to move forward
Greet by name; acknowledge effort/accomplishment

Certainty: This refers to our need for predictability and control over our environment. When we feel uncertain or unsure about a situation, our brain perceives it as a threat and may respond with anxiety or stress.

THREAT SIGNALS
Withholding information, not invited to meetings
Communicate whenever you feel the time is right
Assuming shared knowledge

CERTAINTY
Feeling in the loop

REWARD SIGNALS
Share information, invite all relevant parties
Be explicit about your communication cadence
Check prior knowledge, provide placement if needed

Autonomy: This refers to our need to have a sense of control over our own actions and decisions. When we feel that our autonomy is threatened, we may become resistant or defensive.

THREAT SIGNALS
Overcontrolling/Overseeing every step of a project
Strictly define how tasks must be tackled for success
Over-emphasis on personal control

AUTONOMY
Having choices and control

REWARD SIGNALS
Allow people to suggest/decide how to do their job
Allow flexibility in how others deliver outcome
Help each other identify things within span of control

Relatedness: This refers to our need for social connection and a sense of belonging. When we feel isolated or excluded, our brain perceives it as a threat, and we may experience negative emotions.


THREAT SIGNALS

No human connection with each other
See personal work as independent, more important
Make all interactions "strictly business"

RELATEDNESS

Feeling you belong

REWARD SIGNALS

Check in at the start of a meeting
Continuously explore/define shared goals
Ask about each other's experience/interests

Fairness: This refers to our sense of justice and equity in social interactions. When we perceive that we are being treated unfairly, our brain may respond with anger or resentment.

THREAT SIGNALS

Preferential greetings and opportunities given
Make people to think their vote matters but it doesn't
Decide and direct without explanation

FAIRNESS

Equal opportunities and recognition

REWARD SIGNALS

Acknowledge everyone, share opportunities equally
Be clear on who has the final say (decision rights)
Provide the "why"

By understanding these five domains and how they activate our brain's reward or threat responses, we can create social situations that activate reward responses and promote collaboration and productivity.

Managing SCARF
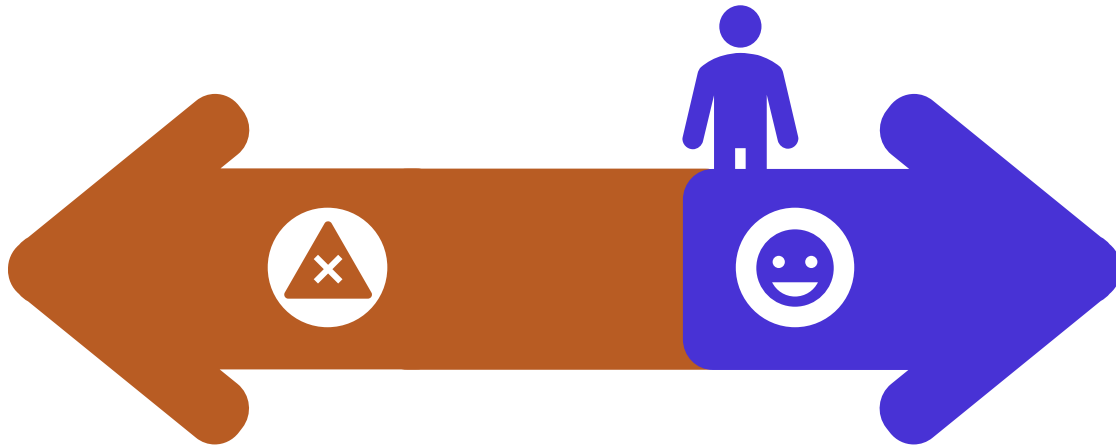
Threat

Overwhelming
Most SCARF© domains in threat

- ✓ Options shut down
- ✓ Reactive thinking
- ✓ Minimal creativity or collaboration

Reward

Manageable
Most SCARF© domains in reward

- ✓ Peak performance for short periods
- ✓ Engaged and motivated
- ✓ High focus

For example, we can enhance people's sense of status by recognizing their accomplishments or expertise, provide clear communication to reduce uncertainty, offer choices to enhance autonomy, foster social connections to enhance relatedness, and ensure fairness in our policies and decision-making. This can lead to a more positive and productive workplace culture.

This model gives us some first insights to understand resistance to change from a **neuroscientific** perspective. By considering this model, we can gain insight into the underlying neurological factors that contribute to resistance to change. We can then develop tactics for helping people see a change differently.

If we want a better understanding of our own social motivations, and those of others, run the SCARF assessment, provided by the NeuroLeadership Institute, and have conversation about the outcomes. The self-assessment can be taken here: https://neuroleadership.com/research/tools/nli-scarf-assessment/

There's one model describing a different form of 'change resistance', the **Immunity to Change Model**. This type of 'resistance' is <u>not caused by a perceived threat</u>. Immunity to change is observed in people that mentally support the change. Developed by Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey, the Immunity to Change Model suggests that people have internal barriers to change that they may not be aware of. These barriers can be related to limiting beliefs, assumptions, or values. By uncovering these internal barriers and working to overcome them, people can become more open to change. More on this model:

https://hbr.org/2001/11/the-real-reason-people-wont-change;
https://www.mindtools.com/a4l75hx/immunity-to-change;
https://www.gse.harvard.edu/hgse100/story/changing-better.

Letting go of the status quo bias

When we understand the social domains that are important to us, we can use several tactics that can be effective in helping people overcome status quo bias and become more open to change.

- **Highlight the Costs of Inaction**: This can include highlighting the risks of not changing for the social domains important to the people impacted by the change, as well as redirecting focus on the rewards that may be obtained through the implementation of the change. When people understand the potential negative consequences of inaction on the domains important to them, and the upside of taking action, they may be more willing to consider change.

- **Provide Information and Education**: Providing people with accurate and relevant information about the need for change can help to overcome status quo bias. Have a conversation through which the why of the change is highlighted. Provide a (open) space for people to speak up about what worries them about the change makes them feel heard and reduces the 'threat feeling'. This can include sharing data, case studies, and testimonials from others who have successfully implemented similar changes.

- **Involve People in the Change Process**: Involving people in the change process can help to overcome status quo bias by giving them a sense of ownership and control. By involving people in definition, planning and decision-making, they may be more invested in the success of the change and more willing to embrace it; people that define the plan don't resist the plan. Promote a mindset of continuous improvement and experimentation. When people are encouraged

to try new things and take calculated risks, they may be more willing to embrace change.

There is not a single tactic that'll work in every situation. Different tactics, or combinations of them, may be more effective in different contexts and with different individuals. By understanding the underlying factors that contribute to status quo bias we can help people overcome status quo bias and embrace new opportunities for growth and improvement.

The confirmation bias

Confirmation bias is a common cognitive bias that can contribute to resistance to change. It occurs when people seek out information that confirms their existing beliefs and ignore or dismiss information that contradicts their beliefs.

There are several models that can help us understand confirmation bias and where it comes from. Here are a few examples:

- **Cognitive Dissonance Theory**: Cognitive dissonance theory suggests that people experience psychological discomfort when they encounter information that contradicts their existing beliefs or attitudes. To reduce this discomfort, they may seek out information that confirms their existing beliefs and dismiss information that contradicts them. This can contribute to confirmation bias. (more details on Cognitive Dissonance)

- **Motivated Reasoning Theory**: Motivated reasoning theory suggests that people are motivated to seek out information that supports their existing beliefs and attitudes, and to reject information that contradicts them. This can be influenced by factors such as identity, values, and emotions, and may contribute to confirmation bias. (more on Motivated Reasoning)

- **Social Identity Theory**: Social identity theory suggests that people identify with certain social groups and may be motivated to defend the beliefs and attitudes of those groups. This can make it more difficult for them to consider information that contradicts the beliefs of their social group, and may contribute to confirmation bias. (more on Social Identity Theory)

However, I'd want to go one step deeper than looking at explanations about why we seek information that confirms our existing beliefs and attitudes. I'd like to look at how

we come to those beliefs and attitudes, our mental model. Where does it come from? Why is mine different than yours?

The best model I've been confronted with that explains this is Chris Argyris' Ladder of Inference. To overcome confirmation bias in the context of the Ladder of Inference, it is important to become aware of our own interpretations and assumptions and to examine them critically. This involves being mindful of the data we select and how we interpret it and being open to alternative perspectives and viewpoints. By doing so, we can avoid jumping to conclusions and making judgments based on incomplete or biased information.

The Ladder of Inference

The Ladder of Inference is a model that explains how we make sense of the world around us and how we draw conclusions based on the information available to us. The model suggests that we often follow a mental process that takes us up a ladder of inference. This "ladder" shows us how we 'construct' our mental models from early childhood on. The ladder can be visualized as follows:
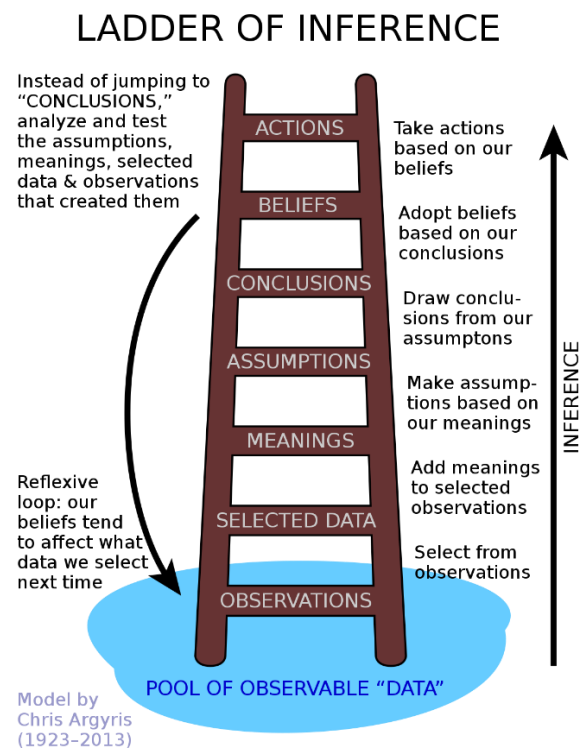
LADDER OF INFERENCE

Image credit: Wikimedia Commons, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International

When we climb the ladder, we start from a pool of **observable "data"**: We observe certain facts or data about a situation. When we're kids, much of this data is provided to us through decisions and behaviors from the adults surrounding us.

We **select some of the data** that we think is relevant to the situation – which data we select is often a choice made based on experiences our brain associates with the situation at hand. It may be completely unconscious and go back to (early) childhood experiences..

We **add meaning to the data** we have selected, by interpreting it and making assumptions about what it means.

Based on the meanings we have added to the data, **we make assumptions** about the situation.

Our assumptions drive us to **draw conclusions** about the situation.

If our conclusions get confirmed through the circumstances we're currently in, over time, they **form beliefs**.

Based on our beliefs, we **take the action** we have grown to believe is the correct one in response to the situation.

The Ladder of Inference model is useful because it helps us to become aware of:

- Our own mental process and to recognize when we are making assumptions or drawing conclusions without full information.
- Other people's response to change by visualizing how our change impacts their beliefs.

By being aware of our own thinking process, we open up to how other people perceive change. More often than not, a proposed change is impacting what people believe. Beliefs build up over time and reconfirmed time and time again. Suddenly 'a change' is needed for that? Why? You're telling them that what they've always done is wrong?

You can see that understanding the construction of our mental model through the ladder of inference can improve our decision-making and become more effective in our communication and problem-solving in general and especially with regards to the "resistance" to the change. It can help us see different perspectives on and solutions for the introduction of the change.

If you want a practical example of the ladder at work, I invite you to watch this 5-minute or so [video](#).

Being agile is good, why are you not adapting?

Let's try to walk this through with an example of the launch of a "going agile" initiative.

Imagine your company's CIO walking into the room telling you and his other direct reports that the company is "going agile" and believes that 'changing the people's mindset' is a key to get that transformation started.

At first the group may applaud the initiative: finally, a people focused change intent. Though once an understanding arises of what that 'changed mindset' looks like, many people will figure that it impacts their habits (their actions and beliefs). The initiative asks for shared accountability of the teams, distributed decision making and leadership at all levels. You start to think that this transformation is targeting the elimination of your position, and your peers, all together.

You start to wander… 'But I reached my position by doing good, no? I've been a true people manager, I'm good at it and love my job as it is! I always gave the people credit for their work, assigned them tasks that interest them, made sure they reached their goals. Wasn't that what the company always asked us to do? Didn't I do exactly that, and a bit more? Where did I go wrong?'

Though you first were enthusiastic, the initiative quickly starts to mess with your beliefs. Because of your past success with your management (or call it leadership if you want) style you've grown to believe you are already taking the right actions when working with people. And that provokes a response.

You start to try to convince people that what you were doing all along was already pretty 'agile'. Try to work your way around (some parts of) that 'new' mindset. Getting to a point where you get asked "but, being agile is good, why are you not adapting?".

If we put this against the Ladder of Inference, we can see that:

- You always *give* your people clear, easy to reach objectives.
- You **observe** that your people are *more motivated than those in other teams.*
- You **select the data** that your people *are motivated.*
- To you that **means** *you are motivating them.*
- So, you **assume** that *giving* them objectives *is the key* to that.
- Based on that you **conclude** that *setting objectives for them is good.*
- Because your people remain more motivated than others in other teams, you **believe** your *assumption and conclusions are correct.*
- You **act** on that by focusing even more on *setting objectives for them.*

Now it turns out that your efforts of setting objectives for your team, not giving them the autonomy to come up with their own and challenge those, goes against what the company wants to see as 'agile mindset'.…

"Mindset change" is first and above all a **change**. When you force change on people, you provoke an unpredictable range of responses.

So, what can we do?

The process of acceptance of a (mindset) change starts with helping people understand that they make a selection of the available data based on their past experiences and preferences.

In this case, we might confirm your observation, though ask you to select different data: the observation doesn't tell you if your people are highly motivated, it just says they are more motivated than others. How would you approach this differently if you selected different data from your observation? Maybe you can ask yourself 'are my people highly motivated?'. Maybe you can ask them why they believe they are more motivated than others? Asking this may lead to a different observation, different pieces of data, an adjusted (or completely changed) meaning, etc....

The point is, if we want people to change (their mindset) we can't ask them to simply change their beliefs and actions, we have to help them 'deconstruct' their current behaviors and habits.

Letting go of the confirmation bias

By understanding the Ladder of Inference, we can pause at any point in the ladder and ask ourselves questions to ensure that we are not making assumptions or drawing conclusions without full information. This can lead to more effective decision-making and problem-solving.

There are several tactics we can apply in overcoming confirmation bias and become more open to change:

- **Critical Thinking**: Learn to evaluate evidence objectively and consider alternative viewpoints. This can involve asking questions, exploring different perspectives, and challenging (our own) assumptions.

- **Diverse Perspectives**: Actively seeking diverse perspectives can help to overcome confirmation bias by exposing yourself to a range of viewpoints and opinions. This can include consulting outside experts, engaging in debate and discussion, and exposure to a range of information sources.

- **Data and Evidence**: Using data and evidence can help to overcome confirmation bias by providing objective information that supports the need for change. This can involve collecting and analyzing data, using case studies and success stories, and presenting evidence that supports the change.

- **Cherish a Growth Mindset**: Fostering a growth mindset can help to overcome confirmation bias by promoting a belief in the potential for growth and learning.

This can involve emphasizing the importance of ongoing learning and development, celebrating experimentation and innovation, and encouraging a willingness to embrace new ideas and approaches.

By using a combination of these tactics, we can (help people) overcome confirmation bias and become more open to change. Note that this is not an easy task, we must recognize that confirmation bias is a natural tendency that affects us all, and that overcoming it requires ongoing effort and vigilance.

The role of emotions

Rosabeth Moss Kanter wrote a short HBR article, back in 2012 called, Ten Reasons People Resist Change. In at least 7 out of those 10 there's a clear reference to emotions.

Now, there are many 'curves' out there that try to explain the emotional part of change. However, not many are capturing them as well as the Satir Change Model (the full Satir Model is so much more than 'just' a curve…).
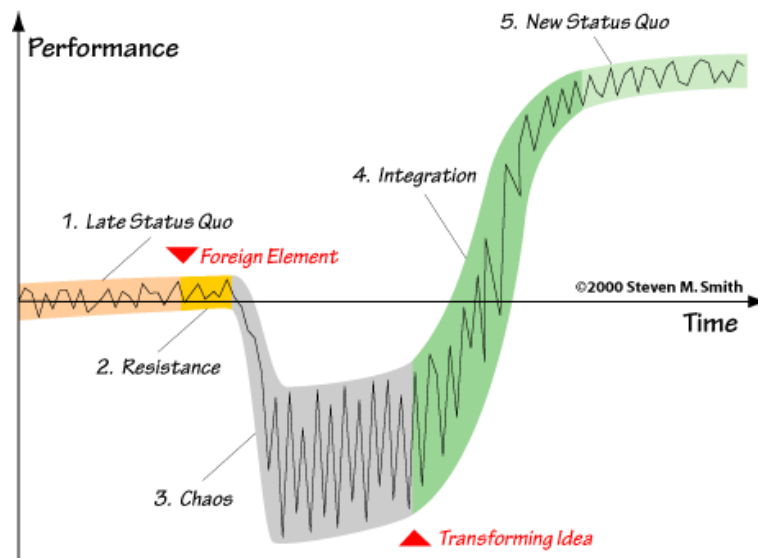
After a first exploration of the curve we'll check in with situations of stress that can occur at any given time during a change (or even under' business as usual circumstances).

Based on the article The Satir Change Model by Steven M. Smith:

> "Improvement is always possible. This conviction is the heart of the transformation system developed by family therapist Virginia Satir. Her system helps people improve their lives by transforming the way they see and express themselves.
>
> An element of the Satir System is a five-stage change model (see Figure 1) that describes the effects each stage has on feelings, thinking, performance, and physiology. Using the principles embodied in this model, you can improve how you process change and how you help others process change."

The SATIR Change Curve is a model that describes the emotional journey that people go through when they experience change. The model suggests that when people are faced with change, they go through five stages:

The Satir Change Model diagram showing Performance over Time: 1. Late Status Quo, Foreign Element, 2. Resistance, 3. Chaos, Transforming Idea, 4. Integration, 5. New Status Quo. ©2000 Steven M. Smith

- **Late status quo**: At this stage, people are comfortable with the way things are and are not actively seeking change.

  o **Foreign element**: The foreign element is the event or circumstance that initiates the change process. It could be anything from a new policy or procedure at work to a personal crisis or major life event. The foreign element is what prompts people to start thinking about change and to begin the journey through the change curve.

- **Resistance**: At this stage, people realize that the foreign element threatens the stability of familiar (power) structures. Most members resist by denying its validity, avoiding the issue, or blaming someone for causing the problem.

- **Chaos**: The group enters the unknown. Relationships shatter: Old expectations may no longer be valid; old reactions may cease to be effective; and old behaviors may not be possible. All members in this stage need help focusing on their feelings, acknowledging their fear, and using their support systems. Management needs special help avoiding any attempt to short circuit this stage with magical solutions. The chaos stage is vital to the transformation process.

  o **Transforming idea**: The members discover a transforming idea that shows how the foreign element can benefit them. The group becomes excited. New relationships emerge that offer the opportunity for identity and belonging.

- **Integration**: Awareness of new possibilities enables authorship of new rules that build functional reactions, expectations, and behaviors. Members may feel euphoric and invincible, as the transforming idea may be so powerful that it becomes a panacea.

- **New status quo**: In this stage, the members continue to need to feel safe so they can practice. If the change is well conceived and assimilated, the group and its environment are in better accord and performance stabilizes at a higher level than in the Late Status Quo.

The SATIR Change Curve is useful because it helps us to understand the emotional journey that people go through when faced with change. By understanding this journey, we can better support people through the change process and help them to adapt more effectively.

Helping people deal with emotions

The article includes a "Postscript: Coping With Change" in which Steven gives suggestions from his experiences, on how to help during each stage of the change model:

Stage	Description	How to Help
1	Late Status Quo	Encourage people to seek improvement information and concepts from outside the group.
2	Resistance	Help people to open up, become aware, and overcome the reaction to deny, avoid or blame.
3	Chaos	Help build a safe environment that enables people to focus on their feelings, acknowledge their fear, and use their support systems. Help management avoid any attempt to short circuit this stage with magical solutions.
4	Integration	Offer reassurance and help finding new methods for coping with difficulties.
5	New Status Quo	Help people feel safe so they can practice.

For example, if a company is implementing a new software system, some employees may initially resist the change and feel frustrated or overwhelmed. By understanding that this resistance is a normal part of the change process, managers can take steps

to support their employees through the change. This may include providing training and resources to help employees learn the new system, acknowledging their concerns and frustrations, and helping them to see the benefits of the new system.

> "Our challenge now is to develop human beings with values: moral, ethical, and humanistic. For me, this means learning how to be congruent, and that leads to becoming more fully human. When we achieve that, we will be able to enjoy this most wonderful planet and the life that inhabits it." - *Virginia Satir*

It is important to notice that Satir believed that the more often people go through the curve the easier it becomes for them to cope with change. Change becomes a habit, and the 'announcement' of a Foreign Element will provoke more positive responses over time.

Of course, there's a challenge with this thinking as well, I believe. The challenge is that if people must move through the curve at ever increasing speed, because of the acceleration of the speed with which Foreign Elements 'hit' us, it can more easily lead to change fatigue.

It is important to 'manage the risk' of too much change in a very short time frame. However, in many situations this is beyond our control. In today's business environments the Foreign Elements are more often triggered from the outside. VUCA sensitivity is still increasing, leading to economic, social, environmental impactful events appearing at a higher rate than ever, which are pushing our companies to react.

Paying attention to people's responses to, yet another, change is quickly becoming a crucial skill for change agents.

Tendencies under stress

Virginia Satir herself also proposes 'Coping Stances' with which she referred to behavior and communication tendencies when people are put under stress. These stances are easiest to identify in the Resistance and at the beginning of the Chaos stages. Although less visible, they do occur all the time throughout the change.

When we are not in balance, we are likely to cope with change in an unbalanced, less effective way. When we are placed under stress Satir proposes we should remain congruent. This means we have to maintain a whole view of the situation including ourselves/our team (SELF), the other person/people involved in, or impacted by the change (OTHER), and the here and now, the context in which change takes place (CONTEXT).

However, people under stress start to ignore parts of that equation (red being the ignored part).

Irrelevant	Context	"Other"	Self
Super-Reasonable	Context	"Other"	Self
Placating	Context	"Other"	Self
Blaming	Context	"Other"	Self

Let's take a short look at each of these stances and the typical, emotional reactions that come with them.

Blaming

Probably one of the most, and most easily, observed stances. When we are blaming, we take no account of other. It's definitely not our fault something is amiss. The typical body stance for this would be finger pointing. As Jerry Weinberg says: where do the other three fingers point to, when one finger is pointing away? Blaming is usually made possible because **others** are placating.

Potential signs:

- Blames other people: "It's your fault", "Why didn't you?", "It's because you/they…", "It would have worked if only they had…".
- Takes no responsibility for the situation.
- Complaining, dictating, and potentially bullying.
- Labels and judges.
- Challenges and criticizes head on.

Example:

- *D:* When I came in this morning, I found that the code was broken. It took me 1 hour to find the cause and fix it.
- *M:* Did you break the code again? This is already the fifth time! You're always so sloppy.
- *D:* Well, I noticed that Peter was the last one to check in code yesterday…

- *M:* So now you're blaming someone else … you never take responsibility for your actions!

Ways to help this coping stance become congruent:

- Help them see how blaming only makes things worse.
- Help them see her responsibility.
- Point out the positive intent behind people's behavior.
- Help them see and understand the other's needs.
- Help them regain a sense of belonging / confirm to them that they're safe.
- Ask elevating questions that focus forward. "Instead of focusing on who did what, what do we need to do now?"

Placating

At first sight you might recognize this as an extreme form of servant leadership style (remember, this is a stance under stress). When we are placating, we accept blame, or blame ourselves, even when we had nothing to do with it. When we placate, we believe we try to prevent conflict. Mostly, we only delay conflict, or set ourselves up for more blaming/placating. Often maintaining our placating stance hurts us more than dealing with the conflict, but that is hard to notice. In placating, we have erased **self** from the picture..

Potential signs:

- Victimize themselves.
- Agree with everything: "I think all ideas are good".
- Take blame: "I'm sorry / shouldn't have".
- Try to please everyone.
- Does not inject their ideas.

Example:

- *D:* When I came in this morning, I found the code was broken. It took me 1 hour to find the cause and fix it.
- *M:* Oh, I'm so sorry. I should have provided you with better tools!
- *D:* I noticed Peter was the last one to check in code yesterday.
- *M:* I'm so sorry. I should have checked Peter was working with a pair. Please forgive me!

Ways to help this coping stance become congruent:

- Express and validate how important they are.
- Stop them from taking the blame.
- Help them express what they want and think.

- Help them set boundaries and maintain integrity in their ideas.
- Help them see that their contribution is necessary in order for the solution to become good.

Super-reasonable

This we may see most in very controlled industries/companies. When we are being super-reasonable we want to apply general theories, whether they apply to the context or not. **Self** and **Other** are missing. We are being professional, and emotions are irrelevant. Going one level deeper, we may act super-reasonable to hide our blaming ("you are not conforming to the process manual. You are a bad, bad person") or, more often, our confusion and helplessness.

Potential signs:

- Disregard emotions and individual needs when making decisions.
- Looking for the ONE correct answer.
- Become irritated at emotional displays.
- Not willing to give up control/power of the situation.

Example:

- *D:* When I came in this morning, I found that the code was broken. It took me 1 hour to find the cause and fix it.
- *M:* Was proper procedure followed for checking in the code?
- *D:* Well, It was Peter who was the last to check in code, yesterday afternoon.
- *M:* Well, according to our Software Engineering Guidelines section C Paragraph 5, every developer has to check in his code before he goes home. So, Peter followed the right procedures. I don't see what you are coming to my office for - everything is as it should be. The Corporate Software Engineering Process Group didn't write these guidelines for nothing, you know…

Ways to help this coping stance become congruent:

- Show them how emotions and individual needs are parts in the system they are trying to improve that need to be factored in
- Give them feedback on how lack of emotional display affects the group's ability to solve problems negatively.
- Give them feedback that they are being super reasonable.
- Confirm that you trust their judgement and that they're in control.

Irrelevant

Probably the most dangerous stance. When people 'resist' they care, you can work on that. If people are irrelevant to your change, they've stopped caring, they'll do whatever they please. As with super-reasonable, **Self** and **Other** usually are out of the picture. In addition, **Context** is missing completely. Often used to counter super-reasonable (when we can't or won't find a counter-super-reasonable stance as in "but in section x.y.z.14 it is stated….."). Irrelevance can be used to make difficult situations bearable - in a way highly relevant. It is another way to avoid conflict, like placating.

Potential signs:

- Change topic/subject frequently.
- Interrupt people.
- Do things completely different than what was planned.
- Make jokes at inappropriate times.
- Do various things to get all the attention.

Example:

- *D:* When I came in this morning, I found that the code was broken. It took me 1 hour to find the cause and fix it.
- *M:* Did you see the soccer match yesterday evening?
- *D:* Well, I did, but I was talking about the broken build…
- *M:* And did you like the match? I really enjoyed it, it was much better than the one last week… The penalty shoot-out was breathtaking!
- *D:* Bye….

Ways to help this coping stance become congruent:

- Provide structure in different ways. E.g., remind them of the goal, make the goal smaller and more concrete, create an agenda and write it on the whiteboard.
- Help them understand that a natural response to their behavior might be exclusion.
- Create a parking lot so that their ideas can be discussed at a later time.
- Offer feedback about how their behavior affects the group's productivity and motivation.

The collaboration of the models

The SCARF model, the Ladder of Inference, and the Satir Change Model can work together to help guide people through the process of change. Here are some ways that a better understanding of these models can help:

- **SCARF Model**: The SCARF model helps to identify the social and emotional factors that can influence people's reactions to change. By understanding these

factors, we can tailor our approach to change to minimize potential threats and maximize rewards. For example, we can use positive language and feedback to increase people's sense of autonomy and relatedness, which can help to guide people through the resistance and chaos stages of Satir's Change Curve.

- **Ladder of Inference**: The Ladder of Inference helps to identify the cognitive biases and assumptions that can lead to resistance to change. By understanding these biases, we can help people to become more aware of their own assumptions leading to change resistance and to examine them critically. Additionally, awareness of the steps in the ladder is useful for people to see how during the Integration stage of Satir's Change Curve their efforts lead them to new assumptions, conclusions, and beliefs.

- **Satir Change Model**: The Satir Change Model provides a framework for understanding the emotional stages that people may go through during the change process and under stress. By understanding these stages and stress signals, we can anticipate potential challenges and provide support and guidance to help people navigate them. Understanding these emotions in combination with SCARF (social factors) and the Ladder of Inference (assumptions and beliefs people hold) provides us with a more holistic perspective on change resistance.

When we combine and use these models, we can develop a more comprehensive approach to guiding ourselves and other people through the change process. This involves considering both the social and emotional factors that can influence responses to change, as well as the cognitive biases and assumptions that can contribute to resistance.

Thank you, now let's make it happen.

Acknowledging people for their change resistance, giving them a voice, listening to them, helps them to cope with the change. Which is, as MasterCard would say, "priceless".

If we invest in people by taking time to listen to them, to interact with them, to care for them, asking them to try something new or different becomes easier. To turn that 'advantage' into a new or different set of actions and behaviors is an additional step.

But where do we start?

Movers, Moveables, Immoveables

> "There are those that move, those that are moveable, and those that are immovable" - *Benjamin Franklin*

People experience change at different rates and intensities. As change agents, we work as bridge builders between people who see the change differently.

Benjamin Franklin said that there are three classes of people:

- Those that move.
- Those that are moveable.
- Those that are immoveable.

While people are obviously more complex than that, as we've explored earlier, we can use this idea to help people move through change.

Early in change, the **Movers** take action because they're already excited about the change. The **Moveables** might wait around to see some social proof before they jump in. **Immovables** might be vocally opposed to the change, or they might just be upset they weren't included in the co-creation of it.

When we look back at the exploration of responses to change we've done earlier we can try to identify more in depth 'personas' within these three types of people.

Movers

- See the change as providing rewards for at least one of the 5 domains in the SCARF model. The reward identified being larger than the potential threat they experience in any of the other domains. If any at all.

- The change most likely aligns with their beliefs, or at least they are sufficiently open minded to reconsider their beliefs.

- People able to reconsider their beliefs are most often congruent. They understand that their beliefs have been formed by what has been made possible by themselves, others and the context they've worked in so far. They recognize that their actions, based on their beliefs, are the right ones to take given the specifics of the environment they worked in… till now.

- Movers may also include people that have gone multiple times through the change curve proposed by Satir. They've learned their way through managing their emotions in relation to stress and change.

- However, a warning for dealing with Movers. Once the reward is received and new beliefs have formed, these people might start to look for a new challenge. Seek more reward. They may try to force an increase of the speed of change. Often we cannot, yet, give in to their needs. This may turn them into Moveables or even Immoveables.

Moveables

- Are on a balance, they might not fully understand if and how the change is impacting their SCARF domains. Therefor they often take a wait and see stance. Quick, social proof of rewarding impact can pull them into the Movers group. Or push them to the Immoveables group if they identify more threat than reward in the results of the early actions.

- Carefully crafted stories can, early success in the change program can help show this group that there may be rewards possible by decomposing current beliefs and work up the ladder of inference based on different assumptions. It may take a few attempts to let them realize the data they select is not in line with a new, or future, reality anymore. This may be a slow process, if pushed (to hard), people will show grit and push back on the change.

- This group will look first and above all look from a distance to how others pass through the change curve. They won't resist actively, though aren't ready to throw themselves into the chaos stage either.

- Often we find people that take a Placating or Super-Reasonable stance when under stress. They'll avoid taking decisions that move them into the chaos stage. They avoid conflict. If we place this group under too much stress, they may turn to an Irrelevant stance.

- Avoid taking a Blaming stance as a change agent, keep in mind that these people might not have experienced much (impactful) change yet. They may therefore be more hesitant to jump on the emotional curve, and the change, than the Movers.

- Be aware of the influence the Immoveables can have on this group. Exposing Moveables to too much negativity makes it harder to help them see the positive sides of the change.

- Movers may also include people that have gone multiple times through the change curve proposed by Satir. They've learned their way through managing their emotions in relation to stress and change.

Immoveables

- Have identified the change as threatening more than rewarding. Contrary to the Movers, this group sees the change as providing threats for at least one of the 5 domains in the SCARF model. The threat identified being larger than the potential rewards they identify in any of the other domains. If any at all.

- These people are not able to see yet that their actions may not be contributing the same value anymore as they used to. This group hangs on to the status quo, sees the beliefs they hold, and their past actions as the reasons that brought them to the comfort zone they're in right now. They're not willing to give that up. Your change messes with their beliefs.

- Interestingly these people can be congruent. This is where saying thank you is important. They may provide us with contextual information we weren't aware of. They may provide excellent reasoning why this is not the right change, or the right time.

- We can recognize when no reasoning of such kind is present when people in this group take on an (extreme) Blaming or Irrelevant stance. Though Blaming still is a response, and as long as there is a response we have a connection, we have to be careful not to get sucked in to their stance. For change to move forward we can't afford to spend all our energy on this group.

- The most dangerous group within the Immoveables is by large those that take an Irrelevant stance. They just don't react. Though by using the SCARF model, and paying attention to their beliefs and actions we might get an understanding of why they take this stance, it is very hard to move people out of this.

Our responsibility as change agents is to live in the space between these groups. We can help in a few ways:

- Provide cover for the Movers so they can run amok.
- Facilitate workshops and conversations between the Movers and the Moveables.
- Have empathy for, and listen to the Immovables.

Moving the (first) Movers (first)

For change to be successful, we always need people to adopt new behaviors or adjust existing behaviors.

Let's turn one last time to models, to help people move through the personal part of the change. Which models are simple and helpful to achieve that and why?

There are several models that can be helpful for achieving behavior change, and the choice of model will depend on the specific context and goals of the change effort.

- **The Transtheoretical Model (TTM)**: The TTM, also known as the Stages of Change model, identifies five stages that people go through when changing behavior: precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance. By understanding which stage people are in, we can tailor our approach to support their progress toward behavior change.

- **The Social-Ecological Model**: The Social-Ecological Model suggests that behavior change is influenced by multiple factors at different levels, including individual, interpersonal, community, and policy factors.

- **The Fogg Behavior Model**: The Fogg Behavior Model suggests that behavior change occurs when three elements are present: motivation, ability, and a

trigger. By focusing on these three elements, we can design interventions that make it easier for people to adopt new behaviors or adjust existing ones.

By tailoring our approach to the specific context and goals of the change effort, we can increase the likelihood of successful behavior change. Of these model I have worked successfully with the Behavior Change Model of BJ Fogg, described in his book <u>Tiny Habits</u>.

The Fogg Behavior model

The Fogg Behavior model is a simple framework that helps people understand how to create new habits or behaviors. It's based on the idea that behavior change happens when three things come together at the same moment: motivation, ability, and a trigger, or a prompt.
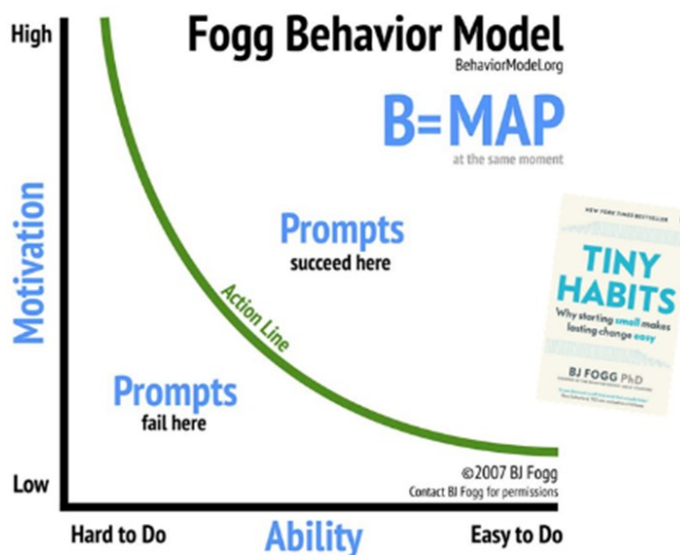
The simple explanation of this model:

- If we're highly motivated, but unable to do the 'new thing', it is unlikely we act, no matter what prompt we use.
- When our motivation is low, and we can't do the task… you guessed right: deadlock.
- When our motivation is low, but it is something we can easily do, we might give it a go.
- When motivation and ability are high, it is most likely we need little encouragement.

- The action line indicates where we can intervene. If we find the right prompt, the right trigger, somebody with lower motivation or ability may be prompt to action.

Keep in mind that we can't change people, or their behaviors. We can only help them through change if they want to move through the change. Trying to work with a model like this one with a group of Immovables will always be a deadlock situation.

Understanding the relation between Motivation, Ability and Prompt is important because we deal with people. People that prefer the comfort of the status quo, even if they know it isn't the best thing for them (or the company).

When it comes to 'motivation' and 'ability' and how prompts interact with them, think it through with an example:

- Remember the last times you heard your phone ringing and didn't pick up?

- Why?

- Were you reading a book, watching your favorite TV show, concentrating on a task at hand, …not him again…? – you didn't have the **motivation** to answer the phone.

- Or you might have been under the shower, in the bathroom, participating in an important meeting, driving your car? – you weren't **able** to pick up the phone.

- In both situations your response might have been different if the **prompt** had been different. If the call had come after your meeting or shower, if you hadn't been called 3 times already by that same person on that same day…

Or consider another example:

- Drinking too much or frequently alcohol is a bad thing. It's proven. We can read hundreds of reports on it. Still, many people fall victim to it.

- Anybody is able to drink 1 less (if not, consider connecting with the AA). And because we know it's bad, let's assume we're willing to change this habit, as well.

- The point then becomes to identify the prompt. Assume we always take a drink when they get back home from work.

- We can try to break that habit by not going (directly) home after work. Instead, we first go to a park for a walk. Pass by a supermarket, or do any other activity that might relieve us from the 'stress of a day on the job'.

- We can experiment with alternative drinks (juice, soda, tea, energy drinks...), or planning for an activity at home that keeps us away from the booze. Household tasks, place a book in the hallway, grab it and read, etc.

- Point is, it is hard to change a prompt like "get home after work", because in the end that's where we'll end up (given normal daily circumstances). In such cases we can define a 'replacement' strategy.

Let's look at the process proposed by BJ Fogg for the construction of desired behaviors and habits.

When you get started you can use this model like this:

1. Define and clarify an aspiration you have – What do you really want?

2. Use a "B-cloud" to explore behavior options that may get you to your aspiration.

3. Match with behaviors:

   a. Define the **impact** of each of the behaviors in your cloud on your aspiration (vertical, step 1).

b. Be honest with yourself about your **ability** to actual insert a new behavior in your daily routine (horizontal, step 2).

c. Select those with high impact and you know you can do (in the 'star' quadrant).
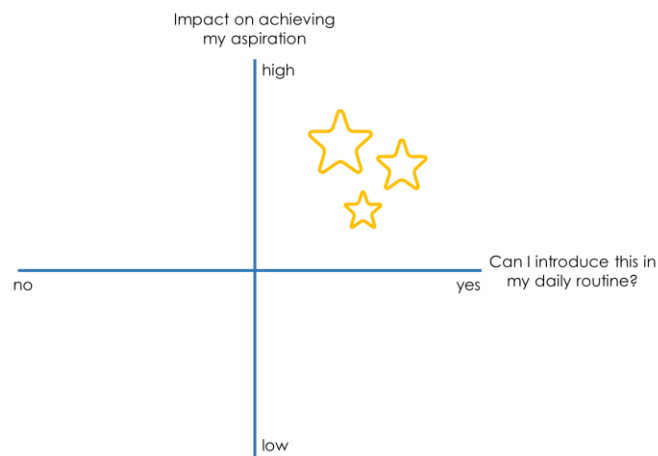
4. **Start tiny** – If you find it hard to get started, try to identify 'why' by checking that new behavior against *Time, Money, Physical Effort, Mental Effort and Routine*.

5. Find a good **prompt** – where does it fit, as precise as possible, in my daily routine?

6. **Celebrate** your success - before, while, and/or after; train the brain for success.

7. **Troubleshoot, iterate, expand** – using what BJ Fogg defines as "the skills of change".

That last step is what I believe makes working with BJ Fogg's model 'real'.

At the start of a change, or transformation, we know not enough to understand what the desired behaviors need to be. When we guide people towards a behavior or habit change we know little about what will truly work for them. We don't know which type of celebration we can recommend that they'll feel good about. We don't know how 'disruptive' we need them to be, or they are willing to be. We don't know yet if the context of the change will support or block the expansion of the new habit, etc…

Personal change, change of habits and attitudes are per definition complex. And because of that, can't follow a linear approach. We learn through trial and error.

There's another model similar to the Fogg Behavior Change model: James Clear's Atomic Habits. James lays out a simple 4-step process which he derives from a self-designed framework he calls the *Four Laws of Behavior Change*:

> "The **cue** triggers a **craving**, which motivates a **response**, which provides a **reward**, which satisfies the craving and, ultimately, becomes associated with the cue." – James Clear, Atomic Habits, p50.

The mayor differences, to me, between these two are:

- The background of their books/methods. James Clear comes with references to many studies and research, while BJ Fogg's focus is on experiences from the field.
- The sequence of actions differs. BJ Fogg invites us to first explore why and what we can do. James Clear seems to assume we know that already.
- Though Atomic sounds smaller than Tiny, the first starts from introducing a response as a whole, the latter describes a process of breaking that response down into steps if that's what we need to grow a habit.

I leave it up to you to decide which model you want to experiment with.

Summing it up

The discussed models provide a valuable framework for understanding human behavior and how to facilitate change in individuals and organizations. Here are some key points that I would take away from the information:

- The **SCARF model** highlights the importance of minimizing threats and maximizing rewards in order to create a positive environment for change. Using the model **promotes empathy and respect** for all employees.

- The **Ladder of Inference** helps us to understand how individuals form beliefs and make decisions, and how we can **facilitate a more open and collaborative decision-making process** within the organization.

- **Satir's change curve** provides insight into the **emotional stages** that individuals may experience during a change process, and how we can support them through these stages in order to achieve successful change.

- The **Fogg Behavior Model** emphasizes the importance of motivation, ability, and triggers in behavior change, and offers **practical strategies for making behavior change easier and more sustainable**.

These models provide a comprehensive understanding of human behavior and change, and can be applied to a wide range of organizational challenges. Understanding what underlies people's responses to change and our ability to deal with that makes us better change agents.

If we honestly bring ourselves into the equation, we have to accept we must start with ourselves. I invite you. The next time you see change resistance, get curious not furious. Say "**Thank you for resisting the change**", it'll make a difference from the start.

"Change is never painful,
only the resistance to
change is painful."

– Gautama Buddha