

truth

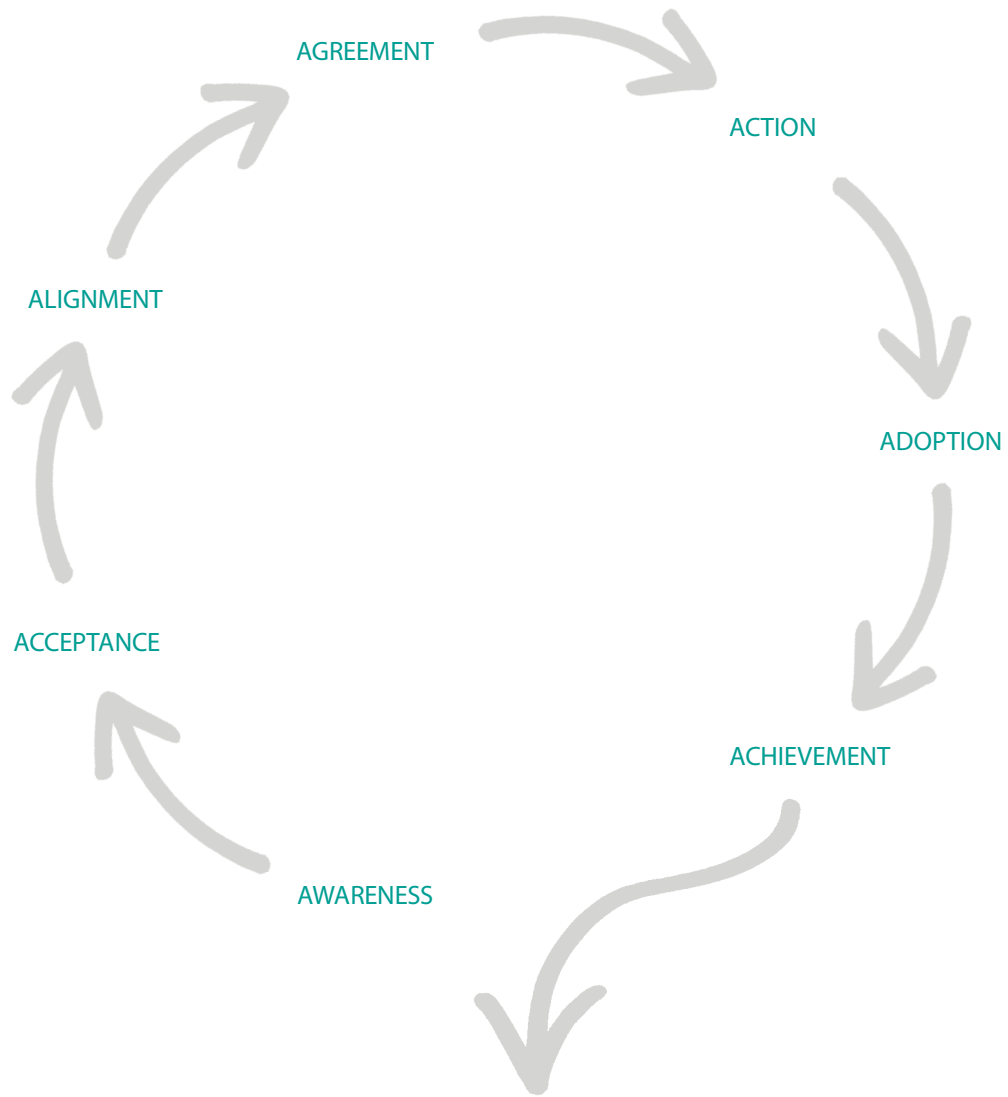
“Organisations fail to deliver change when they ignore an obvious truth that is getting in their way.”

The biggest barrier to getting things done is staring you in the face. It is the elephant in the room – the issue that is being ignored and yet is as big and obvious as having an elephant in your boardroom. By taming your elephants, your organisation can move mountains. Transform your peoples' ability to make change by becoming an elephant tamer.

seeing pink elephants – how to overcome the elephant in the room and make change stick

KAREN NELSON

HOW TO MAKE CHANGE STICK



how to make change stick

ELEPHANTS PROTECTING ELEPHANTS

Picture a baby elephant walking alongside its mother. I dare you to walk up to that baby and lead it away. You would of course decline the dare knowing that the mother elephant would trample you. Her instinct would be to protect her baby. But what if the baby was sick and you were trying to help it in a way that the mother couldn't? Unless you approached the elephants in a skilful, reassuring way, the mother would become anxious and crush you.

This powerful analogy is worth remembering when making any kind of change in any type of organisation. Quite simply, when you mess with people's work place, you are messing with their baby. Their instinct will be to protect their work and trample any attempt to change it.

There are two sides to this problem of dealing with an elephant. Either you ignore the problem to avoid a stampede, or you forget there is a baby involved and cause a stampede. The first option results in no change; the second option crushes the change effort.

BEWARE THE HALF ELEPHANT

A famous Indian legend tells the tale of six blind men who touch an elephant to find out what it is like. As each man touches a different part of the elephant they stop to compare notes on what they are touching, and learn that they are in complete disagreement with one another. One touches the side of the elephant and declares the elephant to be like a wall. Another touches the tusk arguing that the elephant is like a spear. A third man touches the tail and exclaims that the elephant is like a rope. As another touches the trunk and pronounces the elephant to be like a snake, a man touching an ear states that the elephant is like a fan. However, there is a sixth man touching the knee who is

certain that the elephant is like a tree trunk. This parable teaches us that reality can be viewed differently depending on one's perspective. This suggests that what may seem like an absolute truth is in fact relative because we are being deceived by what turns out to be a half-truth. Reading on, when we discuss how to spot and tame an elephant, you will remember that it is essential to ensure that you have identified the whole elephant and not just a part of an elephant which on its own will mislead you.

SPOT THE ELEPHANT

To spot the issues that are crushing change initiatives within your organisation, simply look for the gaps between what is being said and what is being done.

While this process is relatively simple, it needs to be exhaustive. No matter how small the failing change is, all aspects of the organisation must be observed to find the gaps that are preventing this change from sticking. It is necessary to identify and separate the delusions, myths and beliefs from the realities. As these gaps – or parts of the elephant – are spotted, the elephant tamer can piece them together to reveal the complete elephant.

It may sound a little harsh but what is being said can be a figment of someone's imagination, a widely held legend or even a genuine conviction that is proven wrong when compared to the reality of actions, behaviours and results.

To this end, spotting the elephant is the domain of the elephant tamer. What is spotted is not necessarily shared with the organisation in its raw form. The tamer will take this insight and utilise it in the design and delivery of the seven-step elephant taming process to make change stick Remember, the elephant tamer is about to approach a mother elephant (person) and mess with her baby (work place). To do this successfully requires skill and diplomacy – the mother needs to be at ease to allow the tamer to deal with her sick baby.

To spot the issues that are crushing change initiatives within your organisation, simply look for the gaps between what is being *said* and what is being *done*.

TAME THE ELEPHANT

Armed with the insights gained from spotting the elephants in the organisation that are currently preventing change, you now need to work through the following seven steps to improve the work place by both resolving the gaps between what is being said and done and delivering the desired changes successfully.

1. Create awareness

Firstly, it is necessary to confront the elephant by creating awareness amongst the people in your organisation that the issue exists and that it is blocking change.

The safest way to create this awareness is to reveal the issues within a story format. To present the issues in this way creates context by describing the big picture, or the journey, of how this elephant came to be in the organisation and the impact it is having. This story-telling approach removes blame from any one individual and shows how the issue has emerged over time.

Although creating awareness is simple, it is not always easy. The tamer is talking elephant language to mother elephants in order to gain their permission to safely approach the herd and administer first aid. This process can of course go terribly wrong and the tamer, or change initiative, can be crushed.

Remember, the objective is to have the mother elephants hear the full story and agree that first aid is indeed required and that it is right for them to allow the tamer to approach and take whatever action is necessary.

2. Facilitate acceptance

This second step – to ensure that people in your organisation have accepted that issues do exist and they are preventing change – requires intuition and patience on the part of the tamer. Acceptance is the emotional part of the change journey. Acceptance that there is a problem, that an elephant does exist and that it needs first aid, is established during the story-telling awareness phase. However, until the gaps between what is being said and done are acknowledged, change will not stick. Therefore we treat acceptance as a separate step in the elephant taming, change making, process.

3. Establish alignment

Having created awareness and acceptance that there is an elephant in your organisation and that it is stopping change, it is now time to solve the problem. It is time to overcome the elephant and encompass change by establishing an integrated solution that aligns the myriad priorities held within the organisation.

It is worth noting that elephants can be spotted where solutions have previously been designed for one part of the organisation, in isolation of other parts. Therefore, this phase of aligning priorities and solving problems, so that change will stick, is all about integration. Creatively bringing together all the disparate parts within your organisation to ensure the solution will work for everyone, including the organisation itself.

4. Broker agreement

This phase of gaining agreement is about ensuring that all the key people within your organisation ‘buy’ into the way forward. The tamer may need to broker this agreement if people need to be reassured that their priorities are being served by the proposed solution.

Without agreement, it is likely that those who did not agree will scuttle any attempts to make change. There is no point undertaking a change initiative unless there is comprehensive agreement regarding the way forward. If agreement cannot be reached there is another elephant at large and the first three steps of this process will need to be repeated until agreement is possible.

5. Take action

Plan. Build. Test. Train. Implement. Launch.

Tamers always implement change as quickly as possible. The thought of change is always worse than the change itself. The faster you make the change the less resistance you will face.

6. Adopt change

OK, you have made the change. Tamers, now make sure you follow up. Like a baby learning to crawl, and then stand, walk and finally run, your staff will take time to learn to run with this new way of working. Never implement change with one round of training before the launch and then wonder why two months after the launch the change is coming unstuck. Never confront an elephant once and then assume it will never come back. Always plan to follow up, for example, organise post-launch training and support until the organisation or individual can take the training wheels off.

7. Achieve results

Tamers take stock by facing reality again. If change has failed, or you succeeded but you want to improve on your results, repeat this seven-step process again. Spot the gaps between what is being said and done, and overcome them.

Organisations fail to deliver change when they ignore an obvious truth that is getting in their way.

MAKE CHANGE STICK

Organisations fail to deliver change when they ignore an obvious truth that is getting in their way. Transform the experience of people in your workplace by becoming an elephant tamer who can spot the elephant in the room, overcome it, and make change stick.

While issues are being ignored, change cannot take place, and of course, you cannot change things which you do not first acknowledge. Awareness and acceptance are critical in ensuring that all issues are understood and can be dealt with appropriately. Alignment and agreement are critical in establishing integrated solutions to overcome the issues and allow change to stick. Rapid action and robust adoption processes are critical in creating change that becomes the new norm. Finally, measuring your level of achievement will set up a continuous improvement process. ☺



Karen Nelson

KAREN is a successful elephant tamer who works with organisations to get things done . After graduating from the University of Waikato with a Bachelor of Management Studies (BMS Hons) in 1991, Karen travelled extensively to develop her craft within large multi-national businesses.

Noted for her early success in delivering the core integrated business systems for PepsiCo Europe's 17 finance, procurement and manufacturing snack-food plants, Karen was engaged to design and broker the global fixed assets management solution for Reuters' 62 country-based operations.

Leveraging these early accomplishments, Karen has continued to work independently with many organisations to trouble-shoot issues, design integrated solutions, turn-around failing projects, deliver change initiatives and launch new operations.

When not teaching others to tame their elephants, Karen works directly with organisations of all sizes to help them design solutions, overcome barriers and deliver results. Karen is an expert at spotting and resolving the 'elephant in the room' – the obvious, yet ignored, issues preventing organisations from getting things done.