The Myth of Resistance to Change

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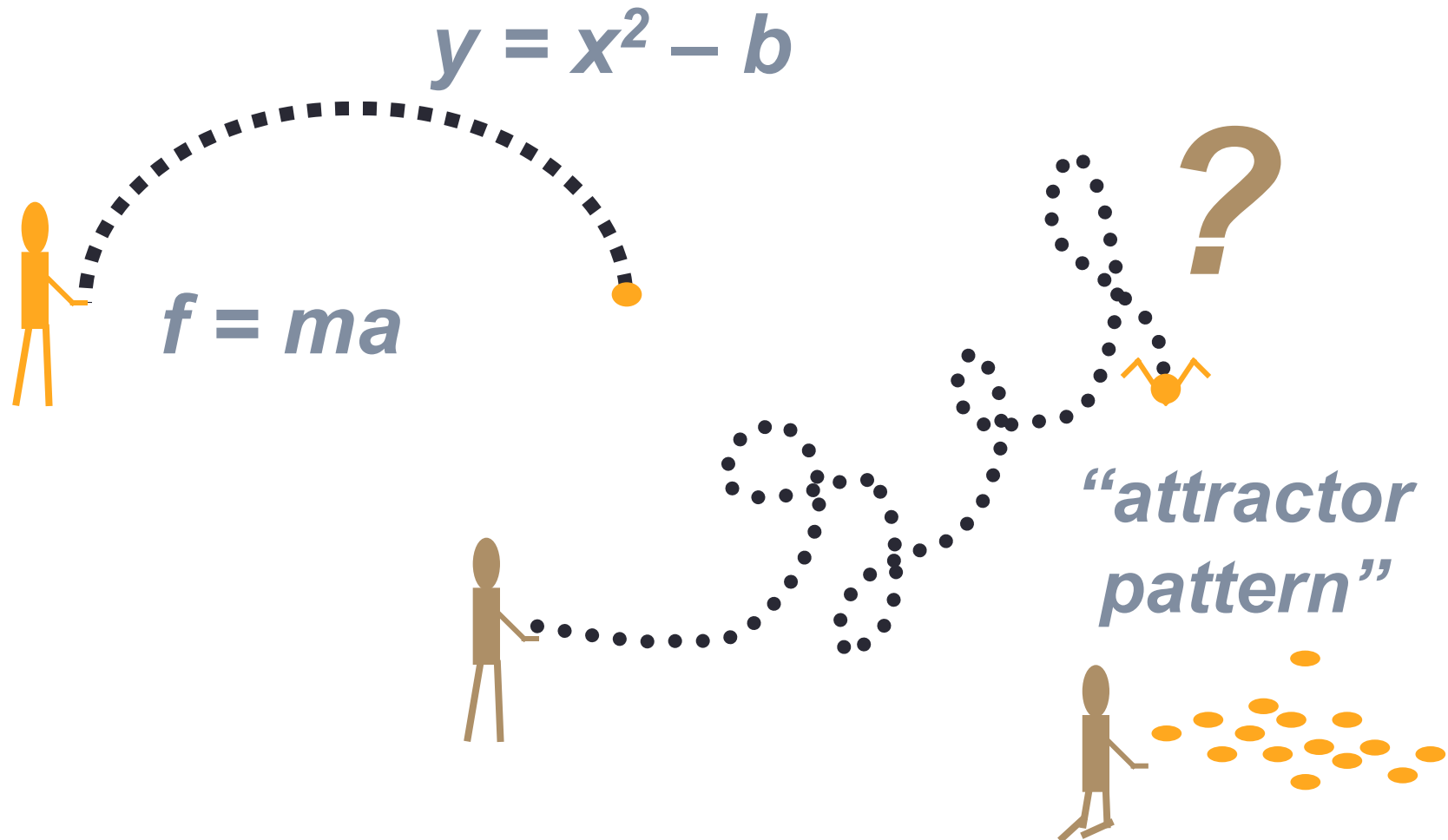
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Central Truths of Improvement

- Every system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets

- Every change has both a technical and a social aspect

- Technically rational changes can fail if the social aspects of change are not handled well

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Throwing a rock or a bird?

$$y = x^2 - b$$

$$f = ma$$

?

"attractor pattern"
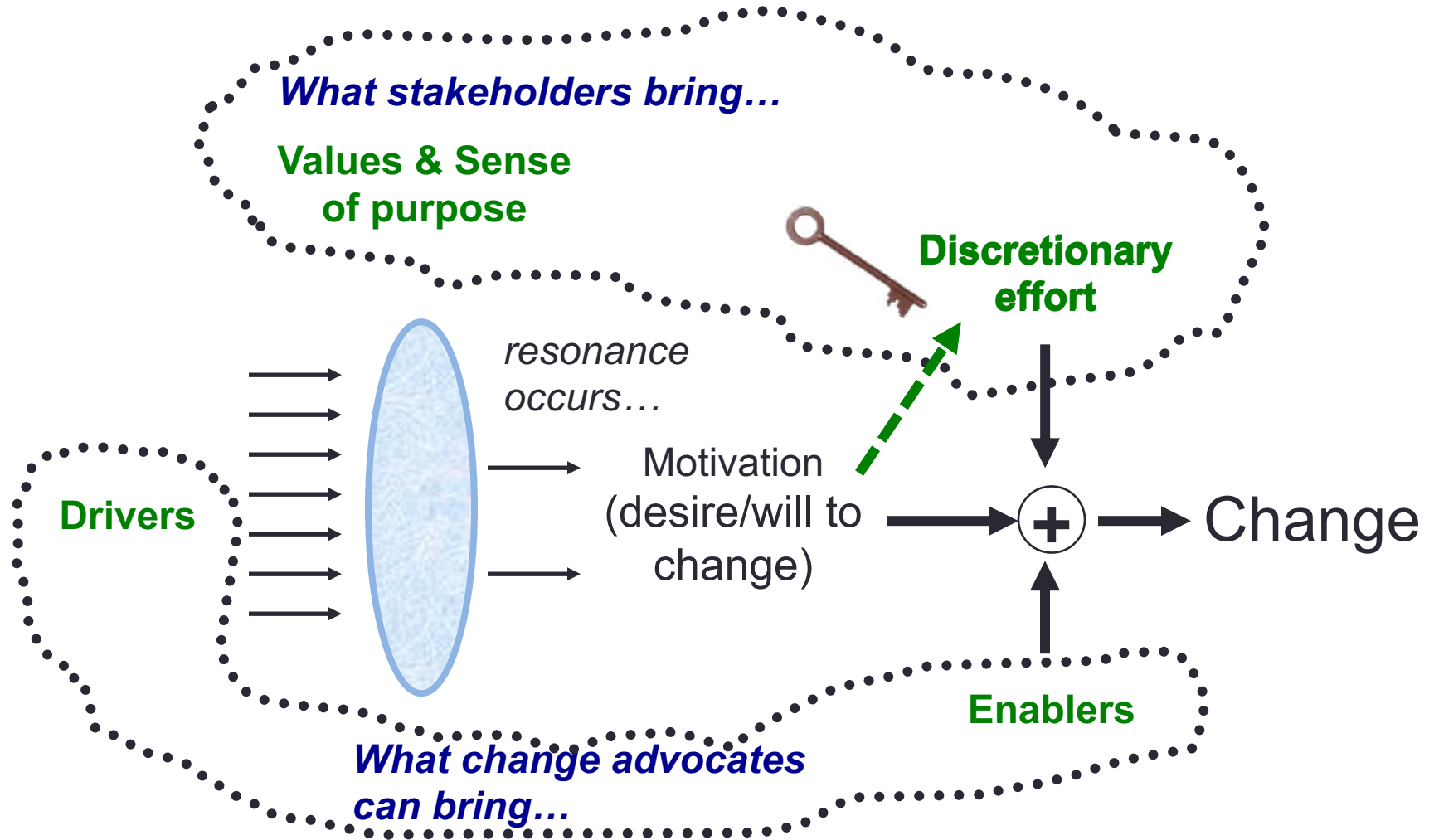
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Engagement in change

- *Key things to keep in mind…*
- It is not so much that people are "resisting change"
- Rather, it is that behavior – specifically, the release of discretionary effort in service of a proposed change – revolves around patterns associated with *personal:*
  - Values (e.g., desire for professional autonomy or *my own* sense of what is right for *my* patients) and…
  - Sense of purpose (what is meaningful for *me* in *my* work)

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Discretionary effort and engagement in change…

What stakeholders bring…

Values & Sense of purpose

Discretionary effort

resonance occurs…

Drivers

Motivation (desire/will to change)

+ → Change

Enablers

What change advocates can bring…

Source: Paul Plsek for UK NHS National Quality Board, 2008

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Some basic values of professional staff

- Altruism

- Service/Quality (incl, harm avoidance)

- Mastery

- Autonomy

- Comfort/control

- Affiliation

- Recognition (being valued)

- Survive/thrive

- *Etc., etc.*

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For health and social care professionals, "attractor patterns" tend to form around basic values such as…

- **Altruism**… I value doing good for others / society
- **Service and Quality**… I value meeting needs of, and above all avoiding risk or harm to, those depending on me (e.g., service users and carers)
- **Mastery**… I value in myself and others being a good professional, scientific thinking, knowledge / wisdom, achievement, challenge, innovation, boundary-pushing, demonstrating advanced practice, being a life-long learner, etc.
- **Autonomy**… I value having some say and choice in how things are done
- **Comfort/control**… I feel that I know what I am doing, that it is working for me and those I serve, and I want to avoid being in situations where I might appear not fully competent or in control
- **Affiliation**… I value my identity with peers as a social system (e.g., sustaining the professional opinion leader system)
- **Recognition**… I value praise and respect (or avoidance of rebuke) from peers, others in the organisation, society / community
- **Survive/thrive**… I value sustaining my group or organisation, or, more personally, I desire a good, comfortable lifestyle for myself and family
- *Etc. etc.*

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Concept: 'Frame resonance'

- Frames must resonant for audience to respond
- Resonance is determined by extent to which the message fits with peoples' individual and collective (identity group) values, beliefs, world views, and life experiences
- The better it fits, the more people will be ready to consume it *(Benford & Snow, 1988, 2000)*

Recognising/diagnosing the values of others

- Asking them directly does not often work
  - People do not always do what they say/think they do
  - "Espoused theory" v. "Theory in practice" (Argyris)
- Reflection on what they *do and say* provides clues to basic values, and priorities among them
- While identifying with all eight values, most people mainly operate from 2-3 key ones
  - Situations that create conflict among values help uncover priorities among values
- **Key mindset:** Others are doing something *positive* (for them) that reflects their values (appreciative reflection)
  - Cynicism clouds our view of others

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Reflect on past engagements…

- What do they do/say–what issues do they bring up–when they are "resisting change"? What issues do they bring up when they are suggesting, leading or supporting change? *(Most people present cases for change – or raise issues and challenges – that appeal to their values.)*

- What do they seem to like most about their work? What do they seem to dislike? What do they seem to really want, deep down? *(Don't be cynical.)*

- What initiatives, programs, changes, and innovations have they been actively and constructively engaged in the past? On which ones have they sat passively by or actively resisted?

- What are the characteristics of initiatives, programs, changes, and innovations that they seem to engage naturally? Resist naturally? *(Don't be cynical.)*

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Tools
(Available from: paulplsek@DirectedCreativity.com)

- What people tend to do and say when operating from certain values
- What to do, and avoid doing, when influencing people operating from certain values

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    and…
  - Sense of purpose (what is meaningful for *me* in *my* work)

Overcome the "principal-agent" mental valley

"The "principal-agent problem" …is the standard economic model for describing an organization's relationships with its workers.

Here's the basic idea: The principal (the employer) and the agent (the employee) form a work contract. The agent is effort-averse. For a certain amount of money, he or she will deliver a certain amount of labor, and no more. Since effort is personally costly, the agent underperforms in providing it unless the principal puts contractual incentives and control systems in place to counter that tendency.

This model precludes the notion of a fully engaged workforce… Look for excellence, examine the purpose that drives the excellence, and then imagine it imbuing your entire workforce."

Quinn & Thakor (2018) Creating a purpose-driven organization. *Harvard Business Review*

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Sense of purpose: What do you do here?
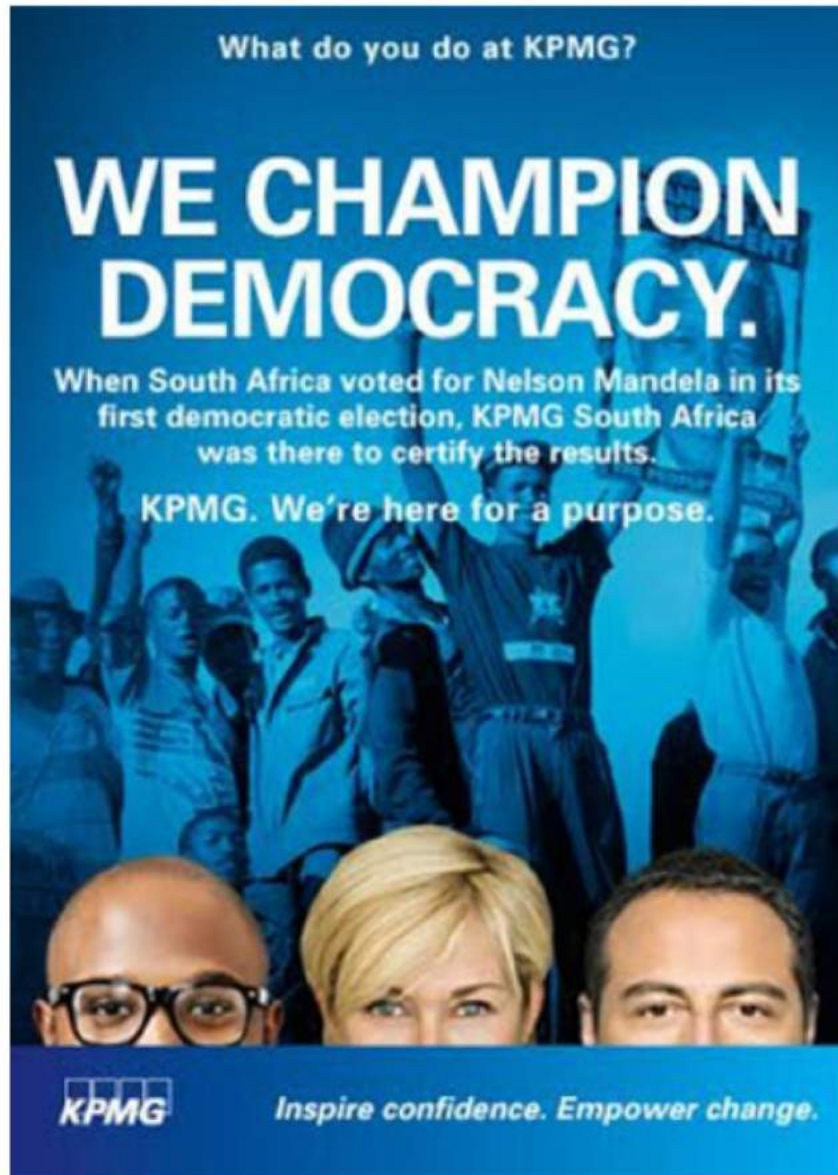
KPMG Story

- The simple question "What do you do at KPMG?" and a video that answered *"We Shape History!"*

- Leaders at all levels encouraged associates to share their own stories about how their work makes a difference

- The *10,000 Stories Challenge…*

Pfau (2015) How an accounting firm convinced its employees
they could change the world. *Harvard Business Review*

What do *you* do at KPMG?

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KPMG Story

- The simple question "What do you do at KPMG?" and a video that answered *"We Shape History!"*
- Leaders at all levels encouraged associates to share their own stories about how their work makes a difference
- The *10,000 Stories Challenge*… resulted in 42,000 stories!
- Survey results…
  - 76% said "my job has special meaning and is not just a job" (higher than other Big 4 accounting/consulting firms)
  - 89% say KPMG is a great place to work
  - Little difference across generations
  - Big difference with "my manager discusses higher purpose"

Pfau (2015) How an accounting firm convinced its employees they could change the world. *Harvard Business Review*

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Leaders' work: Create ongoing dialogue about sense of purpose

- Leadership by (sincerely & appreciatively) asking around…
  - What do you do at here? *(no, really!)*
  - What difference do you want to make here?
  - What turns you on?
  - I notice you light up (or switch off) when we talk about X – what's that about? *(It's OK, I really want to know)*
  - What does "best" mean?
  - What are you most commited to in your work (professionally)?
  - What do we do here in this team that is most relevant and meaningful to you?
  - How do you want to be remembered?
  - I'm a patient, "sell" me on coming to this team for help when I need it?
- Recognize that it is your highest daily-work as a leader to help connect people to their purpose
  - If you cannot do that, you're back to the principal-agent problem… *How's that working for you?*

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Engagement in change

- The concepts of "resistance to change" and "change fatigue" are negative and emotionally draining
- We all change naturally; at our own pace and with our own rationale
- Stop speaking of "us" and "them"
- *How can I talk about change in a way that:*
    - *Is more naturally attractive to those I wish to influence?*
    - *Resonates with their values?*
    - *Ties to their sense of purpose at work?*

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