

Using a "Staged Approach" to Change To Design Global Warming Communications & Policy Interventions

Based on: *The Power of Sustainable Thinking: How To Create A Positive Future For The Climate, The Planet, Your Organization and Your Life* (In press, Earthscan Publishing).

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Why do so many global warming communications and policy initiatives struggle? Because they are one-size-fits-all general education or action-oriented initiatives that reach only a small percentage of the population who are either not interested in change or are ready to act. Normally 80% of any population lies between these two poles. The people climate change efforts fail to address naturally resist change efforts.

Staged-Based Approaches to Change: In contrast, research shows that what I call the 5-D stage-based approach to change, which combines elements of the Transtheoretical model (TTM) of change as well as Motivational Interviewing, Appreciative Inquiry, and Systems Thinking, to be much more effective than generic information or action-oriented initiatives. This approach utilizes communications and policy instruments targeted to the specific stage of change that individuals or groups are in, with the goal of moving them to the next stage of change all the way to action. They thus engage people in the change process even if they are not yet ready to take action themselves or are already engaged in action.

<u>Five Stages of Change for Climate Protection and Sustainability</u>	
Disinterest	"I won't change." No intention to change thinking or behavior. Can't see or won't admit a problem.
Deliberation	"I might change." Recognition that problem may exist. Beginning to consider the possibility of making a change in distant future.
Design	"I will change." Committed to take action in immediate future and designing an action plan to do so.
Doing	"I am changing." Making overt changes in thinking and behavior.
Defending	"I have changed." Maintaining and expanding the change, while defending against resistance, obstacles and backsliding.

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The First Key to Successful Climate Protection and Sustainability Efforts: *Know the Stages of Change of Your Target Group and Match Change Mechanisms to Those Stages!*

- Each stage of change is predictable and can be diagnosed
- Successful movement through each stage requires that a specific set of activities be completed
- Certain change mechanisms, which include communications, policies, programs and other processes that help modify thinking & behavior, are more helpful than others in each stage.
- Mismatching change mechanisms with the stages of change can slow, halt, or reverse climate protection and other sustainability efforts.

The Second Key to Successful Global Warming Efforts: *Build Both Tension for Change and Efficacy*

- To motivate fundamental change, sufficient tension must be established between some deeply held unmet values and aspirations and current conditions (tension for change), and sufficient confidence must exist that the changes requires to close the gap and reduce the tension can be achieved (efficacy).
- This means that awareness building is necessary but insufficient to motivate fundamental change. Similarly action without some level of awareness building is doomed to fail.

The Third Key to Successful Global Warming Efforts: *To Build Efficacy Emphasize the Benefits of Sustainability Practices in the Early Stages and the Downsides in the Later Stages of Change!*

- Research shows that for people to advance from the early stage of disinterest to the later stage of doing, an individual’s perception of the benefits of new thinking and behavior must increase by an average of 1 standard deviation.
- The most important task in the early stages of change is therefore to enhance an individual or group’s perception of the benefits of engaging in sustainable thinking and behavior twice as much as they decrease their perception of the downsides.
- The flip side of this point is also true. In the doing and defending stages of change the focus must turn to the downsides of change due to the need to overcome obstacles.

