

*Karen Ferris*

# HOW TO EMBED YOUR CHANGE

*.... AND MAKE SURE IT STICKS!*

Balanced Diversity  
A Portfolio Approach to Organizational  
Change

A white paper by  
Karen Ferris

2021

## About the author



An organisational change management rebel with a cause!

Enjoying challenging the status quo I drive new ways of working along with new ways of thinking.

I have authored four books on organizational change management.

I am an author, speaker, coach, mentor, facilitator and trainer, with the desire to make a difference.

I am passionate about enabling individuals to be resilient and thrive in a rapidly changing and ambiguous world.

We need to be creative and innovative in the way we transition people through change so that it becomes embedded into the fabric of the organisation.

“The challenge of organizational change is that it involves people – the most dynamic, versatile, volatile, complex and diverse aspect of the organization.

Therefore, a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional approach to change is required.”

<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>4</b>
THE PROBLEM .....	4
THE SOLUTION .....	4
<b>THE FRAMEWORK .....</b>	<b>5</b>
BACKGROUND.....	5
THE CONSTRUCT.....	5
<i>Intent: what you are trying to accomplish .....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Approach: how you are going to do it.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<b>10 REASONS WHY YOU NEED TO USE THE FRAMEWORK.....</b>	<b>10</b>
1. CHANGE IS EVERYONE’S BUSINESS .....	10
2. 59 PRACTICES.....	10
3. STRUCTURE TO PRACTICE SELECTION .....	10
4. AUGMENTATION.....	11
5. ONE-SIZE-DOES-NOT-FIT-ALL .....	12
6. BIAS AND COMFORT ZONE INFLUENCE .....	12
7. TIME PRESSURE INFLUENCE.....	12
8. EMPHASIS ON FORMAL PRACTICES DELIVERING ON CURRENT COMMITMENTS.....	13
9. THE MORE TOOLS WE HAVE, THE MORE DYNAMIC OUR APPROACH .....	14
10. REALIZED BY RESEARCH. DELIVERED BY DESIGN .....	15
<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>16</b>

## Introduction

Much has been written about change initiatives failing to achieve a return on investment because they did not gain traction or become embedded as a new-way-of-working.

This paper explores reasons changes often fail to be adopted, the solution in the form of the Balanced Diversity framework, the construct of the framework, how it should be used and why you should be using it on all of your change initiatives.

## The problem

Often change is implemented only to find that there is not widespread adoption. This is a costly situation that results in project overruns, unnecessary rework, additional training, delivery delays and project resources unable to be assigned to new projects.

I believe a reason for this failure is the failure to use the right selection of practices (or activities) to successfully transition to a desired state.

Many organizations will invest in a communication plan and a training program in the hope that the transition will be achieved. In most cases, this does not work.

The reason is that those practices (or activities) of communication and training are not diverse enough and do not comprise a balanced portfolio of practices for the transition to be successful.

A balanced portfolio contains formal and informal practices, and practices that build on current commitments and move the organization further along the path to change.

## The solution

The answer is the framework contained within my 2020 publication – [Balanced Diversity: A Portfolio Approach to Organizational Change](#).

The Balanced Diversity framework is a reference guide for every leader of change who needs access to a wide range of practices.

The framework provides a wide-ranging and diverse set of practices that can be used for successful transitions. The key is that they have been divided into informal and formal practices. They have then been grouped into those that will help the organization deliver on current commitments (referred to as fulfillment) and those that will help the organization move further along the path to change (referred to as innovation).

The result is that the framework provides four groups (quadrants) of practices from which leaders of change need to select a balanced portfolio of practices to make their transition a success. Practices need to be selected from each quadrant and used together to achieve sufficient penetration and traction to achieve the desired outcomes.

# The framework

## Background

In 2010, the Network for Business Sustainability (NBS) commissioned a large- scale systematic review of both academic and practitioner resources related to successfully embedding sustainability into an organization.

The research team, led by Dr. Stephanie Bertels of Simon Fraser University, identified 13,756 academic and practitioner articles and reports related to the topic. A detailed review then narrowed this down to the most relevant 179 to be included in the systematic review.

*The Balanced Diversity framework is a reference guide for every leader of change who needs access to a wide range of practices.*

The extensive analysis of these sources revealed a multitude of ways that organizations can work to embed sustainability into the organization.

In the end, the research team identified 59 distinct practices and grouped them in way that they anticipated would be meaningful to businesses.

In 2011, as a result of my interest in sustainability for IT service management I came across this body of research, and I soon realized it had far-reaching implications for those of us leading change.

Although the focus of the research was on embedding sustainability into an organization, my examination of the research results clearly showed that the findings could be related to embedding any type of change into an organization.

My resulting 2011 publication, utilizing the framework for embedding change related to IT service management was written with the permission of Dr. Bertels.

In 2020, I revised the publication to make it applicable to a wider audience and a more agile and digitally enabled world. Dr. Bertels also gave the 2020 publication her approval.

## The construct

The framework revolves around two main dimensions relating to intent and approach. Intent is what you are trying to accomplish. Approach is how you are going to do it.

### Intent: what you are trying to accomplish

On the path to making a change, organizations face tensions between ensuring they meet existing commitments (fulfillment) and making way for changes that will help them improve performance in the long term (innovation).

These two goals form the vertical axis of the framework.

**Fulfillment:** These are practices targeted at delivering on current commitments or implementing current initiatives. These practices involve discussion about what the organization ‘should do’ and emphasize compliance, operational excellence and targeted reinforcement, or refining what the organization is already doing in the area of the intended change.

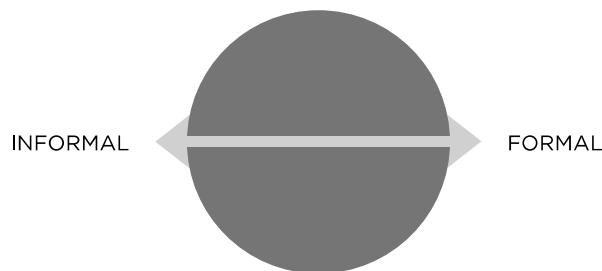
**Innovation:** These are practices aimed at innovation: looking at better or different ways to do things. These practices involve discussion about what the organization ‘could do’ and involve experimenting, listening and trying new things.

### Approach: how you are going to do it

There are two different approaches to embedding change: informal and formal. There is an ongoing interplay between these approaches and both impact culture.

This requires management awareness of the impact of both hard and soft approaches to building cultural change.

These approaches form the horizontal axis of the framework.



**Informal:** The informal approaches to shaping an organization’s culture target people’s values as well as social norms. A social norm is an expectation that people will behave in a certain way.

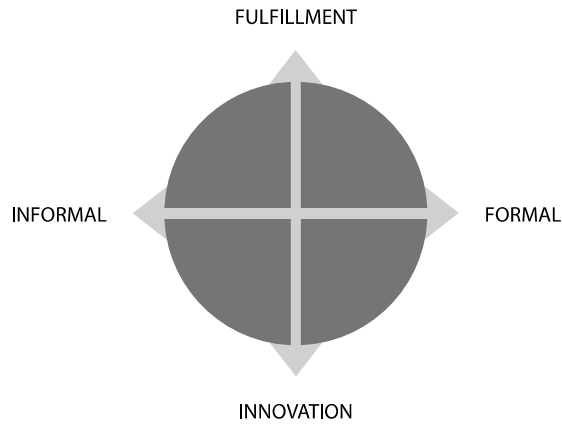
Norms (as opposed to rules) are enforced by other members of the organization through the use of social sanction. Norms and values are generally passed on and shaped through observation or experience.

Thus, informal approaches aim to establish and reinforce shared values and shared ways of doing things that align the organization with its journey toward the intended change. This is often accomplished through discussion and experiences, and by modelling desired behaviors.

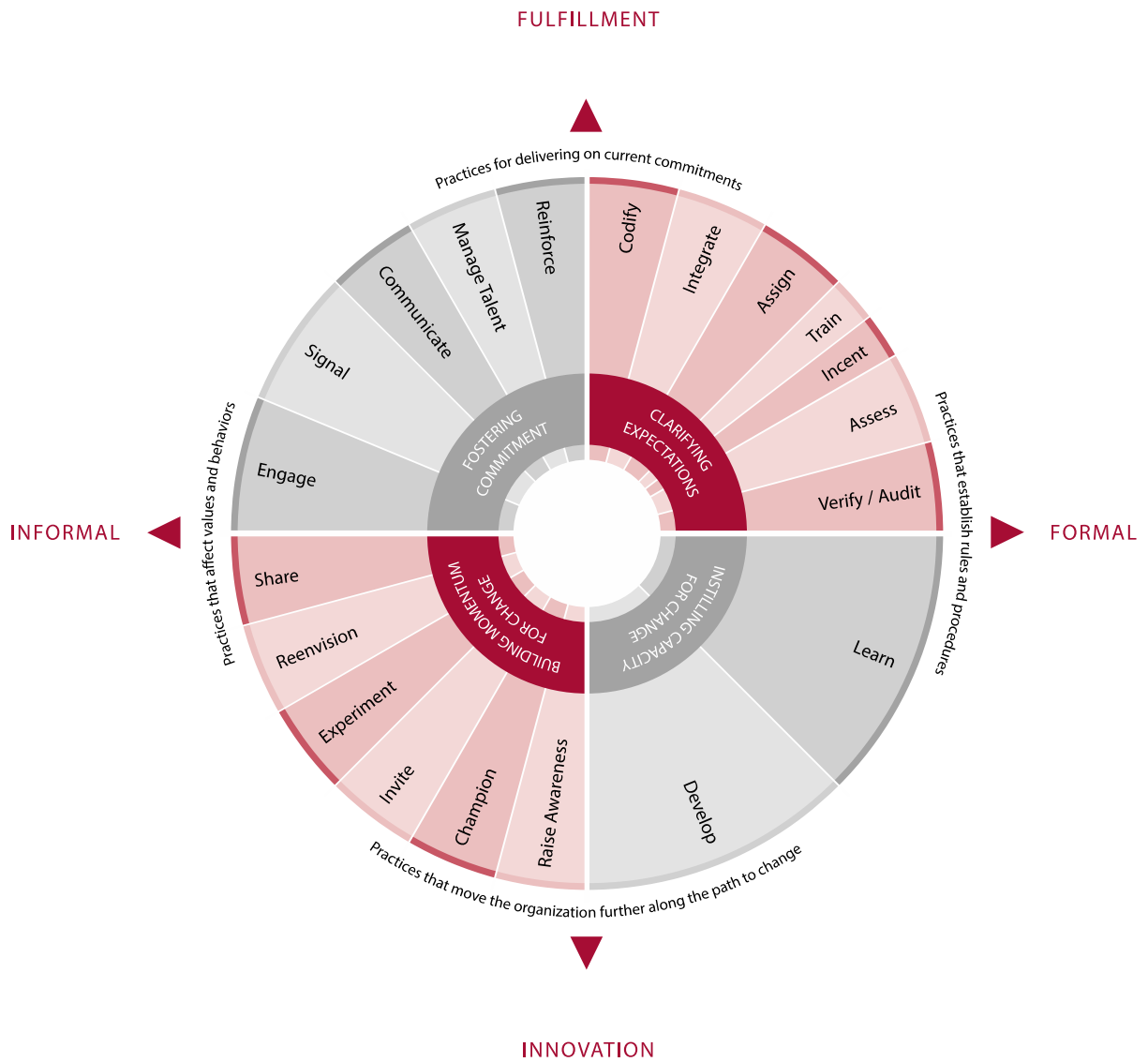
**Formal:** Formal approaches to shaping an organization’s culture try to guide behavior through the rules, systems and procedures. The idea is to codify and organize values and behaviors that have developed informally.

This is often accomplished by generating documents and texts such as codes of conduct, procedures, systems and training materials and by implementing programs.

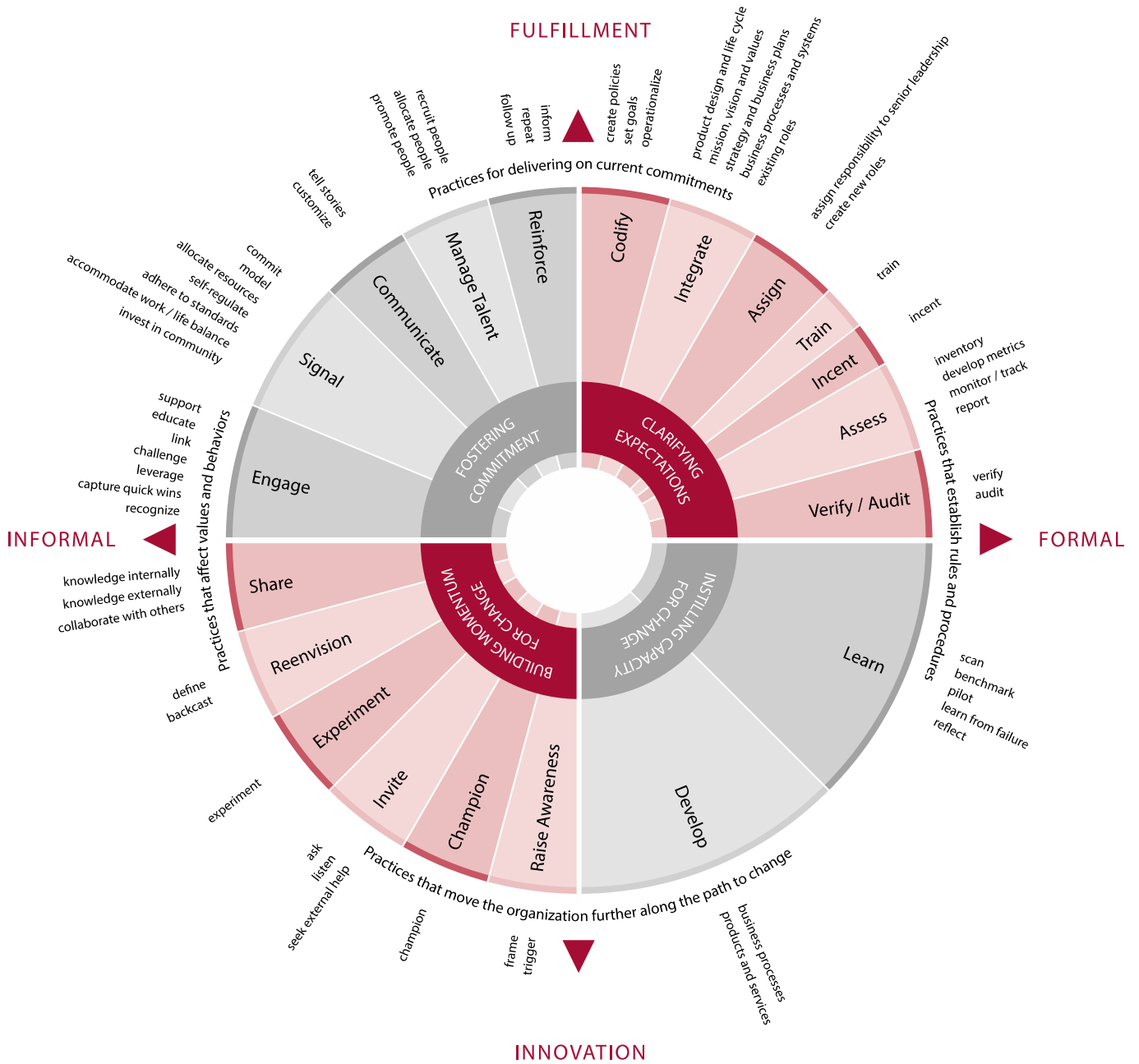
The resulting four quadrants, as shown below, represent the different types of practices that can be employed to embed change into the organizational culture.



The 59 practices identified by the research are grouped into 20 categories across the four quadrants and the categories are shown here.



The 59 practices are distributed across the categories are shown here.



You can download an A3 copy of the framework [here](#).

The key to the use of the framework, revealed from the research, is to draw a balance of practices from each of the four quadrants of the framework in the effort to embed change.



Similar to the need to consume food from each of the four food groups for good health, it is a balanced approach, and uses a wide and diverse range of practices that will achieve successful change.

Those working to embed change into the organization need a portfolio of practices at their disposal. The portfolio of practices creates a balanced diversity to ensure successful change.

The approach can be used for strategic, tactical and operational change.

It can be used for small, medium and large changes of varying complexity and priority. It can be used to increase resilience in the face of constant change.

*The key to the use of the framework, revealed from the research, is to draw a balance of practices from each of the four quadrants of the framework in the effort to embed change.*

# 10 reasons why you need to use the framework

There are many reasons to utilize the framework in your change endeavors.

## 1. Change is everyone's business

Everyone has to take responsibility for embedding change into an organization. Whilst many organizations may have the advantage of an internal organizational change management competency, it is highly unlikely that there will be sufficient resources within that competency to take an active part on every project and every change.

As the speed and volatility of change increases, the organizational change management subject matter experts will have to take on a strategic focus and drive a change capability throughout the organization.

We no longer exist in a bubble in which leading change can be left in the hands of a few. Today, it has to be in the hands of many.

The Balanced Diversity framework is a reference guide for every leader of change who needs access to a wide range of practices.

## 2. 59 practices

As mentioned earlier in this paper, the practices chosen to embed a change are often limited to communication and training.

*We no longer exist in a bubble in which leading change can be left in the hands of a few.*

*Today, it has to be in the hands of many.*

Whilst these practices are important, they are not diverse enough to assure successful change.

Even if this was realized by those leading change, there was no comprehensive list of 59 practices, arranged to enable a balanced selection before the publication of – [Balanced Diversity: A Portfolio Approach to Organizational Change](#).

The 59 practices in the framework provide a myriad of options to be chosen from based on the characteristics of the organisation and the change at hand.

The structured approach to choosing practices is discussed in the next section

## 3. Structure to practice selection

Often the approach to choosing practices to embed change is haphazard and based on variables such as personalities, previously used practices, biases, comfort zones, capabilities and competencies, and limited by knowledge of what practices are available to be utilized.

Those tasked with leading change may not have received training in organizational change and therefore lack awareness of the considerations that should lead the choice of practices.

The Balanced Diversity publication provides guidance on the approach to take to choose the right practices.

The following diagram provides a high-level view of the areas to be considered and the questions to be asked when selecting practices from the framework.



When this approach is used, there is informed decision-making rather than choices led by personal preferences that have no correlation with the change being addressed.

## 4. Augmentation

I am often asked whether the Balanced Diversity framework replaces other change management methodologies and approaches already in use within an organization.

My answer is a categorical 'NO'.

The Balanced Diversity framework augments, not replaces, all of the existing and future change management methodologies and approaches.

Most, if not all, methodologies involve identification of stakeholders, determination of impact and consideration of how those stakeholders are going to be engaged and be made ready for the change and a successful transition.

It is at this stage that practices should be chosen that will address the specific needs of each stakeholder group.

The Balanced Diversity framework provides an abundance of practices that can be utilized to meet those needs.

The material in the publication describes each practice in detail and how it should be applied.

## 5. One-size-does-not-fit-all

Every change is different. No change is exactly like the one that preceded it or will follow it.

Variables include scope, size, change type, impact, amount of change, timeframes and the stakeholders impacted.

Other variables that come into play are the perceived need for the change by stakeholders, the history of past changes, change readiness or resistance, management commitment and buy-in.

All of these factors means that each change has to be taken on its own merit and that its unique characteristics are addressed accordingly.

Just because a set of practices for change A resulted in a successful outcome and widespread adoption does not mean that the same set of practices for change B will have the same result.

Applying the same set of practices for every change is like a sports team playing the same set of tactics in every game regardless of who their opponent is. That is not the way to win the game. The tactics will change based on many considerations.

## 6. Bias and comfort zone influence

I have already alluded to personal bias and comfort zones influencing the choice of practices to be deployed for a change.

The Balanced Diversity framework and the structured approach to its use, ensures that those factors do not result in the wrong choice of practices.

We all have biases for particular practices, and this can be as a result of having used them extensively previously and therefore we are well inside our comfort zone when we choose them once again.

We need a structured approach that does not allow us to be prejudiced in our choice of practices.

The Balanced Diversity framework is that approach.

## 7. Time pressure influence

Our choice of practices can be influenced by time pressure put upon us to get changes implemented and adopted so that we can meet agreed deadlines and move on to the next change.

*Applying the same set of practices for every change is like a sports team playing the same set of tactics in every game regardless of who their opponent is.*

Failing to choose the right practices for each change due to time constraints is false economy.

When changes fail due to the wrong practices being deployed to try and embed change, it costs time and money.

As mentioned at the start of this paper, failure results in project overruns, unnecessary rework, additional training, delivery delays and project / change resources unable to be assigned to new projects.

Do not be intimidated by the availability of 59 practices to choose from and assume that selection will be a time-consuming process. This is not the case.

When effectively facilitated, selection of practices can be done in a time effective manner.

A recent practice selection workshop, looked at a change with the following characteristics:

*OUTCOME: Adoption of a project management system across the enterprise. 500 directly people impacted. It is determined as a significant change.*

*CULTURE: Many changes are underway and there is a poor history of change – perceived as negative and poorly managed. Change resistant.*

*NEEDS: Stakeholders know there is a need for this change. Current project management system is outdated.*

*SKILLS: There is access to other departments in the organization. Funds are available to source both internal and external resources.*

*TIME AND RESOURCES: The go-live date is in 3 months' time. Adequate resources and funding are available for the change.*

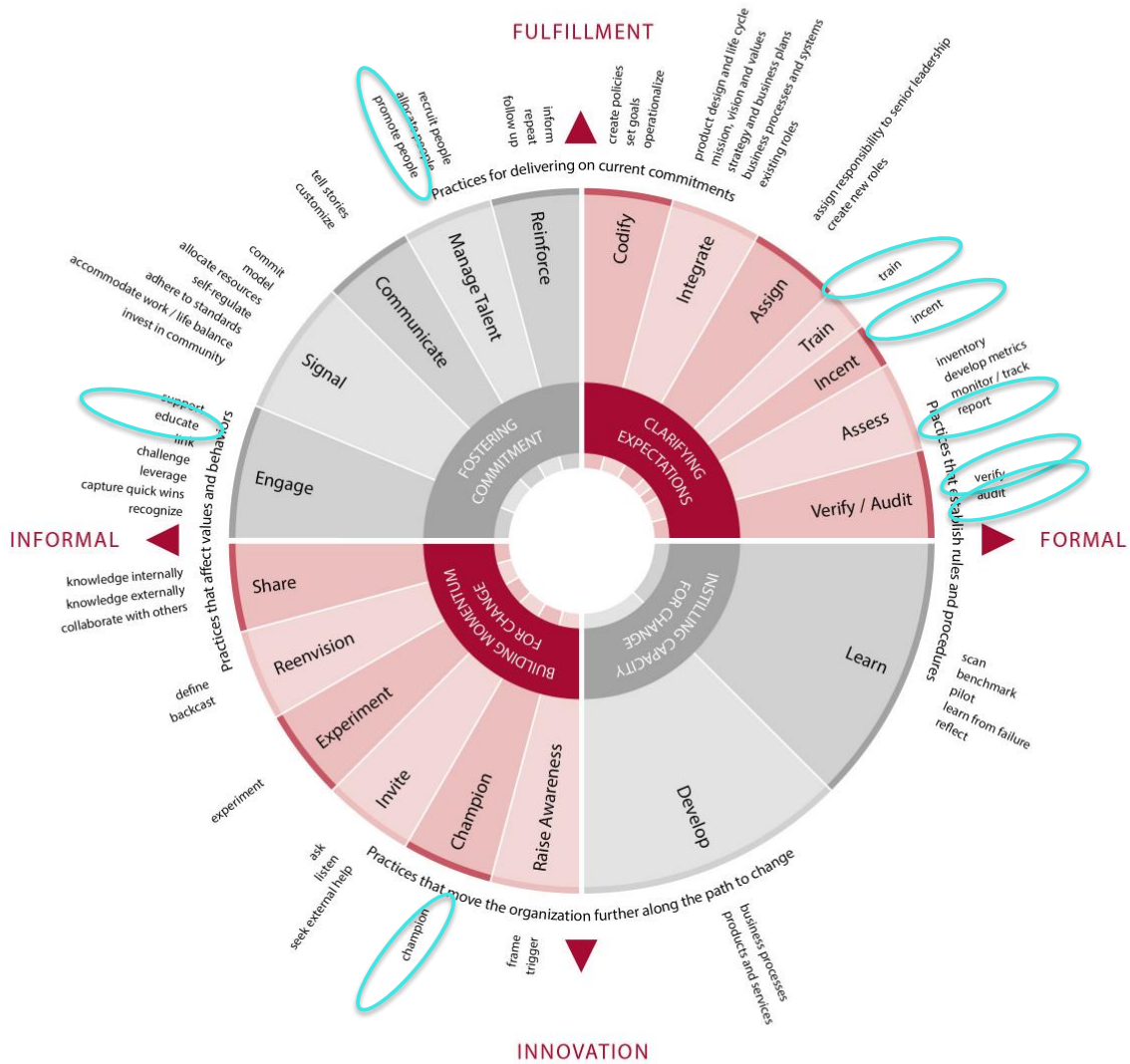
There were 6 participants and a facilitator. 8 practices were chosen and agreed on in under 30 minutes.

## 8. Emphasis on formal practices delivering on current commitments

Extensive use of the framework to undertake a gap analysis of practices currently in use to embed change and determine their balance as per the Balanced Diversity framework, has revealed a prevailing bias to select practices from the *Clarifying Expectations* quadrant.

These are the formal practices that deliver on current commitments.

The following is an example of an unbalanced selection.



The research behind the framework revealed that it was a balanced selection of practices from each quadrant that resulted in change being successfully embedded into the organization.

Therefore, the imbalance in this example reduces the chances of change success.

The Balanced Diversity framework and the guidance on its use, provides a means to ensure a balanced and diverse choice of practices to deliver on desired outcomes.

## 9. The more tools we have, the more dynamic our approach

If we only have a hammer in our toolbox, every challenge looks like a nail.

We need a wide choice of tools to address every challenge we may face. A well-outfitted toolkit for driving change can boost capability and ensure success.

Our change toolkit can never be static – we need to continually look for new and innovative tools to enhance our capability.

## 10. Realized by Research. Delivered by Design

Unlike many change management frameworks we are presented with, the Balanced Diversity framework is underpinned by extensive research.

As mentioned earlier, the research was commissioned by the Network for Business Sustainability.

For over a year, the researchers set out to determine how companies go about making change an everyday, enduring part of their organization.

The research team identified 13,756 academic and practitioner articles and reports. Preliminary screening narrowed the pool to 701 sources. Further review and analysis reduced the sources to 179 upon which extensive and detailed analysis and synthesis was conducted to extract the various practices that supported successful change. Based on that analysis the researchers narrowed the practices down to 59 and created the framework that I have called the Balanced Diversity framework.

*The framework was realized by research.*

*The choice of practices from the framework are delivered by design.*

The following is an extract from the [research report](#) recommending how the framework can be used as a baseline / gap analysis or new program implementation.

*“Use the Portfolio Assessment Tool to conduct a baseline assessment and gap analysis for the organization as a whole. Or, use the framework to plan what practices you will use to support the implementation of a particular program*

### *Step 1*

*When conducting a baseline/gap analysis, place a check mark next to the practices that you already employ. If you are planning a new program, place a check mark beside those that you plan to employ.*

### *Step 2*

*Take a look at the distribution. Do you make use of a sub-set of practices from each quadrant? Are you making use of the supported practices? Do you expend too much energy in one quadrant at the expense of others?*

### *Step 3*

*Circle additional practices that you might want to consider, emphasizing those that have been demonstrated to be effective. See the full systematic review for more details making use of the framework.”*

This is how the framework practices are delivered by design.

## Conclusion

Evidence and personal experience show that a one-dimensional approach to try to embed change into an organization does not work.

There may be some immediate tangible benefits experienced but, most likely, the change will not stick. In the long term, there will be no return on investment.

The integration of change into the organization will become an increasingly uphill battle. As each successive change fails to become part of the DNA of the organization, the appetite for change will decrease. There will be increased resistance to change, apathy and change fatigue as a result of a string of failed change initiatives.

*Our change toolkit can never be static – we need to continually look for new and innovative tools to enhance our capability.*

The more changes that fail, the harder it is to achieve successful ones.

The challenge of organizational change is that it involves people—the most dynamic, versatile, volatile, complex and diverse aspect of the organization. Therefore, a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional approach to change is required.

A diverse set of practices is needed—formal and informal—to deliver on current commitments as well as being aimed at innovation.

Balanced diversity is how change becomes embedded into the fabric of your organization.



[karen@karenferris.com](mailto:karen@karenferris.com)

[karenferris.com](http://karenferris.com)

+61 (0)425 728 498