

The statistics are compelling. 60 to 70 percent of change projects fail. People are considered the main reason for this failure with resistance to change being among the top reasons.

When people hear change, the first inclination is to say change is difficult. Yet, it seems to depend on the type of change that creates the difficulty. This document aims to help identify the types of changes we adapt to willingly and those not so willingly. And it will provide insights that help us identify what supports or hinders the change.

## Personal change

A human has an extraordinary amount of change during a lifetime. In a nutshell we change from sitting to walking, adjust to school and working life, have job promotions or changes, get married and possibly divorced, may have children, and lastly life's biggest certainty we experience death. These are situational changes that help us grow and develop.

The changes we find hardest relate to breaking habits (e.g. breaking the habit of smoking or taking up exercise) and changing beliefs and consciousness. These changes take individuals out of their comfort zone and require a mindset shift in how to do things differently.

The hardest part about these changes is the ability to look into the mirror and honestly say that the person looking back at you is the biggest barrier to change. Still, achieving personal change is possible because we have control over the change. Individuals can reduce the uncertainty of the change outcome. They have more choice over the methods used or try different methods if one does not work for them.

## Organisational change

Organisational change is partially a fallacy. Organisations change to new structures, systems and processes. But it is people who work in and with the structure, the systems and processes. If people don't adapt to these changes then in essence they will do the same thing within a new context. Depending on the alignment of people's behaviour and this new context, the organisation will be more or less productive. In this sense it is people who change not organisations.

'Organisational change' is usually imposed. Having control, managing uncertainty and choosing the method are the three key differences between personal change and organisational change. The lower the rank in an organisation, the less control and the more uncertainty one has to deal with.

The less control someone has over change the more stress they experience. The stressors often relate to meeting basic needs i.e. the need to have an income to support self and family

or the need to feel connected with colleagues. Even the perceived inability to meet these needs generates fear and stress making these emotions a regular companion of change.

There are many different ways fear and stress shows up:

- Fight and flight mechanisms kick in at the first signs of change;
- Anxiety about the future;
- Emotional about the potential loss shown through frustration, crying, or increased absenteeism;
- Anger about the change shown in more passive-aggressive or aggressive behaviour;
- Physical or mental exhaustion influencing productivity and work quality.

**What change(s) do you currently experience in your life and what is your level of control?**

**I experience change(s) in \_\_\_\_\_**

**And I have (select applicable)    no control / little control / make the decisions / have influence / am engaged with the change / Other \_\_\_\_\_**

The brain and personal motivations are important during change. Neuroscience shows us how people react to change. An individual's motivation influences how we deal with change and how we weigh up options.

## Neuroscience

### Fight and Flight

A brain going through change uses three major parts: The first is the lizard brain which controls all survival functions such as eating, breathing, sleep and sex. The fight and flight mechanism is an instinctual way of survival. Hence, a change project that is announced to *create the urgency for change* in essence triggers the fight and flight mechanism in people. Therefore creating urgency has the opposing effect to what is intended and may increase the resistance to change before the change even begins.

### Habits

After the fight or flight response, people have an emotive response such as frustration, fear, anger or joy and excitement. Because the brain triggers emotions it is worth noting that it is people who trigger their own emotions, not other or the organisational change. In addition to emotions, the limbic brain also maintains habits and works ways to reduce uncertainty. And the easiest way for the brain is to stay within the current status quo despite the change.

Many habits happen on autopilot. In a sense this is good as it allows the brain to focus on areas that need problem solving. However, during change it is often this autopilot that needs updating. And this update requires conscious effort and energy.

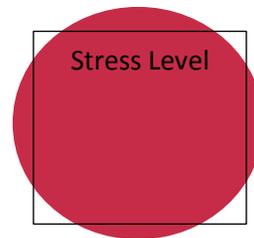
The third part of the brain, the pre-frontal cortex, is the area of decision making, strategy, judgement and emotional self-regulation. This part of the brain does not fully develop until 20 to 25 years of age. It is assumed that the interconnection between the limbic brain and the pre-frontal cortex creates emotional intelligence.

**Stress**

Living with uncertainty is stressful for most people. Stress attacks the immune system increasing bacterial and mental health issues, resulting in increased sick leave and absenteeism. When employees experience a combination of personal and workplace change, they are less likely to cope than those employees, who have at least one stable environment in their life.

Stress and habit changes need more brain fuel, as the body and mind need to work harder. We only have about 2 hours’ worth at the best of times. The only thing that can recharge brain fuel is a break, food, relaxation, sleep or exercise.

**On a scale from 1 (low) to 10 (high) where do you place your stress level in regards to the above change(s)?**



Let’s have a look what motivations trigger the stress.

**What Motivates You?**

Whatever is important in your life will dictate how you react to the change. If the change influences the thing that is important to you then you will be more stressed and resist it more. If the change does not induce a loss you will cope with it better.

**Here is a checklist of possible motivations that help create resistance. Tick those that apply to you before reading more. I am motivated by my need(s) to**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> achieve financial security</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> provide for myself and my family</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> stay safe and out of harm</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> have control over my life</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> reduce emotional stress</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> keep a sense of belonging</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> feel connected to the community/team/unit</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> live life in harmony</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> feel respected for who I am</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> be recognised for my skills and talents</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> have opportunities to excel at what I do</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> keep my current status</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> keep my current influence / power</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> have a sense of achievement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> have autonomy over my life / work</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> have challenges that test me</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> have opportunities to learn and grow</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> have responsibility and accountability</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> find meaning in life / work</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> have a sense of purpose</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> do things I am passionate about</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> live life with integrity</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> make a difference in the life of others</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> collaborate with others for the common good</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> mentor or coach others</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> support and serve those around me</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> help others meet their needs</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> see what could be for the future</li> </ul>
---	---

**What would happen if you can no longer meet this/these need/s?**

---

---

The left column of the above table shows basic needs we all need for survival, relationships and self-esteem. If lost these needs may trigger self-interest and fears. The fears may have a paralysing effect getting us stuck and creating resistance. During change this is the most challenging place to be, as the change will happen without us and we are left behind. Often people don't go with the change until the pain of it is unbearable.

The right hand column shows the needs for growth and working for the common good. When these needs are no longer met, people experience a dissonance with the organisation or life situation that is uncomfortable and therefore will drive us towards change. Motivated people and those with higher cognitive and emotional intelligence can live with more controlled uncertainty than others. Often these are the people organisations lose. Yet, these are the people who will help grow the organisation after the change.

**In what other ways can you meet your needs arising from the change?**

---

---

**What Motivates You to Change?**

Knowing what motivates you is important. But is usually not enough to motivate change. There are several other essentials:

*Intention:* transformation and change adaptation is a personal choice, whether this is for home or for work situations.

**What choice do you make?** \_\_\_\_\_

*Attention:* Paying attention means leaving resistance behind.

**Are you paying attention to what could be?**

**Are you open to new perspectives that might help you adapt?**



*Repetition:* Changing habits needs practice.

**What do you do to help with practice?**

---

---

## Change Helpers

Regardless if the change is of personal or organisational, it is you, yes **You**, who needs to do something about it. Because it's personal, you are in control of what method you choose to adapt to the change.

As discussed previously, our habits and beliefs need to come out of autopilot and get reset to new ways of thinking and doing things. There are several ways of helping change along.

- Training and Education: Taking up opportunities for growth.
- Self-reflection: looking in the mirror and seeing yourself requires openness of mind and honesty to self. This helps with attention and fosters practice.
- Setting action triggers: this helps with remembering to practice.
- Celebrating: Develop positives around the change by acknowledging and celebrating progress. Be kind to yourself and have patience, but don't make excuses.
- Coaching: may help with overcoming barriers to intention, and keeping focus on attention and practice.
- Keep up the brain fuel: look after yourself with rest, relaxation, sleep, exercise, and nutritious food.

Remember, ultimately change is deeply personal regardless where it occurs.

More information is available in the development manual [Looking Inside Out: Know yourself to lead self and others through change.](#)

Claudia co-creates change working with board members, executives and operational staff across the community, government, higher education, tourism and manufacturing sectors. Her passion is helping people and organisations to live up to their potential by creating healthier workplace cultures from the top down, the grass-roots up and inside out.

She works with clients improving work environments, trust and team cohesion to help businesses unlock growth in people and productivity, decrease conflict, and encourage greater innovation and collaboration. Over the past 20 years her work has included change projects with a multicultural and multigenerational focus.

Most often she is called in during a disruption in the market calling for change, after a staff engagement survey, during team conflict issues, a merger, or a change of leadership.

She holds qualifications for the Master of Business Administration with specialisation in change management and governance, a Bachelor of Commerce with majors in marketing and electronic commerce and a Diploma of Project Management.

She has volunteered actively on boards and reference groups since 2005. Claudia founded a not-for-profit organisation called Junior Chamber International Illawarra for which she received numerous leadership and honorary awards.

Claudia is a valued speaker at numerous conferences and forums.



Phone: +61 (02) 8005 7240 | Skype: CPB555  
Mobile: +61 (0)439 457 240 | Email: [claudia@culturalinspirations.com.au](mailto:claudia@culturalinspirations.com.au)

Connect:  |  |  | 