

Using the Continuum™ Assessment to Measure Reactions to Change – Part 2 of a Series –

“It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change.”

– Charles Darwin

All of us are constantly bombarded by change. Both minor disruptions (like a new boss) and mega disruptions (like the pandemic) have become part of daily life. Some we can see coming (like AI), and others blindsides us (like being rear-ended on the freeway). While some changes are by personal choice (buying a new house), other changes are forced upon us

(being downsized at work). Change can be invigorating at times, but most of us have experienced feeling like a “victim of change” at one time or another. Change is complicated!

“When change disruption is greater than change capacity, an organization faces change saturation....Many organizations are feeling saturated right now. In addition to pandemic-related changes, industries are changing, the economy is uncertain, and many companies are facing growing pressure to change in order to survive. A recent study by Prosci found that 73% of respondents reported being near, at or past the point of saturation.

Ultimately, it is individuals in the organization who feel change saturation. They are tasked with completing their own work and adopting new changes to how their work is done. When there is too much change happening, individuals react. Individual behaviors resulting from saturation include disengagement and apathy, frustration and increased stress, fatigue and burnout, more resistance to change, confusion, cynicism, and skepticism.”

Source: Enough is Enough: Tips for Avoiding Change Saturation by Tim Creasey, Chief Innovation Officer at Prosci, 2023.

Yet one thing is very clear: Change is unstoppable. Both individuals and organizations must be prepared to cope with change to survive.

Much like a boat traveling through water, change creates a wake. Any knowledgeable boater knows that a wake can be dangerous. It can capsize other boats; it can injure passengers or throw them overboard. It can erode the shoreline.

That doesn’t mean the boat shouldn’t move forward! That is what boats are built to do. Yet, leaders must focus not only on the shoreline ahead, but also on the wake that change creates and its impact on others.

A study conducted *prior to Covid* by the American Psychological Association American (2017) found that those impacted by change at work are more likely to report chronic work stress, less likely to trust their employer, and more likely to say they plan to leave the organization within the next year. A more recent study by Prosci (see sidebar) indicates that those impacted by change are near or past the point of change saturation. Perhaps, we should have seen the Great Resignation coming!

Managing Change: Is It Working?

Change management has been a part of the world of work since the beginning of the industrial age. Many change management models and approaches exist. Some of the most popular include Kotter's 8-Step Process for Leading Change; McKinsey's 7-S Model, the Prosci ADKAR Model, and Lewin's early 3-Step Change Model of (a) unfreezing, (b) change, and (c) freezing; (Jouany & Martic, 2023).

If Kurt Lewin were with us today, he might say we are in a perpetual state of slush! Change is much less linear and finite and much more unpredictable and ongoing. While traditional change management models have and do serve an important purpose, they don't always work, or work as well as we need. In fact, the consulting firm McKinsey estimates that 70 percent of change programs fail as a result of employee resistance and lack of management support (Ewenstein, Smith, & Sologar, 2015). And change is expensive, representing as much as 14% of all operating costs (see sidebar).

"Change is expensive. The average change budget at a financial services institution represents about 14% of annual operating costs, according to our most recent findings.

Almost one-fourth of respondents are spending 21% to 30% of their operating costs on change programs, and budgets can exceed that for organizations going through challenging periods. Moreover, spending on change programs has continued to increase since our previous survey, despite continued cost pressures and the impact of COVID-19, and is up 5% year-on-year"

Source: PwC's 2021 Report: Productivity 2021 and beyond: Five pillars for a better workforce

Perhaps, one of the reasons that change management has not been as successful as desired is the result of taking a "broad-brush" approach. Change management models rarely if ever consider the unique ways individuals perceive and respond to change based on a variety of personal factors.

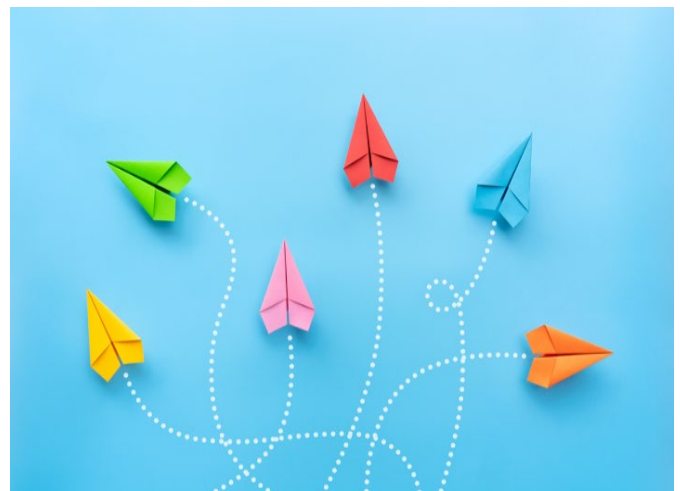
Understanding Individual Differences in Responding to Change

A more nuanced approach to change requires understanding that individuals respond to change differently. As described in the first white paper in this series – ["Influences on the Continuum of Individual Responses to Change: Part 1"](#) – our review of the literature pointed to a number of factors that affect how we react to change (see below):

- How our brains are wired
- Previous experiences
- Beliefs about the situation
- Fairness expectations
- Our personality
- What we value
- Beliefs we have about ourselves
- Resilience and coping strategies

Organizations able to assess individuals' responses to change can, can better prepare to manage these differences. The *CONTINUUM™ Assessment* was developed specifically to support organizations in the following ways:

- Provide analytics for predicting how individuals and teams are likely to react to change;
- Better equip organizations to tailor strategies for navigating change at both the individual and group levels; and
- Help individuals become more aware of their own tendencies so that they can be empowered to respond in healthy, productive ways rather than feeling like a victim of change.



Development of the CONTINUUM™ Assessment of Reactions to Change



Based on an extensive review of the relevant literature, a pool of assessment items was crafted. From 2020 through 2022, those items were piloted, culled, and refined through three different studies involving over 300 participants. Ultimately, five factors emerged from this research that accounted for much of the variability in how individuals responded to the *CONTINUUM™* items. These factors are described below.

1. **Change Emotions** – The extent to which an individual manages emotions and responds effectively to the stress resulting from organizational change.

2. **Change Preferences** – The degree to which an individual actively seeks task variety and change, preferring a workplace that fosters ongoing learning, diverse assignments, and new opportunities.

3. **Change Confidence** – The level to which an individual is confident in his or her ability to respond to organizational changes successfully and thrive in a change-oriented workplace.

4. **Change Expectations** – The extent to which an individual is supportive of change, because they expect successful outcomes and are confident in their organization’s capability to manage change effectively.

5. **Change Optimism** – The degree to which an individual views change positively and strives to maintain an optimistic attitude toward organizational changes.

The table below describes likely reactions of individuals with low, moderate, or high scores on each of these Continuum facets:

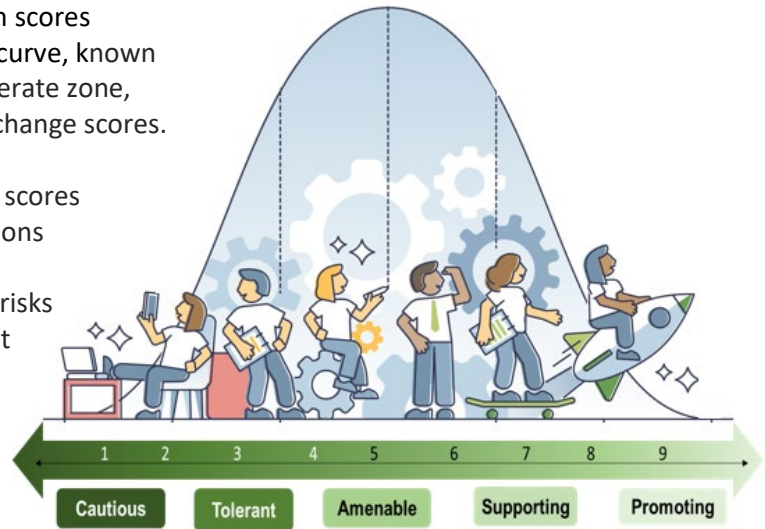
	Low	Moderate	High
Change Emotions	Experiences considerable stress and negative emotions	Experiences a typical amount of emotional distress; may be emotionally neutral or alternate between anxiety and excitement	Experiences little to no negative emotions or stress and may even feel excited
Change Preferences	May be uncomfortable doing things in new ways and losing the stability of prior routines	Likely to understand that change is to be expected and accept it as it comes	Likely to regularly seek out variety and change and may dislike or quickly get bored with routine
Change Confidence	May lack confidence in ability to adjust to change.	Fairly confident in ability to adjust to change given appropriate resources.	Has a high degree of confidence in ability to adjust to change and at times may even be overconfident
Change Expectations	Views change as disadvantageous personally and/or for the organization	Has balanced expectations about the value of change personally and/or for the organization	Expects that change will be advantageous personally and for the organization; may even overlook the possible negative impact
Change Optimism	Doubts that change will be successfully implemented	Has realistic expectations about the outcomes of change and assume there will be some bumps along the way	Expects that change will be successfully implemented; may overlook the risks associated with change

Scores on these five facets are combined into a single “overall score,” which indicates where someone is on a continuum of responses to change. These range from Cautious to Promoting as described below.

- Cautious – Likely to be slow to adapt to change and may even actively resist change.
- Tolerant – Likely to tolerate change as a follower when change appears inevitable.
- Amenable – Likely to accept change if well managed, but unlikely to be an early adopter.
- Supporting – Likely to embrace change, be an early adopter, and a candidate to lead the change effort.
- Promoting – Likely to champion and push for change, perhaps at a pace that’s too fast or reckless.

When looking at a large group of individuals, Continuum scores (like most individual differences) fall into a bell-shaped curve, known as a normal distribution. Most people fall into the moderate zone, with fewer people having either extremely high or low change scores.

It’s important to keep in mind that neither high nor low scores are inherently “good” or “bad.” Indeed, different reactions by employees can be advantageous for an organization. For example, those who are more cautious can identify risks that others may miss. What is critical to recognize is that “one-size-fits-all” approaches to change management are less effective than those tailored to meet individuals and teams where they are at.



Summary

Today, organizations are faced with the need to constantly adapt to survive without ignoring the needs of a workforce that may be overwhelmed by change.

Organizations that understand how individuals respond in different ways to change will gain a competitive advantage by tailoring change strategies to address the unique needs of individual employees. Time and resources can be focused on the factors most prevalent within teams and the workforce overall. The *CONTINUUM™* was developed to provide an easy, robust, and cost effective way to assess individual reactions to change.

When change is not successful, it is often blamed on employee resistance. However, it may be less about resistance and much more about individuals and organizations lacking in change resilience (Crow, 2022).

Assessing individual differences when implementing change is a vital first step in identifying how to develop the change resilience needed to cope in a constantly shifting world.

Next Up in This Series

Part III: Using the CONTINUUM™ Assessment to develop individual and organizational change resilience.

“Resilience is the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands. A number of factors contribute to how well people adapt to adversities, predominant among them:

- *the ways in which individuals view and engage with the world*
- *the availability and quality of social resources*
- *specific coping strategies*

Psychological research demonstrates that the resources and skills associated with more positive adaptation (i.e., greater resilience) can be cultivated and practiced.” - [American Psychological Association](#)

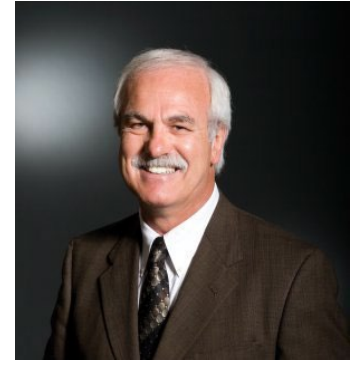
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