

# Types of change

Change is not one-size-fits-all. Different types of change require different leadership approaches.

A helpful way to distinguish change types is to consider what is fixed (the decision, the outcome, timeframes) and what can be shaped (the implementation, sequencing and supports). In practice, most changes include a mix of approaches over time.

- **Directive change**

Directive change occurs when the decision and key requirements are already set (for example legislative, policy, safety, security or whole-of-government requirements). The *what* (and sometimes the *when*) is constrained. Leaders still have significant control over *how* the change is implemented, including consultation on impacts, role clarity, workload management, training and transition support. Directive change is often time-bound and requires strong governance and clear communication.

- **Pre-planned change**

Pre-planned change suits situations where the outcome is known and the work can be designed and sequenced (for example system implementations, process redesign, service improvements with a defined target state). Leaders can plan the change approach upfront, then deliver in phases with clear readiness checks, communications and capability support. While the end state is clearer than in adaptive change, implementation should still incorporate feedback and adjust where needed.

- **Adaptive (inquiry-led) change**

Adaptive change is appropriate when the problem is complex and the best solution is not fully known upfront (for example cultural change, behaviour change, multi-stakeholder reforms or new ways of working). Leaders set clear intent and guardrails, then use iterative cycles to listen, test, learn and adjust. This approach can produce stronger adoption and sustainability, but it requires time, disciplined feedback loops and clear decision-making.

- **Blended approaches**

Most change initiatives involve a blend of these approaches. For example, a mandated requirement (directive) may involve a planned rollout (pre-planned) and an adaptive approach to embed new behaviours.

Select the dominant approach for each stage of the change and for different stakeholder groups, adjust as you learn.

# A common starting point

## Change Management Toolkit



### Understanding change

Dimensions	Directive change	Pre-planned change	Adaptive change
Examples	New compliance requirements for a public service	Implementation of a new IT system or office move	Embedding values and behaviours
Characteristics	Top-down, 'tell' rather than 'ask'	Linear 'road map'	Guided, iterative spiral
Change goals (end state)	Tightly defined, inflexible	Clear goal, with some modification as needed	Loosely defined, requires investigation, may be slightly different approach for each person impacted
Change process	Tightly constrained	Flexible, participative	Experimental, involved
Role of leaders	Tell, explain, support, monitor	Devise a plan and work with employees to implement	Point the way, provide the overarching vision, guide and watch over, listen, lead
Change-maker dynamics	Persuasion	Influence, cooperation	Collaboration
Pace of change	Urgent, fast	Go slow during planning to go fast during implementation	Act quickly, improvise, learn, react and continue to iterate
Common risks	"Done deal" approach, poor consultation, inadequate support	Over-planning delivery, under-planning adoption	Endless consultation, unclear decisions, fatigue
Minimum mitigations	Impact/readiness check; consult on impacts; stabilisation support; monitor wellbeing	Phased rollout; time-to-learn; job aids; two-way comms; stabilisation support	Guardrails; time-boxed tests; "you said/we did"; manager support; monitor adoption

Use **Change Impact Assessment** and **Change Readiness Assessment** to decide where to put effort.