

Challenge #14

Go for a push or pull change approach?

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The nut to crack

The fastest route

Do you manage your transformation top down or bottom up? And if it is true that people want to change, but don't want to be changed; when do you consciously choose an imposed non-organic way of change and when don't you? And which approach works best in which situation? Questions that come up in almost every process and are not always easy to answer.

The solution

Cruise with backpack

Managing top down change means something different from "enforcing" or "imposing" top down change. You can opt for both a push and a pull approach when choosing Top-down.

Other than calling the approach push or pull, I find the metaphor cruise and back-pack useful to illustrate the type of trip.

A **cruise** has clear timelines, milestones and has a well-defined character with a clear start and end point. The approach feels a bit stricter and is more often experienced as a push. A cruise approach generally works well when changing more rational matters such as organisational structure, processes and systems.

Support tool: Change strategy tool

	Get on a cruise	Go back-packing
Purpose	New equilibrium	Continuous change
Desired result	Stability	Dynamics
Touch point	Strategy, structure, systems	Mindset, behaviour, way of working
Starting point	Top down, external pressure	Seize opportunities, reduce pain
Change strategy	Blueprint	Directional
Motivation	Obligation	Energy
Approach	Announce outcome, build buy-in along the way	Create snowball effect
Steering by	Power and regulation	Clients and mission
Dynamics	Be thought	Learn
Managing..	The content	The process

A "**back-pack**" approach symbolises a more flexible, organic journey, in which principles and objectives are presented, but people direct their own change process. This approach is often experienced more as a "pull". A back-pack approach typically helps change behaviour and ways of working.

By running these **two approaches simultaneously**, you give people space to explore while also offering guidance by setting frameworks. The cruise and back pack method are described in detail in the support tool.



The real life example shows how to put this dual approach into practice.

Real life example

The fastest route

An organisation known for its clothing for the fashion-conscious consumer wants to transform **from a traditional to a circular organisation** in five years. The two directors cannot agree on how to get there. One of them believes in a **centrally managed, strict change approach**, because it would go faster. The other believes in the pace of an **organic approach**, because it generates a ripple effect. After much discussion and conversations, the directors come to the conclusion that **one approach cannot exist without the other**. Establishing the circular strategy and anchoring it in the organisational structure requires an organised process. This is devised and managed centrally and has a start and end date: a cruise.

The result is a clearly formulated objective in the area of people and planet at the heart of the corporate strategy and a sustainability impact board is comprised of directors from each discipline who are responsible for strategy execution. To change beliefs, behaviour and working methods, they opt for a flexible route, backpacking. Large groups of managers and employees are encouraged to clarify for themselves how they can redesign their daily work in line with the circular idea. Both approaches are implemented simultaneously and ultimately lead to a **balanced change journey**, in which co-creation with employees in the organisation takes place, within clear frameworks of corporate strategy and organisational structure.



Tip for the change leader

Depending on your own profile, you will feel more comfortable with a cruise or backpack oriented approach. Mostly, the cruise approach is more suited to rationally minded leaders and the backpack approach more to more creatively minded leaders. However, one cannot exist without the other. Therefore, make sure that you gather people around you who are complementary to you in your team, so that you can implement a complementary change strategy.

The back-pack method is organic, but that does not mean that it is without obligation. Also make progress visible in this journey, show best practices, and address responsibility based on the objectives and principles set. Setting up pulse surveys can help to make progress transparent.



Tip for the change enabler

Conclusion

Dual strategy is often necessary: Depending on the change dial you turn, a cruise or back-pack oriented approach is more suitable. In many projects you tune several dials **simultaneously**. This requires a dual change strategy, in which you are comfortable applying both.



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