

Managing Change in Education



By Roger Terry

What do we really mean and understand by the much overused phrase, 'managing change in education'?

The impact of change

In the education arena, the changes that most often impact schools are in response to the latest government or Ofsted directives. Much of the change in schools is stimulated externally and is non-negotiable: changes may range from subtle restructuring through to wholesale shifts in the curriculum (or both), and can be accompanied by a squeeze on budgets.

Perhaps what we *really* mean is: when the change arrives, how do we manage the people? Their states, thinking and objections – both overt and covert.

Why is change challenging in education?

In my work in the non-education field it has become clear that strongly bonded, cohesive teams are able to navigate change very effectively with less drama, less pain, and with a more workable result.

When I turn my attention to schools, their unique structure mitigates against building strong teams unless the head teacher and senior management team hold an unwaveringly clear focus on bringing this about.

Teachers spend the majority of their time in their own classroom kingdom and much less time working in a team context, whereas in non-educational organisations as much as five hours a day is spent interacting and working in a team. Teams in schools tend to come together less frequently, and do so mainly for meetings or INSET days. In addition to this, having your kingdom threatened by change may very well produce resistance and defensive behaviours.

This conscious or unconscious attitude can become the underlying tone during meetings and workshops intended to inform or decide on how to 'manage change'. All in all, the job of bringing in the changes becomes more difficult and problematic because of this misalignment of intents.

How can using NLP help?

NLP is one of the best sets of tools for achieving alignment and for creating sustainable ecological change. Understanding the principles of change and then having good presuppositions (beliefs) to hold the process together is a vital place to start.

Principles

David McClelland, who spent his career studying motivation, has three conditions that need to be fulfilled before change can take place. Addressing these in a change process will help frame change initiatives. Although not originally from the NLP



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world, these guiding principles have been adopted by many NLP professionals.

- 1 You must want to change (motivation, dissonance, desire)
- 2 You must know how to change (tools, methods, models)
- 3 You must have the opportunity to change (space, time, process).

Personally, I add a fourth: 'Be prepared to be different after the change.'

Beliefs

Then, from the NLP world, holding presuppositions relevant to the type of change process is important for managing mind-sets.

Here are my three favourites.

- 1 The meaning of your communication is the response you get
- 2 We are always communicating
- 3 The person / group with the greatest flexibility will have most influence in a situation.

Questions

One of the advantages of applying NLP is the ability to ask some very precise questions. The language models are a fabulous tool to scope situations and lay the ground for the best change programme to be delivered.

Asking questions when faced with the job of 'managing change' is a wise move, especially before taking on a role of managing change in an organisation.

As with any potential confrontation, what is needed are accurate common maps before a campaign can be successful. (Imagine what chaos would ensue by attempting to win a battle if all your command units were operating from different maps.)

- What is the change a response to, and where is it coming from?
- What, precisely, is going to change?
- How quickly do we need to act?
- How many people are involved / affected?
- Do they have the skills / experience needed?
- Have the barriers been identified, and can they be removed?
- What problems are currently being focused on, and are they actually important in the change context?
- What is the current climate in the organisation?
- How much flexibility is available?
- Is there a readiness for change?
- What are the consequences of the change?

Using the meta model, we can certainly begin to ask more focused questions that will move towards solutions that are both workable and ecological from a system perspective.

Exploration process

In *The NLP Toolkit*, Richard Churches and I describe a method of school improvement that uses Robert Dilts’ Neuro-Logical Levels in the iceberg format (tool 67). Since writing the book, we have updated our approach somewhat. In order to help teams visualise the change and gain involvement, we have included the Present State to Desired State model as part of the process which can easily and simply be represented on a flip chart (see Figure 1).

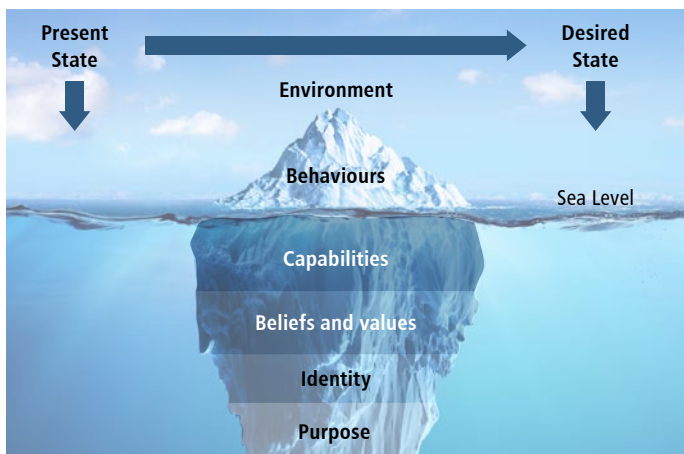


Figure 1

You can use this model to map out the range of improvements and changes that would work best. Find any sticking points that lie below the waterline and decide how to address them. This can be done as a team or multi-team process, it requires a good level of facilitation and process management in order to produce solid results. (Place the summarised and collated results on either side of the iceberg.)

The iceberg has six levels – three of which are observable and often attract more attention:

- Environment
- Behaviours
- Capabilities (or skills) – only visible when they emerge as behaviours. This level includes the untapped talent in your school.

The next three levels lie deeper, are often invisible and are part of the unspoken traditions that all institutions tend to generate over time.

By paying attention to these categories we can begin to create



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plans that will work:

- Beliefs and values
- Identity
- Purpose.

Survey present situation

Familiarise yourself with the model, categories and the types of questions that are helpful to ask (available in *The NLP Toolkit*).

Begin your analysis with the environment category and work towards the purpose level, identifying the gaps and revealing any sticking points or obstacles.

In each category, take care not to mix categories together. This will help you define your present state or situation.

This is a great exercise to do with teams using post-it notes on a large wall.

Once you have completed your survey you can begin to sort and map the essential parts of your change plan, which will take you to a vision of the desired situation.

Formulate the change strategy

It’s now time to design your desired state or situation, and we reverse the process.

- 1 This time start with the *vision* – make it short, clear and succinct to bring clarity.
- 2 Define or refine your *mission*
- 3 Make a comparison between the current *values* and *beliefs* that you uncovered in your review, to any new values and beliefs that will be needed in order to complete the mission
- 4 Are there any *new capabilities* (or skills) that will be required in order to fulfil the vision and mission, and actualise the beliefs and values needed?
- 5 What *behaviours* are useful in building the capabilities?
- 6 Finally, what changes are needed in the environment in order to support the *vision, mission, values* and *beliefs, capabilities, and behaviours*?

Create detailed plans and an execution strategy.

Design your plan to create shifts in the levels of thinking in the iceberg that are currently most out of alignment with the overall purpose and mission.

Your aim is to create alignment of categories and people so that a supportive framework is built and the change can be a success.

Communicate the vision, mission, values, behaviours, plan and consequences clearly and concisely to everyone – even if it seems they are not directly affected.

The most common reason for resistance and sabotage is that people have been kept in the dark, feel ignored and think they don’t know what is happening.

Remember: you cannot not communicate.

So if you are a leader then it’s best to be upfront and decide what to communicate rather than simply hope that your message will get through.

Because, whatever you do in a change situation, something will be understood or misunderstood and it’s down to you when ‘Managing Change’ to communicate to succeed. ●