

The Triangle of Change *focuses on strategy*



The Triangle of Change helps change agents to act strategically.

It visualises positions relevant to change in a network. Any process of change takes place in the field of tension between people having ambitions and structure that sets the conditions for what is expected, allowed and profitable. People take on different positions. Some are inspired about change, whilst others feel primarily responsible for the structure. There will also always be those who are more concerned about their own circumstances and survival than what they share with others.

1. *Change Agents* are those who follow their ambition and take initiatives. They may inspire others with similar ambitions, and motivate them to join in the action. A shared ambition is a strong driving force.
2. *Gatekeepers* feel responsible for maintaining the existing structure. Not every initiative is a useful one. Sooner or later change agents will encounter the gatekeepers in the system, and have to negotiate about what's feasible.
3. *Survivors* are primarily concerned with their own position, rather than with the system or necessary changes. They might just follow, avoid risks and deliver only what is asked for. Some survivors take on the guise of gatekeepers or even change agents if they see it as the smartest way to get by.

An easy rule of thumb for recognising people in survival mode is that interacting with them does not generate energy. In other words, they tire you. The logic is that energy is generated by sharing ambitions. Survivors do not follow ambitions you can connect with.

We all are change agents, gatekeepers or survivors at times

These distinctions should not be used in a normative manner, separating the good and the bad. We all take on the positions of change agents, gatekeepers or survivors at different times, depending on the context.

The Triangle is helpful in choosing a strategy:

- Find sufficient supporters who share an ambition.
- Approach gatekeepers only after acquiring a position which ensures the initiative will be taken seriously.
- Then communicate about realistic changes with the others.
- Don't waste energy trying to persuade survivors until the risks have been reduced to acceptable levels.

Origins

The first version of the Triangle of Change was developed by Eelke Wielinga in his PhD thesis: "Networks as Living Tissue". Here he suggested that any network needs a Free Actor to make it effective, who can do whatever it takes, with or without a mandate. It was a useful tool in an experiment on networks in livestock production.

First published in:

Wielinga, H.E. (2001): Networks as Living Tissue. PhD Thesis Wageningen University.

Wielinga, H.E., Zaalmink, B.W. et al (2008): Networks with Free Actors. Wageningen University and Research.