



## RESHAPING MINDSETS SERIES

*"The greatest danger in times of turbulence is not the turbulence; it is to act with yesterday's logic."*

— Peter Drucker

### 1. Changing Someone's Mind—The Basics of Reframing

An important part of successful change facilitation is the ability to influence others (especially sponsors). Sometimes we only need to explain to them what needs to be done. Much of the time, however, their behaviors and/or mindsets must be carefully reshaped for an initiative to be fully realized.

There is a close interdependency between a person's mindset and his or her behavior. Each reflects an important component to the change process, yet many practitioners are better prepared to address the behavioral dynamics than the mindset implications. Although successful change facilitators attend to both when attempting to redirect a person's natural reaction to a situation, this series will focus only on how to encourage new mindsets that support an initiative's desired outcome.

#### What Is a Mindset?

Mindsets contain both intellectual and emotional elements that affect our perceptions, interpretations, and actions. They guide what we *think* and how we *feel* about people and things. Mindsets are formed by a combination of organizing models, values, beliefs, preferences, and attitudes. Because actions are typically based on a person's thoughts, feelings, and priorities, most behaviors have a mindset behind them that is used to justify the behavior from the person's perspective at the moment.

That is a lot to absorb, so to keep things simple, we will focus on only two elements of a person's mindset:

- Frame of reference—the way an individual makes sense of situations
- Priorities—the relative importance and value of various options

## Frame of Reference

Each individual has a unique way of interpreting the world (e.g., some people are optimists; others are pessimists). Professional background, past experiences, education, etc. all influence a person's viewpoint. The combination of all the various parts of an individual's interpretation of the world makes up that person's frame of reference (FOR).

## Priorities

A person's FOR guides his or her attention, goals, and actions in any given circumstance: Should I eat lunch or exercise? Return this phone call or send an email? Take the time to raise this issue or let it slide? The choices people make are reflections of the things they see as most important—their priorities. What is important to them may be temporary in nature (goals) or reflect a longer-term perspective (values).

A person's unique mindset is indicative of that individual's *personality traits*. When groups of people share frames of reference and priorities, it reveals aspects of their *culture*. In either case, mindsets ultimately lead to behaviors that support them. Because of this, practitioners must be able to reshape mindsets as part of navigating important organizational transformations.

## The Basics of Shifting Mindsets

Within organizations pursuing major change, the first step in attempting to shift someone's mindset is to be clear about the intent of the initiative and then to identify the FOR and priorities required to support that outcome. Here's an example:

*A company wants to move from having transactional relationships with its customers to building extremely strong customer relationships. To do this, it is necessary for employees to share a "customer-centered" mindset. Employees must begin viewing the people they serve differently and making different choices in their interactions with them, or nothing of substance will change.*

This means that two things are important:

- It's essential to understand both the desired future FOR as well as the current FOR, to gain a clear picture of the magnitude and nature of the gap that must be closed.
- It is also critical to articulate what should become more important or less important than it was in the past (priorities).

## Reframing

Reframing is the reshaping of a person's FOR and related priorities to shift how that person sees and interprets certain things.

We can't force people to change their mindsets in support of successful implementation of an initiative. There are steps that we can follow, however, to significantly increase the likelihood that a different perspective will unfold.

Reframing involves focusing a person's attention on the same information previously available, but helping him or her view it differently so the implications can be recalibrated. Through "reframing," new options are made possible that would otherwise not be feasible or acceptable to the person. (The picture of the frog at right, if viewed from a different perspective, contains a second image.\*)

## Key Reframing Skills

Reframing requires that the change practitioner be willing and able to do five things:

1. Address the “context” as well as the “content” of interpersonal communications.
2. Redefine the other person’s FOR in a way that sheds positive light on the successful implementation of the change at hand.
3. Reset the person’s priorities.
4. Respond effectively when the person reacts to the reframing attempt.
5. Confront the person with the real price it takes to achieve success.



I’ll discuss each of these skills in detail in upcoming posts.



## 2. Three Steps to Communicating a Reframing Message

In my last post, I described the two elements—frame of reference (FOR) and priorities—that make up a person’s mindset. I also listed five skills that practitioners can use to “reframe” a person’s FOR and priorities to shift how that person sees and interprets certain things. Here, and in the next three posts, I’ll describe these skills in more detail.

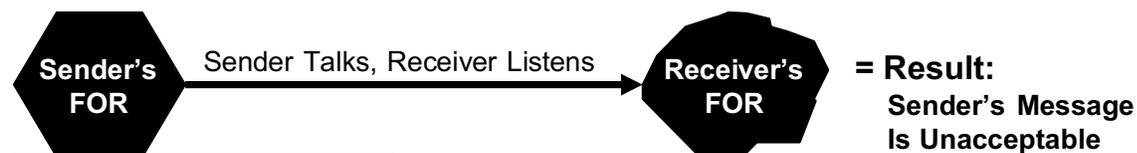
### Reframing Skill #1: Use 3-Step Communication Effectively

Communication between people always occurs at two levels:

- **Content Level**—The message one person is attempting to convey to another (think of this as a “coded transmission”)
- **Context Level**—The FOR used by the sender to interpret the message (think of this as “the code book”)

When one person attempts to communicate with another, it is often done without knowing the receiver’s FOR. When this occurs, the sender conveys a “content” message that can be understood and accepted only from the sender’s own FOR—not that of the receiver. We call this **One-Step Communication**.

**Step 1:** Sender conveys a “content” message from his or her own FOR.

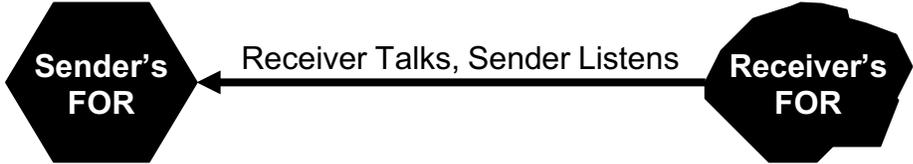


\* Turn the picture counter-clockwise 90 degrees to see the image of a horse head.

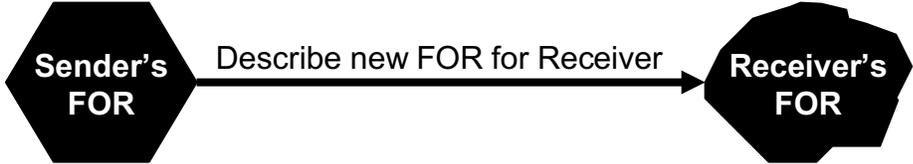
### Three-Step Communication

Reframing involves modifying the receiver's FOR *before* the content of a message is conveyed. By first reshaping the receiver's context so the receiver will understand the situation as seen by the sender, the sender's message will have a greater chance of being accepted. This requires **Three-Step Communication**.

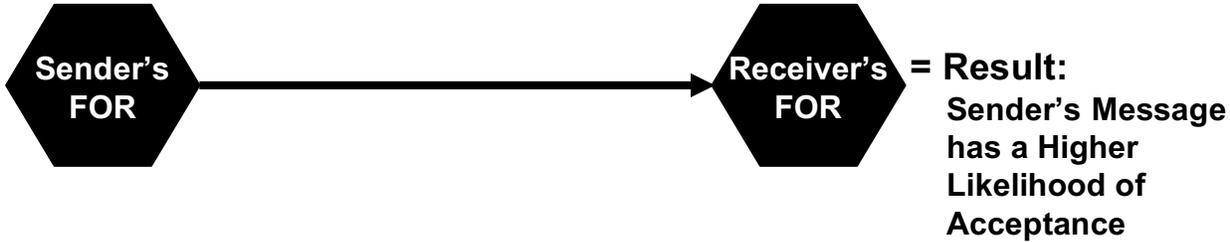
**Step 1:** Identify the receiver's FOR.



**Step 2:** Shift the receiver's "context" by reframing the receiver's FOR.



**Step 3:** Sender now conveys "content" message.



Next, I'll talk about developing the skills practitioners need to redefine the other person's FOR and reset that person's priorities.



### 3. How to Redefine a Person's Frame of Reference and Reset Priorities

In this series, I'm exploring the importance of being able to reframe a person's mindset during a change initiative to shift how he or she sees and interprets certain things. There are five reframing skills. I will address skills 2 and 3 in this post, and skills 4 and 5 in subsequent posts.

#### Reframing Skill #2: The Ability to Redefine the other Person's Frame of Reference

A person's frame of reference (FOR) is made up of six components. You can foster a shift in someone's FOR by applying one or more of them.

- **Definition:** A depiction of how the situation could be viewed in order for the change to appear more desirable. Often, the way a situation is defined limits the range of solutions. For

example, is the person facing an “opportunity,” a “problem,” a “dilemma,” or a “hassle”? (Download a PDF with a complete explanation of these terms [here](#).)

- **History:** An explanation of events leading up to a current situation that allows the change to appear more viable. (If certain factors from the past are not identified appropriately, the desired effect may not be achieved.)
- **Meaning:** An interpretation of key events, circumstances, or information that shows the change has more benefits than were previously apparent.
- **Purpose:** A description of what a person wants to achieve that supports the need to change. (For example, people often do not realize that their true agenda is not to find a solution to a problem, but to vent anger, protect turf, or achieve some other goal.)
- **Expectations:** A portrayal of what could be anticipated that would justify the change.
- **Requirements:** Clarifying what it will take for the desired outcome to be accomplished. (Many people feel they cannot commit the resources required for change. However, a more complete understanding of the cost for not changing may make the cost of change seem affordable.)

These six components make up the interrelated aspects of a person’s view of an event or situation.

Here are some examples of how these framing components present themselves, and how they can be reframed.

Framing Components	Situation as Originally Seen	Reframed Perspective
Definition	“How can we eliminate the tension between production and customer service?”	“Their tension is not a problem that can be solved; it’s a dilemma that will always exist to some degree, and, therefore, must be managed.”
History	“We have always demonstrated the ability to grow, so why should it be any different now?”	“When I look back over the past several years of the company’s performance, I don’t see consistent, sustained growth. I see a few home runs that compensated for an otherwise poor track record.”
Meaning	“People here enjoy talking behind my back.”	“I believe your people are expressing resistance covertly because there is a lack of synergy in the work environment. It would be an important step forward for them to feel safe in expressing their concerns overtly.”
Purpose	“I can’t wait until I get my hands on that guy.”	“Given what has happened, how do you want to handle your next meeting with John? Do you want to vent your emotions (anger, blame, etc.) or resolve the issue?”

Framing Components	Situation as Originally Seen	Reframed Perspective
Expectations	“Why would we want to alter our course now when profits are higher than ever?”	“Although margins are high now, if the market continues on its present path, you will face the probability of a major erosion of profits in the next 18 months.”
Requirements	“I can't afford to confront her with this problem. She might get so angry that she would quit, and then what would I do about her accounts?”	“I understand how difficult it is for you to talk to her. Without doing so, however, your objective of resolving the problem will not be met. Failing to discuss the situation with her may result in the problem never being resolved. This would mean you would continue to have the kind of low productivity you now have as a result of her operating as she does. What it really boils down to is, how badly do you want to fix this problem? Are you willing and able to pay the price to achieve what you say you want?”

### Reframing Skill #3: The Ability to Reset the Person’s Priorities

While an individual’s FOR provides the context in which he or she makes sense of situations, the day-to-day choices that create genuine organizational shifts are made on the basis of the priorities that an individual holds. These priorities are what guide specific behavioral choices.

Priorities can take the form of *values*—relatively enduring judgments about what is good, true, and important. An individual who values harmony, for instance, will make a very different choice when facing an interpersonal conflict than would a person who values candor. Priorities can also be much more situation-centric, in the form of specific *goals* an individual wants to achieve. An individual who has set a goal of selling 10 insurance policies each day is likely to behave differently on a call with a new prospect than is an individual who has set a goal to develop a strong relationship with each customer contacted.

If the values or goals individuals embrace are not aligned with those needed for successful change, part of the process of reshaping their mindset is to guide them toward priorities that are more consistent with what is needed.

Goals are extremely powerful drivers of behavior. They are also relatively easy to shift compared to encouraging people to change something about their values. In some cases, an individual has not set clear goals. Under these circumstances, the appropriate action might be to work with him or her to establish specific desired results and ensure that meaningful rewards are linked to the person’s achievement. In other situations, an individual may have goals that are counterproductive to realizing the change. Here, the appropriate action could be to identify goals that will be more effective in reaching change realization, and ensure that appropriate positive and negative consequences are linked to achievement or non-achievement of the goals.

Fostering a shift in values is much more challenging. Values are deeply held and are often the product of life experiences and entrenched emotional reactions as well as conscious reflection. Values are viewed as positive by the people who hold them and attempts to shift them can be seen as intrusive, resulting in only more entrenchment. However, there are three steps we can take to encourage people to reexamine their values to see if they still fit current reality.

1. Be clear about the values that the organization judges to be most important to achieving its desired change.
2. Ask individuals to reflect on the values they hold that might have a bearing on the way they relate to the change at hand.
3. Help people understand the implications of choosing one set of values over another in terms of personal and organizational outcomes.

For instance, a person may be able to see, through reflection, that he or she has valued short-term gratification more highly than longer-term benefits. The person may then see that the second value (more self-disciplined thinking) is an advantage, and choose to make a shift. This, in turn, could possibly lead to a new view on the situation (FOR) and ultimately different behavioral choices in new situations.

The bottom line is that shifting priorities at the goal level is much easier than trying to influence some new aspect of a person's values. In this regard, the more a person's resistance is due to value conflicts instead of goal conflicts, the more likely it is that he or she will remain entrenched in a negative view of the change.



## 4. Danger? Opportunity? You Decide.

In this series, I've been talking about the importance of being able to reframe a person's mindset during a change initiative to shift how he or she sees and interprets certain things. There are five key reframing skills:

1. Address the "context" as well as the "content" of interpersonal communications.
2. Redefine the other person's FOR in a way that sheds positive light on the successful implementation of the change at hand.
3. Reset the person's priorities.
4. Respond effectively when the other person reacts to the reframing attempt.
5. Confront the person with the real price it takes to achieve success.

I'll focus on the fourth skill in this post.

### **Reframing Skill #4: The Ability to Respond Appropriately Based on the Person's Reaction**

The disruptive nature of major change produces a crisis in the sense that the status quo is no longer viable. The Chinese express the concept of crisis with two symbols (figure 2).

The top symbol represents potential danger, the lower, hidden opportunity. By combining the two, the Chinese position change as a paradox. Observing how people respond to the stress produced by the crisis of change reveals two basic orientations that reflect similar characteristics. Some react to reframing attempts with a Type-O (opportunity) orientation. Others react with a Type-D (danger) orientation. Each of these reactions requires a different response from the change practitioner.

Creating profiles for D-type and O-type orientations to change is a useful tool for practitioners, but it comes with a risk of stereotyping that we must be careful to avoid. As you review the following descriptions, keep in mind two important implications:

- When people resist your attempts to reframe them regarding a particular situation, it doesn't necessarily mean the following characterizations apply. The descriptions below reflect *patterns* of responses, not isolated reactions to specific situations. Sometimes O-type people resist efforts to reframe them and sometimes D types are amenable to shifting their perspective.
- A person who displays a few of the distinctions for Type-D or Type-O people doesn't necessarily fit the entire profile. We can't extrapolate a few descriptors that seem to fit and assume a person will demonstrate all the characteristics.

With these cautions in place, let's explore the two basic orientations people demonstrate when facing significant change.

### ***Danger-Oriented People***

Type-D people view the crisis of change as threatening and often feel victimized by it. As a result, they find it difficult to re-orient themselves when their expectations are disrupted.

They tend to see life in "either/or," sequential terms, thinking that change should progress in an orderly, predictable fashion. Since the world rarely offers major change in such a simple package, a Type-D's low tolerance for ambiguity can become a source of heightened anxiety. For them, change is not natural, needed, or pleasant.

During turbulent times, danger-oriented people often feel insecure about themselves and their ability to manage their surroundings. They are usually unaware of the dynamics associated with human transitions, tend to see the unfolding of change as unpredictable, and think they have little chance of influencing the outcomes. This can make them defensive against what appears to be mysterious, random, emotional reactions to disruption.

Type-D people can be slow to acknowledge the need for change. Listed below are three common defenses they use:

**Denial:** "I don't see anything that would suggest a change in our planned course."

**Distortion:** "Well, the data doesn't look that bad to me."



**Figure 2. The Crisis of Change**

**Delusion:** “All this talk of transformation is nothing but hot air. We don’t have to worry so much; what has worked for us in the past is still viable.”

When faced with change, Type-D people are often reactive rather than proactive. They tend to dodge the forces of change in themselves and others as long as possible. When they can no longer avoid it, they have too little time to plan a sound response. This leaves them with only their knee-jerk reactions to protect themselves or their families, friends, companies, industries, or countries against the new requirements for success.

Type-D people can spend much of their time blaming someone or something for the problems they experience during change. This behavior inhibits problem solving, demoralizes others, and is counterproductive. Blaming and attacking typically result in counter-blaming and attacking by others. The energy that should go toward addressing the transition is spent instead on scapegoating, face-saving, and CYA activity. This usually only results in more headaches and increased anxiety and hostility.

Many Type-D people feel robbed of stability. They feel that, in the past, the rate of change was less and they enjoyed more of a sense of peace and security. The changes they did face were more isolated and evolutionary in nature. The impact was less disruptive and easier to contend with. Now their world has become chaotic and they experience gaping holes in their defenses against the stress, ambiguity, conflict, and imbalance brought on by change.

As the reality of change crashes in on them, they feel more and more overwhelmed. They experience their lives as unpredictable, confusing, and contradictory. They see that their previously adequate responses to events and issues no longer work. They apply all the skill and knowledge that may have brought success in the past but now, too often, it yields failure, humiliation, and defeat.

A Type-D response to the crisis of change is heavily influenced by a person’s understanding of change and his or her available resources to assimilate the change. It has little to do with a person’s age. So the Type-D approach to change is by no means limited to older people or the “soon to retire.” Unfortunately, many young people today are Type-D oriented. It may not be apparent because their baseline of change expectation is higher than those with more years of experience. Nonetheless, when young people exceed their threshold for absorbing disruption, they display the same symptoms of future shock as anyone else.

The Type-D orientation toward change is not limited to individuals. It can also be seen in family relations, group dynamics, church politics, community relations, etc. It is found in management teams, organizational cultures, industry attitudes, and national biases. Wherever it is manifested, it significantly curbs people’s abilities to manage transitions for themselves and others.

### ***Opportunity-Oriented People***

Opportunity-oriented, or Type-O, people respond to the crisis of change in a dramatically different way. While seeing the dangers, they also view change as a potential advantage to be exploited rather than a problem to be avoided.

Type-O people usually have a strong life vision that serves as a source of meaning...a beacon guiding them through the turmoil of change. When the unexpected throws them off-course, they are able to regain their bearings by realigning with their sense of purpose. Their vision functions as a template they lay on top of the ambiguities that arise, allowing them to stay on their charted course.

Type-O people view life as a set of constantly shifting, interacting parts that produce an ever-rising number of combinations. Each day, Type-O people assume that a new set of opportunities will emerge that will produce even more demanding challenges.

When disruption occurs, these people experience the same disorientation as Type-D people, but they feel less need to defend against what is happening. They view disruption and its discomforts as a required (if unpleasant) part of life. They develop creative ways to manage the implications rather than waste their resources trying to avoid them.

For example, Type-O people tend to “compartmentalize” the stress caused by change. In doing so, they are able to contain the strain they may be feeling in one area of their lives. They prevent it from causing ramifications in another. It’s not unusual for Type-O people to isolate the anger and frustration felt toward a particular group in the office. They resist aiming these emotions toward other work groups during the day or family members in the evening. Type-O people thereby avoid the drain on resources that would result from escalating problems in other areas of their lives.

Type-O people protect their ability to adapt by not engaging in change efforts that require resources they don’t have. They know the limits of their personal and organizational means and don’t waste their time, money, or political capital pursuing endeavors that cannot be properly supported. While they are cautious about overextension, they are typically creative about using the resources they do have, thus stretching them to their maximum utilization. They constantly challenge their own assumptions about how something can be done with what they have.

Type-O people are also aware of the limits of their capacity to absorb change. Change *resources* have to do with things like time, money, and political capital. Change *capacity* has to do with how much transition a person can absorb before experiencing future shock symptoms (inability to maintain productivity, quality, and safety standards). Recalibrating expectations to adapt to change requires intellectual, emotional, and physical energy. When more of this recalibration is called for than people have the capacity for, they will likely start displaying evidence of future shock.

However, Type-O people know when to ask for help. People with this kind of reaction are often independent and self-sufficient, yet they know when to tap the special skills of those around them to achieve common change goals. In this way, they conserve both resources and capacity to absorb change. Type-O people also rely on nurturing relationships to help them bounce back from the strain of change. Such ties provide a “safe haven” where love and acceptance revive their energy and help them regain perspective. For some people, their families, close professional colleagues, or friends provide this nurturing. Others find sanctuary in religious or support groups.

An obvious ability of Type-O people is their acceptance of change as a natural part of life. Type-D people don’t expect that significant change will be an aspect of their lives. Therefore, they are disrupted when fate hands them a surprise. The Type-O group avoids some of this dismay because change does not surprise them. They never assume that their world will remain unchanged. They view change, even major change—as an inherent part of existence.

They also do not feel that life will unfold in a logical, easily rationalized manner with clear-cut, right-or-wrong options. Instead, they expect to be confronted with confusing, mixed signals that must be decoded and acted upon. They are better-equipped to act in these kinds of situations because they understand the ever-shifting nature of the world. They see the paradox that so often lies below the surface of what might otherwise appear to be a situation filled with contradiction.

Type-O people recognize many ways to achieve balance in their lives:

- Find opportunities hidden within dangers
- See humor in serious situations
- Find order embedded in chaos
- Show the patience required in urgent circumstances
- Make the necessary shifts so things can remain the same
- Find the constancy that exists within a transition
- Strive toward perfection while accepting its impossibility

The Type-O ability to respond in a positive way to change does not occur because of any special immunity. These people are as vulnerable to the discomforts of confusion, anxiety, and stress as are Type-D people. The main difference between the two groups is not the feelings of discomfort caused by change—both have these emotions. Their *reactions* to these feelings differ.

Type-D people tend to become immobilized and react with fear, denial, or complacency. Type-O people recognize the discomfort as a signal to start adapting to the shifting circumstances.

Type-O people are, therefore, quicker to determine that a change is certain, needed, or advantageous. They usually move to a problem-solving mode relatively quickly. Type-O people don't waste much energy blaming others for the unexpected. They merge what they have learned from the disruption to a fresh understanding of the situation. As solutions form, stability and productivity return. Of course, it is only a matter of time until the disruption of another change alters expectations. The process then begins again.

Practitioners must be able to recognize whether a person is displaying Type-D or Type-O characteristics and respond appropriately.



## 5. How to Be Direct and Explicit When Reframing Others

In this series, I've been describing the skills required (there are five of them) to reframe a person's mindset during a change initiative. In this post, I'll talk about the final skill.

### Reframing Skill #5: The Willingness to Confront

For many change facilitators, this final skill is the most difficult part of the reframing process. Being direct and explicit with other people by challenging their way of looking at the world is risky, both personally and professionally. People can become trapped in their existing perspectives and lose their ability to adapt to important changes. Most people tend to believe only what they see, but see only what they believe exists.

Sometimes, the only way to effect movement from the status quo is to "confront" people with the true price for what is required to accomplish the desired outcome. The term is not used here to imply being argumentative or insulting. When associated with reframing people, "confronting" means putting a mirror up so they can see and face the implications of their current mindset. Here is an example:

*“I understand how you view this situation and I can see how it has led you to have the priorities you do, take certain positions, and do the things you do. That said, the current course you are on will lead to consequences that I don’t think are in your best interest. The same situation, however, viewed differently, could provide some alternatives that may work more in your favor. If you keep your present mindset, you will probably not solve the problem (or leverage the opportunity) the way you ultimately want. You’ll need a different perspective to accomplish what you want. I know it’s difficult to redefine your view of things but I believe it is important to try because I honestly believe you will not be satisfied with the result otherwise.”*

The confrontational aspect of reframing means we care enough about the individual to be brutally honest about the downside of their current perspective and to offer an alternative view.

## **The Reframing Process**

Reframing is the process of integrating the five skills covered in this series into four specific phases. (Download a complete table of strategies and tactics [here](#).)

- In Phase 1, the practitioner identifies the other person’s mindset. This step provides a basis for understanding the person’s existing context or “code book” for interpreting a given change situation. Strong communication and active listening skills are critical to the success of this phase.
- In Phase 2, the practitioner follows certain specific steps to help create an alternative FOR so the person can interpret the situation in a manner more amenable to a successful outcome. The ability to legitimize the person’s current viewpoint, offer an alternative perspective, and be honest about the price for success is critical to the achievement of this phase.
- In Phase 3, the practitioner helps reset new priorities based on the new FOR.
- In Phase 4, the practitioner must be prepared to respond appropriately to the person’s reaction when the recommended new FOR and priorities are offered.

Professional facilitators of organizational change must be able to influence those they serve (sponsors, agents, targets, and advocates). Of particular importance is their ability to guide sponsors. There are times when this kind of influence takes the form of reshaping others’ views as well as their interpretation of a situation in order to alter their natural tendencies. What I have presented here is the way I address the challenge of reframing mindsets. There are many perspectives on this important part of practicing our craft, so I encourage those who rely on other approaches to share them with us.