



Degree of Difficulty Assessment

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Research and experience from ODR[®]

Introduction

This assessment is designed to help you evaluate the overall level of challenge your organization is likely to encounter when implementing a change initiative. It focuses on the three dimensions that combine to influence the level of challenge leaders and agents will face when implementing a major change:

- Incremental vs. Transformational Change: To what extent will the change significantly disrupt the expectations of those involved?
- Installation vs. Realization Focus: To what extent are implementation activities focused toward *installation* (putting the key building blocks of the solution in place) vs. *realization* (ensuring that the intended business outcomes are achieved)?
- Good Idea vs. Business Imperative: How high is the cost to the organization and its leaders if the initiative fails to achieve its objectives?

Instructions

You should have a specific initiative in mind as you respond to the questions on the following pages.

For each question, you will see two statements, each representing one end of a continuum, with five boxes describing various points along the scale. Choose the box that best describes your perception of the change initiative you are evaluating. There are no right or wrong answers, so please be as objective as you can in evaluating the true situation you are facing.

If you do not yet have enough information to provide a definitive rating on any of the questions, please offer your best estimate of what is likely to happen (based on previous change initiatives in your organization or other information).

	A is most descriptive	Both, but A more than B	Somewhere in between	Both, but B more than A	B is most descriptive	
Statement A	0	1	2	3	4	Statement B

At the bottom of each page, please total the numbers in the boxes you have marked.

Incremental vs. Transformational Change

Statement A	A is most descriptive	Both, but A more than B	Somewhere in between	Both, but B more than A	B is most descriptive	Statement B
The initiative will require some minor adjustments in how certain people do their work.	0	1	2	3	4	The initiative will require dramatic shifts in how certain people do their work.
We can predict pretty well how things will unfold during the transition.	0	1	2	3	4	We are moving into uncharted territory and know there will be many surprises during the transition.
There will be little change in who has power and influence within the organization.	0	1	2	3	4	There will be large shifts in who has power and influence within the organization.
The culture of this organization will not need to change significantly for the initiative to be successful.	0	1	2	3	4	The culture of the organization will need to change significantly if this initiative is to be successful.
It will affect a relatively small part of the organization.	0	1	2	3	4	It will affect significant portions of the organization.

Please add up the numbers in the boxes you have marked on this page.

Total = _____

Installation vs. Realization Focus

Statement A	A is most descriptive	Both, but A more than B	Somewhere in between	Both, but B more than A	B is most descriptive	Statement B
The success of this initiative is primarily a result of getting the technical/concrete aspects of the solution in place.	0	1	2	3	4	This success of this initiative is dependent on ensuring people apply the technical/concrete aspects of the solution to deliver the intended results.
We should begin to see results almost as soon as we hit the "go live" date for the project.	0	1	2	3	4	We will need to sustain our implementation efforts for some time past the "go live" date before we see significant value being generated.
The main ingredient for success in this initiative will be the successful efforts of project managers and subject-matter experts.	0	1	2	3	4	Although we will draw on experts as needed, we will only succeed if leaders devote a significant portion of their time and energy to the initiative.
The success of this initiative mostly involves shifting processes, procedures, and associated behaviors.	0	1	2	3	4	The success of this initiative is dependent on people shifting mindsets and operating in a fundamentally different way.
The evaluation metrics for this initiative focus on achieving tactical implementation milestones.	0	1	2	3	4	The evaluation metrics for this initiative focus on the full achievement of the business results we expect to attain.

Please add up the numbers in the boxes you have marked on this page.

Total = _____

Good Idea vs. Business Imperative

Statement A	A is most descriptive	Both, but A more than B	Somewhere in between	Both, but B more than A	B is most descriptive	Statement B
This is one of a large number of major initiatives we are currently undertaking, and all of them are seen as extremely important.	0	1	2	3	4	This initiative is one of a select few priorities we are focusing on.
If we fail to accomplish this project's goals, the implications, while troublesome, will be tolerable.	0	1	2	3	4	If we fail to accomplish this project's goals, the implications for the organization will be totally unacceptable and completely intolerable.
The primary drive is coming from individuals or groups who want the change but can't sanction it.	0	1	2	3	4	The primary drive is coming from leaders who can apply communications and consequences to ensure it happens.
If our budget were cut dramatically, this initiative would probably be dropped.	0	1	2	3	4	If our budget were cut dramatically, this is one of the few initiatives that would survive.
If this initiative fails, there will be few personal implications for key sponsors.	0	1	2	3	4	If this initiative fails, the personal implications for key sponsors will be significant.

Please add up the numbers in the boxes you have marked on this page.

Total = _____

Interpreting Results

Summarize the scores from the three sections below. If you wish, you can also plot the scores on the graph provided on the last page. Use the information provided to interpret your scores on each dimension.

_____ Incremental vs. Transformational Change

_____ Installation vs. Realization Focus

_____ Good Idea vs. Business Imperative

Incremental vs. Transformational

High (14-20)

Your responses indicate that your change is potentially transformational in nature. That is, it will require a strong combination of significant shifts in how much of the organization and its people operate and/or how power and influence is distributed. As a result, you will probably not be able to fully anticipate how everything will unfold. There will likely be many surprises, which will draw on the organization's resources and test both the tolerance for ambiguity and resilience of its people. This will almost certainly raise the overall level of resistance and other risks. At the same time, by taking on a change of this magnitude, you have created the possibility of making a real difference in the future of your organization.

Your score places the relative difficulty of your project at the highest possible level on this dimension.

Medium (7-13)

Your responses indicate that your change calls for moderate shifts in the organization's operations and/or who exercises what degree of power and influence. While you will probably not encounter the level of turbulence, unpredictability, and ambiguity that comes from deeply transformational change, you will likely face many surprises as well as at least a moderate degree of resistance. You should set realistic expectations about the level of results you will achieve—it's not likely that you will see dramatic shifts in organizational outcomes based on the amount of change you are introducing.

Your score places the relative difficulty of your project at a moderate level on this dimension.

Low (0-6)

Your responses indicate that your change is relatively incremental in nature. It is much more limited in scope and impact (along with the associated ambiguity and anxiety) than changes that fall at the transformational end of the spectrum. This means that, although you will not be able to completely predict everything that will happen, you are in a more reliable position to plan your implementation and the resources that would be required than if you were facing a transformational change. While this will make your project easier, it will also limit significantly the level of results you can expect—incremental changes yield incremental outcomes.

Your score places the relative difficulty of your project at the lowest possible level on this dimension.

Installation vs. Realization

High (14-20)

Your responses indicate that you are approaching the initiative with a focus on realization. This increases the degree of difficulty you face in this change due to the level of time, energy, and resources required to create the necessary mindset and behavior shifts to achieve the true purpose in a sustainable way. The good news is that if you successfully work your way through the inevitable challenges, you have a high likelihood of generating significant positive results. You should guard against the temptation to lower the bar as you face obstacles, and be prepared for significant pushback as people face the reality of what it takes to reach full realization.

Your score places the relative difficulty of your project at the highest possible level on this dimension.

Medium (7-13)

Your responses indicate that your focus is somewhere in between installation and realization. You may be incorporating some realization elements in an otherwise installation-focused plan, and/or underestimating the effort required to reach full realization. You are likely to expend more resources than you would on a purely installation-focused effort, but less than you would if you were focused on full realization. Because you are taking *some* steps to address realization-related issues, there may be people who have unrealistically high expectations about what you will be able to deliver.

Your score places the relative difficulty of your project at a moderate level on this dimension.

Low (0-6)

Your responses indicate that your current plans are focused primarily on installation—getting the major building blocks of the solution in place—rather than going beyond these elements to shift mindsets and behaviors to support the realization of business results. The good news is that this approach will require fewer resources than a realization-focused approach and, in that respect, will be easier to accomplish. The bad news is that your results will likely be short term and superficial. In many cases, organizations expect realization even though they only plan for installation, so make sure you are setting appropriate expectations.

Your score places the relative difficulty of your project at the lowest possible level on this dimension.

Good Idea vs. Business Imperative

High (14-20)

Your responses indicate that this initiative represents a true business imperative. By having done the work to establish a few urgent priorities, you have removed some obstacles from your path and made it clear where your resources will be focused. At the same time, you have added two challenges. First, you have raised the stakes by declaring that the price for failure is unacceptably high, which means that no one can afford to let down their guard or do anything less than his or her best in the execution process. Second, you have set up a situation in which you will be continuously struggling against requests to add additional items to the plate. Your score places the relative difficulty of your project at the highest possible level on this dimension.

Medium (7-13)

Your responses indicate that this initiative falls somewhere between a “good idea” and a business imperative. It may be that this is one of a small number of local initiatives you are undertaking, but the price of failure is not unduly high. It may be that this is one of many initiatives, some or all of which include a high cost of failure. In either case, you are likely sending mixed messages to the organization about what’s most important. As a result, people may not be clear about where their resources should be devoted, or about how much effort they should invest in the initiative. If you are not able to clarify these issues, you run the risk of burning people out.

Your score places the relative difficulty of your project at a moderate level on this dimension.

Low (0-6)

Your responses indicate that this initiative likely represents one of many “good ideas.” The stakes are relatively low, in that you have a number of other initiatives competing for resources and the price of failure is not particularly high. In many ways, this will make the process easier for you, but your chances of achieving the outcomes you want are relatively low because people are likely to divide their attention across multiple efforts and will likely not perceive significant consequences for doing less than their best.

Your score places the relative difficulty of your project at the lowest possible level on this dimension.

Graphing Results

Take your three scores and plot them on the corresponding axes below. Connect them with a solid line to create a profile of the degree of difficulty you face in your current initiative. The larger the area contained within the triangle, the greater the degree of difficulty you should expect.

