

"Your job as a change agent is to bring meaningful change. That is, change that matters to people. Change isn't about tools and techniques. You have to *love* what you do, and if you don't love bringing meaningful change, get off the path!"

I heard these words from Daryl Conner at The Art and Science of Change conference a couple of years ago. He said his fear was that change management was headed too far down the tools, techniques and process path as opposed to the artful path.

Much of my research for the Lean Change Management book showed how traditional change management is focused on tools, techniques and linear, plan-driven change models. While useful, sometimes you, as a change agent, need to rely on your gut and instincts.

I was happy to hear a thought-leader like Daryl make such a bold statement, partially because it aligns with my beliefs and partially because his influence is powerful in the traditional change management world.

Hopefully you've read the story of The Commission in Lean Change Management! If you didn't, let's just say I described how we learned the hard lesson that pushing process doesn't work. People don't resist change; they resist having change *forced* on them. One of the best pieces of advice I've ever received, with respect to that, comes from Esther Derby, who was one of the facilitators of the AYE conference I mentioned in Chapter 1 of Lean Change Management.

Excited that I had developed new ninja skills for facilitating change, I had a one-on-one conversation with Esther and asked her how I could go back to the organization I was working with to unleash these ideas on them.

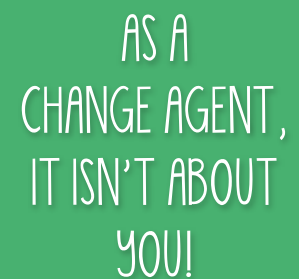
I'll never forget her reply.

"Jason, it isn't about you."

Simple and powerful.

I'm not the one who has to live with the consequence of the change I'm helping facilitate. The people in whichever organization I'm working with are. My responsibility as a change agent is to help them navigate through the change without robbing them of the painful lessons they need to learn in order to internalize the change, and attach their own meaning to it.

A delicate balancing act indeed.



AS A  
CHANGE AGENT,  
IT ISN'T ABOUT  
YOU!

## THE ARTFUL APPROACH

I was working with an enterprise organization, post-Commission days, and our change team had created, and communicated, a whole bunch of changes that would help software teams deliver features faster. Don't worry if you're not technical, that's not the point!

The person leading this initiative, Mark, had learned that one of the teams had run into a problem that our technical improvements would have prevented. And he was a little ticked!

*“But we TOLD them this already! This has been in place for weeks, what's wrong with THEM!?”*

Do you remember having a conversation with someone who said *“hey, I already told you that! Why didn't you listen to me?”* That seems to be a daily conversation with my kids!

But what's really going on with this team? Are they clueless? Didn't they read the memo? Didn't they visit the Sharepoint site with the instructions for how to implement this technical stuff to avoid this problem?

Even if they did, there's no substitute for experience. Sometimes people need to experience hitting a wall with a change so they can trigger the thinking part of their brain. All the *telling* isn't going to help...sometimes.

The artfulness of change facilitation is about knowing that different people, teams and departments progress through change on their own schedules. There's no way, which I know of, to *ensure* change or speed it up. As a change facilitator, the best you can do is help people make sense of the chaos they're experiencing so they can internalize the change.

The good news is that there are plenty of models that you can pull from to help you, as a change facilitator, make sense of your observations.

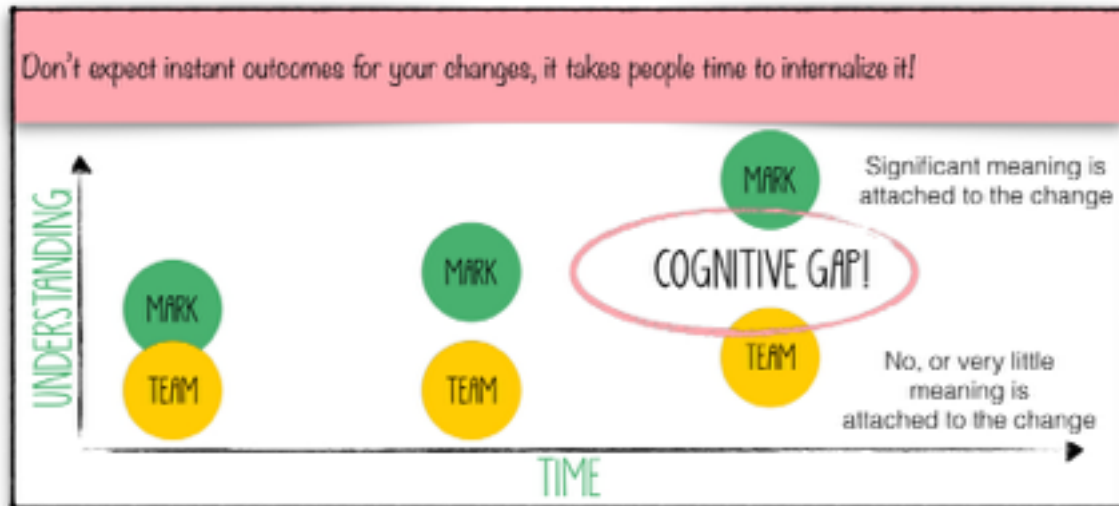
## THE TIME CONTINUUM OF MEANING

Let's dig deeper into what could have been going on for the team I mentioned earlier. Mark had been working on that particular change for months. He had spend an enormous chunk of time understanding how to implement this new technical process, invested in tools, talked to many people in the local technical community and even woke up in the middle of the night with new ideas! Simply put, his passion for what he was doing was off the charts!

The more he read, the more he was convinced that this new technical process was the right thing for the company. He was constructing his own meaning of how this process would improve the company and make it a better place to work for everybody. The more meaning he attached

to this technical process, the more his own confirmation bias and beliefs were re-enforced. How could anyone *not* understand what Mark was talking about? It was so clear to him!

That happens for a reason and here's a visual attempt to explain what could be going on:



You may be reading this and thinking “*bah, that team just didn't know about it!*”. You might even think, “*this makes sense in theory, but how can I apply this practically?*” You might even be thinking, “*this is GOLD! I completely get it!*”

If you had those thoughts or other similar ones, you've proven my point!

The larger the gap, the more friction there will be. Of course, some people will share the same beliefs as Mark so the gap will be less of a concern. Those will be the early adopters that you, as a change agent, can latch on to.

They will help spread the change because they *get it* right away.

At some point, understanding the difference in the cognitive gap can help you figure out if you should put a particular change on hold or not. Sometimes it just isn't the right time to implement a change.

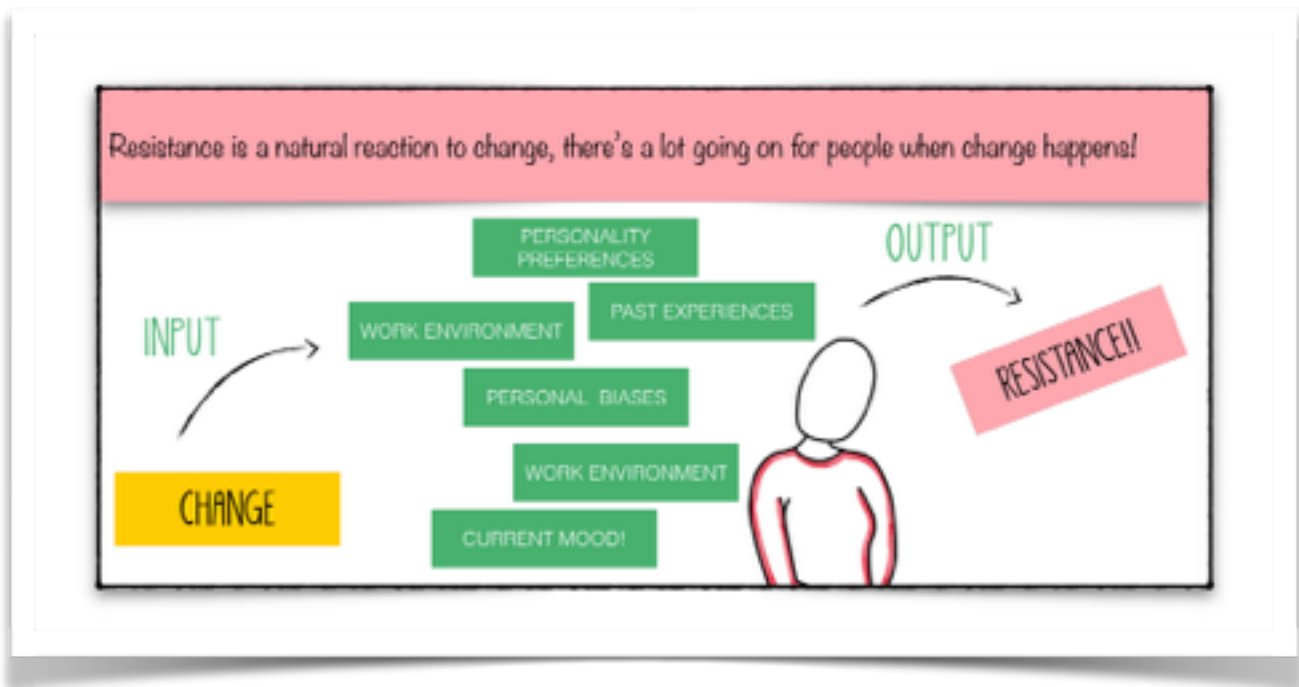
# HOW “CHANGE RESISTANCE” MANIFESTS

My world of change involves helping organizations use Agile practices to discover more effective ways for managing work and people but regardless of how an organizational change is triggered, there’s a lot going on for the people affected by the change.

My experience has shown me that people have strongly held beliefs when it comes to managing work. Traditionalists who value certainty feel traditional, plan-driven approaches are best. They believe these traditional practices bring certainty and that they ensure success. Others believe that traditional practices don’t work. They believe that collaboration between people is more important than budgets, status reports and Gantt charts.

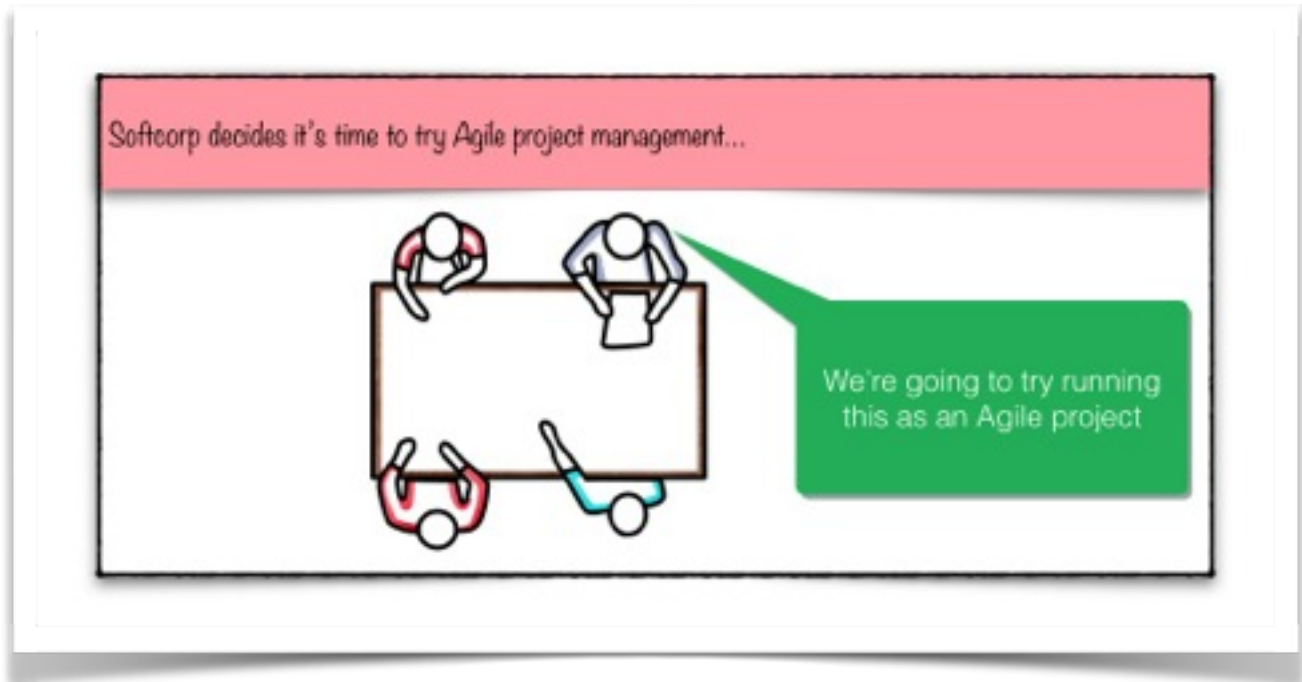
The difference between those belief systems is the problem, not the people themselves. Let’s look at an example of how I’ve seen traditionalists and non-traditionalists clash when “Agile” is introduced.

This example shows a model referred to as the Ladder of Perception, or Ladder of Inference, in action. This model was introduced by Chris Argyris and popularized by Peter Senge. It’s a model that describes how we make sense of our environment and events that shape our lives.



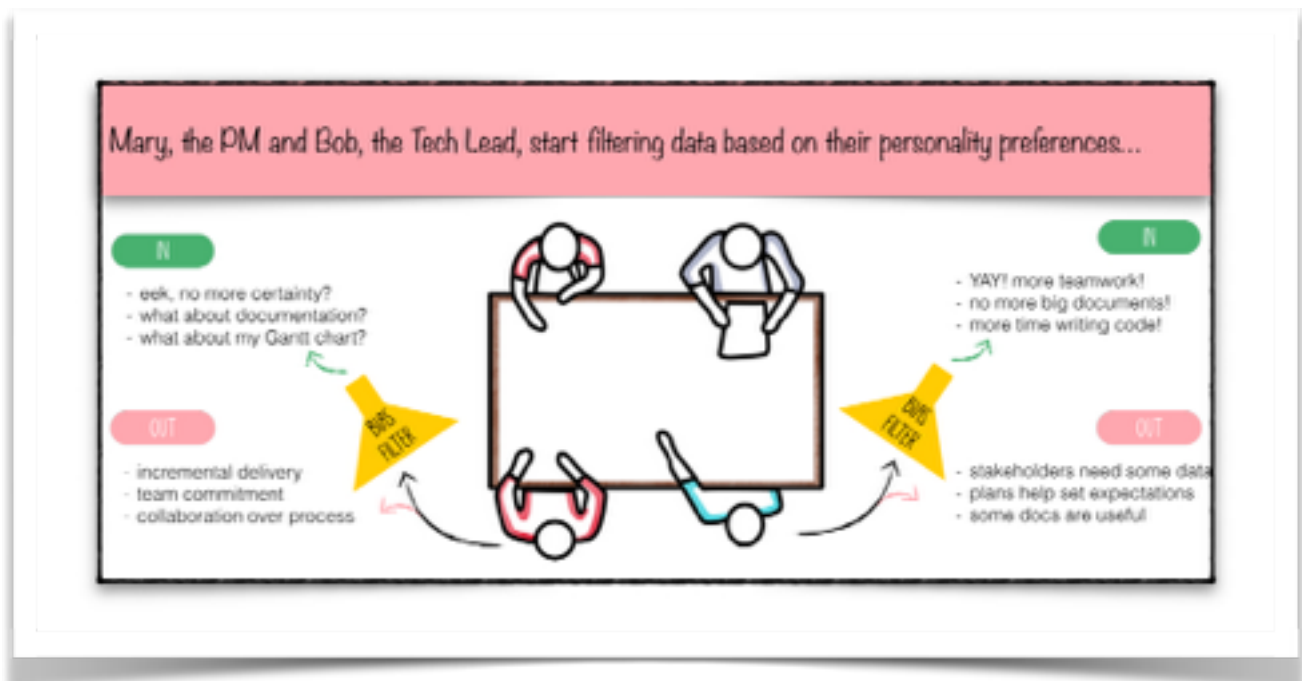
## RAW DATA

Imagine you're seeing a video playback of an event. The first rung of the ladder is devoid of interpretation.



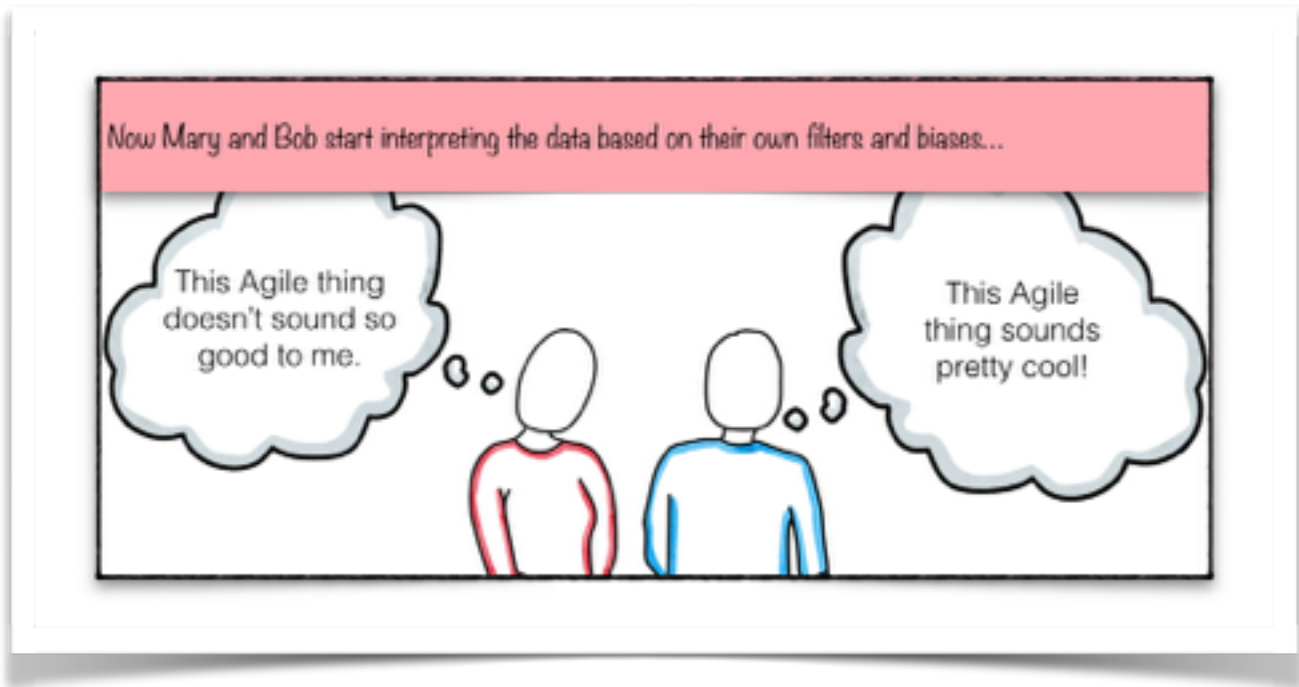
## FILTER DATA

On the second rung, people begin to filter data based on their own biases and personality preferences.



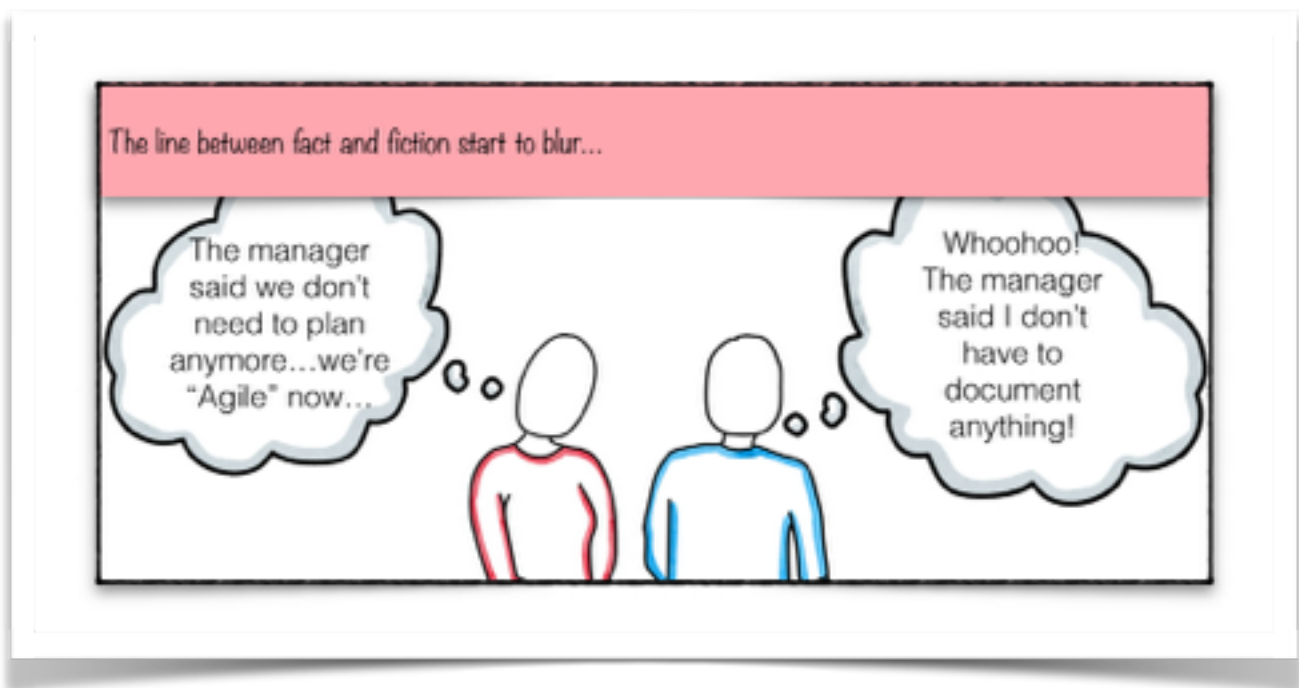
## MEANING

On the third rung, people begin to attach meaning to what data has passed through their bias filter.



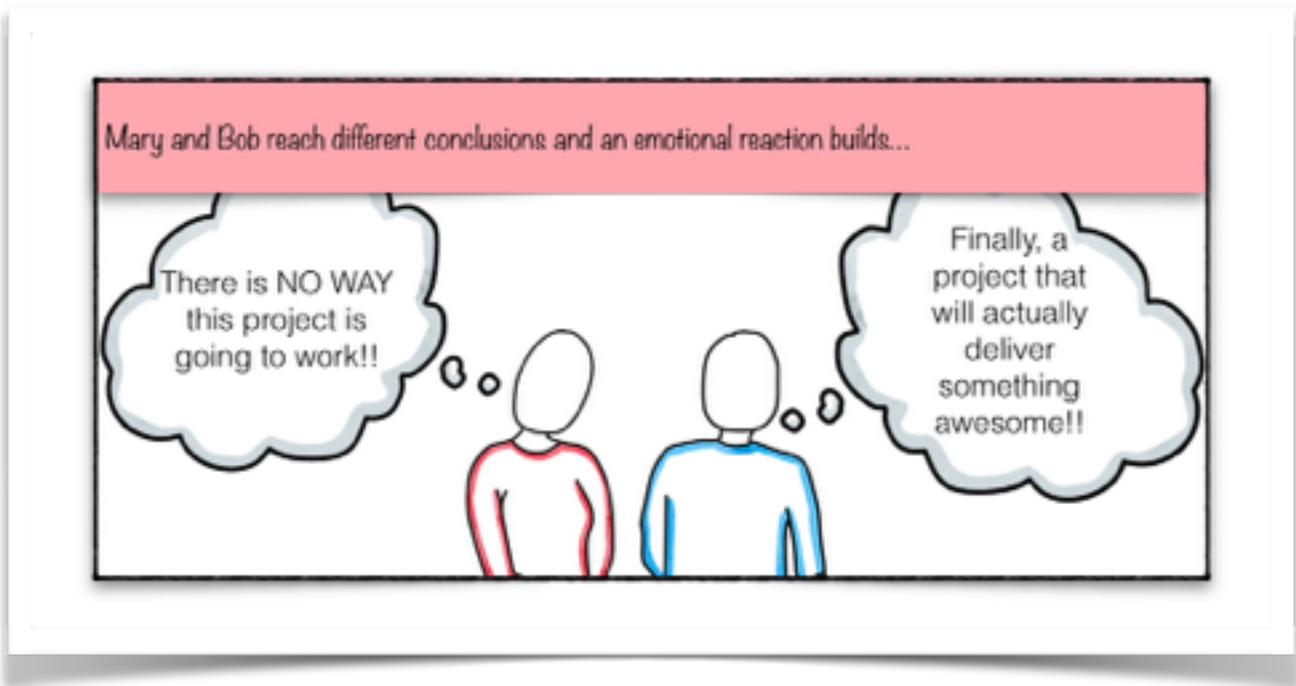
## ASSUMPTIONS

On the 4th rung, the line between fact and fiction begin to blur and people make assumptions about the meaning they've attached to the event.



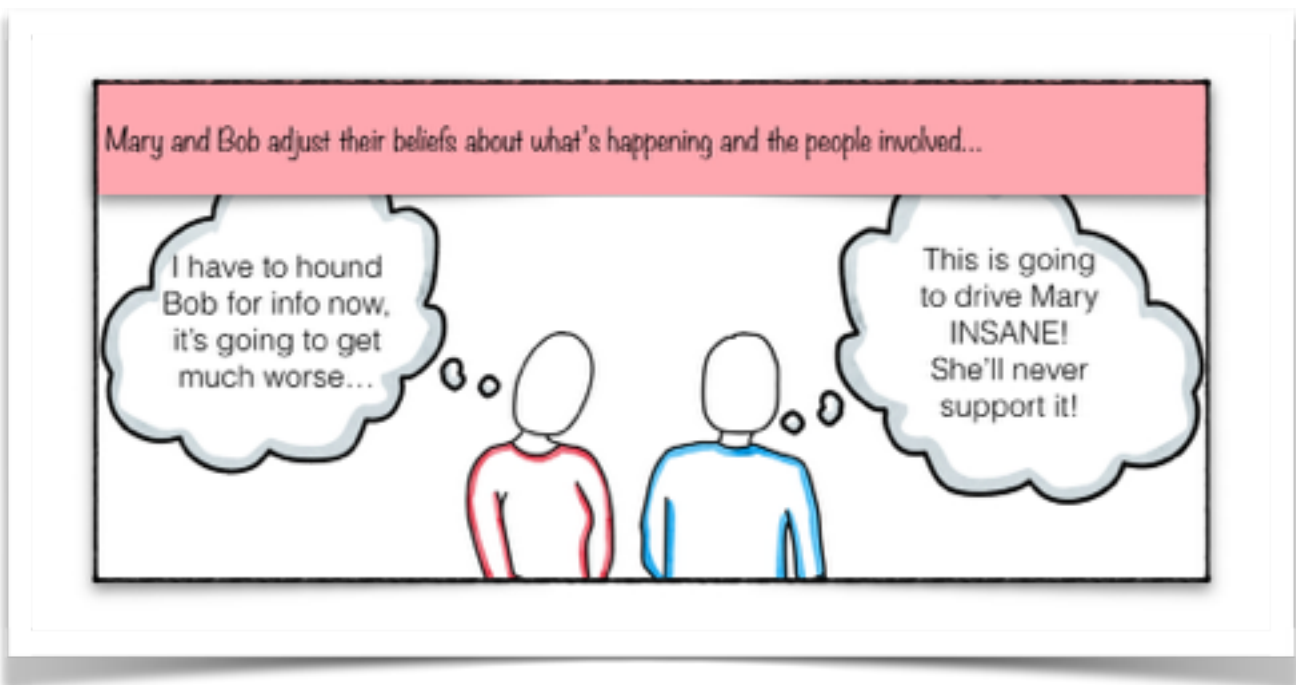
## CONCLUSIONS

On the 5th rung, people reach conclusions based on their assumptions and an emotional reaction is developed.



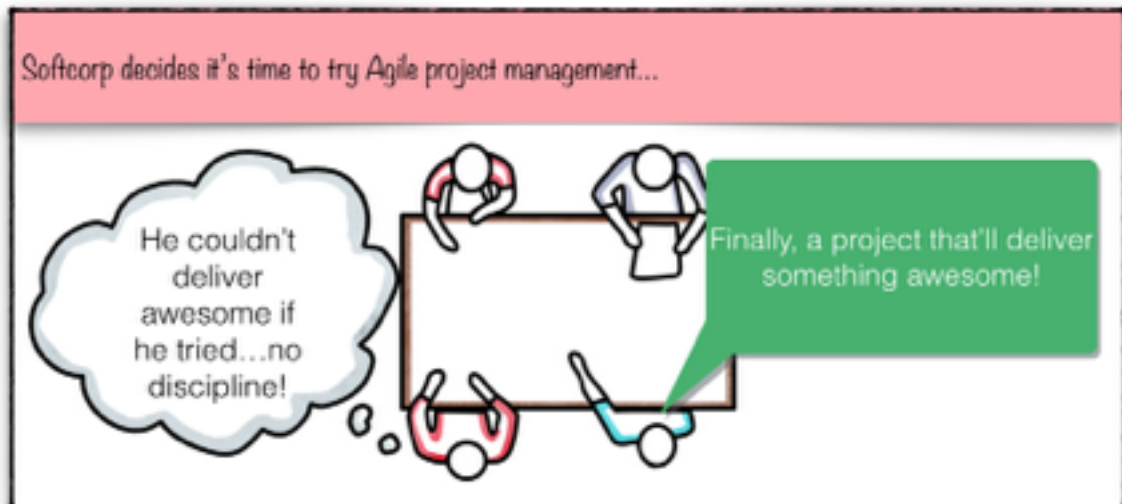
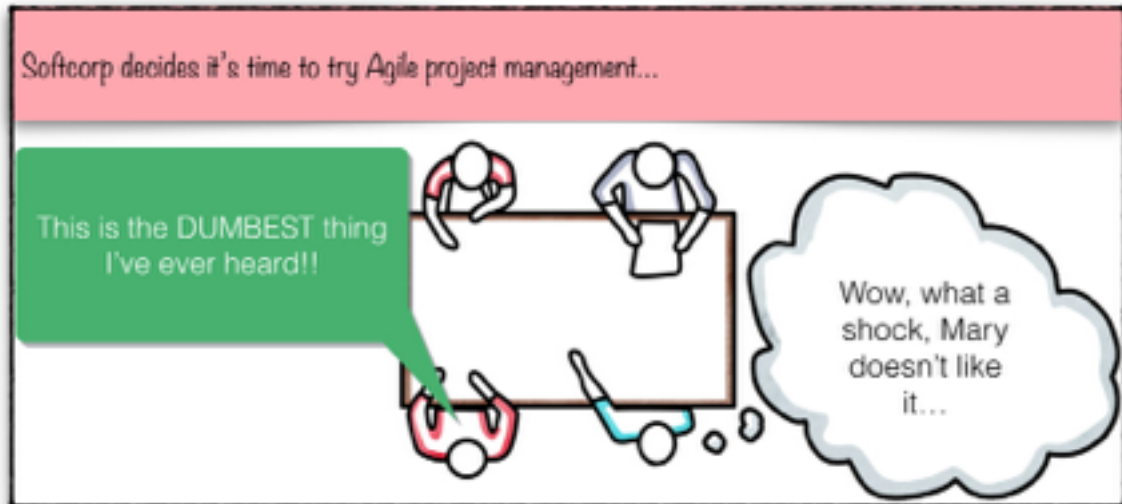
## ADJUST BELIEFS

On the 6th rung, existing beliefs are re-enforced, opposing beliefs create a stronger emotional reaction.



# ACTIONS

In the blink of an eye, we progress through all the rungs and react to the event.



# “CHANGE RESISTANCE” IS NATURAL!

When there is that large gap between belief systems, we humans seek out people who share our biases. That creates a re-enforcing loop and makes it harder for us to consider new data. That loop is hard to avoid, and to exit once we’ve entered it. If you’ve ever been locked in a discussion with someone who you believe is clearly crazy for thinking the way they do, you’ve experienced what the Ladder of Perception is all about!

My experience has taught me that feedback-driven approaches to change are more effective than planning. While I try to consider other perspectives, sometimes my biases get the best of me. The good thing is: I know when my biases are taking over. When I presented at a local Change Management conference a few years ago, someone presented an 18-step plan that *ensures* successful change. I needed to wait for the thinking part of my brain to come back online because my first reaction was, well, not so positive! That said, there were a couple of good ideas but I still disagreed with the overall assertion that detailed up-front planning alone *ensures* successful change.

It’s the difference in beliefs between people that causes the symptoms of resistance. We assume people are bad and resist change, which is not the case.



# SHORT-CIRCUITING THE LADDER

The good news is, there are techniques you, as a facilitator of change, can use to help people align to changes you're implementing.

## Understand How People Process Change

Josephine was the most detailed-oriented project manager I've ever worked with. Her knack for uncovering, and maintaining, excruciating levels of detail on large projects was simply amazing to me.

I had numerous one-on-one meetings with her when her organization decided it was time to "go Agile". It was easy for me to see she was a little freaked out by this change. The team she was working with was full of early adopters who loved the ideas that Agile project management brought and I could immediately see the impact this difference in beliefs was having on Josephine and the rest of the team.

The more she pushed the team for details – as she had always done before – the more the team became irritated. A few team members had said to me that they needed her to back off the details and let them figure it out.

The problem was, from Josephine's perspective, that she was on the hook for the project and the lack of control was un-settling for her. It was so un-settling that she asked her manager to make the project go back to the old project management methods they used to use.

This situation is a classic example of where I've seen less-experienced change agents label Josephine as a resister. Not me. It was obvious this change was really hard for her so I took a different approach.

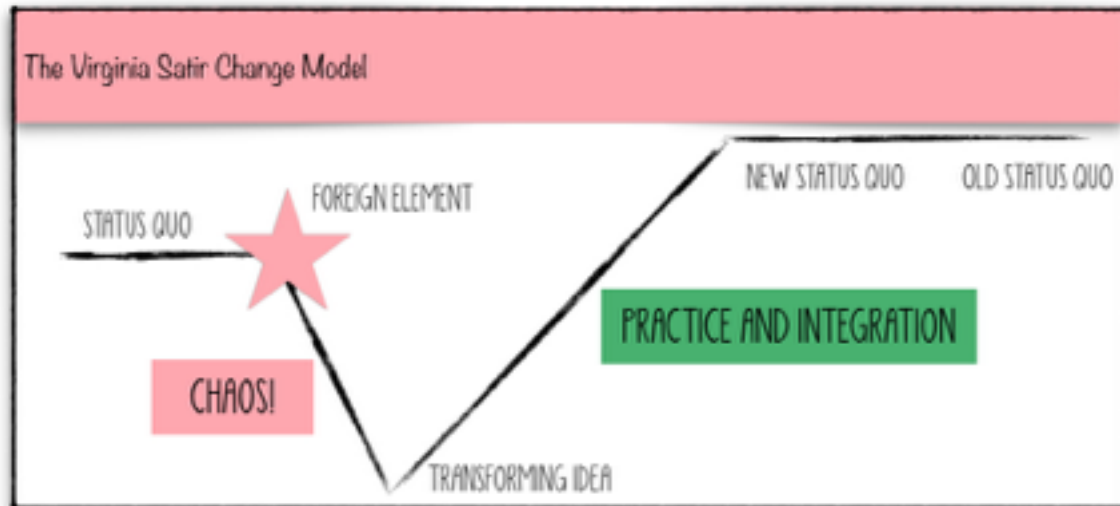
Together with her manager and key team members, we explored possible compromises that would balance Josephine's need for certainty with the team's need to take on more responsibility for defining the scope and schedule for the project.

We visualized the work on a big-visible wall that showed all the project milestones, dependencies on other teams and asked Josephine to back-off on the details during our bi-weekly planning sessions. In exchange for that, the team agreed to let her manage the overall program schedule and produce the regular status reports that were common in the 'old world'.

"Utter waste!" I hear you say? Yes. Sometimes that's necessary. In this case we wanted Josephine to feel comfortable with the change because we understood that she could help the team, if we helped her find some comfort amidst all the changes that were going on.

## People Progress Through Change at Different Rates and Intensities

The Virginia Satir change model – which I described in Chapter 1 of the book – describes how people process change.



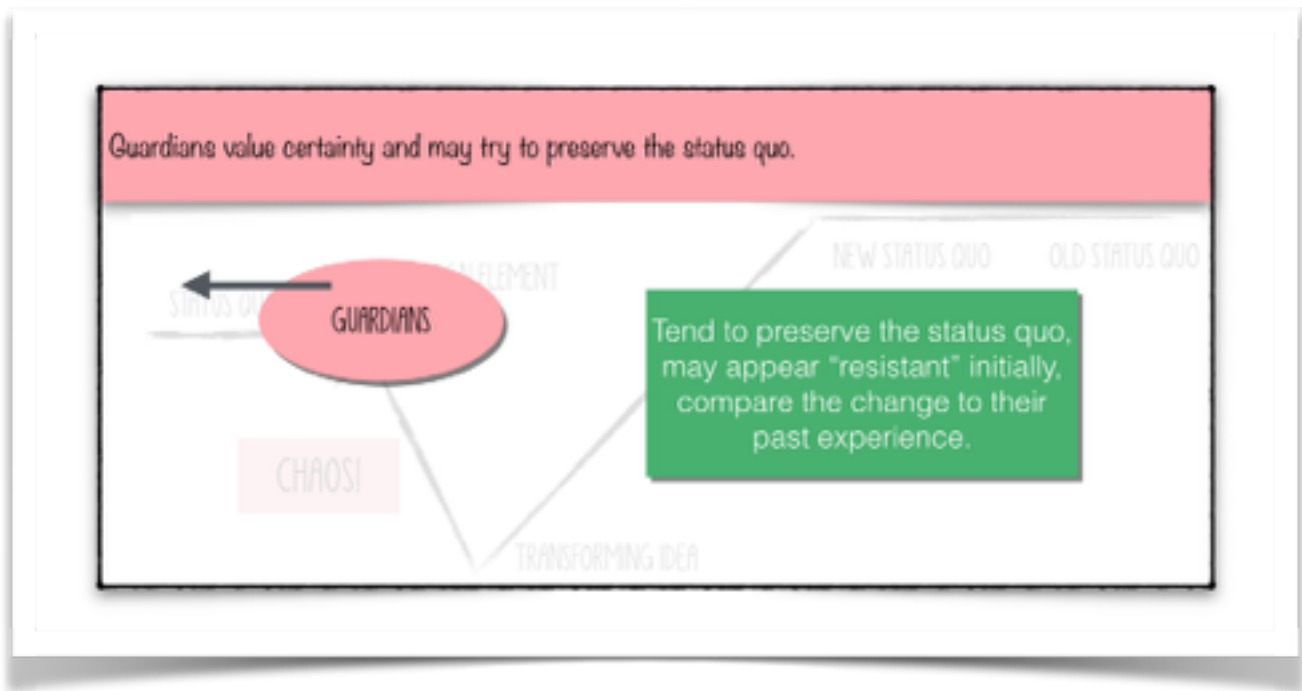
For now, all you need to know is that when some change happens (**Foreign Element**), whether it is invoked internally or externally, people descend into Chaos until they make sense of the change (**Transforming Idea**). After a period of internalizing the change (**Practice and Integration**), people arrive at the **New Status Quo**. Eventually the New Status Quo becomes the **Old Status Quo** until the next change happens.

To make matters more complex, everyone is progressing through this curve at different rates and different intensities. If the change makes sense to you, you may fly through this change curve faster than others. While that might be good for you, and those who share your beliefs, that can cause more chaos for people who are struggling with the change.

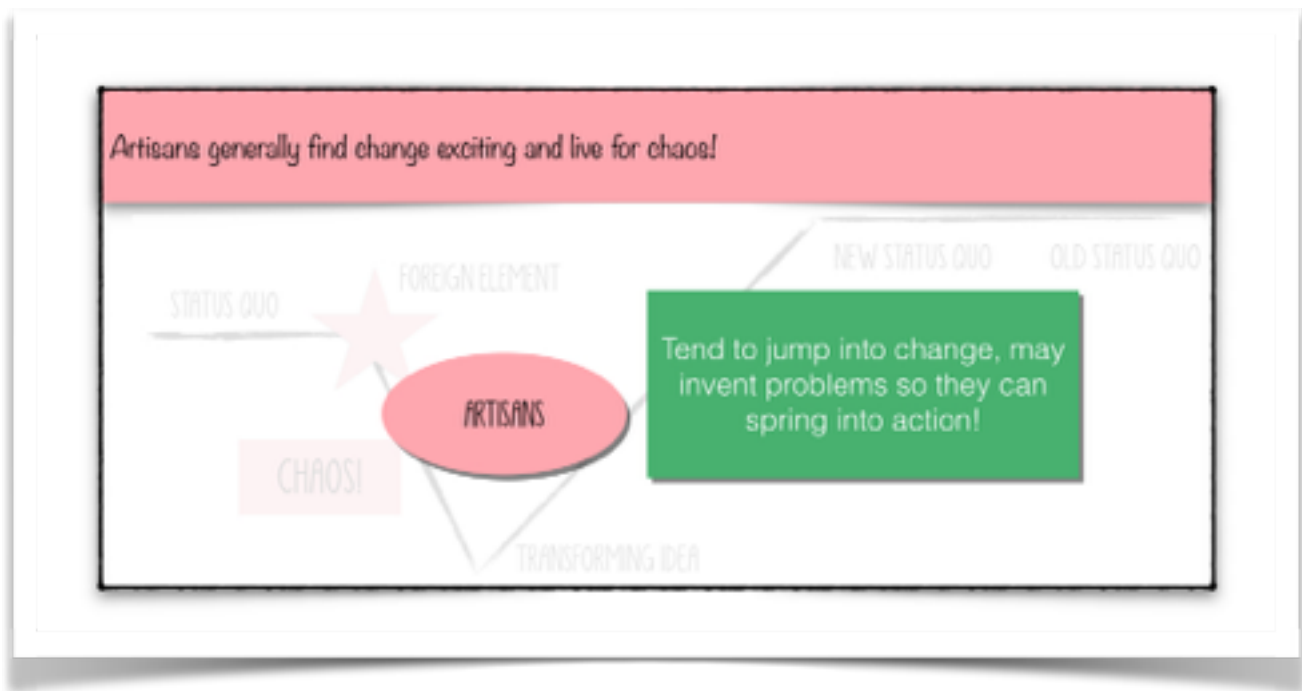
Our personality preferences, biases and experiences all factor into how we progress through this change curve. I find it helpful to understand how different personalities react to change, which gives me insight into how I can best approach facilitating particular changes with people.

To do that, let's take a look at how different temperaments react to change. David Kersey created 4 distance temperaments based on decades of research starting in the 1940's:

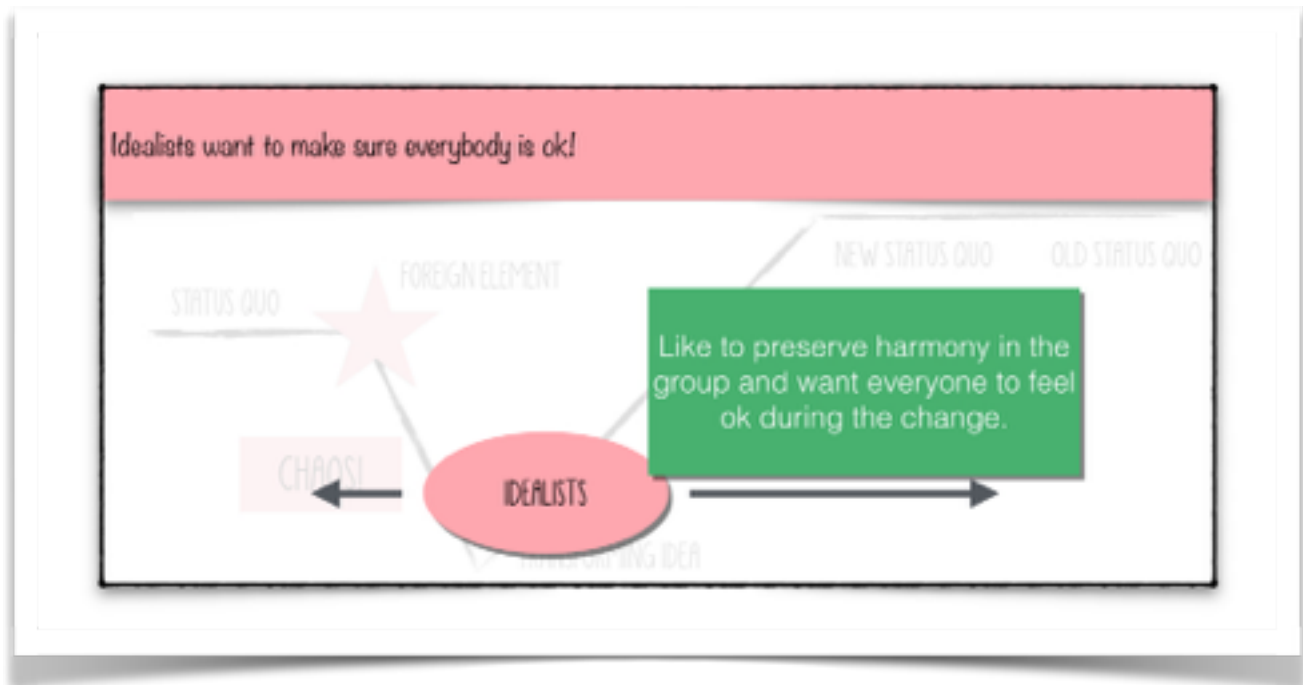
**Guardians** - People with this preference value certainty. They take their duties and responsibilities seriously and have a strong preference for following rules and processes.



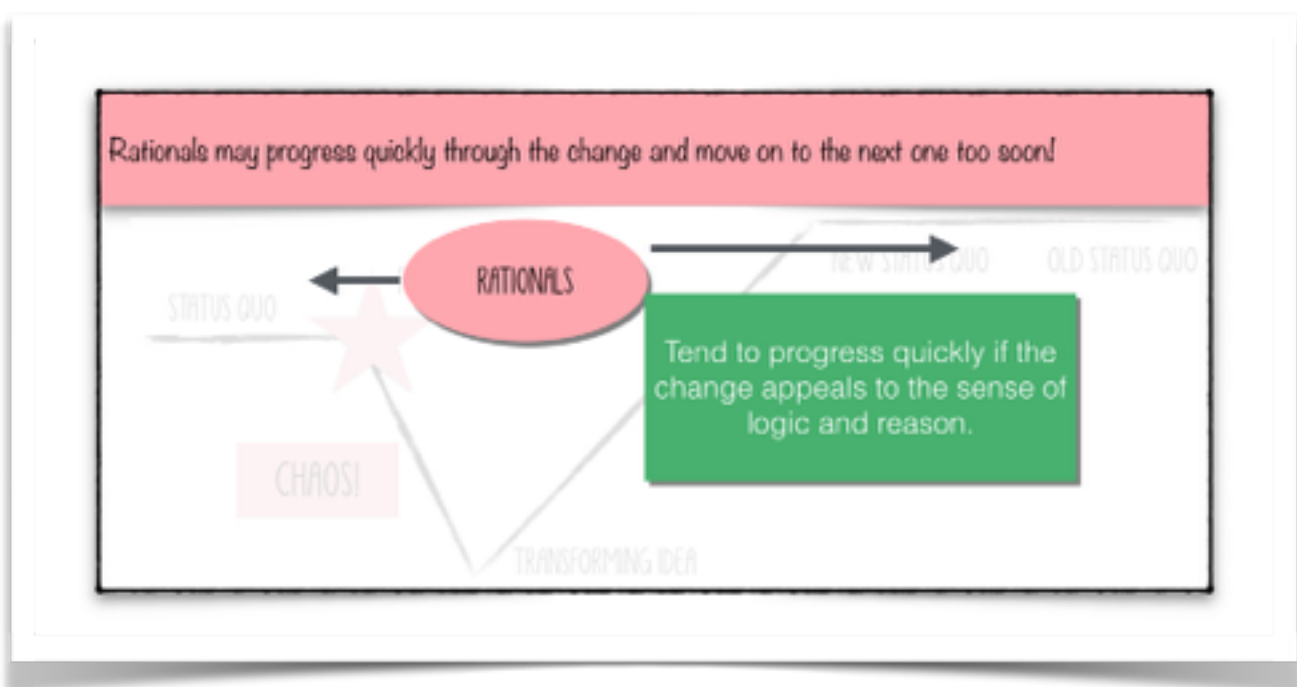
**Artisans** - People with this preference value all that is AWESOME!<sup>(tm)</sup> Artisans are adaptable and live in the here-and-now. They will forge through a problem skirting the rules if it gets to the desired outcome.



**Idealists** - People with this preference value people. They like to establish, and maintain harmony in the group and hold themselves to a high standard of ethics.



**Rationals** - People with this preference value data! They are avid problem solvers and can sometimes appear cold and distant due to their objective problem solving skills.



Suppose you have a team of ten people. Five have a strong Guardian preference and the others have a strong Artisan preference. Can you see how that might cause some problems?

Each of people in this hypothetical team progress through the Satir change curve differently. The five with the Guardian preference may fight to preserve the status quo while the five with the Artisan preference will want to descend into chaos.

Keep in mind, these temperaments are theory based on observable behaviors, not scientific fact! There's a danger in labelling people a certain temperament so use this information with caution!

I find it helpful to make sense of the behaviors I see when facilitating change. There's more art to this than science. After years of studying temperaments, Myers Briggs theory and other personality models based on Carl Jung's work, sometimes I can *feel* what approach would work best. It's not magic, it's about understanding that people are different, and what I think is best, might not be best for the team or organization that I'm working with.

Remember Josephine? To me, it seemed like she had a strong Guardian preference. She loved her plans and dissecting project tasks into teeny-tiny chunks. How could I help her adjust to this change?

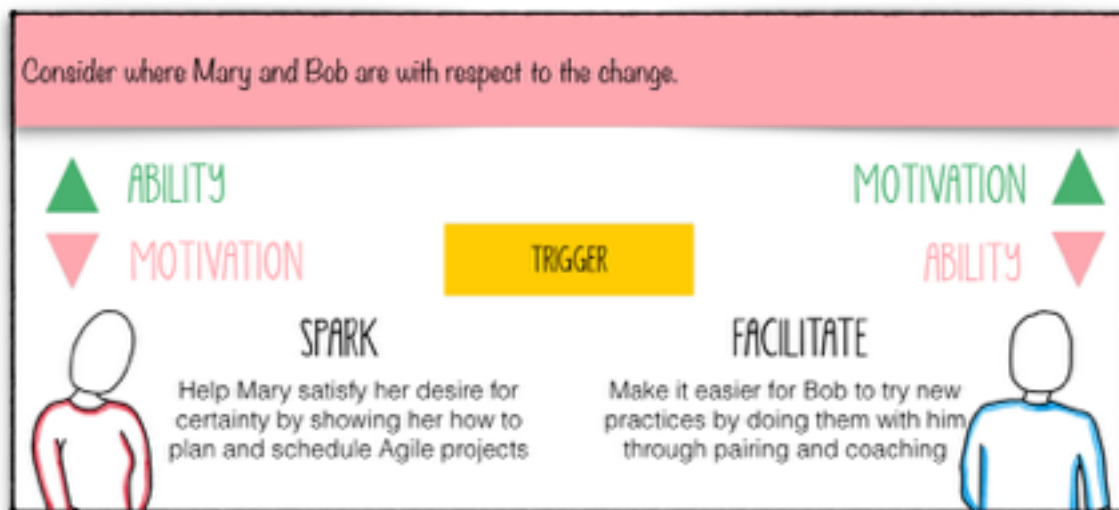
Through her actions I could sense that certainty was strong motivator for her. Her interpretation of Agile project management represented a direct threat to that motivator. She clearly had the ability to learn and use Agile project management practices, but she would need to have her desire for certainty satisfied first.

Professor BJ Fogg of Stanford University developed a behavior model called BJ Fogg's Behavior Model. Seems like a reasonable name to me! He describes three aspects to behavior change:

- 1) **Motivation**: People have different core motivators. Each motivator has 2 sides:
  - **Sensation**: How people feel about the change. The change will either invoke a painful response or a pleasurable one.
  - **Anticipation**: The change will give people hope or it will invoke fear.
  - **Social Cohesion**: The change will either make people feel accepted into the group or it will make them feel like an outcast.
- 2) **Ability**: People need the ability to perform the new behavior. Hint: Training alone isn't the way to build ability! People need practice time as well!
- 3) **Trigger**: Something needs to trigger the change in behavior. Fogg describes 3 triggers:

- 1) **Spark:** When motivation is low and ability is high, focusing on the person's motivators is a way to create behavior change.
- 2) **Facilitate:** When motivation is high and ability is low, figure out how to make the change easier for the person.
- 3) **Signal:** When both motivation and ability are high, making people aware of a new behavior is all that is needed for the change to happen.

In order for change to happen, all three elements must be present or change simply won't happen. Combining Professor Fogg's ideas with how people process change, you can start to visualize how best to approach a given change:



A couple of colleagues of mine were involved in a large project that involved multiple teams and hundreds of people. Stress and frustration was high with many people. What made the situation worse was that the program manager who was leading the project, William, was getting the reputation for being a yeller and screamer when things didn't go right.

Making matters worse, this organization was moving to Agile project management practices which was just another massive stressor that William had to deal with.

It's easy to jump to a conclusion that William was a jerk.

But there's more to it than that.

After interviewing people, observing dynamics and understanding the organizational system William was trapped inside of, my colleagues found out there were multiple factors that were contributing to this behavior.

They could have assumed he was a jerk. They could have assumed his boss was pressuring him. They could have assumed a broken performance management system was creating unnecessary pressure for him.

They could have assumed just about anything. But they didn't.

They took the time to understand what was important to William, what his motivators were, what stressed him out and how they could help him.

William was a smart guy and a very experienced program manager in this organization. He wanted to learn how to work in this new way (motivation), but didn't feel he could (ability). A tactic my colleagues took was to help make this change easier for William by taking responsibility for visualizing this enormous program on a big-visible wall. Instead of telling William to do it, they did it *with* him. After a few false starts and cancelations of the sessions to visualize the work on the wall, William finally understood the benefits of doing this. Instead of it being extra work, it became a more effective way for him to manage the program.

This program is in progress as I write this so the jury is out on the outcome, but that's not the point of the story. The point is, there is a lot happening when people experience change. Understanding their personality preferences, how they process change and how to pick the right trigger for change is essential for understanding the art of facilitating change.

## YOUR BRAIN IS NOT YOUR FRIEND!

Wise words from a colleague of mine, Andrew Annett. Andrew introduced me to the work of David Rock. David created a model called SCARF and it describes how our brains respond to changes that affect our core motivators.

SCARF is an acronym for Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness and Fairness.

**Status:** There are 2 elements to Status. Imagine you're talking to your boss. There's a difference in Status and you may feel threatened to speak your mind. The other element is situational, for example when you're locked into a conversation where you feel the other person is simply trying to be right so they'll win the conversation.

**Certainty:** This is our natural desire to feel certain about an outcome. Think of the last time you went on a road trip and your GPS broke. That can be pretty stressful! Of course, if you don't value certainty as much as the next person, you can rely on navigating by looking at the sun and think of the whole situation as an adventure!

**Autonomy:** This is the desire to be in control of your own destiny. When an external change happens, like the introduction of Agile project management practices, you may feel more motivated to have control over the project versus having a schedule enforced on you.

**Relatedness:** This is the desire to feel part of the group. Have you ever worked on a team where you felt like the odd-ball? I have. And it doesn't feel very good.

**Fairness:** All bets are off when you don't feel you're being treated fairly. The same goes for when you see others not being treated fairly, from your perspective.

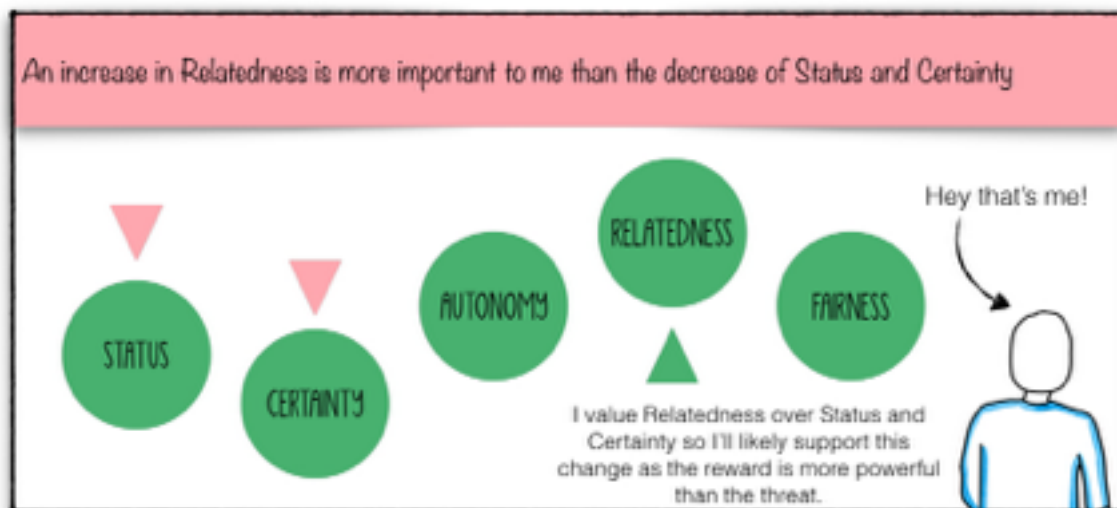
A reward response is created when these motivators are increased. That means your brain excretes a chemical called dopamine, which makes you feel good. Status is one of my motivators. If you tell me you love my book, that makes me happy and I'd love to chat with you!

A threat response is created when these motivators are decreased. That means your brain excretes a chemical called cortisol, which makes you feel stressed. If you tell me my book sucks, after the shock wears off, I'll say "thanks for the feedback" and move on!

Our brains are designed to protect us, if the threat is too strong, we may stand and fight or we may give up. If the reward is strong, we'll engage in a positive way.

This is sometimes referred to as the "fight or flight response". David's research shows that our brains are not able to distinguish the difference between physical and social threat. A threat to one's certainty is just as real as the feeling you can imagine when you're walking home late at night and hear footsteps rapidly approaching from behind.

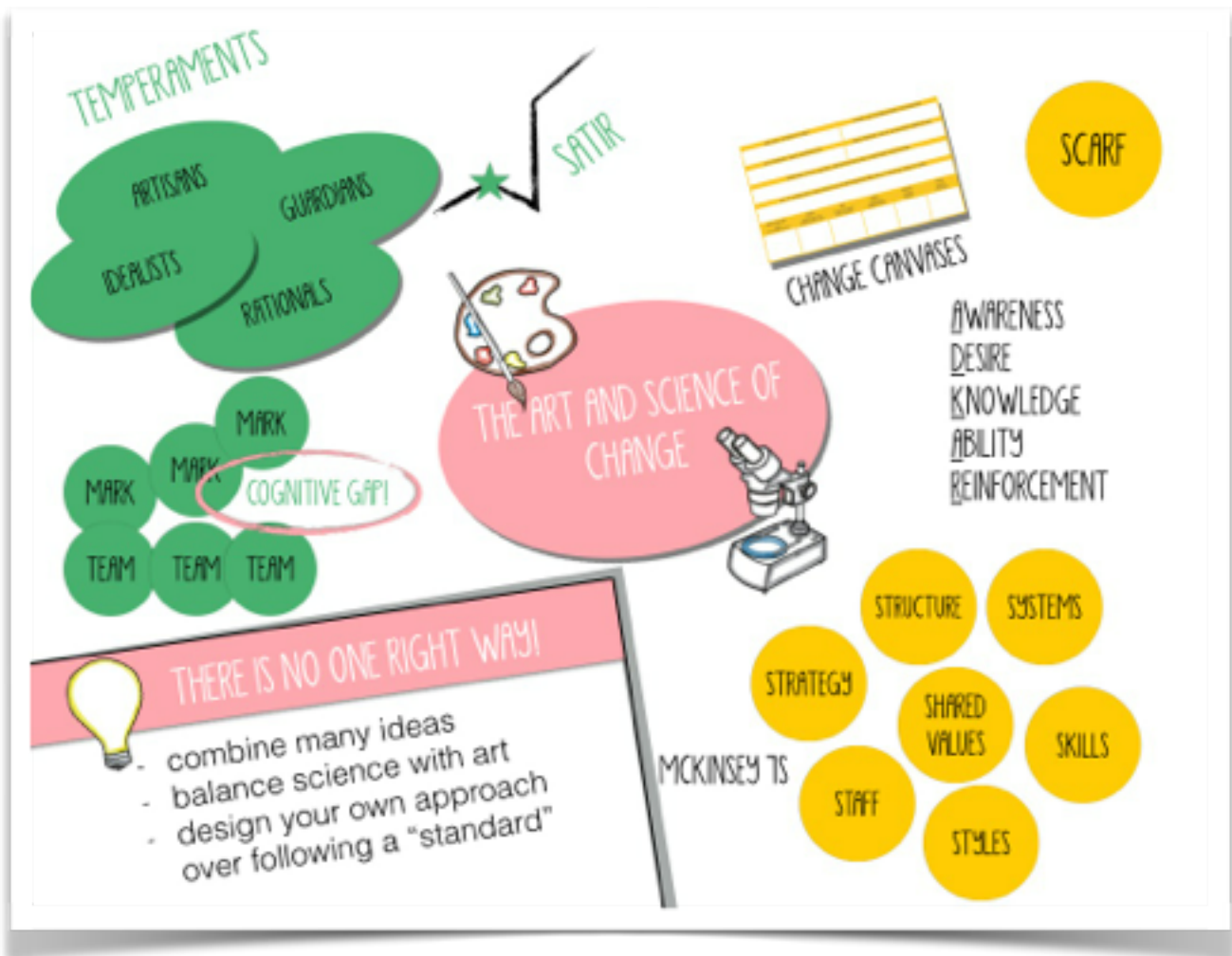
Everyone has different motivators. The reward response to a motivator must be greater than the threat response, otherwise change isn't likely to happen.



These are a few of many behavioral models that are available. I like these three the most because they provide a good mix of art and science. They help me make sense of what I observe as a change agent and they help me reward my Relatedness motivator!

## THE ART AND SCIENCE MAP

The world of change is messy. The change models I described in Lean Change Management, and the models described in this book are the tip of the iceberg. I don't believe one model is better than all other models.



Change agents need many tools, from many sources, in order to facilitate change. The key is knowing which tools to pull out of the toolbox, and when!

I know I am biased towards using feedback-driven approaches to change, otherwise I wouldn't have written the book! That said, I know how to recognize when my biases are taking over. That usually happens when I'm working with a team of like-minded individuals. When I detect that my confirmation bias sensor is blinking, I have to challenge my own assumptions...and that is really difficult. It uses much more mental energy and there is a danger that I'll isolate myself from the group by playing the role of devil's advocate too strongly.

What matters most to me is facilitating meaningful change, and it's as much of an art as it is a science.



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