

Third Edition

# CHANGE AGENT'S GUIDE



**7 STAGE MODEL TO HELP FACILITATE  
ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE MANAGEMENT**

**Ronald G. Havelock**  
with Steve Zlotolow  
& Alice Fackre

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# **Do you see yourself as a change agent? Create a new reality by guiding your team to successful change.**

Whether you are a seasoned change management pro, you've recently been tasked with managing a change initiative or you've been tapped as part of a change team, *The Change Agent's Guide* provides a practical approach to understanding and managing the process of change. It's an accessible guide for leaders and practitioners alike. Anyone who sees themselves in a position to activate positive change!

As a change agent, you want to turn ideals into reality. Understanding the process of change and adhering to a process model to guide your efforts goes a long way toward making your efforts successful. *The Change Agent's Guide* is designed as a companion on your change journey. It helps you form the change team, understand your role in the change process and guide your change initiative through seven stages of change.

The first and second editions of *The Change Agent's Guide* were developed based on research conducted by Dr. Ron Havelock while he led the Institute for Social Research at The University of Michigan, research that was funded by grants from the U.S. Office of Education. For the second edition, Havelock teamed up with Dr. Steve Zlotolow, then of Central Michigan University and later tapped to design and launch San Jose State University's eCampus. The second edition quickly became a foundation for teaching change management and empowering change agents at universities across the country. This revised third edition expands practical guidance and goes deeper, introducing you to key concepts that cut across all stages. You'll also find an exploration of roles on the change team, how to recruit and support both informal and formal change team members and how to understand your mandate as a change agent.

With *The Change Agent's Guide* as your companion, you'll not only be positioned for a successful beginning of your change initiative, you'll also be ready for whatever comes up along your change journey.

# The Change Agent's Guide

## Third Edition

Ronald G. Havelock  
Steve Zlotolow & Alice Fackre

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# Contents

<b>Introduction: Beginning the Change Journey .....</b>	<b>8</b>
A Process Model as a Practical Guide .....	8
The Rainbow Logic of Change .....	9
Placing Yourself in the Context of Change.....	10
Welcome to “Change” as a Process .....	11
What is Change? .....	13
The Basic Idea: Cycles of Problem-Solving .....	15
Why Use a Process Model and Why This model?.....	19
The Seven Steps in the Cycle and Recycling.....	20
<b>Stage 1: CARE: Establishing the Need for Action .....</b>	<b>23</b>
Stage 1.1 Whose Cares Are They?.....	24
Stage 1.2 How Widely is Concern Felt? .....	25
Stage 1.3 How Deep is Concern Felt? .....	26
Stage 1.4 How Do We Sort Out Cares? .....	27
Stage 1.5 Rating and Prioritizing Cares .....	28
Stage 1.6 Social Sectors and their Different Cares .....	29
Stage 1.7 When Everything is “Fine” .....	32
Stage 1.8 Concerns All Over the Lot .....	33
Stage 1.9 The Real Care Is Hidden from View.....	34
Stage 1.10 Client Intentions and Values .....	34
Stage 1.11 The Change Agent’s Value Issues .....	35
Stage 1.12 The “License” to Manage a Change Process.....	36
Stage 1.13 Six Questions.....	36
Summary of Stage 1: Care .....	37
<b>Stage 2: RELATE: Building Good Relations .....</b>	<b>37</b>
Stage 2.1: Who is the Client?.....	38
Stage 2.2: Relating to the Larger Social Space .....	39
Stage 2.3: Where are You? Defining And Managing Your Own Role.....	41
Stage 2.4: Where are you Starting From?.....	43
Stage 2.5: Assembling Your Change Team .....	46
Stage 2.6: Managing Initial Encounters .....	47
Stage 2.7: What is the Ideal Relationship? .....	49
Stage 2.8: Danger Signals .....	52
Stage 2.9: Size Up - Sum Up .....	54
Summary of Stage 2: Relate.....	55
<b>Stage 3: EXAMINE: Defining the Real Problems .....</b>	<b>56</b>
Stage 3.1: Identifying Problems .....	57
Stage 3.2: Identifying Opportunities .....	59

Stage 3.3: Visualizing the System .....	59
Stage 3.4: Diagnostic Inventory.....	64
Stage 3.5: Collaboration in Making the Diagnosis.....	66
Stage 3.6: Diagnostic Pitfalls .....	67
Summary of Stage 3: Examine.....	69
<b>Stage 4: ACQUIRE: Reaching Out for Resources .....</b>	<b>71</b>
Stage 4.1: D-A-E-T-E-I-M, The Seven Reasons to Acquire Resources.....	73
Stage 4.2 Acquisition Strategies .....	76
Stage 4.3 Acquisition Tools.....	88
Stage 4.4 Building a Permanent Capacity for Resource Acquisition.....	94
Summary of Stage 4: Acquire .....	95
<b>Stage 5: TRY: Committing to Solutions .....</b>	<b>97</b>
Stage 5.1: Assembling and Ordering Findings.....	101
Stage 5.2: Deriving Implications .....	102
Stage 5.3: Generating a Range of Solution Ideas.....	104
Stage 5.4: Testing Feasibilities.....	107
Stage 5.5: Adapt .....	110
Stage 5.6: Acting .....	111
Summary of Stage 5: Try.....	112
<b>Stage 6: EXTEND: Gaining Acceptance .....</b>	<b>113</b>
Stage 6.1: Gaining Individual Acceptance .....	116
Stage 6.2: Gaining Group Acceptance .....	122
Stage 6.3: Deeper Adoption .....	130
Stage 6.4: Wider Adoption.....	133
Stage 6.5: Orchestrating Multiple Diffusion Strategies .....	140
Stage 6.6: Further Extending and Staying Flexible .....	140
Summary of Stage 6: Extend .....	143
<b>Stage 7: RENEW: Sustaining and Improving .....</b>	<b>144</b>
Stage 7.1: Repeating the Cycle .....	145
Stage 7.2: Improving the Process.....	146
Stage 7.3: Keeping the Change Fresh.....	153
Stage 7.4: Creating a Self-Renewal Capacity .....	154
Stage 7.5: Passing on the Process: Installing the Change Function in an Organization .....	157
Stage 7.6: Transforming the System I: From Item Change to System Change .....	164
Stage 7.7: Transforming the System II: What is “Better”? .....	167
Stage 7.8: Terminating and Moving On.....	169
Summary of Stage 7: Renew .....	171
<b>Change Team: ROLES: Making the System Work .....</b>	<b>172</b>
Three Concepts Cut Across All Stages: <i>Openness, Connection, and Structure</i> .....	174

Where Does the Change <i>Agent</i> Fit in the Change <i>Process</i> ? .....	176
Roles in the Change Process .....	178
Your Own Role, Your Team, and Your Strategy .....	180
Role 1: How to Be an Effective <i>Catalyst</i> .....	181
Role 2: How to Be an Effective <i>Human Relations Expert</i> .....	183
Role 3: How to Be an Effective <i>Diagnostic Advisor</i> .....	187
Role 4: How to Be an Effective <i>Resource Linker</i> .....	190
Role 5: How to Be an Effective <i>Solution Giver</i> .....	194
Role 6: How to Be an Effective <i>Extension Agent</i> .....	196
Role 7: How to Be an Effective <i>Process Helper</i> .....	198
Summary of Change Team Roles.....	201
<b>Summing Up: Tying it all Together and Understanding your Mandate.....</b>	<b>205</b>
Your Point of Entry .....	206
Your Reason for Taking on the Change Agent Role .....	207
<b>Table of Figures.....</b>	<b>210</b>
<b>About the Authors.....</b>	<b>38</b>

# Introduction

## Beginning the Change Journey

Do you see yourself as a change agent? Whether you are a seasoned change management pro, you've been recently tasked with managing a change initiative or you've been tapped as part of a change team, understanding the process of change and adhering to a process model to guide your efforts goes a long way toward making your efforts successful.

### **A Process Model as a Practical Guide**

The Change Agent's Guide is designed to be the change agent's companion on the change journey, providing a structure and process for managing change. It's intended as a practical guide you can refer to throughout your change initiative.

Now newly revised in its Third Edition, The Guide and its supplemental content are available in a variety of formats:

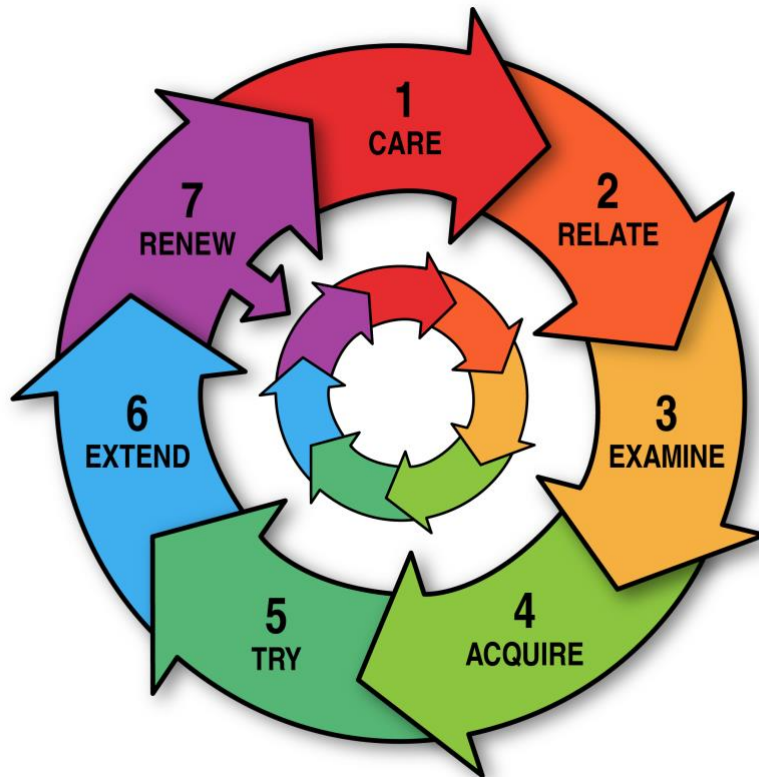
- **Book:** The Guide is available in printed book form and eBook form on Amazon.
- **Workbook:** A companion workbook with checklists for each stage is available as a supplemental resource.
- **Website:** Visit [changeagentsguide.com](http://changeagentsguide.com) for additional resources, case studies, videos and downloadable PDF versions of The Guide's individual chapters.

We begin The Guide with an introduction to our change process model, how we think about “change” as a process, and how you can think about your role as a change agent. As a change agent, you have a pivotal role in guiding improvement and achieving a successful outcome. We are here along with you on your journey!



## The Rainbow Logic of Change

Take a Good Look at this figure, your key to how the CHANGE process works. We'll refer to each stage in the process frequently throughout The Guide.



*Figure I-1: The Seven Stages of Change*

The color scheme of the diagram, which will keep reappearing as you navigate your way through The Guide, is intended to have a certain logic. It starts with red for **CARE**. Think hot, angry, upset, but not necessarily thinking too clearly. Then, as various people get involved in constructive ways, it cools down to orange in **RELATE**, and then to yellow in **EXAMINE**, as in “Let’s figure out what the real problem is that we are so upset about.”

As we move toward solutions, in the **ACQUIRE** and **TRY** stages, the world becomes greener. When the solution spreads, in the **EXTEND** stage, we enter the clear blue sky of solution land. From the blue, we begin again to be concerned with (a) whether we have really done a good job, and (b) whether we should be thinking again about the whole swath of problems that are out there. Blue begins merging to red as we transition through the purple-violet of the **RENEW** stage. The circle keeps turning, the rainbow follows.

## Placing Yourself in the Context of Change

Now take a step back and consider the larger context. The Guide is organized to help you place yourself in the context of change.

### Ask yourself: “CHANGE – What is it?”

- What is natural change in human affairs?
- What is change as a problem-solving process?
- What is change as a planned problem-solving process?

This chapter guides you in considering these aspects of change, deepening your understanding of core change management concepts and what we mean when we talk about change and change management.

### Place yourself in context

- Your organization
- Your place
- Your situation

### Review all seven stages: C-R-E-A-T-E-R

- This is the heart of The Guide.
- The seven C-R-E-A-T-E-R stages are: Care, Relate, Examine, Acquire, Try, Extend, Renew
- Each stage has several components and sub-stages.
- There is a chapter in The Guide devoted to each stage, with detailed discussion, considerations, and guidelines.

### Choose your role

- Each CREATER stage points to an important change agent role.
- What skills do you need to acquire to expand or strengthen your role?
- If not you, who do you need to recruit to fill the other roles?

## Welcome to “Change” as a Process

Think of the change agent as a person called upon to help a group trying to cope with a difficult and complicated circumstance. This group that is in need of help can be designated as the “client.” At the outset the agent-to-client relationship requires definition and a set of expectations. A necessary but not always clear expectation is that the agent can provide some kind of help and that the client is ready and willing to receive that help. A series of exchanges ensues in which the agent comes to understand (a) what the client’s world is like, (b) what the problem really is, and (c) where it might be possible for the agent to intervene within the world of the client.

While a ‘client’ needing change could be an individual, as conceived in The Change Agent’s Guide, the client is a group of people in a social system - a social entity with defined borders and defined purpose. This system ‘client’ has been determined to need some sort of ‘change.’ Presumably this projected change will be beneficial to the system or to that client system’s own clients or users.

### The ‘Content’ versus the ‘Process’

The core idea behind the “change agent” construct is that we can differentiate the content of action from the process. In our experience, it is very difficult for most people in the midst of a change activity or project to make this distinction because they fixate on the content as the motivating force, the *raison d’être*, the reason for doing anything. The Change Agent’s Guide is intended as a template for understanding and applying a rational and effective process to any effort to bring about change in a system, no matter how large or complex that system may be. Our view is that there is always a process underlying any action, a series of steps that lead from a starting point of ‘need’ to an end point of ‘consequence.’

In the most primitive form of problem solving, the arc of action between need and consequence is pre-set in the animal. It could thus be called ‘instinctual problem solving.’ All animals have it, although humans probably have a more sophisticated repertoire of responses, and their instinctual arc of response may involve several more built-in steps. We refer to such instinctual responses as ‘the two-step cycle’, essentially, first, stimulus and then response. Don’t think; just act.

In more advanced forms, the need awareness is followed by a series of steps, which in the human includes “thought.” In other words, interposing additional steps between need and response. Too many of us too often think that problem solving is basically simple. And, ironically, the more urgent the need seems to be, the stronger the tendency to respond immediately. The fundamental role of the change agent is to get the client to think — especially to think more constructively about the entire arc of problem solving, starting

with understanding more clearly what the need really is, then, how to mobilize a community of actors around the problem-solving process, with them collectively determining what the real problem is. Once the problem is more clearly and consensually understood, the problem-solving group can meaningfully set about determining what the range of possible solution avenues are, and how best to implement the favored solution ideas or actions. All these steps are set in a quasi-experimental framework which assumes that solutions can be tried and then evaluated and then changed or refined based on interim evaluations or feedback.

Once we accept the (perhaps obvious) idea that there is a need to interpose additional steps between need and action, we need to consider what steps and how many steps there might be. The Lewin model of three steps, “unfreeze, move, refreeze,” is a useful starting point, but it is a radical simplification. The “Guide” proposes seven steps and then breaks these seven into digestible sub-steps. The number ‘seven’ is arbitrary of course, but there is a reason to restrict the number to the approximate number of principles that the average human can keep in mind at any one time.

The broadest way to conceive of the change process is: “How do we make things better?” But what does “better” mean? To answer that very basic question we need to follow with more questions, such as:

- Better for whom?
- What is “better” for them vs for us?
- Who is the “us”?

There is always a “given” which confronts the change agent. That “given” is an on-going situation with a specific set of actors. These actors form a social system of sorts, a social entity with which the change agent is in contact, formally or informally.

There is also a “given” area or scope of concern, which defines and limits the actions that the client system wants or needs and the change agent might provide.

The change agent may be an individual or there may be a change team, functioning apart from the client system or as an integral part of it.

Role definitions may alter as the interactive process proceeds: the definition of the “client” and even the definition of who is the “change agent” can expand, contract, or reshape. Even the goals and the scope of action may require reformulation.

## **What is Change?**

Change is everywhere and is always happening. It is a coming together and a falling apart. Somewhere in the middle is a state of 'No Change,' which we could also call "stasis" except that the stasis is inherently unstable, coming apart even as it is coming together. A better term is quasi-stasis, a sometimes-desired state of equilibrium, a balance of forces between the coming together and the falling apart.

For each of us individual humans, 'change' is life itself, a coming together of trillions of atoms to make a whole living thing, walking, talking and acting on the world around us.

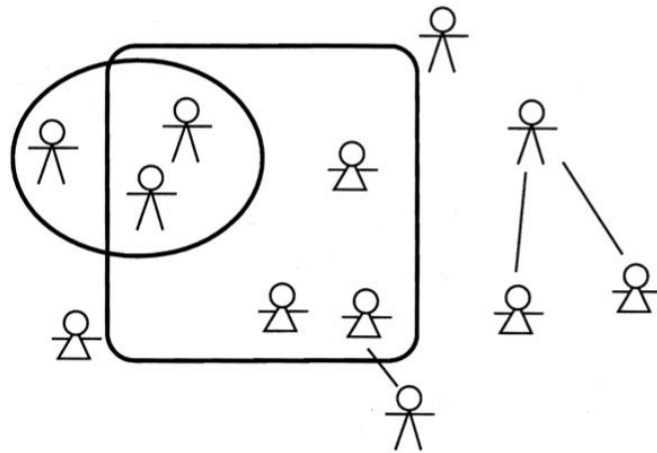
This living whole is always and continuously in a state of flux. But the flux is not random. It is mostly purposeful, and the goal is to reach a better state of equilibrium. That striving or converging toward the 'better' state could also be called "PROBLEM SOLVING." If the result of this coming together is an improved quasi-stasis, that could be called "PROGRESS."

## **Living Social Systems: What Are They?**

To begin to understand who is being served or who is in need of change, we need to make a brief review of what social systems are, how they come into being, how they keep going, how they change, and how they grow and decay.

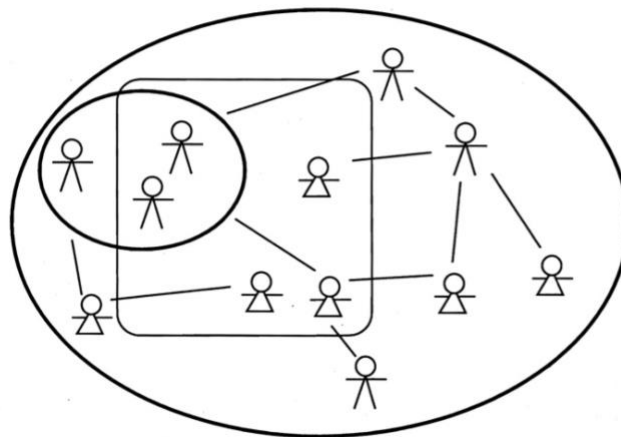
### **Formation of social systems**

Social organization is always going to be complex beyond our knowing. It exists in great variety and abundance everywhere, always overlapping, multiplying, connected, partially connected, or coming disconnected. Given this complexity, we can still step back in our imagination to the chaotic world of pre-connection when all people were islands unto themselves. Imagine a group of people boarding a bus at an airport, headed for downtown. A few may be acquainted, but most are headed in from different places and getting ready to head on out to different destinations. Here they are, in one place, at one time, the most rudimentary of social organizations, the collection. They have, at this moment, only one relatively weak common goal, to continue on this bus until it stops. Such might be as depicted in Figure I-2.



*Figure I-2: Forming a Coherent Group*

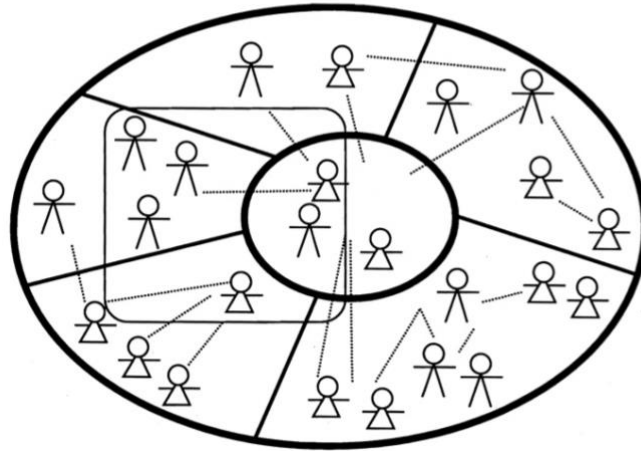
The next figure extends these ideas into something that we can begin to call a social system with not only a joint recognition of common concerns, but a division of labor and an integrated set of relations capable of producing joint action.



*Figure I-3: Forming a Group into a System*

Figure I-3 represents the typical state of affairs in organized societies. Most of us are embedded in social organizations with specified roles and task expectations relating to innumerable shared goals and concerns. However, the degree of connectedness and the areas of shared concern vary widely from group to group. As the change agent, in the initial survey of the scene, you will have to make some judgments about the strength and tightness of the social organisms with you are dealing. Sometimes, the first task of the change agent may be to bring people together and to increase the degree of cohesion, but

in other cases, the more urgent first task may be to open up a system which is so tightly bound and ordered within itself that it has lost the ability to change.



*Figure I-4: System in a frozen state, with defined sub-groups and barriers*

## **Change agents in social systems**

Change agents can be viewed as both builders and destroyers of systems. Certainly, where linkages are very weak, (as in Figure I-2) the focal concern may be system-building, creating linkages among members and creating a sense of the whole for

all the members taken together. A social system is in many respects a prized human achievement. In its fullest form it has evolved over countless generations to provide stability, safety, and comfort to our individual lives. Thus, once achieved, cohesive social organization is tightly held, sometimes even to the death. By the same token, where it is very weak or in a state of disintegration, it may be a cause for great anxiety to would-be change agents and others. If you judge this to be the primary concern for your system, then the focal chapter in The Guide for you is Stage 2, Relate.

## **The Basic Idea: Cycles of Problem-Solving**

All human activity is made up of **repeating cycles of actions** driven by the need to survive and thrive. As people and systems learn and grow, the set of actions included in the cycle becomes progressively more intricate and more successful. This process guide is founded on the idea of a cycle of specific actions, which promote positive system change; a cycle which needs to be repeated over and over again as a change advances, with careful attention to each of the action steps. Thus, the “steps” are also guiding principles which the change agent must attend to on a continuing basis.

## **Kurt Lewin's 3-Stage Model: Unfreeze-Move-Refreeze**

If you are confronted by an established system containing a rather well-defined social structure and long-standing relationships (almost always the case in educational settings), then your initial “change” activity may have to be directed toward weakening or loosening some of these bonds, at least temporarily.

This brings us to one of the many valuable insights into change processes introduced by the great social psychologist and field theorist, Kurt Lewin. Lewin proposed that all social systems exist in a state of what he called “quasi-stationary equilibrium,” the parts being held together by a cohesive energy which also acts as a barrier to outside influences. Like all living things, social systems are required to absorb new inputs from outside on a continuing basis as a matter of survival, but they do so in a highly controlled manner, which preserves the essential stability and relations among existing elements over time. The most conservative view of system maintenance is that all inputs be either absorbed, without changing any of the internal elements or their relations, or expelled.

If we take a state's educational establishment as a “system,” for example, the inputs are all the new children entering and the outputs are all the young adults graduating. The purpose is to sustain the culture by providing new knowledgeable and skilled people to fill all the adult positions and jobs required. The specific content may change over time as knowledge expands but the system stays in place. Both the barrier and the cohesive ties between elements are necessary for system survival, but barriers and ties are a hindrance to change coming either from within or outside. Internal rigidities and commitments prevent reorganization, growth, and reintegration of existing elements. Strong barriers protect the system from unwanted intrusions but inhibit entry of new people, new resources, and new ideas.

### **Unfreezing: Often a change agent's first task**

Lewin proposed that the initial posture of most social systems to change is “frozen.” They don't want ‘change.’ Change means trouble, disruption. Therefore, the initial task of those who wish to bring about change is to unfreeze the system, to create an environment in which ties are at least temporarily loosened and barriers made temporarily permeable.



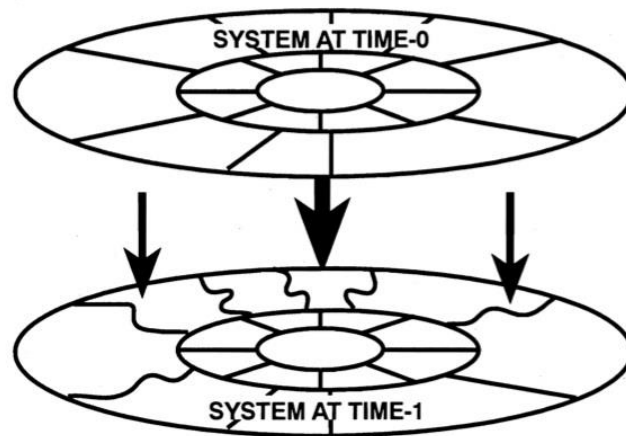


Figure I-5: From Frozen to Unfreezing

### **Moving: Only possible if there is openness to changing**

The second step in Lewin's change model is what he called "moving." This is the introduction of the change or innovation and its initial acceptance or absorption into the system. The more permeable the barriers and the looser the interconnections within the system, the more rapidly and easily new elements can enter. This is what we could call system "openness." Advanced and sophisticated systems are able to retain a great deal of internal stability while still welcoming many types of innovations. They can do this by being temporarily open at certain times or by having specialized subsystems that take in, analyze, and transform.

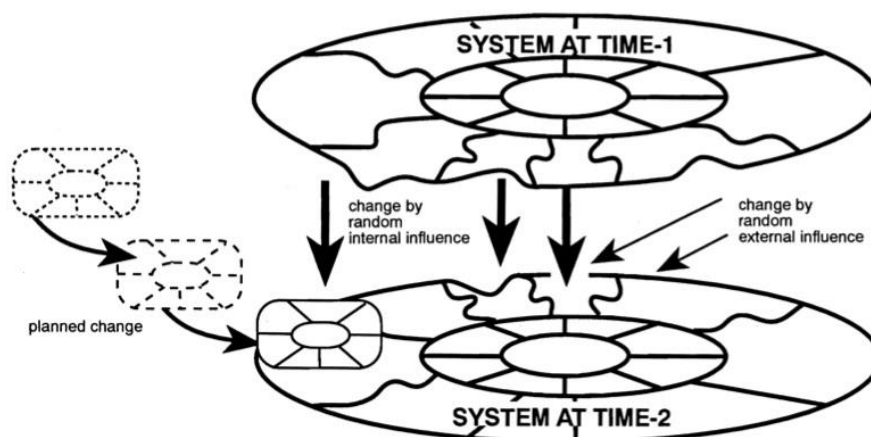
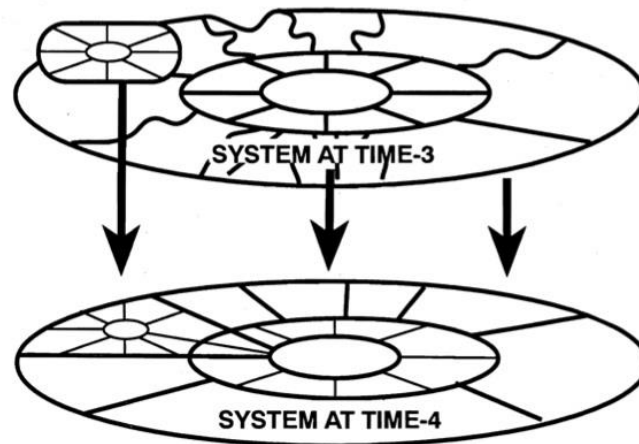


Figure I-6: Moving

Figure I-6 suggests that “moving” might involve three rather different types of change inputs: (1) change involving internal elements only, i.e. changing relationships, reallocating resources, changing internal linkages and barriers; (2) changes from outside in a more-or-less random fashion about either intent or planning; and (3) changes, made by deliberate action of persons inside or outside the system (or both). This Guide is concerned primarily with this third type.

### **Refreezing: Making sure the change stays (if it is good)**

The final step in Lewin's simple model is “refreezing,” i.e., the return to stability wherein the new elements are incorporated. Of course, systems that are temporarily open to new ideas can close up again without incorporating any new elements.



*Figure I-7: Accepting the New and Refreezing with the New in Place*

New elements can be tolerated for a time but then rejected, often at a point in time when members are forced by circumstance to decide what is “really important” (e.g., when budget trimming is required). Thus, in many ways the greatest challenge for the change agent is to gain a level of acceptance for the innovation that is strong enough to survive this closing-up process.

Lewin's three-step unfreezing-moving-refreezing model actually covers all of the seven stages around which The Guide is built, but they are introduced here because they help us to understand the critical aspect of the first stage. The level of concern for a problem, or the sense of a need to change the status quo, must reach the point at which the system becomes unfrozen. The “moving” part of Lewin's model really goes with our Stages 2, 3, 4, and 5. The “refreezing” applies to The Guide's Stage 6.

It is also useful to think of change issues in terms of the system concepts that Lewin introduced. Our world is made up of systems within systems; sets of elements which go

together from the micro-space of atoms to the macro-space of galaxies. Living systems appear to be the most complex and interesting because of their ability to reproduce and to process material from their environment to maintain a more-or-less stable internal state. At the physiological level, we refer to this state as “homeostasis” and the processing transformation as “metabolism.” Social organization has developed into a variety of forms with equivalent quasi-stationary internal states and with processes equivalent to metabolism. Both the states and the processes of social systems have to be recognized and evaluated. They are the barriers to change, the targets of change, and the very stuff of change.

## **Adding Reason to the Process of Action**

Designing “change” is based on the practical idea that we should add reason to the process of problem-solving. In essence, we need to first define the problem as clearly as possible. Having done this, we need to cast a wide net for solution ideas and resources that might be relevant. Further, we need to sort through such ideas and resources to find the combination that makes the most sense and has the best fit to the problem at hand. Then we need to apply that solution in a coherent and concerted manner to give the best chance of success. This kind of rational strategy could be broken down into any number of separate steps, but it is also important to keep the presentation simple. As change agents develop a greater understanding of what is involved, they may want to add others or organize their strategies somewhat differently. The seven stages in The Guide are a good starter set.

## **Why Use a Process Model and Why This model?**

The Guide sets forth the notion that effective problem solving requires a series of stages, starting with the definition of the need and the problem and moving on to a concerted search for solution ideas and relevant resources. Using this knowledge, a change agent can help the members of the client system sort through the assembled ideas and resources to find the combination that makes the most sense and has the best fit to the problem at hand. To complete the cycle, the preferred solution idea is put into action through a coherent plan to give the best chance of success.

## **The Core Concept Bundle: Seven Ideas in a Cycle**

The Guide defines the seven stages of the change process using an active verb for each stage. The name encompasses a core idea, which suggests the primary considerations and activity for the stage. The core ideas in sequence are Care, Relate, Examine, Acquire, Try, Extend, and Renew.

Care	What is the concern? Who cares? How much do they care? How much should they care?
Relate	Whose concern is it? Who is the client? How do we relate to them? How do they relate to each other?
Examine	How do we define the concern as a solvable problem?
Acquire	How do we get help? Who has resources, solutions? How do we get access to what's out there?
Try	How do we pick the best solution? How do we put the elements together?
Extend	How do we translate into action? Get consensus? How do we widen the circle of users?
Renew	How do we go on to repeat the cycle with this client and/or others?

## The Seven Steps in the Cycle and Recycling

These seven ideas form a coherent progression. They lead into each other and they onlead back to each other. When we sense a concern, we then must direct ourselves to the question of whose concern it is and how we relate to those people. We then have to think through what the real problem or need is that underlies the concern. That leads to a more focused search for solutions and a strategy for putting the solutions into practice. Yet, as we go through these stages, we are frequently rechecking on what the real need is, whose need it is, and what the level of concern is that is driving that need.

We identify the cycle as having seven steps but, of course, it can have any number of steps. A good systems engineer can probably break down any significant change effort into hundreds of steps which lead into one another and that build on each other. However, in starting out, the change agent should never go to that level of detail too quickly. In fact, we should probably take a step backward and consider that the simplest form of problem solving involves just two steps: arousal and response.

“Planned Innovation” is a complex subject which has been analyzed by scholars from a number of viewpoints. However, most practicing change agents organize their work and their thinking about innovation in terms of specific projects in which they are involved, projects which have a defined beginning and an end, and a sequential history. Therefore, we chose “stages” of planned innovation as the framework for navigating change.

There are two ways to look at stages of innovation. One way is to see it from the point of view of the people who are being changed, and the other is to see it from the point of view of someone who is trying to change someone else. First, consider the viewpoint of the one who is changed. Every person, every group, and every social organization necessarily adopts some sort of problem-solving process in order to survive in a changing world. This does not mean that everyone is an expert problem-solver, and it does not mean that everyone finds innovative solutions when they have a problem, but everyone does develop some sort of procedure for coping with change.

The real key to effective problem-solving and sensible action to improve our world is to get beyond the two-step mode of thinking about change and acting to bring about change. In a major sense, that is what this book is all about. Take at least one extra step before you act on an impulse: stop and think; stop and plan what you are going to do; stop and think about the consequences of your action for different people, for the longer term, for the system as a whole. Stop and think about whether you know what the problem really is. Stop and think about who your client really is. Stop and think about whether you have considered enough alternatives either on what should be done or how to go about doing it. Become a rational problem-solver.

## **The All-Important Social Context**

There is still one more important piece of the picture that is missing: the people! Who are they? What sort of social grouping are we looking at? How many? How are they related to one another? Does the need for change apply to some or all?

Change never occurs in a social vacuum. There are always people to consider. Different people with different needs, related to one another in complex ways. Thus, one more step is needed to complete the problem-solving model, the step of “relating to the system.” In the most general sense, “system” just means a number of things that go together: elements, molecules, cells, organs, organisms, or whatever. Social systems are merely bunches of people that go together in some way. Just who are the social elements, how they go together, and how well they go together are crucial questions for the change agent.

The mere connectedness of the members of a system may be the central change issue. Do the people involved even see themselves as part of the same system? Do they see themselves as having common goals and interests and an ability and willingness to talk

to one another and to work together for the common good? Very often they don't. And if they don't, then the first task of the change agent is to try to bring them together. Groupings of individuals create a challenge to the change agent, and change agents may want to work at any or all of these levels. For example, there are many change situations which can be defined in terms of the relations between two individuals. As we include more and more individuals and subgroupings in the target population, the social integration task becomes more complex. Thus, the social relating skills of the change agent are, in every case, paramount.

Successful change agents are not merely technical experts, they are people movers. The psychological and social aspects of the change effort must always be kept front and center, and the relationships of the change agent to the system and of the system to itself must always be nurtured. Thus, the first enormous step after a concern is recognized is the establishment of relationships among the change actors and beneficiaries, including the change agent. Even after a relationship has been established, and as the change effort proceeds, the agent must return again and again to ask if the whole system has enough integration to support the change effort and has enough trust in the change agent to allow this person to continue efforts on behalf of the desired change.

Thus, the building of the relationship is the core idea for Stage 2, Relate, and is also a key aspect of stages 3, 4, 5, and 6. As we define the problem and reach out for solutions, participation and involvement must continue on as wide a basis as practical. Even more importantly, the sense and perception of participation must be maintained at each stage so that the final solution will be "owned" by most of those who are affected by it.

# Stage 1: CARE

## Establishing the Need for Action

The first task of the change agent is to develop some sense of what the concern is, a sense of where the system seems to be hurting, and where the need for change is most pressing. This may be obvious enough from signs and symptoms everywhere. It may be a “given” if the change agent has been asked to work on a particular problem. But this “given” may not be what is really the most urgent issue for the system. The change agent needs to look around and listen to what is being said by different members of the system before determining what the **real** concern is.

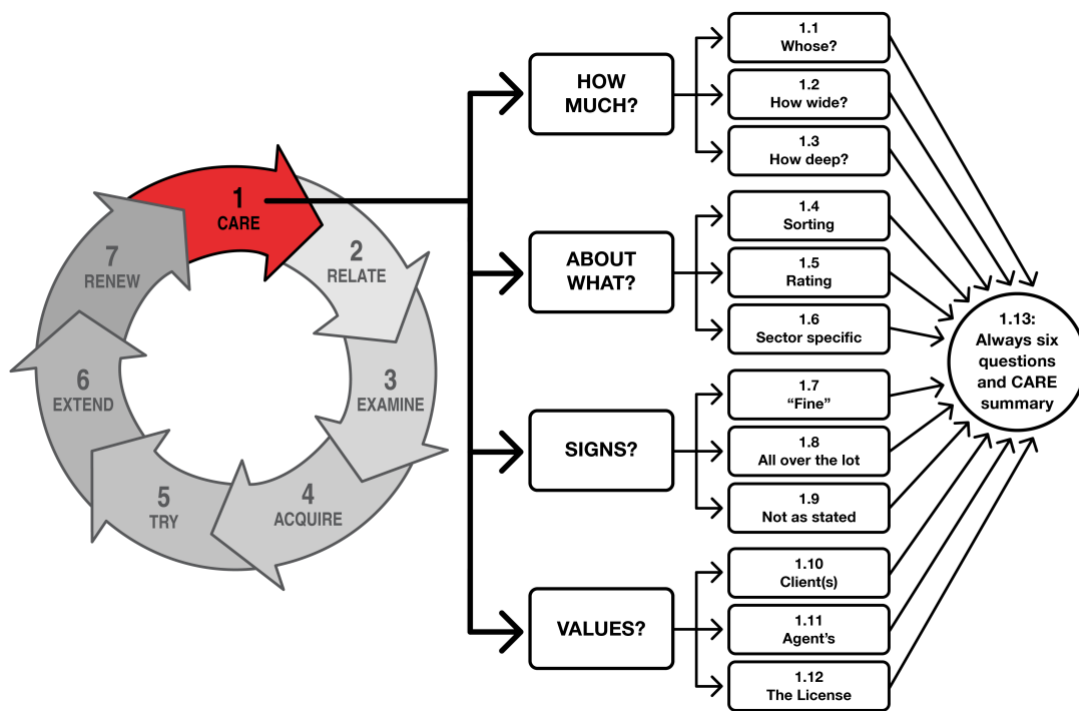


Figure 1-1: Stage 1 “Care”

## **Someone must care enough to make it all worthwhile.**

Change begins with a care or a concern, a feeling that something is wrong, and that someone should do something to correct that wrong. But where is this concern located? Who has the concern? How strongly do they feel it? How can we decide if this is the right starting point or the best call to action? Change agents must face such questions before setting out on the “change” adventure. At this point, you, as the change agent, are ***establishing the need for action.***

Start with these framing questions:

- What constitutes the “system” to be served?
- Who are the people who have a common concern?
- In what sense are these people a “group”?
- To what extent are they aware that their concern is shared?
- Can all those involved reach consensus on their main concern?
- Is the shared concern high enough to drive the “change” effort?

### The Change Agent and the “Care”

Having established the shared concern, ask yourself these questions:

- Is this an appropriate concern for **your** involvement?
- Are **you** really needed?
- Do you have **legitimacy** to assume a change agent role here?

## **Stage 1.1 Whose Cares Are They?**

The stimulus for change can come from anywhere and apply to anything, but it all starts with some precipitating event or action which makes someone believe that a change of some kind is needed. Yet, social systems are complicated, and what appears obvious and urgent to some may not appear so to others. Caring is certainly the engine of action. It is what brings the change agent into the picture in the first place.

We need to ask initially:

- Who is the initiating source?
- Who is the creator of this stimulus to action?



- Is it the creators' concern for themselves or for others?
- If it is a shared concern, how widely is the concern shared?
- Is there self-interest involved as well as interest for others or for the system as a whole? If so, is this a troubling element or is it a positive element, an energy reinforcer?

For the change agent who is invited into the situation to “help,” it will be important to judge where the concern is really coming from. For example, if it is the concern of the leader of the system, is the leader truly representing the system the way it is or is this leader reflecting more their own opinion or concern about where the system should go?

If the change agent is also the leader, these questions need to be self-addressed.

## **Stage 1.2 How Widely is Concern Felt?**

A concern may be felt by just one member of a system and still be a legitimate basis for system-changing action. Obviously, the larger the system and the more members, the more important it is to have widespread acknowledgement or acceptance that something needs to be done.

### **Who cares? Is the entire system riled up?**

Begin by developing an understanding of who is feeling the pain and among whom there is a sense of urgency to take action.

If the change agent senses at the outset that not enough people really feel the pain or are even aware of the need, then the first task may be to get members to become more aware.

Three complicating factors should be noted:

- **Your pain and my pain may not be about the same thing.**

Even though both are energizers, the actors may find themselves at cross purposes, and the energy required to invest in one sort of change may drain away the energy required for the other.

- **Concerns may be in direct conflict with one another.**

They may effectively cancel each other out. Here the main change agent concern may be to resolve the conflict and bring more order and calm into the system.

- **The concern or caring is primarily driven by the leader or by outside powers — in effect, *mandated change*.**

This is also characterized in The Guide as “one-step” change. The boss orders it and so it is done. This is the way many people look at change, it’s just that simple: it must be done, so do it. However, in many situations, this one-step mandated “change” generates all kinds of resentments and resistance at different levels, often hidden from the view of the initiators.

## **Stage 1.3 How Deep is Concern Felt?**

Someone always wants some kind of change, but there has to be a certain level of concern by key members of a system before anything can happen. In some sense, a theoretical ideal system, in perfect equilibrium, doesn’t need to be disrupted, but there is no such system in real life.

### **When they care too little**

It is not always easy to judge when the energy to advance a change process is just not there. After all, most people are polite, and if someone has assigned you the job of initiating some sort of change action, they may pretend to be interested. Nevertheless, if you find your appointments continuously rescheduled or the people you are supposed to meet with are always late or somewhere else, it may be that there is just not enough energy to proceed in a successful direction.

### **When they care too much**

Sometimes the concern of a client will be felt so intensely that it interferes with constructive problem solving. First of all, such an intense focus may blur perception of other concerns; the client doesn’t get the big picture, may miss other important concerns that yield more easily to problem-solving, or may fail to perceive that there are underlying problems that need to be covered.

Intense concern focus can also diminish appreciation of the need for deliberate, rational, and collaborative processes. The client’s sense that action is needed immediately forestalls serious problem diagnosis, extensive search for resources, and consideration of alternative solutions. In effect, all the change processes that are described in The Guide are vitiated! Thus, the change agent may need to develop strategies to buy time in order to create space for reflection and for viewing the array of client concerns without intense pressure for solutions.

## Stage 1.4 How Do We Sort Out Cares?

Most change agents will approach their client systems with their own concerns well in mind. Some may show up as advocates for the concern they intend to promote, and advocacy is often a very much needed form of change agency. In some ways, having concerns in advance helps move the change process forward, but it can also get in the way.

Let us suppose, therefore, that our agent starts out as the most altruistic of public servants, with no agenda other than to help clients bring about beneficial change of some kind. What would the change agent look for as concerns or cares of the clients? What sort of list or framework would be helpful for sorting out the cares of individual members, sub-groups, and the system as a whole? Obviously, some cares are more important than others, but how do we decide or, more properly, how do we get them to decide, keeping in mind that these focal concerns are going to become the forces that will drive the change effort.

### **The hierarchy of concerns**

When Thomas Jefferson penned the phrase “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” into the Declaration of Independence, he gave us a wonderfully simple taxonomy of the cares of humans. These are the things that people prize above all else and probably in that order.

The most basic need of humans is *life*, i.e., survival, of the species. First, then, survival of the self, the self being subordinate but integral with the species, of all of humanity. Survival requires food, shelter, protection from the destructive forces of nature and of other people.

*Liberty* is what we hope to have, once life is secure. Liberty implies the freedom to choose our own way of life, our own religion, our own company, and our own ways of thought.

The *pursuit of happiness* perhaps encompasses the rest. The phrase begs the question of whether happiness is out there somewhere. All it says is that we should be able to pursue it, not necessarily find it. Yet implicit in the phrase is the notion that there are many types of things that humans find rewarding and pleasurable, and they should be allowed, even encouraged, to go after them in their separate ways as part of their fulfillment of life. Thus, there are foods not just for survival but for the infinitely varied delights of taste and smell. There are sounds not just to hear and to warn of danger but also to inspire through poetry and music. The trappings of culture are not merely functional requirements of a system but prized jewels which elevate the quality of all our lives.

Everything we have listed so far represents cares or concerns which can be powerful enough to energize a significant action of some kind, either an action to save, or to enhance, or to create. However, such concerns are vocalized by individuals. The systems to which they belong may not speak with one voice, so what does the system say? The change agent should also be able to think in terms of system concerns that transcend the individual. For example, system survival is always an issue, usually in the back of the mind but sometimes up front. It is sometimes referred to as “existential,” meaning that the system will be destroyed if something is done (or not done.) Systems, like people, are born, they grow, they decline, and they die. Systems also can merge or subdivide and remain healthy. Even the idea of system “health” is complicated and perhaps controversial. For some, long term survival is proof of health, but, for the change agent, system health is more likely to be suggested by such qualities as the ability to change, to grow, to adapt to new conditions, and to adopt new ideas and new subsystems.

Focal concerns may also reside at the level of subgroups or minorities within a larger system. These concerns may be viewed as system defects by advocates of these particular causes. In such cases the change agent seeks to make the larger system feel responsible for the concerns of the minority, whether it be in terms of caring for the poor, the handicapped, the homeless, or the racially or culturally different.

## **Stage 1.5 Rating and Prioritizing Cares**

### **Different players and stakeholders = different priorities**

It is probably important to allow different members to articulate their priorities early in the process if there are opportunities to do this.

### **Make Your Own Care List**

Make your own list of the major concerns that relate to your client.

- Do your concerns match those of key stakeholders?
- Are concerns of various stakeholders compatible with one another?
- Are there concerns that can be combined or worked on simultaneously? (Note that there is usually overlap among concerns of different stakeholders and between content, process, and structure.)

Once you have made such a list, can you then find ways of prioritizing for yourself? A greater challenge is to find ways the client system can reach consensus on sensible actionable priorities.

## **The special cares of change agents**

Change agents, as a special class of people, are likely to have certain concerns that are somewhat different from other actors in the system. Above all, for the change agent, openness to change and caring about change are prominent and continuing concerns. Each stage of the change process, C-R-E-A-T-E-R, points to an important capacity that a system should have and therefore a legitimate concern and goal for the change agent.

## **Stage 1.6 Social Sectors and their Different Cares**

All change efforts are embedded in specific sectors of society, even though sometimes a concern is so pervasive or overwhelming that it spills over from one sector into another, even engulfing the entire society. The world pandemic of 2020 qualifies in that regard.

Every sector has been studied as a target for change action and change strategies over the last century.

### **Agriculture**

Probably the most thoroughly studied change area is in agriculture. In fact, this is where the term “change agent” came into use in the US more than a century ago. Out of this early study and focus on supporting change, every county in the United States came to have a specialist assigned to provide new information on best practices in agriculture, usually based on research coming out of the land grant universities and their experimental farm stations.

Rural sociologists started studying how new practices, i.e., “innovations,” spread from one farm to another and eventually became established practices. Productivity per acre has always been a major concern, but soil and water management, plus every imaginable problem involved in rural living and working, became part of the domain for these pioneer agents. They therefore became a model for change agents in other sectors. Thus, the system of agricultural “extension” has been imitated throughout the world, a major factor in the increasingly successful fight to feed the hungry everywhere.

### **Business**

The biggest concern of all businesses might at first glance appear to be survivability or profitability, which is often simply defined down as “the bottom line.” Yet it is truly much more complicated. All businesses, large or small, are set to function within a much larger social environment which includes its own workers and managers, its clients or customers, its shareholders, its competitors, and various governments. The Care target may emerge in any one of these relations, and each presents its own change process

issues. Nevertheless, the change agent process of The Guide should apply to each and every area of concern within the business world.

## **Education**

The earliest version of this Guide was prepared for the U.S. Department of Education 50 years ago, at a time of great ferment throughout the United States and many schools were struggling to introduce all kinds of innovations to make the process of education more effective, more equal, and more satisfying for teachers and learners. The specific areas needing attention were legion and remain so today.

Elementary and secondary education areas of “need” where the principles of The Guide might apply, include:

- Curriculum standards
- Underserved cities and rural areas
- Children in poverty
- Crumbling infrastructure
- Immigrants, minorities, English language learners
- Equity, diversity and inclusion

Higher education and life-long learning areas of need might include:

- Financial stress on institutions
- Financial stress of students and families
- Modernizing curricula
- Matching community needs and requirements
- Workforce skill development

## **Government**

Governments at all levels and in every part of the world are far from perfect. To a greater or lesser extent, all government functions could be considered proper targets of planned change. Here is but a sampling of likely Care sectors in governmental affairs:

- Choosing leadership
- Serving the public

- Fulfilling missions
- Revenues, budgets, and spending
- Addressing the needs of the underserved
- Improving regulation

## **Legal Systems**

Law and Legal Systems are considered by many observers to be less than perfect at administering true justice in the United States and many other countries. Here is an incomplete sampling of likely Care sectors in the legal arena.

- Equal treatment
- Preserving order
- Law enforcement
- Race relations
- Courts
- Prisons
- Police hiring, training, regulating

## **Medicine**

No other area of human endeavor has seen more progress in discovery and accomplishment than medicine in the twentieth century. We know more and can do more in this sector than anyone could have imagined 150 years ago. Yet the medical world in beset by many problems that change agents could take on. Here is a short list

- Transition to digital and electronic records
- Equitable care, particularly in the third world
- Medical management
- New devices and practices
- Financing

There is truly no end to possible targets of change for the human race to take on. In the long run we may be able to take all the big ones on. Wise application of a humanized change strategy will help us along the way.

## **Stage 1.7 When Everything is “Fine”**

### **How People Show and Don't Show They Are in Trouble**

As the change agent enters the scene, different client systems may show widely differing “caring” postures. For example, they may profess that everything is fine: no need for change. At the opposite extreme, they may appear to be so completely absorbed with a particular concern that they have no time for you. The ways in which people express and hide their concerns can present a baffling array to the change agent. Like a good psychologist, the change agent needs to listen with a “third ear.” What the client says may not be what they really mean; or what they say may be a cover for something else.

Is there such a thing as a system without concerns? Without the need for change? Perhaps there are such systems in theory, but not in practice. All human systems are unfulfilled, incomplete, or lacking in some ways. Yet, ironically, those that are most able and willing to change are probably in the best shape. These are the systems which can adapt to changing circumstances, which can grow and take on new missions.

So, if a system presents itself to you as being without concerns that require significant change effort, you might ask yourself, “what is really going on here?” There are at least four possibilities, dismissing the “perfection” alternative:

- The system is frozen
- The system members are not yet engaged
- The key concerns have not reached the boiling point
- They are not willing to tell you what is going on.

#### **The system is frozen**

Having achieved a certain level of equilibrium and integration, members of a system may not wish to go further at this time, to rock the boat, particularly if the state of integration has been very recently achieved. At the opposite extreme, some systems may have existed at one level of integration for so long that even the thought of change is seen as a threat to system stability. In either case, such a system needs to be unfrozen before any serious change effort can begin.

#### **The system members are not yet engaged**

We often make the mistake of assuming that people hear what they are told and see what they are looking at. Very often, especially on first encounters, what appears to be



“hearing,” “seeing,” “understanding,” and “agreeing” are merely polite or ritualistic posturing. The supposed audience is not really attending to your message. Change agents will often be angry and frustrated when they proceed on a plan of action which they thought was agreed to, only to find that what they are doing is unsupported, contradicted, and undermined by the very people they thought were on their side. No doubt there is venality involved in some of these cases, but one should first consider that it was just a lack of real engagement. The other parties simply weren't attending to what you were saying. The antidote is effective initial communication and active solicitation of feedback. If you can get your listeners to repeat to you what you told them and it still sounds right, there is a good chance that the message got through.

### **The key concerns have not yet reached the boiling point**

Think of concerns in terms of threshold. Below a certain level of intensity, they remain unarticulated, we might say “unconscious.” Concerns may be bubbling just under the surface. Then something happens to bring these previously silent concerns to the surface: something breaks, someone dies, someone quits. Many really vital concerns can lie just underneath the surface for years, waiting for some catalytic event to come along to bring them to serious attention. Of course, your involvement can be that catalytic event. (See later in The Guide, “*Change Agent as Catalyst.*”)

### **They are not willing to tell you what is going on**

If you enter the scene from outside, you may observe or hear no concerns because you are not permitted to, particularly if you are perceived as (a) a threat, (b) someone of inferior status, (c) someone from an alien culture, or (d) simply someone who, for any number of reasons, will not understand and will not respond appropriately. All these are aspects of the definition of “outsider” that change agents must overcome before they can obtain real insights from many client systems. Essentially, the members of the system are not willing to level with outsiders. If you think this may be the case in your situation, then your first task is to work on building relationships (Stage 2). Then get back to a consideration of what your client's concerns are or should be.

## **Stage 1.8 Concerns All Over the Lot**

In some situations, rather than there being no concerns expressed, there are many, perhaps too many. The change agent is now in the predicament of facing widely differing concerns expressed by different members of the system. One possibility is that there is, as yet, no real “system” here but rather a pattern of weak and dysfunctional internal linkages, a lack of integration, and a lack of perceived common purpose.

If the concerns are more coherent but tend to line up as polarities, irreconcilable needs and conflicts, then the change agent may be confronting two strong subsystems that have to be reconciled in some way for positive change action to occur. In both the non-system and the conflict instances, the first task of the change agent would again be to start building bridges and to make the first change project a system-building exercise.

## **Stage 1.9 The Real Care Is Hidden from View**

It is possible for the members of the client system to signal one concern to the change agent while they really want help on another. It is important for the change agent who is invited into a situation to, **first**, listen carefully to what the manifest concern is, and, **second**, consider that this might not be the real concern. There are a variety of reasons why clients may not be able to articulate their real concerns. One might be defensiveness or embarrassment. Another might be simply inability to articulate what is really bothering them.

For example, when an educator asks for some outside help on curriculum reform to introduce a “multicultural studies” program, this might be a mask for an underlying problem of racial tension. Change agents should always enter the situation with an open mind but be prepared to view the presented concern skeptically. They should look for any signs that contradict the priority claim of this concern and should develop their own lists of concerns independently to see if they match up.

## **Stage 1.10 Client Intentions and Values**

The word “change” can be a very hot button, indeed. If you are the self-appointed “change agent,” and I am the one you are planning on changing, I am not likely to welcome you with open arms. Who has the right to change anyone, after all! As the hero farmer of the old western movie might say: *“That railroad ain’t comin’ through my land!”*

Thus, it is important for the would-be change agent to get straight early on about some value issues that swirl around the change process.

For example:

- When does change effort become manipulation?
- When does change effort become coercion?
- Is there such a thing as “justified manipulation”?
- Do we have a right to tell other people what they should do?

- Can we justify serious intervention into other people's lives?
- What is a "just" cause?
- Is justice for some, injustice for others?

Such questions don't necessarily arise or come to the forefront of a change process very often, but they are always there, lurking somewhere in the background, in any encounter between two people, when one is supposedly providing a service to the other. As societies progress, the unwritten rules of such encounters can change. Just one example is the relationship between doctor and patient. At one time it was assumed that the doctor knew best what was good for the patient. More recently, it has been recognized that the patient has an important role to play, both in describing what is wrong and in understanding what the doctor is trying to do and why.

## **Stage 1.11 The Change Agent's Value Issues**

The role of change agent can be seen as problematic on a number of grounds that might be called "moral" or value-based. It can be argued, for example, that people have a fundamental right to work out their own problems (or not) in their own ways. This is a dilemma as old as the helping professions. Indeed, the strictures of the ancient Hippocratic oath, "*primum non nocere*," (*above all, do no harm*) are very much applicable to change agents.

But can we ever guarantee that we will do no harm, that we will leave the system in at least as good a condition as we found it? We definitely cannot. After all, we are trying to make significant changes in ongoing living systems. We are interfering with ongoing linkages and arrangements that may have been in place for centuries. When we open up a new room, how do we know we are not tearing down a bearing wall that will threaten the collapse of the structure? There is risk in what we do, and we should be aware of it, striving always both to minimize the risk and provide the client with "informed consent" regarding our interventions.

One of the trickiest moral dilemmas concerns the client system's initial expectations. They invite you in because they think you will do one kind of thing for them, but inevitably, a good change agent may well end up doing more and different things than their initial mandate stated. If expectations are to fulfill one change agent role, is it legitimate to fill others as well or instead? If brought in by one member of the client system to serve their needs, is it legitimate to reach out in an attempt to serve other members of the system or the system as a whole?

All change agents will have to resolve these dilemmas for themselves in their own ways. The Guide may help in sorting out some of the issues, but it won't resolve them for you.

## **Stage 1.12 The “License” to Manage a Change Process**

One way to approach the “values” question is to ask if anyone has what might be called the change agent “license.” Clearly some people do: If you are called in by legitimate representatives of the client system to provide help or consultation of some kind, whether paid or voluntary, this provides you with a kind of moral cover: you are doing the bidding of your sponsor, whoever that might be. You have the sponsor's permission. End of story.

As we have framed the process in The Guide, the change agent who follows the C-R-E-A-T-E-R model will always be working collaboratively with various members of a client “system,” which may be defined differently at different stages of a change process. Thus, the originating sponsor who granted the initial license may have different objectives and values than other stakeholders who emerge along the way. It may be that these different stakeholders may require their own licenses, their own acknowledgement that you have their permission to work with them or to proceed further through the total process.

## **Stage 1.13 Six Questions**

### **Care Questions the Change Agent Should Always Address**

- What is the primary voiced concern of the system with which I am working?
- Why do I Care? Is this enough to keep me going through this effort?
- Is the level of concern high enough to keep them motivated throughout?
- Is there a real desire for change? If not sufficient, can I instill it?
- Does the system require unfreezing before change effort can proceed?
- Are there competing concerns which might undermine a collective effort? If so, can we develop a strategy to contend with these?

## Summary of Stage 1: Care

There is a beginning to every “change,” starting with a growing sense that something is wrong with the status quo.

There is always an initiator, someone, or some group, who articulates and amplifies the concern. This ‘someone’ may either be inside or outside the client system. They may be a leader or a sponsor or an advocate at any level, but who they are may affect how the change agent operates and how much of a license the agent has to guide the process.

This “care” and “concern,” at whatever level and with whatever urgency expressed, is the engine driving the change process. Your initial task as a change agent is to evaluate the status of this Care impulse, to understand how the system works, to identify who the key players are, and to assess where the Care is felt most keenly. Such an analysis will then guide the process and give an initial estimate of the chances of success.

A concern may sometimes be so intense or seen as so urgent or overwhelming that it vitiates rational action. The client’s sense that bold action is immediately required can forestall serious problem diagnosis, extensive search for resources, and consideration of alternative solutions. Thus, the change agent may need to develop strategies to buy time, to create space for reflection and for allowing the client to view the array of concerns without intense pressure for solutions.

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**Steve Zlotolow**, Ph.D. has been an educator for over 45 years. He began his career as a participant in Teacher Corps, a federally funded program intended to improve teaching in inner-city public schools. Following this, he taught middle school for eight years in an "open school" environment. Always interested in educational innovation, Steve attended The University of Oklahoma earning a Ph.D. in

Educational Technology and Instructional Design. This is where the study of "Change," "Change Process" and "Change Management" were formally introduced to him. In the 13

years that followed, Dr. Zlotolow worked as an Instructional Designer at Central Michigan University. At CMU he designed and developed courses, and consulted with faculty to integrate innovative technology into instruction. He also taught *Computers in Education* in the College of Education. During this time, Dr. Zlotolow worked with Ronald Havelock to co-author the second edition of *The Change Agent's Guide*. Dr. Zlotolow was later hired by San Jose State University to design and develop the University's eCampus. Today there is a robust online learning environment at SJSU for students to learn, for faculty to teach and for departments to innovate new digital programs.



**Alice Fackre** is the founder of Go-to-Market Lab LLC and a business leader with over 20 years' experience guiding start-up technology companies in strategic planning, market assessment and technology innovation that effectively serves client needs and grows revenue and brand reputation. After starting her career as a software engineer in software companies focused on graphic arts and enterprise business applications, she grew into product management and led the introduction of innovative new products and business models to meet the evolving markets her business clients served. In 2011, she joined a start-up consulting firm and with them pioneered technology-supported operational excellence methodologies for financial services businesses and government agencies. In 2013, she shifted her focus to educational consulting with a focus on technology-supported methodologies to support student and teacher success in public education. She has authored numerous articles on marketing, continuous improvement, and educational systems improvement.