



# PRINCIPLES FOR PUBLIC SERVICE CHANGE MATURITY

CHANGE DIRECTORS'  
NETWORK

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Leading a change effort in the federal public service and making it stick is a significant undertaking. Departments are large and complex, have a diverse array of stakeholders and have countless known and unknown interdependencies. While the capacity to lead and manage change is still very young in the public service, there are ways we can navigate this complexity successfully.

This document is intended for all leaders and change managers to help guide them in building change capacity. Understanding and applying the seven principles listed below will benefit not only the particular change effort we are focused on, but also those of our department and, ultimately, the entire public service. Each of the following principles are described in this document:

### THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES

1. Start with a focus on improving change capacity
2. Build a solid foundation for change
3. Use processes that engage people early
4. Ensure leadership stays involved throughout the change effort
5. Approach change from a systemic perspective
6. Attend to mindset and culture
7. Learn and share along the way

These principles set us on a path to successfully lead change by focusing on understanding and building our capacity (or maturity) to deal with change as an organization. Ultimately, by following these principles we can ensure transitions are smoother, commitment to the change is stronger, and staff and managers are more resilient.



## PRINCIPLES FOR PUBLIC SERVICE CHANGE MATURITY

Leading a major change is a significant undertaking involving systems thinking, leadership team involvement, and engagement with stakeholders, among other things. To effectively lead change, it is important to understand the current capacity our organization has for change, and to build on it as we go through the change process.



### AIM

These principles for public service change maturity are a guide to help us build change capacity within our respective organizations and, ultimately, across the federal public service. To do this, the principles apply to two critical aspects of the change process, namely, change management and change leadership capacity.<sup>i</sup>



### AUDIENCE

The principles are meant for anyone supporting a change initiative at any level. For those intimately involved in a change effort at the staff or management level, they can be used to influence decision-making and in briefing senior leadership. For senior leadership, they can be used to guide the overall direction of a particular change effort, or to increase change capacity more broadly. Whether coming at it from a project, organizational, or public service-wide perspective, the idea is that we all contribute in our own way to improving how the public service approaches change.



## THE PRINCIPLES

Below is a list of principles to keep in mind when starting out, and throughout the change effort, which will help contribute to building capacity in our organizations along the way. They are meant to be methodologically and organizationally agnostic, meaning they will help us effectively build change capacity no matter which change methodology we are using and which organization we are in. Because of this, they can apply to any type of change initiative.

### 1

#### **STARTING WITH A FOCUS ON IMPROVING CHANGE CAPACITY – UNDERSTANDING THE CURRENT LEVEL AS A STARTING POINT**

All public service departments and agencies fall onto a continuum from ad hoc approaches to change, to those that have institutionalized a commitment to change leadership as a core organizational competency.

By understanding where our organization is at on this continuum, and aspiring to reach the next level, we can put in place activities to help us increase our organization's capacity for change.

Below is an example of a possible change maturity framework, with 5 being the highest level of maturity. We have included more content on level 4 because this is the state that we are aiming for. Level 5 is not necessary for all organizations and requires a significant amount of resources to achieve. This example only illustrates the concept and is not meant to be comprehensive.

The important point here is to get a sense of where our organization is at on the continuum in order to start to help build change capacity. Depending on our respective realm of influence, our role, and the nature of our change initiative, we may be able to influence some of the aspects of change maturity listed above to a greater or lesser extent. The important point is that we all contribute to building change capacity. By following this principle, and those below, we can be a positive force in building change capacity regardless of the maturity of the organization we are in.

It is worth emphasizing that efforts to build change capacity and the change process itself should not be an exercise to check the boxes on prescribed activities. Depending on our respective realm of influence, our role, and the nature of our change initiative, we may be able to influence some aspects of change maturity to a greater or lesser extent. What really matters is that we all contribute to building change capacity.



## HIGH-LEVEL CHANGE MATURITY MODEL

### LEVEL 1 | AD HOC

No conscious approach or priority exists for change management and change leadership.

### LEVEL 2 | BUILDING

Some change capacity exists in pockets. Some change tools are being used consistently.

### LEVEL 3 | REPEATABLE

Some best practices in change are being applied across multiple projects. There is a more consistent, coherent approach to change, but there is not yet a common approach established for conducting change initiatives.

### LEVEL 4 | OPTIMIZED

There is an organization-wide priority for effectively managing and leading change. This includes a shift in leadership approach to one based on best practices in change.

- There is a common change approach and set of expectations driving change initiatives across the agency
- Project approvals depend on leaders demonstrating that a change leadership mindset and approach is core to the project
- Change assessments/audits are regularly done to keep change leadership actions central to the success of projects
- There is a centre of expertise on change that guides the training and application of the best combinations of change methodologies based on the type of change
- This centre of expertise on change takes into account the context surrounding the change in support of the whole organization, starting with the most senior leaders
- Change practitioners have the capacity to draw from and combine the best tools and approaches based on the context
- Change leadership is a key item in the departmental performance management framework

### LEVEL 5 | INDUSTRY LEADER

Change leadership and change management are an organization-wide competency and priority. The organization is an industry leader in change and is pioneering new tools and methods based on this expertise.





## 2

### **BUILDING A SOLID FOUNDATION FOR CHANGE**

It is important to take the time to build and sufficiently invest in a solid foundation for change, even if the change has been deemed urgent. While urgency is a great driver for change, it should not be used as an excuse to cut corners. Building a solid foundation will lead to better outcomes, both in the short- and long-term. Key aspects of a solid foundation for change include:

- The change team understands and can select and apply the most effective change concepts, methodologies, strategies and tools given the context
- Mindsets and behaviour in the organization are primed for flexibility, learning, innovation and change
- Solid networks and relationships have been cultivated with key parties affected by the change

When investing in our foundation for change, we can start by focusing on what works and build on that. This includes developing and preparing leaders for the kind of complex changes they face and orienting them to the kinds of values, principles, commitments and mindsets they will need to successfully lead change.

## 3

### **USING PROCESSES THAT ENGAGE PEOPLE EARLY**

People adopt what they help develop. Engage those directly (and sometimes indirectly) affected in understanding the need for the change and in shaping the design of the future state. Engage and mobilize up, down and sideways. This means engaging all levels in the organization including those above us, our peers and staff involved in the change.

The broader and more meaningful the engagement, accepting that we cannot always engage everyone we would like to due to time and resource constraints, the better the chances of success. Having a deep understanding of who our stakeholders are, and engaging the key ones early and meaningfully, will also lead to a deeper understanding of how other activities and interdependencies affect our change effort.





## 4

### ENSURING LEADERSHIP STAYS INVOLVED THROUGHOUT THE CHANGE EFFORT

In our busy public service environment it is tempting for senior people to delegate a major complex change to a sub-team or even an outside service provider. However, delegated changes have a way of getting off track and mired in deep-seated resistance to the outside agents. Staying involved and ensuring leadership remains hands-on, especially when making important decisions affecting people, is key to a successful change initiative.

Leadership behaviour impacts the perceptions and actions of staff. When leaders are only there at the beginning (e.g., for a launch event for the change initiative), it can send the signal to staff that this initiative is not a major priority. This, in turn, can lead to disengagement at all levels.

Instead, when leaders are visible and engaged regularly throughout the process, they serve as a role model for action at the staff level. This goes a long way in bringing people on board.

It can take several years for major change to unfold and ultimately take root. During this time, we can see turnover in our senior leadership. To ensure continuity, and that enthusiasm and motivation for the change initiative are maintained over time, we need to be ready to support incoming senior leaders to easily and quickly understand the history, current status, purpose and benefits of the change. This will not only help to ensure continuity, but also, should it be needed, help to shift certain aspects of the change initiative with consistency and coherency over the duration of the initiative.

## 5

### APPROACHING CHANGE FROM A SYSTEMIC PERSPECTIVE

Using a systems perspective we can follow a holistic approach to analyzing change that takes into account the various parts of the system. This involves examining and understanding the complexity of the system, including how its parts interact with each other, how they change over time and how they function within the larger system.

While this might seem like a major task, it is necessary that we do this to understand the interdependencies that may be critical to the success of the change initiative. Further, it helps us identify when various actions may counteract a change effort, as well as recognize potential synergies that can help propel its advancement.

Looking at a change effort as part of a system will help break down legacy silos, enhance cooperation, and even promote co-development in support of an agile, citizen-focused public service.



## 6

### ATTENDING TO MINDSET AND CULTURE

How we think conditions what we do. Remember that culture is mindset at the collective level. Some aspects of the change we are supporting may require a change in culture and, therefore, a change in mindset. Behaviours and mindsets can be viewed as two sides of the same coin. While aiming to change behaviours, a change in mindsets will ultimately be the deep end of the change we are aiming for.

Explore these shifts early in change exercises and articulate concrete plans to signal these key shifts. Changing culture is leadership work.

## 7

### LEARNING AND SHARING ALONG THE WAY

The discipline of change is constantly evolving and we have everything to gain from continuously learning. We are fortunate in the public service that we are on this journey together. We are not struggling in isolation or competing with each other. This means that we can help each other along the journey to institutionalize competency in change leadership. Networks, working groups, and technology can support all of us as we work to become more skilled in leading change.

When using outside talent or services, it is important to make sure there is explicit emphasis placed on enhancing our organization's capabilities, knowledge and skills in change. We can do so by choosing change leadership and change management products and services that have a distinct emphasis on knowledge transfer to all levels of the organization.

It is key to ensure contracts explicitly include change management and change leadership practices that are built into the change process so that they are not an afterthought.<sup>ii</sup>





## WHERE DO WE GO NEXT?

The aim of these principles is to guide us in our efforts to build change capacity on our teams, in our organizations and across the federal public service. Ultimately, the goal is to work collectively to get to a level of change capacity that gives us drastic improvement in the outcomes of change initiatives undertaken in the federal public service. Following these principles will help us move toward that higher level of capacity.

### <sup>i</sup> **CHANGE MANAGEMENT AND CHANGE LEADERSHIP – TWO CRITICAL ASPECTS OF THE CHANGE PROCESS**

Before we are able to understand and help build change capacity in our respective organization, it is important to understand the difference between change management and change leadership. Both are important in building capacity but are different concepts and will require different approaches.

**CHANGE MANAGEMENT** is a structured approach to guiding change within an organization using various tools and methodologies. It involves establishing a process for transitioning individuals, teams, organizations and societies to a desired future state. Change managers plan and deal with change in a systematic but flexible way, focusing on the people impacted by the change, working to avoid unintended consequences, and increasing the likelihood of successfully implementing the change by taking culture and context into account.

**CHANGE LEADERSHIP** is a skillset used to empower and inspire action in people during a change process. It includes developing a vision of a future state, sometimes through a co-creative process, and generating the necessary energy to get people and processes moving toward that end. It also includes articulating and advocating for the rationale for change and requires being both forward-thinking and responsive in an uncertain workplace environment. It is all about engaging, listening, supporting. Ultimately, it is important to understand that change management and change leadership are two critical aspects of the change process.

<sup>ii</sup> If they are not included in the contract, and deep engagement is not emphasized, it is likely that public servants will have to put in significant effort in these areas, both for the duration of the initiative and ongoing to ensure the changes stick. Further, it will probably mean the changes are not focused on people, and therefore less likely to be supported by those affected by it and more difficult to be effectively implemented.