

Creating commitment for organisational change

Change is hard. Not just logistically – emotionally, cognitively, even biologically. Organisations may shift strategies, restructure teams, or install new software systems, but beneath all that activity is something far more challenging: human commitment.

Without it, even the best-designed transformation will struggle to make progress.

So how do we build the kind of commitment that fuels real change? The answer lies not in top-down announcements or PowerPoint decks, but in how we design the process itself: who is involved, how they're involved, and the conditions we create to make meaningful participation possible.

Change is constant (and that's the point)

Dr. Ichak Adizes put it bluntly: *"If you're alive, you have problems. The only time you don't is when you're dead."* His point? Change and problems go hand in hand. Every opportunity is a new problem in disguise. The question isn't whether we face change – it's whether we're equipped to respond to it constructively, continuously, and collaboratively.

Adizes argues that organisations must develop *flexibility and control* simultaneously. Too much control stifles innovation. Too much flexibility breeds chaos. The organisations that thrive are the ones that mature their systems while staying agile enough to respond.

But that adaptability doesn't just come from leadership – it comes from people, all across the business, stepping into change with confidence.

Change hurts (and that's okay)

Change challenges the very things that help us feel secure – our sense of control, our place in the team, our ability to predict what's coming, and our sense of worth. That discomfort isn't resistance for the sake of it – it's the human nervous system doing its job: protecting us from uncertainty, exclusion, or loss of status.

When people feel they're losing something – be it clarity, influence, or stability – they instinctively pull back. The mistake organisations often make is treating this as 'resistance' to be managed, rather than as information to be understood.

It's critical to acknowledge the discomfort and involve people in designing the way forward. When people feel heard, respected, and genuinely involved, the perceived threat diminishes – and their commitment grows.

When these areas feel under threat, people disengage. They resist, not because they're difficult, but because they're *human*. Which is why *managing change isn't enough*. We have to lead it by design – minimising threat, increasing involvement, and creating spaces where people can re-establish safety and ownership.

People protect what they help build

It captures the core of good approach to change: commitment is earned through involvement. And the more someone invests their time and effort, the deeper they commit.

In his book *Managing at the Speed of Change*, Daryl Conner explains that commitment is not a light switch – it’s a *journey*. He describes it as progressing from contact, through awareness, understanding, and positive perception, all the way to *internalisation and advocacy*.

So how do you speed up commitment without cutting corners?

- **Involve a diagonal slice of the organisation.**

Bring in people from across functions *and* levels. Not just the usual volunteers. Not just managers. Get the people who know how the work really gets done. They have insight, context, and credibility – and when they’re involved, others are far more likely to follow their lead.

- **Design with, not for.**

Involving people early means asking them to help co-create the path forward, not just “sense-check” it after the fact. This is the difference between consultation and collaboration. It’s messier. It’s slower. It’s emergent. But it works.

- **Create the conditions for commitment.**

This means psychological safety. It means time to think. It means listening and learning – not just broadcasting and briefing. It means creating what we call the **Commitment Igloo™**: a space where ideas, feelings, and resistance can emerge safely, be heard, and turned into momentum.

Don’t manage people through change (invite them into it)

Too often, “change management” is a process *done to* people. Leaders identify problems in isolation, design solutions in secret, and then hand down a plan. The result? Low ownership. High resistance. False starts. On the surface it may seem quicker, but long-term it highlights poor and ineffective decision making, often not solving the real issue.

Change, at its core, is a shift in how we think, work, and relate to one another. It’s about values in motion. And if we want those shifts to be embraced – not just tolerated – we have to embed commitment-building into every stage of the journey.

And crucially, we need to jointly optimise both the *technical* and *social* elements of change. Too many initiatives e.g. new systems, processes, or structures are implemented without making sure the human side is prepared, involved, and supported. Or vice versa – culture change gets attention, but the underlying tools and workflows don’t evolve to support it. Real results come when we design for *both* – ensuring that people and processes grow together, and that our change plans explicitly account for this dual need from the outset. It’s not an either/or; it’s a both/and. Ignore one, and the other will fall short.

So where do you start?

Here are three guiding questions to kickstart a more committed approach to change:

1. **Are we involving the people closest to the challenge or just informing them after the fact?**
Commitment doesn't come from being told. It comes from being *trusted* to help shape what matters.
 2. **Have we created a space where people feel safe to speak up and confident they'll be heard?**
If people are filtering their truth, you're designing in the dark, which is not good for the individuals or the organisation.
 3. **Do our actions reflect a genuine intent to co-create or are we stuck in 'tick-box' territory?**
You can't fake inclusion. People know. If the Commitment Igloo™ isn't warm inside, no one's staying.
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Final Thought:

Change doesn't stick because of well-written plans, perfectly sequenced Gantt charts, or daily stand-ups. It sticks because people believe it's worth the effort. That belief is seeded and nurtured by strong leadership – not the command-and-control kind, but leadership grounded in conviction, humility, and a way forward.

The leader as change agent must be sure about what needs to change and why, while also being vulnerable enough to listen, adapt, and grow. They must model the courage to face ambiguity and the patience to engage others, even when it slows things down. Because speed without alignment is just wasted energy.