



***Achieving Transformational Change
Big Bang?
or Incremental Progression?***

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Change ...

one of the key themes of this conference

challenging to achieve - especially in
universities (by nature of their character)

many get it wrong - 50% to 70% of change
efforts fail ... (*Kotter, 1995; Balogun & Hailey, 2004;*

Change ... focus of this discussion

“big bang” – tightly planned & structured change?

iterative adaptive approach to change ?

an analogy for understanding / approaching change - Haidt & Heath's *elephant & rider*

two frameworks for understanding / approaching

Focus of this discussion ...

two experiences of incremental / iterative
change – *La Trobe & Yale*

what can we see from these

- achievements

- lessons / risks / dangers

Change ...

“Like a person riding atop an elephant ...”



Rider & elephant ...

*analytical, logical, planning, rider decides
“this is the way I want to go” - sets off.*

*rider can try to lead elephant in desired
direction ...however, the elephant wins
any contest of wills!*



And universities are very wilful
elephants”!

tensions - collegiality / managerialism

academic method – debate, test evidence,
argue ... result: continually contestable
“agreements”

culture – collaboration? hierarchy?...

academic loyalty: discipline first – then to

Change – just a plan away ...

we need to be/become ...

- *“automated rather than paper driven”*
- *“lean rather than layered”*
- *“more strategic - less administrative”*

now, if we can just find the right plan (and

**Just a plan away” thinking ... leads
to the “big bang” approach**

just do this this and this ...

in this sequence ...

bingo! realise the benefits!

Kotter - 8 step model - linear

urgency - change

powerful coalition - guide & lead

vision - organisation's future

communicate - vision widely / repeatedly

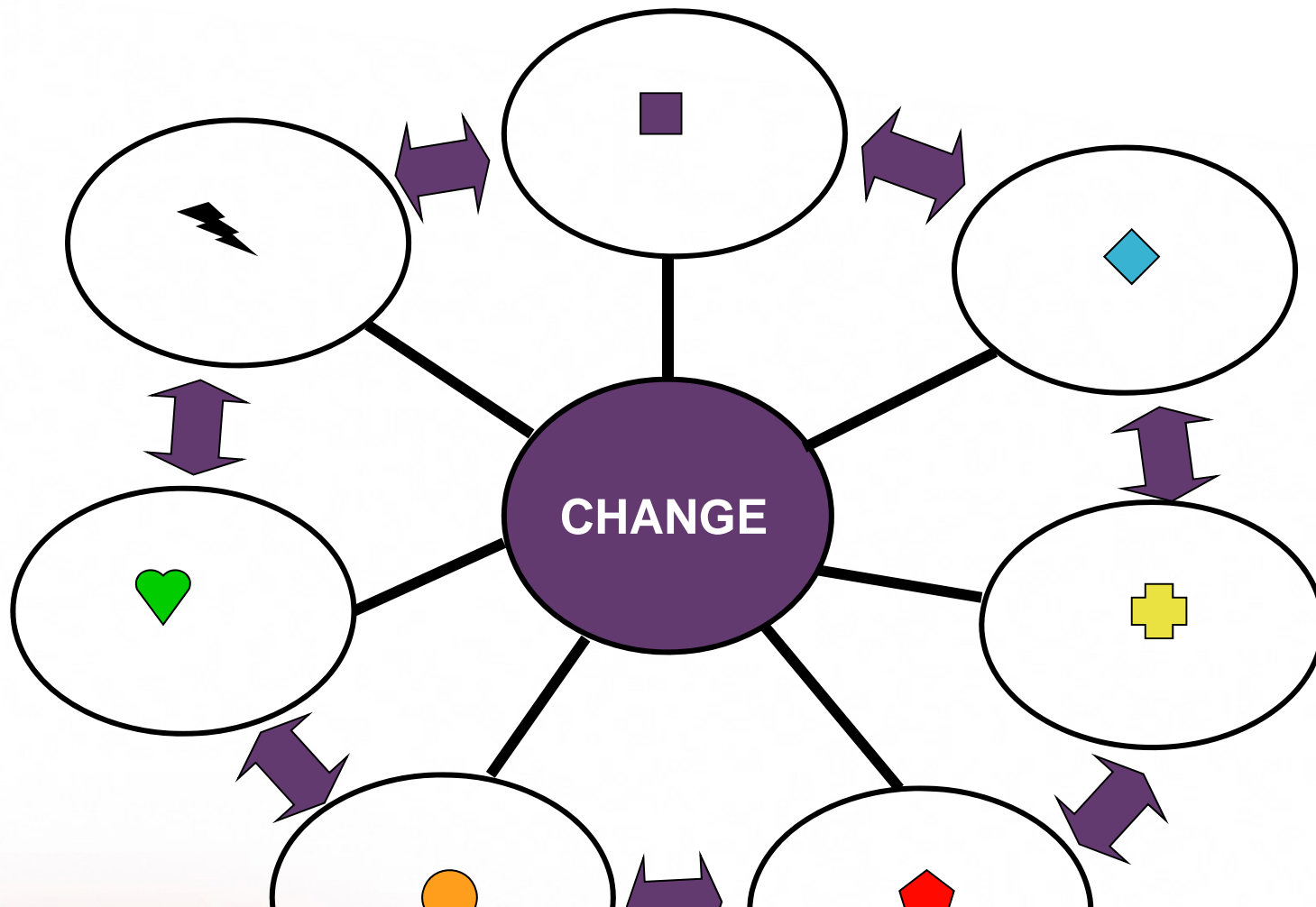
empower people - to act

plan for visible improvement / quick wins








consolidate improvements

institutionalise new approaches

Doppelt - 7 interventions – a “wheel”



Doppelt - 7 interventions – a “wheel”

-  Disrupt dominant mindsets - establish need for change
-  Rearrange parts of the system
-  Alter system goals - create a vision
-  Restructure rules of engagement
-  Shift information flows – communicate vision, strategies, actions
-  Correct feedback loops – encourage & reward learning & innovation
-  Adjust / align system parameters

Advice from the Heaths...



direct the rider - find what works, script key moves, point the way

motivate the elephant – tap emotion for change, shrink the task, grow people’s capacity

shape the path – adjust/align environment, build habits, rally and encourage the “herd”

Two case studies - incremental change

La Trobe University – reforming administrative and professional functions:
Administrative Change Program 2008 - 2010

Yale University - standardizing business processes, professionalising management:
Pro-buy & Expense Management System 2003 - 2005

La Trobe in 2007/8 ...

underperforming

– attracting students / research funding

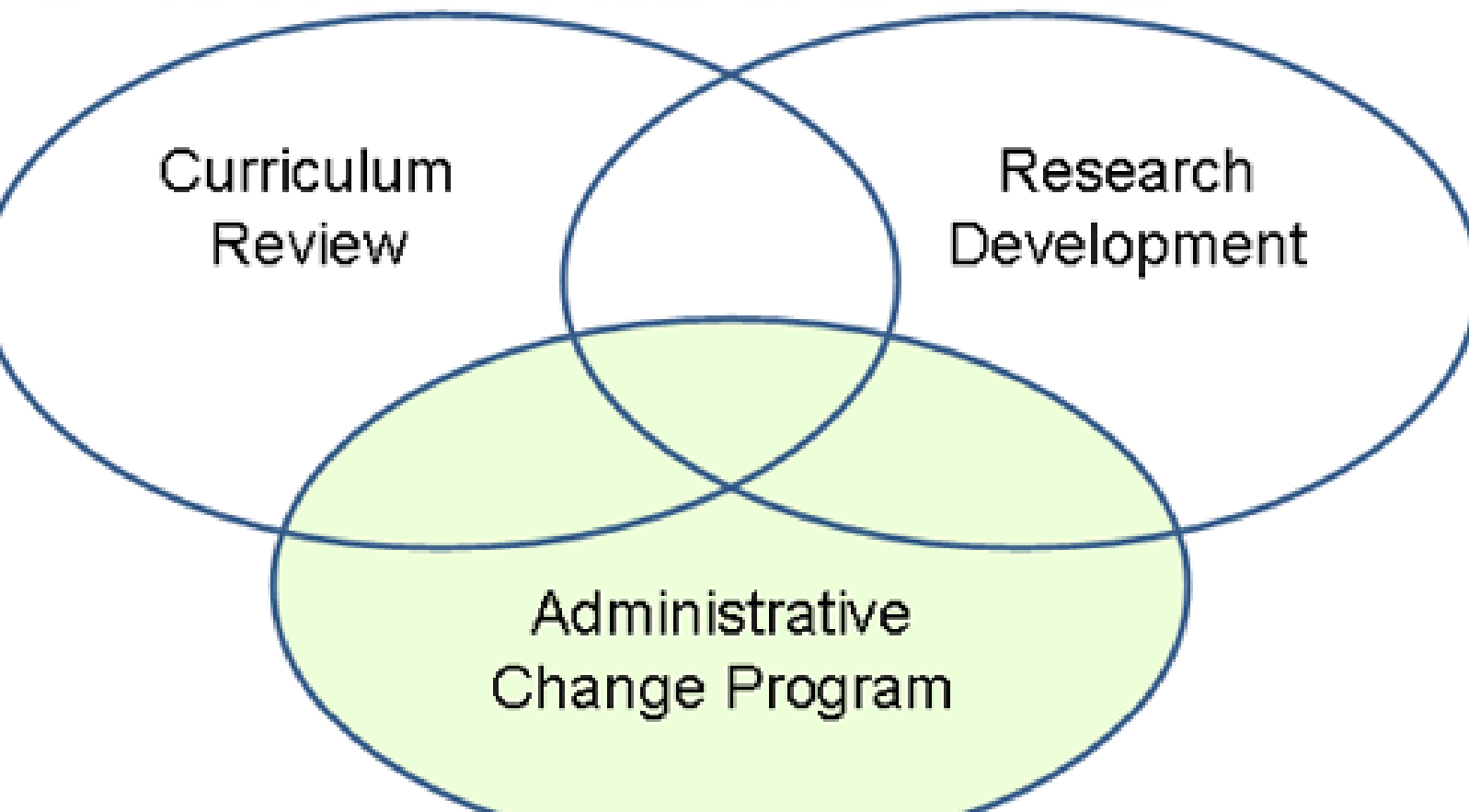
diffused curriculum & weaknesses in teaching

sluggish / siloed administration

history – stalled / ineffective change efforts

budget deficit (2006/7)

Change at *La Trobe* – broad and interlinked



***a Trobe* administrative / professional services - what we set out to do**

improve administrative / professional/technical services

reduce organisational services 'silos' - better integrate services

improve quality of services & service ethos

establish ongoing review - processes, systems, performance

to better support the University's academic

***a Trobe* administrative/professional services - approach to reform**

functional (not divisional / faculty) focus -
crossing existing organisational boundaries

University centred - limited use of external
consultants - avoided “black box” solutions

emphasised consultation, communication,
engagement

***a Trobe* - what can we say we achieved?**

some direct change

- practical, tangible change - roles and structures, functional alignments

some more subtle / holistic

- shifts in organisational attitudes, modes of

***a Trobe* - what achieved - practical?**

deliberately crossed organisational boundaries - broke down (some) organisational silos - made connections

promoted better understanding/working - function to function & function to faculties

worked to connect academic & professional functions

***a Trobe* - what achieved - practical ?**

significant revision to organisational structures & roles

700+ staff positions – 48% of administrative/ professional/technical positions - in some way changed

***a Trobe* - what achieved – holistically?**

brought change onto agenda

disrupted / challenged established ways of thinking & working

involved people - thinking why, where,
how things might be changed – making
change

***a Trobe* - what worked well?**

leadership & management – senior & function level

communication – regular, wide, honest, varied

working outside the “silos”

taking time - careful consideration, engagement, testing/proving = credibility

wide/extended consultation & reacting to the organisational “pulse”

a Trobe - what worked less well?

wide/extended consultation = wide/extended
debate & contestation!

“we agree in concept, but ...”

controlling / focussing / concluding consultation?

“tribal” behaviours – territory defence

La Trobe-centred / working-within approach
(sometimes) = not enough pushing / challenging

a Trobe - some views within the University ...

“It feels like change is underway now – but it feels like it’s not finished”

“Focus should shift from organisation charts to continuous improvement of administrative processes”

“Services: improving, silos: dissolving, service culture: emerging

Overall. improved - but still a way to go”

Change at *Yale* - where they were - where they wanted to get to

Yale had in 2003 –

- projected budget shortfall
- excessively decentralised / non-standard business processes

Yale wanted -

- standardised business processes
- professionalised management function
- to implement *Pro-buy & Expense Management System*

Change at *Yale* - change dynamics

loosely coupled - highly decentralised
organisation

“100 departments = 100 variations on a
theme”

distrust of central administration

Change at *Yale* - change dynamics

tensions – collegiality vs. professional management

unwillingness to abandon old systems / ways of working

“shadow” cast by previous fraught major

Change at *Yale* - some of the problems

lack of clear mandate / authority to
implement change

lack of clear outcomes / targets / deadlines

no dedicated change team & focus

slow / irregular / *ad hoc* action to

Change at *Yale* - some of the problems ...

hard & slow to get acceptance of changes

unwillingness to abandon old systems /
ways of working

fixing business processes and automating
them at the same time

Change at *Yale* - some of the problems

passive resistance – appearing to change
- in reality not

collegiality vs. professional management

impact of the “shadow” (previous project
implementation)

Change at *Yale* - observations - what worked well?

purposeful viewing - stepping back to look – multiple lenses / frames

recognising incremental change as complex / messy

tailoring to organisational complexity

recognising universities as “organised anarchy” – learning to lead within that

Change at *Yale* - *observations* - *what achieved?*

implemented *EMS* & *Pro-buy*

got better at fixing / streamlining business
process – then only then, automating

moved from sense of overwhelming task –
to “yes, can do this – we can change”

established a degree of respect for
“management”

Why/when an incremental approach to change?

incremental approach – accepts reality of organisational complexity

recognises complexity & dynamics – especially in university context - works with those

avoids simplistic “big bang” change prescriptions – illusion of speed & action

allows for time to step back - observe, analyse,

Why/when an incremental approach?

“change!” a war word – threatening word - for many

talking about change can build resistance

fewer big/loud speeches about change - more getting on with change

making incremental change – working with the willing

incremental & iterative change – potentially

Dangers / risks in long term – incremental change

change - quick or incremental - can stall ...

- urgent / compelling reason to change – vision for changed future – can be lost or dissipated
- messages can get muddled
- that which excites people can get lost / dissipated
- will to keep working to change can flag

incremental change – risks exacerbated?

angers/risks - incremental change..

incremental change can reduce - but also
elongate - pressures of change

change fatigue – loss of enthusiasm,
disappointment and disengagement

loss of focus & priority - “death by 1,000
initiatives”

incremental approach = understanding scope /
size / complexity but also extends possibility of

Dangers/risks - incremental change..

can be harder to recognise the changes that people have worked to make

... harder in long haul to measure progress (people forget ...)

... harder to track accountability for implementing long term / incremental

Dangers/risks - incremental change..

capacity of organisational culture to kill
change - longer = increased capacity!

scope for change resistance – especially
passive – increases longer term

more scope for drifting back to old ways of
working

Blending incremental with “big bang”?

there is a place for quick and purposeful action

in some circumstances

use “big bang” sparingly - remember the long implementation “tail”

mix long term planning / thinking with

Remember - elephant & rider ...

don't just direct ... simply directing wont work...

*In any contest of wills,
the "elephant" wins!*



***La Trobe's change
program:***

***[https://www.latrobe.edu.
au/change/](https://www.latrobe.edu.au/change/)***

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