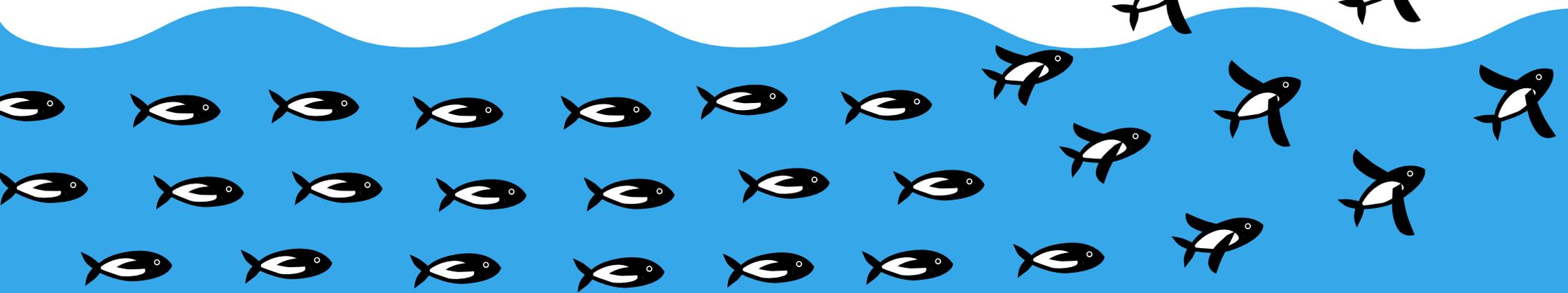


# Comfy zone diagnostic

CHANGE  
Λ9010

A tool for designing change projects



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v1 March 2014

# The Comfort Zone Diagnostic Tool

		Not so	Slightly	Moderately	Very much so	Strategies	
Modify the environment	<i>The desired behaviour:</i>						
	Is a threat to the actors' social connectedness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Build a community	
	Is hard to understand or do	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Redesign for ease	
	Creates perceived financial risks for entry	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Offer incentives	
	<i>The undesired behaviour:</i>						
	Is price sensitive	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Create disincentives	
	Can be physically thwarted	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Block the behaviour	
	Is sensitive to legal threat	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Ban the behaviour	
	Engage the actors	There's an opportunity to involve the actors in shaping the project	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Participative design
		There's an opportunity to give the actors choices about how, when, where, and who with they do an action	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Offer choices
The behaviour is unfamiliar		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Hands-on experience, modelling	
The behaviour is perceived as abnormal in the social set		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Social proof	
The actors are able to deliberate as a group		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Peer discussion	
The actors are human beings		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Enjoyment, fun, food, games	
The actors are members of a cohesive community		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Commitments	

## How to use the diagnostic tool

This tool helps with the design of projects that aim to influence the adoption of specific behaviours by specific actors.

First, be clear about WHO your specific actors are. For example “parents with pre-school age children in Canterbury”.

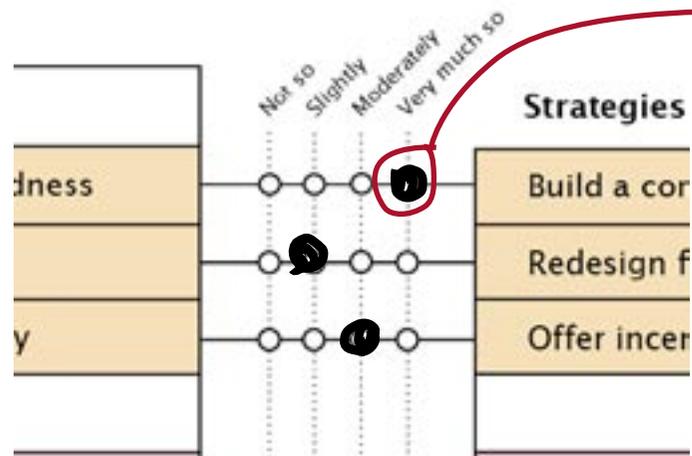
Then, be clear about precisely what actions or behaviour you are hoping they’ll adopt. For example: “send kids to school with fresh food snacks”.

Then, consider each question and decide whether the answer is “not so”, “slightly”, “moderately”, or “very much so” for that group of actors.

Obviously, answering this question depends on having a familiarity with your actors. It’s probably best if you invite some of the actors to help you answer it.

Where you answer “very much so”, the specified strategy *should definitely be part in your project unless there is a very good reason not to do so*.

Where you answer “not so”, “slightly”, or “moderately” the strategy can be treated as a non-mandatory element of your project.



# Expanding the comfort zone

**It's often said** that change makers should “challenge people’s comfort zones”. Nothing could be further from the truth. People will always resist the threats to their self-esteem, certainty, autonomy, and identity that come from exposure to unfamiliar situations. Those threats cause denial (flight) and resistance (fight). Even a message as seemingly benign as “bicycling keeps you fit and healthy” is liable to cause denial and resistance in non-cyclists because of the natural fears it sparks.

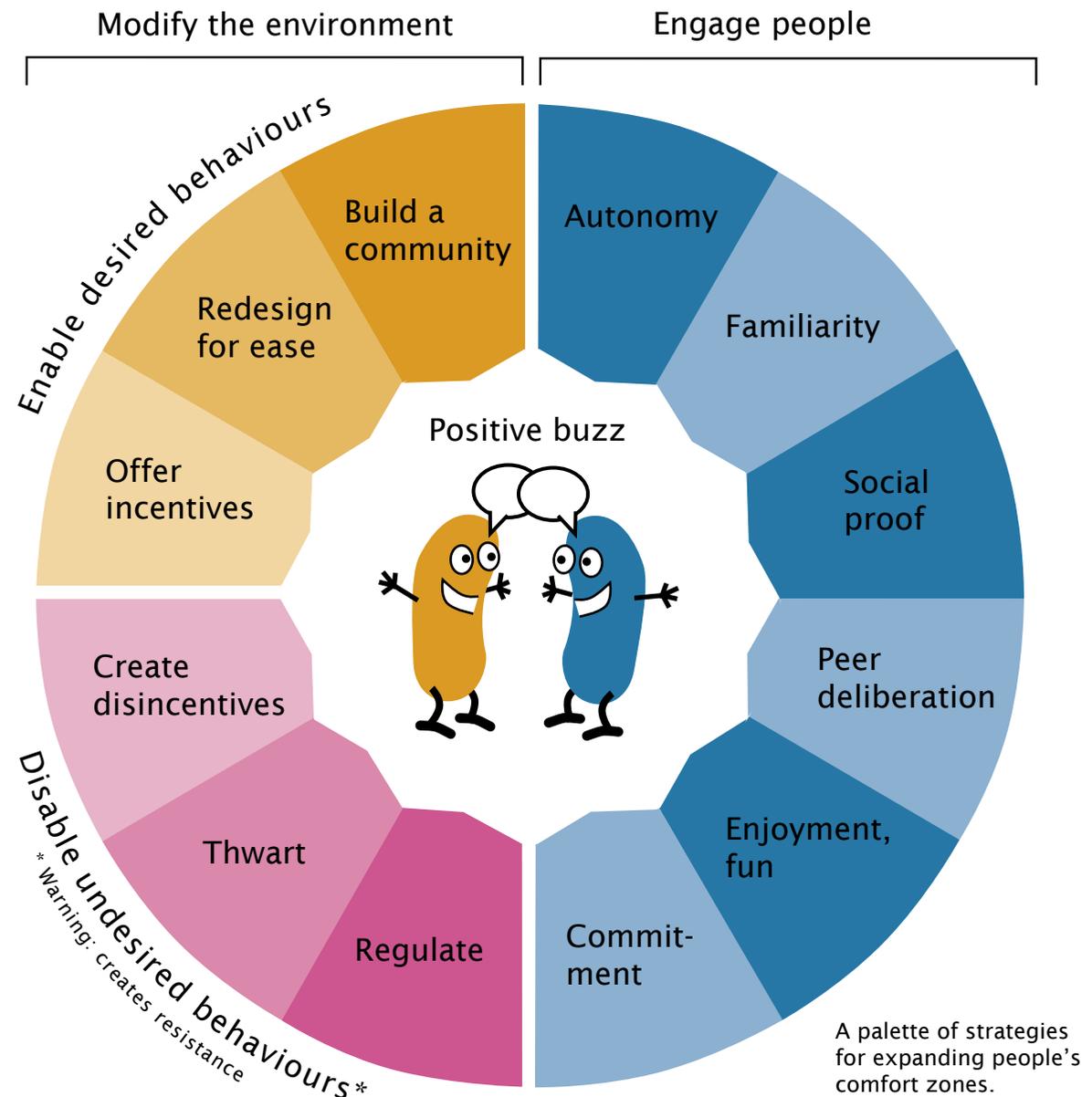
So instead of attempting to impose new behaviours or trying to talk people into them it's always better to expand people's comfort zones by increasing their confidence in their personal abilities to manage the risks of change.

This can be done by building two kinds of enabling factors into change projects.

## Firstly, modifying the environment

Environmental enablers, sometimes called “nudges” or “choice architecture”, are more-or-less permanent changes the landscapes in which people make their day-to-day choices. The possible number of environmental enablers is endless, including regulation, infrastructure provision, leadership, and service provision – literally anything that makes a new behaviour easier, safer, more predictable, or more pleasurable.

If the aim is sustained behaviour change, then



modifying the environment is vital. Six categories of environmental modification are included here.

## Secondly, engaging with people

There are a host of ways we can work directly with people to increase their confidence and reduce their fears. In their book, [Yes! 50 Scientifically Proven Ways to Be Persuasive](#), Noah Goldstein, Steve Martin and Robert Cialdini listed 50 such techniques. Most tend to have short term effects, but that can be enough to encourage people to do vital short-term actions like signing-up, donating, or attending an event.

Six frequently used techniques are listed here, all relatively effective and proven in practice.

Remember that environmental enablers and self-efficacy enablers complement each other, so the more you build into in a project the better.

## 1) Modifying the environment

### Building a community

Social connection and group membership tremendously reduce the perceived risks of change.

Examples include: a club, an action group, a green team, an innovation network, buddies, mentoring, a community of practice.

### Redesigning for ease

Ease means reducing the mental and physical effort of an action to as close to zero as possible. In practice it often means reducing the number of steps or decisions and making each step as idiot-proof as possible.

Ease is more than simplicity, it's about *fit*: carefully matching the proposed behaviour with the realities and rhythms of people's lives.

### Offering incentives

Incentives enable new behaviours in a number of ways: they lower people's fears about cost hurdles, they focus attention, they create buzz, and they make the behaviours seem more socially valued.

### Create disincentives\*

Permanent changes in pricing tend to shift the balance of advantage away from an undesired behaviour. Examples include

increasing the price of alcohol or cigarettes.

### Thwart\*

Thwarting means making an undesired behaviour difficult or more costly to do. It can also mean physically restricting the behaviour. Examples include: safety guards on machinery, cutting car parking spaces to increase 'active transport', or pre-commitment technology on poker machines.

### Regulate\*

Regulation means declaring a behaviour to be a criminal act, punishable by law, in the hope that the threat will prevent the behaviour. Regulation implies a significant, long-term investment in monitoring and enforcement.

\* Note: these methods deprive people of liberties, hence they will always spark a degree of resistance.

## 2) Engaging people

### Autonomy (personal control)

Fear of lost control is one of the main reasons people resist change, so returning control is

powerful enabling tool. Autonomy means letting people decide how, where, when, who with, and whether they adopt a new behaviour.

The good way to mobilise autonomy is to involve people in decision-making about the shape of the project itself (participative design).

### Familiarity

The fear of the unknown is one of the biggest causes of resistance, so if we want people to undertake novel behaviours, unfamiliarity is probably the number one obstacle to tackle.

Familiarity can be achieved through hands-on experience and modelling (that is, seeing similar people successfully do it). A nice approach is social events where people get to experience a new behaviour in a safe, supportive environment.

### Social proof

Social proof is evidence that lots of similar people are already doing a new behaviour. If lots of others are doing it, it must be normal, and if it's normal it must be safe!

[continued...]

Social proof can be as simple as a poster that says “no one smokes here any more”, or it can involve use of statistics: “87.5% of Bankstown residents recycle well.”

## Peer deliberation

Autonomy is more powerful when exercised through a group discussion. Facilitating a group to find its own answers and make decisions is a powerful form of change-making.

## Enjoyment, fun

Happiness, elation, or just being in a good mood fundamentally alters people’s sense of risk. It makes PEOPLE more persistent, more creative and more likely to accept requests and invitations.

It goes without saying that food, social interaction, a sense of humour, and a light-hearted focus on positives are likely to make a big difference to the success of a project.

## Commitments

When people publicly agree to carry out a small, easy action they are much more likely to accept an invitation to carry out a bigger,

more onerous, action later on. Examples include pledges, wearing branded T-shirts, or having names displayed on a supporters’ roll.

Commitments work best when they are public and the actor is part of a cohesive community.

## Positive buzz

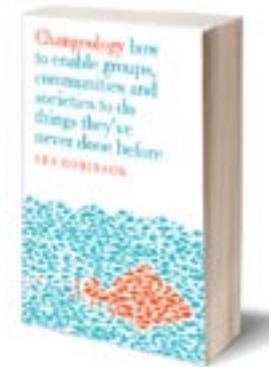
It’s vital that people talk about the proposed changes. Conversation is the carrier wave of change. It’s how communities make decisions, decide what are good and bad ideas, and establish social norms. Successful change projects always give people something positive to talk about.

Chip and Dan Heath, in their superb book on communication, [Made to Stick](#), write that contagious communications are always short, unexpected, concrete, credible, emotionally-engaging, stories. Unexpectedness and emotional-impact are the key ingredients.

To create buzz, two good questions to ask are “What’s something we can do that’s unexpected?” and “What’s a surprising, emotionally-engaging story we can tell?”

For a full description of these methods, plus examples

See Robinson, L. (2012) [Changeology. How to Enable Groups, Communities and Societies to Do Things They’ve Never Done Before](#), Scribe Publications.



## How this fits into an overall theory of change

In *Changeology*, Les Robinson proposed a simple, universal theory of behaviour change, with three elements. All three

are vital, but expanding the comfort zone is where most work in a behaviour change project usually occurs.

Offer hope + expand the comfort zone + invitation = trial;

Trial + satisfaction = likelihood of adoption

