



The Human Reaction to Change

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ See change not as something to be feared and resisted but as an essential element of the world to be accepted.

The Pace of Change

The Trend of Change

At one time, change was a short burst of disruption followed by a longer period of stable operations. Today, there are no longer any rest periods; change is continuous and enormous.

Test Your Knowledge

What are the implications of this trend for your organization?

How will it affect your role?

Reactions to Change

People react differently to change. **Everett M. Rogers** (1931-2004) is best known for developing the **diffusion of innovations theory**. Research on the subject has included a vast range of activities, including how people go from being bystanders to participating in a riot, communities learning about family planning, and farmers adapting to hybrid seeds. Rogers breaks down people's reactions into the following categories:

The Innovators are people who want to try new ways of doing things or who have responsibility for continuous improvement. They will be pushing for change.

The Early Adopters on the team will be the first to embrace the changes. They may even rush in before they fully understand the change and why it is necessary. They welcome change either because they immediately see the benefits or perhaps because they prefer variety to routine.

The Early Majority are those who are influenced by Innovators and Early Adopters and who prefer to be ahead of the wave rather than swamped by it.

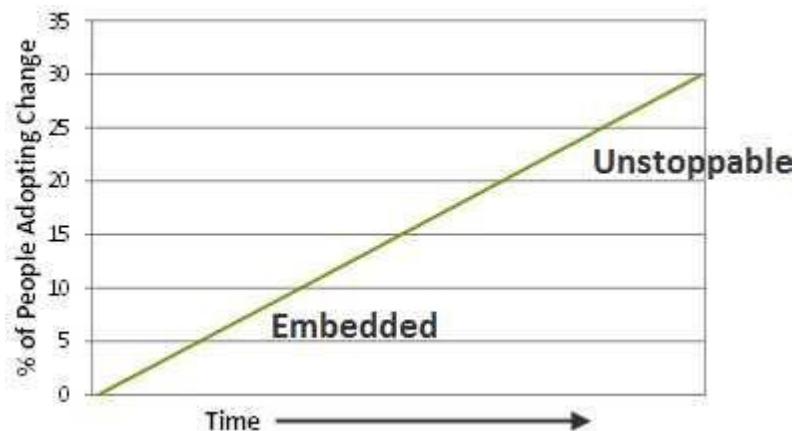
The Late Majority are more cautious. They hold back until they are sure they know what they are doing and until they believe the change has a fair chance of working. Only then do they come on board.

The Late Adopters are the last to come on board and they may not come willingly. They are not easily convinced of the value of the change, but they can be moved to accept the change once they see the benefits or feel that they will be left behind.

The Diehards resist the change. They do not come on board at all. If their resistance is absolute, they may be moved to a back position in the organization, where their resistance interferes with operations less, or even terminated. They can become angry and bitter about the way things are going.

Changes are adopted at different rates in organizations. The Innovators try things first, followed by the Early Adopters. These are people you need to get on board first. Focus your efforts on them, not the Diehards. Some people are never able to change and you cannot spend your own time on them. They become casualties.

When **5 %** of the people in a group adopt a change, the change is embedded. When **20%** adopt it, the change is unstoppable. So, get the Innovators and Early Adopters on board and the success of your change is assured.



Why 20%? On a bell curve, there are only a few Innovators (2.5%) and a larger group of Early Adopters (13.5%). Combined, and then added with the leading edge of the Early Majority, these are approximately 20% of a typical organization. Once that 20% has joined the bandwagon and adapted to the change, the momentum reaches what Malcolm Gladwell refers to as **the tipping point** in his book of the same name. Gladwell's discussion of the theory applies the strengths of three types of people (Mavens, Connectors, and Salesman) to engage people in something. Then, they spread the news to others and build energy.

The Four Room Apartment

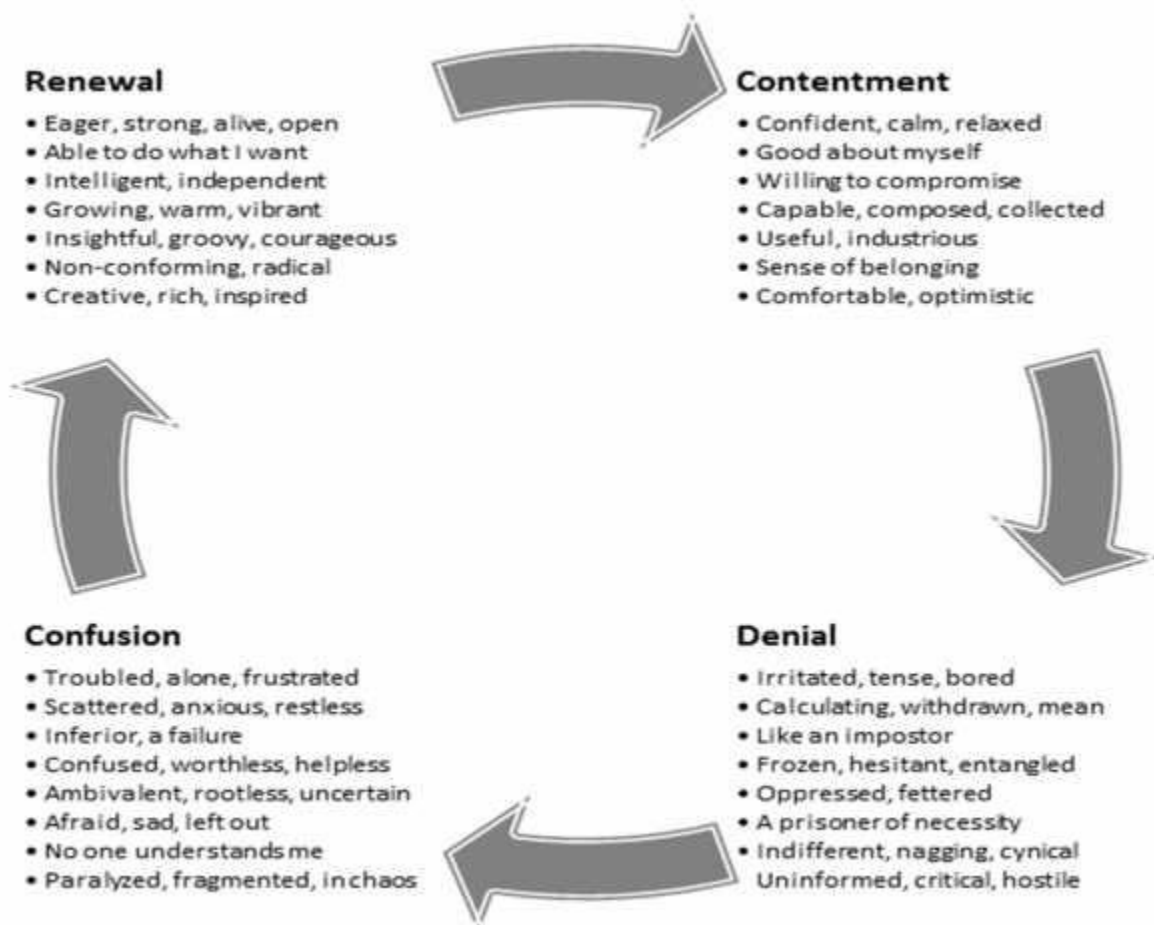
The Framework

This model was developed by Claes Janssen. It gives us a strong illustration of how people react to change, and to help people see where they and others may be in the change process. Discuss characteristics of each group: what they are feeling and what they are doing.

These are presented in the order that we experience them:

- **Contentment:** We like the status quo.
- **Denial:** We are afraid to admit that things have changed. We spend a lot of energy holding onto the past. When the change is traumatic or brutal, we spend less time here because the reality is indisputable.
- **Confusion:** We still have some anxiety but we are ready for constructive action.
- **Renewal:** We have lots of energy for creative work. We then go back to being content until the next change happens.

The Four-Room Apartment



Test Your Knowledge

Group Discussion

What room do you think you are in?

What are others thinking and feeling about those who are in each room?

What can you do to help others move from the Denial room to the Confusion room?

What is the occupancy rate for the four rooms in your department or organization today?

Has there been a recent increase in occupancy in the Denial and Confusion rooms? If so, what factors are contributing to this?

What different types of resistance to change are people exhibiting?

What is the average amount of time people take to pass from Denial through Confusion to Renewal in your organization?

Do some individuals or groups seem to be stuck in Denial or Confusion?

Where do you predict resistance to change is likely to emerge or re-emerge in your organization? What dynamics will be at play?

How do the culture, history, and structure of your organization affect the level and type of resistance to change?

Do you keep all the apartment doors open by providing opportunities for open, democratic dialogue about work climate, working relationships, etc.?

**Are you able to handle criticism about change issues without becoming defensive or taking it personally?
Do you maintain a sense of humor?**

What strategies might you suggest to try and move as many people as possible from the Confusion room to the Renewal room?
