

VIDEO 3: MOVING FORWARD

In the first video of this series we saw that the change process consists of 5 steps and there are 3 things that can happen on each of these steps. People can meet all the requirements of their current step and move forward onto the next step of the change process. Or, they can get stuck on a step, not able to move forward but also unwilling to go backwards. Or they can regress to an earlier step.

It's obviously best to keep moving forward because you can't succeed at change unless you successfully complete all 5 steps. Change can be a very difficult process and there are educational, emotional, and psychological loads that can be difficult to bear. But you can't succeed at change unless you get to the end of Step 5, so we need to understand how we can maintain forward progress. This is the focus of this third video in this series.

Getting Stuck and Moving Backwards

It is right and proper to see progress as the ideal, but we should also accept that getting stuck and going backwards are normal behaviours around change. We shouldn't be surprised when it happens and unless we respond to it with understanding, it will probably happen more often.

There's not much good you can say about getting stuck but going backwards is sometimes the right thing to do. For example, you may get so overwhelmed by change that you might need to step back for a while, catch your breath and regain some perspective. Or you might be busily making change happen in Step 4 and gradually realise you need to go back and do some more preparation before any further progress can be made. In situations like these, going backwards to an earlier step is part of the success pattern – assuming it empowers us to move towards the end of Step 5.

How to Keep Moving Forward

But enough said about getting stuck and moving backwards. What we really want to know is how to keep moving forwards. What do people need to keep moving forward when change bears a heavy load and the temptation to quit is high? And what can managers do to support them? These are the questions we consider in this video.

There are 3 areas we should consider – change fitness, change readiness, and change management. Let's see how each of these areas helps us move forward through the steps of the change process.

Change Fitness

Whenever change brings a heavy load for us to bear, we need our change fitness to give us the internal strength to keep moving forward. Suppose change compels us to learn difficult things and to think in ways that are strange and unfamiliar. It might be learning a new language, learning how to program a computer, or developing new physical skills and capacities.

Such changes bring a heavy educational load, and they can also bring heavy emotional and psychological loads as well. We may become frustrated and discouraged by how difficult it is and

how many times we do it wrong. We might begin to question our capacity to learn and if we're even capable of succeeding at such an endeavour. When all these factors press down on us, there are times when giving up might look very appealing.

And that's when we most need the support of our internal change strengths. People who don't have much change fitness are vulnerable when the load gets heavy and the road gets hard. If the load is too heavy for them to bear, they run out of steam and give up.

Such people might be motivated to change, they might see the need for change, and they might want to be supportive. But motivation and goodwill often goes out the door when the load becomes too heavy and they run out of change fitness. In other words, they might have enough change fitness for some of the steps of change but not for all of it.

This is not the place to get into the specifics of change fitness, but we have programs that explore this concept at depth. In general terms we can say that change fitness is our internal psychological strength to keep pushing forward through the steps of change when the load tries to drag us backwards. The more change fitness we have, the more power we have to fight against the backwards pull and press on towards success.

Imagine for a moment that you want to landscape your yard and need some extra soil. You might get a big truck to deliver 10 tonnes of soil. But it wouldn't matter who brought the soil because 10 tonnes is the same load no matter who delivers it. But that's not how it works with change.

For example, learning to play the piano might be a relatively easy load to bear if you have lots of musical talent, a good knowledge of music theory, and the ability to play other instruments. But if you have none of these, learning the piano could be a very difficult change to make. We all have our limitations and we all experience the load of change in different ways. And we all encounter changes that bring a heavy load *for us personally*. Under the pressure of those loads what we need most of all is change fitness.

Change fitness is not a trait or a talent; it's something you learn. Many people don't learn it well because we are socialised to conform and avoid risk. At school we are supposed to abide by expectations and get the answers right. At work we are meant to be a team player and fulfil our job description, employment contract, or performance review. Because change is inherently risky, many people avoid it and prefer the safety of their comfort zone. And that's a major reason why we don't learn to develop our change fitness.

We are told to be adaptable but not trained in how to be adaptable. We live in a world of change and a cloud of change fatigue. It's little wonder that 70% of organisational change fails and resistance is the major cause of failure. Stress and failure are the prices we pay for low change fitness. As a society, we desperately need people with more change fitness.

Change Readiness

When we think of change fitness, we refer to something internal to the person. And change management is something external to the person. But change readiness is both internal and external to the person.

Change fitness refers to our psychological capacity to overcome the backward pull imposed by the load of change. It is a measure of our internal psychological strength to overcome the load. Change readiness refers to our readiness to be *successful* at change.

On a personal level this means two things. First, it means our readiness to *support and engage in* the change process. We might have the capacity to bear the load of change, but that's not enough. We also need the interest, motivation, and desire to roll up our sleeves and get to work. We need the readiness to engage in the change process.

And second, it means having the readiness to persist with the change process. This is where *change readiness embraces and embeds change fitness*. Someone might be ready to support and engage in the change process, but you can't say they are ready for change if they lack the psychological capacity to overcome the load and be successful at it.

So, on a personal level, change readiness involves having both change fitness and the readiness to engage in the change process. But even that's not enough.

There's also an external dimension to change readiness. The individual might have the capacity and readiness to engage in the change process, but as individuals we live within a network of relationships and associations. Our capacity to succeed at change doesn't depend entirely on us. Other people may support us, or they may add to our load and push us beyond our capacity to cope.

Change readiness takes us beyond the psychological and into the complexities of sociology. Here we think about culture and social networks and it can quickly become an overwhelming topic. So, let's limit it for the purpose of illustration.

A major area affecting change readiness is communication. You might have a team of highly change-fit people, but if you fail to communicate the right messages in the right way and at the right time, you easily limit your team's readiness to engage in and support change. In fact, if your communications are poor, you can easily decrease engagement and increase resistance. Failure to clearly communicate 5 critical messages at each step of the change process decreases change readiness and increases the likelihood of resistance.

Change readiness has all these important internal and external dimensions that must come together in harmony to keep people moving forward through the steps of change.

Change Management

Good change management supports people from the outside as they engage in the change process. Change managers are like the conductor of an orchestra, calling forth the strengths of different parts of the team at different times, and bringing clarity and direction for all.

Over the past 70 years or so there has been a great deal of research into what works when managing change. Organisations like the Change Management Institute have assembled and organised this knowledge into books like 'The Effective Change Manager: The Change Management Body of Knowledge'.

The important thing to realise is that change management is a factor that can help people move forward through the steps of change. Of course, it isn't the only factor, as we have seen, but

nonetheless it is an important one. However, we believe that change management could become much more effective if it were to integrate all the other factors that help people keep moving forward.

Although change management research has identified important insights, there are also serious gaps. In general, most change management approaches are inadequate in their analysis of the change process, they completely ignore change fitness, and they give lip service to change readiness. These are areas that need improvement and we have created the Change Management Toolkit to address these problems.

There are 2 final observations or comments to make. First, employees who are change-fit and change-ready make the task of managing change much easier. When change fitness and change readiness are high, resistance is low and engagement levels are high. There is energy in the room, people are optimistic about the future, and they see change as an opportunity rather than an obstacle. The load of change is still very real and sometimes it is felt as a heavy burden, but people are resilient and adaptable, and people are pulling in the same direction. This is very different to what happens when change fitness and change readiness is low.

The final observation comes as a warning to those who manage change. We must be careful not to categorise people into change-ready and not change-ready groups. The value of concepts like change fitness and change readiness is not to put labels on people but to understand why people behave as they do and to help them behave in more adaptive ways. By understanding these concepts, we can become more aware of how to lift our collective game. That means increasing our change fitness quotient, improving change readiness, and become more effective change managers. This requires a whole-of-organisation approach and focus.

But the results will be worth the effort, now and far into the future. You will have employees who are more able and ready to engage with change, who require less direction to keep them on task, and who don't lose heart under the load of change. Success will be easier to achieve and the cultural stories that follow will be stories of achievement and solidarity. People and organisations will learn how to become adaptable and how to stay resilient when the road ahead gets difficult. And in the end, getting good at change will be to everyone's advantage.

The Change Gym has many tools and resources to help you learn how to become more successful at change. I invite you to book at time to discuss how we can help you.