

Rethinking Change by Embracing your Inner Ninja!

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Insight from Dr Tammy Watchorn, author of [Change Ninja](#)

I'd like you to think back to a recent challenge you had when delivering change. One where a conversation didn't go quite as you'd hoped and left you perplexed, annoyed or both. Did HR refuse to let you recruit much needed contract staff or IT decide your project was a security risk? Maybe governance gave you a bunch of 'just in case' pointless admin to do or a manager was refusing to free up staff for training?



How did you feel when this happened? When someone seemed to be blocking your project for no apparent logical reason? And how did you respond and behave? At best you may have scratched your head wondering what might have just happened. At worst you might have gone home and ranted and raved to the spouse at this person getting in your way of success. I'm also guessing many of you lay awake later that night re-imagining the conversation and in your imagined version most definitely winning.

Next, I'd like you to think about a time when you perhaps disagreed with a project or change. That new email system that wasn't needed, that new reporting software that was just going to create more work for no value. Perhaps you aired these views to others in meetings, perhaps you kept accidentally forgetting to read the latest communication or perhaps you accidentally stalled on doing the tasks you needed to do to ensure project success. Now think about how that might have made the project leader feel. Even if you still think you were right, how might they have been made to feel?

They felt just like you did in the first question.

The only sure fire way to succeed with as little pain as possible is to understand how humans work. And the only way to do that is to become Ninja.

Imagine this: A project stakeholder mapping session. Everyone is shouting out groups of people they think are important or influential. Because that's what you normally do.

But you have some Ninja skills. You realised that despite all of the training courses you've all been on (leadership development; project and programme certification; risk management; personal and team development) not a single one really taught you about people. Real individual people with real thoughts and opinions, experiences, and knowledge. Real people who might all react and behave differently to the same change.

It's hard to teach about real people because we are all different. And because we are all different it's hard to map us out with your traditional stakeholder mapping process.

And so, you tell everyone you are going to manage your stakeholders differently this time. That instead of writing down your stakeholders on a 2 by 2 grid of importance and influence you instead will think about the actual individuals you need to involve. You ask the team:

"Who is it we will be working with in HR? Jim or Marika?"

You explain that Jim and Marika are two very different people who behave very differently to change, and you share your insights about them both based on previous projects. Depending on who from HR will be involved in this project should therefore determine **how** you will approach and engage HR.

Understanding an individual's perspective of your change before you approach them is a vital Ninja Skill.

Why understanding people is key to success:

When someone challenges or tries to quietly block your project there's a very good chance this is based on their view and opinion of the project rather than it **actually** being say, a security risk to IT.

I know you are smart and likely already know this. And I know that you think you know how best to deal with it. I imagine you decide in advance that someone might be difficult, you prepare for battle, you have your arsenal of benefits and reasons why this is in fact a good project they should embrace, you go in and

pitch the project, logically. And perhaps this works. Sometimes. But, if you are being honest, often it doesn't. And there is a good reason for that.

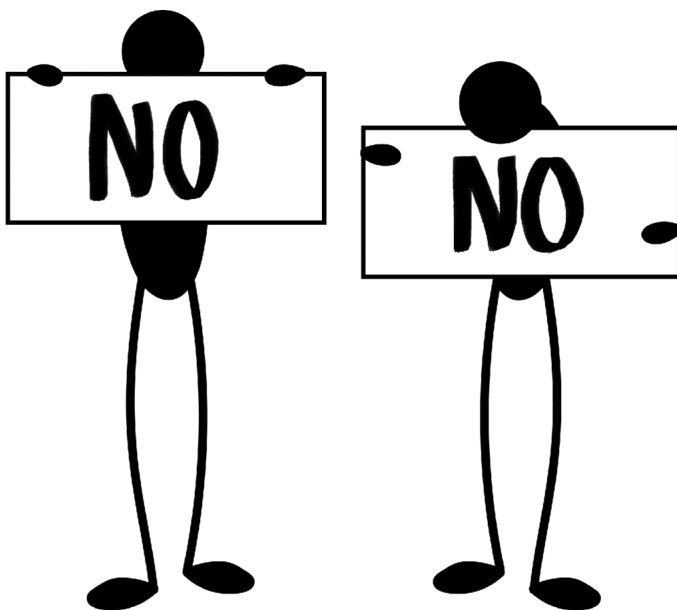
We often respond to change with emotion rather than logic.

When we are faced with change, of any size, our subconscious brain, at breakneck speed, takes in all the information, scans its huge database of knowledge and experience and makes an 'informed' decision, often by filling in data gaps, to make a prediction about whether the change will be good or bad for us as an individual. If it's something similar to something we've previously experienced then we predict good or bad based on the previous experience. If it's something new (like AI) we are more likely to predict bad than good because we can easily imagine all the things that might go wrong for us but not imagine the opportunities because we have nothing to base it on.

Here's a test: Your organisation is about to merge with another. It's essentially a take over bid. How do you feel? Unless you've been through this before and have a good experience or are on the cusp of changing your career or moving jobs then its highly likely your brain is thinking about all the reasons this could be bad for you even though there is likely a wealth of opportunity buried in this change.

The less data, knowledge and experiences we have in relation to a change, the less likely we will predict a good outcome.

When faced with change your brain makes an almost instant prediction about it without you even being aware. The prediction then drives your response and behaviours to the change. It happens to us all, all of the time, and unless you notice it you won't realise why you are behaving the way you are.



When IT say your project is a security risk its more than likely that the person saying that has 'predicted' your project could be bad for them: more work; risk of getting things wrong.

When you sit with your arms folded saying this new email system is just a waste of everybody's time your

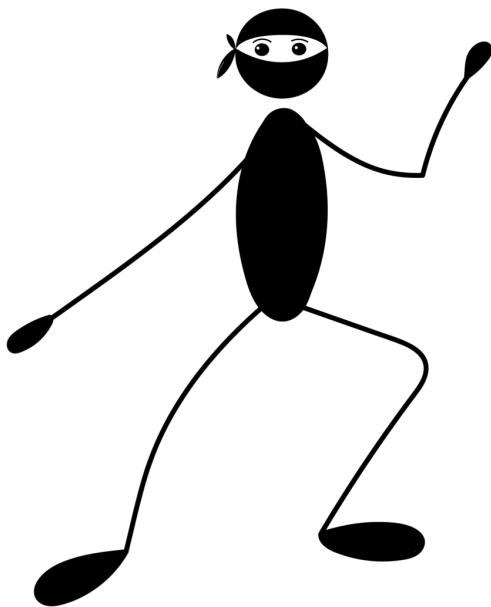
brain has likely predicted a bad outcome for you: more work; admin that you hate; customers complaining and so on.

The brain is evolved for survival.

This all happens because the brain has evolved to protect you from potential danger. You will be familiar with the fight/flight response to physical danger, but perhaps less aware that the same thing happens when faced with social danger i.e. change! Unless your brain can predict a good outcome based on previous experience it will likely decide, emotionally rather than logically, that the change could be bad for you and this is what drives your behaviours. The key, nay Ninja, thing to remember is that when the emotional brain is triggered the logical brain switches off. Therefore, there is absolutely no point in trying to persuade someone in this (emotional) state about all the good benefits and outcomes of your project because they aren't listening with their logical brain. It's a bit like telling someone to calm down when they are angry. It doesn't work.

Emotion beats logic. Every time.

But what if you could learn some Ninja skills and find a way to remove these unnecessary blockers and become the hero of your change project?



Here's a very quick guide to get you started:

Step 1: Notice if you trigger this 'fear' response in others. Are they responding emotionally i.e. their argument won't make much logical sense? If so don't try and beat them with logic. Empathise. You can only beat emotion with emotion.

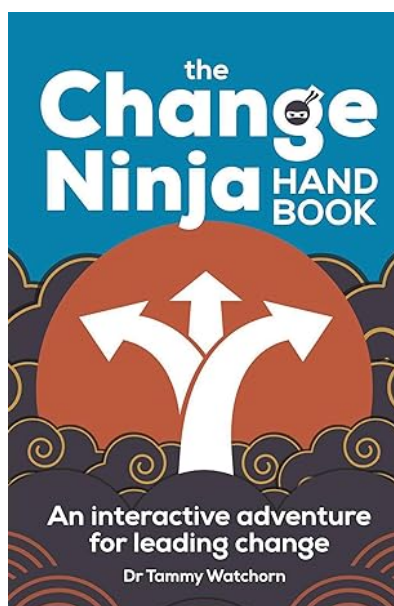
Step 2: Notice your responses to them when they do this. Especially if their argument makes no sense to

you. If you don't notice then there's a very good chance your 'fear' response will also be triggered and you will start retaliating with an emotional reaction. An easy way to spot this is to notice how you **feel**, in your tummy. Is your heart racing and anger churning? If you feel these things your emotion is winning and so you need to calm down and get your logic back on. Basic breathing techniques like the physiological sigh are great for managing this in the moment if you can't leave the conversation till later.

Step 3: Once you start to notice things you can be pre-prepared. Think about the individual and how they might respond and be prepared. Your aim, as a true Ninja warrior is to avoid triggering them into the emotional state in the first place. Can you make your change sound familiar to something you know they like or feel good about? Can you think about your project from their perspective and make sure your immediate pitch answers their concerns and enhances something that is of direct benefit to them? You may need many different pitches for all of the individuals you need on board.

This might make it sound easy. But it's not.

And I know it's not because I too was once a project and programme manager with the certificates and training. I used to get up every day and drive into the office where I would face battle after battle just to get the job done. At the time, the battles didn't stand out as battles, it was all just part of the role of 'delivering'. Dealing with the naysayers, the blockers, the 'that's not how we do things around here' brigade, and the big egos that always thought they knew better. It was all part of the system. It was the norm. The norm until, that is, I decided there had to be a better way and I changed my approach to leading change. I learnt, using a range of Professor Eddie Obeng's People Enhancement Tools, and made small, stealth-like, Ninja moves, to deliver successful change quickly and effectively while bypassing the battles of old. It had such an impact that people kept asking me how I was doing this and so I turned my stories into The Change Ninja Handbook, an interactive adventure book to help you learn and do this too.



The battles I had faced are common battles for anyone leading change, irrelevant of position, grade, or

organisation because they are all about human behaviours. The battles I faced are the same ones you are dealing with now, daily, the ones that are making you pull your hair out with frustration, the ones you just want to go away. And if you are still reading, I know that you know that it's time to start **thinking differently about change**. You are finally ready to embrace Change Ninjary.

Try the steps I mention, just notice what is happening and you will start to shift how you tackle challenges. If you need the tools, then buy the book and practice them. If you need more and want just in time learning that will be instantly applicable to your project today, then sign up for the course. If nothing else join the community to meet and share learning with Ninja peers.

Think differently about change. Be a Ninja!

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