



Inclusive Change

All of us at sr4 have spent a big part of our lives thinking about how change happens in teams, communities, and organizations. We've experienced it – on the receiving side, and on the planning side. And as consultants and practitioners, we've developed a point of view – which we indicate when we place the word “inclusive” in front of the word “change.” It means:

- *Inclusive* of all the people who are affected by any change initiative.
- *Inclusive* of the different ways people approach the work of creating change.
- *Inclusive* of how humans respond emotionally to change.
- *Inclusive* of the ways the human brain can be an inhibitor of change, and...
- *Inclusive* of all the context-building that needs to happen around the transition from “the old and familiar” to “the new and different.”

For example:

Inclusive of all the people who are affected by any change initiative.

We know from experience that there are two kinds of people who are involved in a change initiative: THE FEW who are designing it, and THE MANY who are affected by it. THE FEW have been driving hard toward a finish line of “Announcement Day.” For THE MANY,

Announcement Day is the beginning of a major disruption in their lives. We can't announce the change and then tell everyone it will be "business as usual" until we get back to them with more details. There has to be an inclusive plan for the transition period.

Inclusive of the different ways people approach the work of creating change.

Everyone reacts to change in their own way, but we have found it helpful to think of three large categories of need:

- The need to understand what's changing, why it's happening, and the vision for the future.
- The need to see how the change will affect people and how the organization intends to care for those who are most negatively affected.
- The need to know what the new rules and expectations are, and how they can get started as soon as possible.

In organizations, people tend to be more dominant in one of these needs. There has to be a plan that includes each of these needs.

Inclusive of how humans respond emotionally to change.

The human response to change can range, much like Kübler-Ross's stages of grief, from denial, to anger, to exploration to acceptance. If they're in denial or anger on announcement day or immediately following, they're not "available" for explanations of how or why the change is happening. They're not capable of "business as usual" until new structures are put in place. And they can't ignore the fact that people they know will be leaving. There are practices that can help people work through these stages and arrive at "acceptance."

Inclusive of the ways the human brain can be an inhibitor of change.

In the human brain, the shortest route to action is through engrained habits. Doing something different would take more time and energy. This natural inclination comes into play when organizations introduce major changes. Being “inclusive” of this reality requires, first of all, acknowledging the power of engrained habits as inhibitors of change, and secondly, working with THE MANY to develop new habits.

The human brain also can label any change as a “threat,” which can induce fear and anxiety, which can activate fight or flight responses. We can be inclusive of this negative tendency by providing “certainty” in the change process, even when certainty of outcomes is unquantifiable.

Inclusive of all the context-building that needs to happen around the transition from “the old and familiar” to “the new and different.”

On announcement day for an organizational change, there are always two definitive groups of people: THE FEW who have been designing the change, and THE MANY who are affected by it. THE FEW have a rich context for the change, which was acquired through months of information-gathering and debate. And they have a PowerPoint deck that clearly lays out the changes that are coming. THE MANY have no context at all, and in the absence of context, the deck falls short of meeting their needs. And here’s the bedrock of the sr4 approach to inclusive change: you can never take the context of THE FEW and duplicate it for THE MANY. But you can help THE MANY create their own context for embracing the change initiative.

In Practice

We have worked with organizations that are merging two companies into one, that are announcing a reduction in force, that are taking a public company private or a private company public, that are refocusing the organization on its culture and values, that are making a fundamental strategic change.

And what we typically find is a core team that is highly committed to risk management. They're creating messaging for shareholders, investors, customers, news media, and employees. All the messages are explanatory – the business case, the investment thesis, the FAQs, the press release, the conference calls, the timeline.

Our role is to protect one of the organization's most valuable assets: the "buy-in" of all the people who do the everyday work of the enterprise. People who are hearing the news for the first time, with zero context for the change that's coming. People whose first reaction will be emotional. People who've been working hard to do their jobs but are now in limbo regarding how their job will be different. People, in some cases, who are worried about who will still have jobs and who won't.

At the planning table, with so much emphasis on Day Zero, announcement day, sr4 is the one who's asking: What about Day One, Day Two, Day Three, Week Two, Week Three? In all the planning for the end of the old way and the beginning of the new way, what about the time in-between, the transition? How do we meet the need for different contexts for different people at different times?

In one recent consultation, we were adamant in asking these questions – in the presence of a leadership team that was strong, a business case that was air-tight, and an organization that had pioneered a market segment. And though our inclusive approach was challenged at first, it was ultimately accepted and incorporated in the final plan. The CEO later said it was the best change initiative he'd ever been through, and the HR lead said she had no idea there was another way to initiate change, but we had shown her one.

Something You Can Do, Now

Check out the book, *Change Intelligence: Use the Power of CQ to Lead Change that Sticks*, written by a friend of ours, Barbara Trautlein. At the beginning of Part 1, she writes, “*You’ll explore the psychological and neurological bases for why we often struggle with change. Zeroing in on the unique change challenges experienced by leaders at different levels in the organizational hierarchy, you’ll see how CQ operates in frontline, mid-management, and executive roles.*”

In those two sentences, Barbara describes the essence of our longstanding curiosity about why organizational change is so hard. There are *psychological* reasons. There are *neurological* reasons (the brain can go caveman on us, in times of change). Our approach is inclusive of those human realities. And her mention of “the different levels in the organizational hierarchy” hits the bullseye of our focus – *different people needing different contexts at different times.*

Something We Can Do, Together

Next time you're approaching an organizational change that requires a plan for how you break the news to those who will be affected, we should talk. We'll take the side of those who have no context for what's coming, and how you can help them quickly build a context of their own, which will help them more quickly align with your change intentions. Here's the big idea: *YOUR context for change is NOT transferable, but THEY can create THEIR OWN context for moving toward the new future.* The questions are, how long will that take, and how much will it cost the organization? We are on the side of these answers: not long, and not much. It all fits within the sr4 context of *The Healthy Organization*, which includes *Cohesive Teams, Thriving Cultures, and Healthy Leaders*, in addition to *Inclusive Change*. These are the building blocks that have emerged, for us, from our belief that most people truly want to do great work, but *things* get in the way. Many of those "things" are accepted as *just the way organizations are* – which we have come to see as *just the way organizations might tend to be, but not irrevocably so!*

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