

The anticipation and experience of change

After attending a workshop run by Tom Ravenette some years ago I adapted one of his models to reflect the impact our experience can have on how we perceive change and then extended it to cover how we anticipate the outcome of that change.

This model looks at how we perceive the change and how it fits into our past experiences.

- Do we think we're going to have an experience that is in line with our expectations (i.e. will it validate our map of the world or not)?
- What is our understanding of the range choices we have available and the fit to our past experience in similar situations or not (i.e. have we been here before).

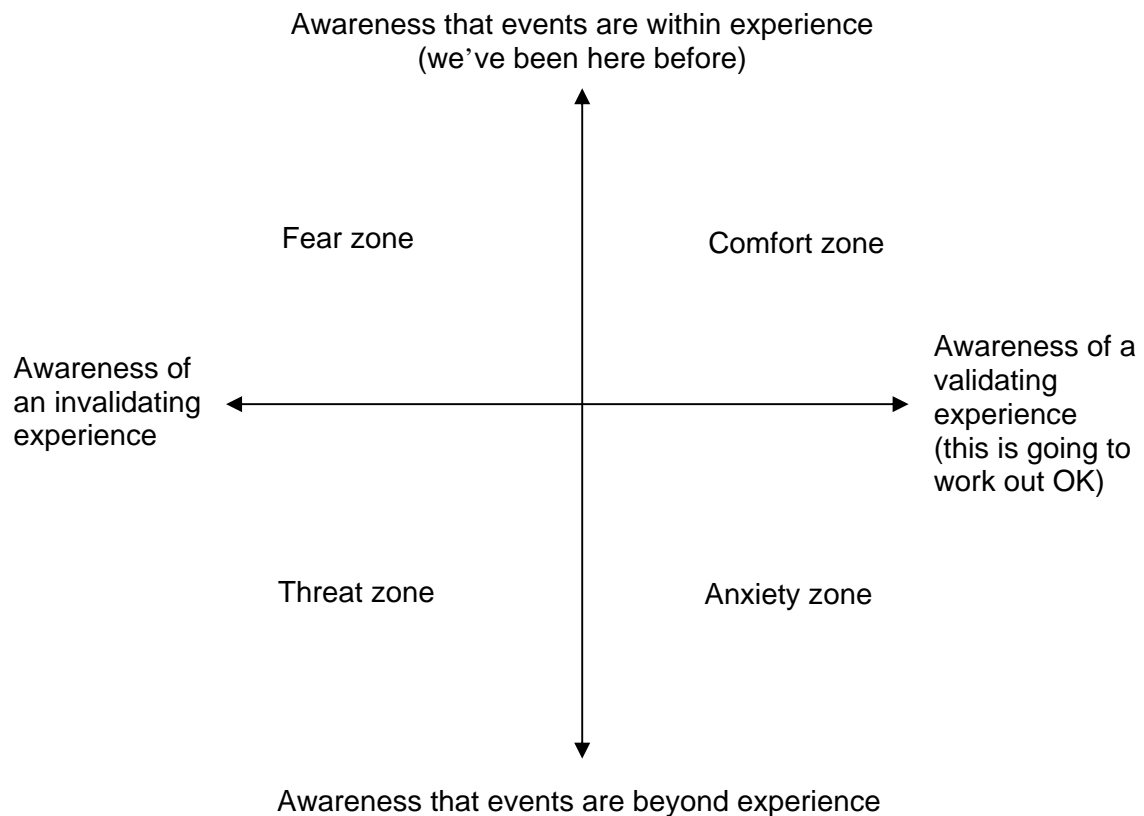


Fig 1: The Experience Grid (after Ravenette)

The meaning I've applied to each of the four quadrants are :-

Threat zone – we're in unfamiliar territory and don't think we'll cope well, or that we'll come out of without having to change how we see the world.

In this area we'll tend to resist the change or try to adapt it to suit our self view.

Fear zone – we've been here before and things didn't turn out too well for us – but we don't know what to do differently.

In many ways this is the zone where we're trapped into making the same, inappropriate and unsuccessful responses to situation.

Comfort zone – here we're of the opinion that we're going into something similar to events within our past experiences (remember the experience cycle Fig 1). We also know how to deal with the situation in a way that will give us the best possible outcome (or at least one that we know will make us look reasonably good).

Anxiety zone – here we've been here before and think we may have a new way of adapting to the situation (although we don't quite know what will happen) that will make it easier for us. So we're going to try something new and wait and see how it will play out.

In many ways our approach to changing events and situations can be supported and understood by using that consultants old favourite (again on a four box grid! – I told you we loved them).

If we look at change as a process that :-

- a) Has an impact on us as people - on what we do, how we do it, etc. (i.e. is inward looking – what does it mean for me) and
- b) Has an outcome that we can use i.e. it creates a new or different situation causing different responses etc. (i.e. is outward looking - how will other people think of me, what impression will I leave?)

then we can plot our reaction based on the following profile :-

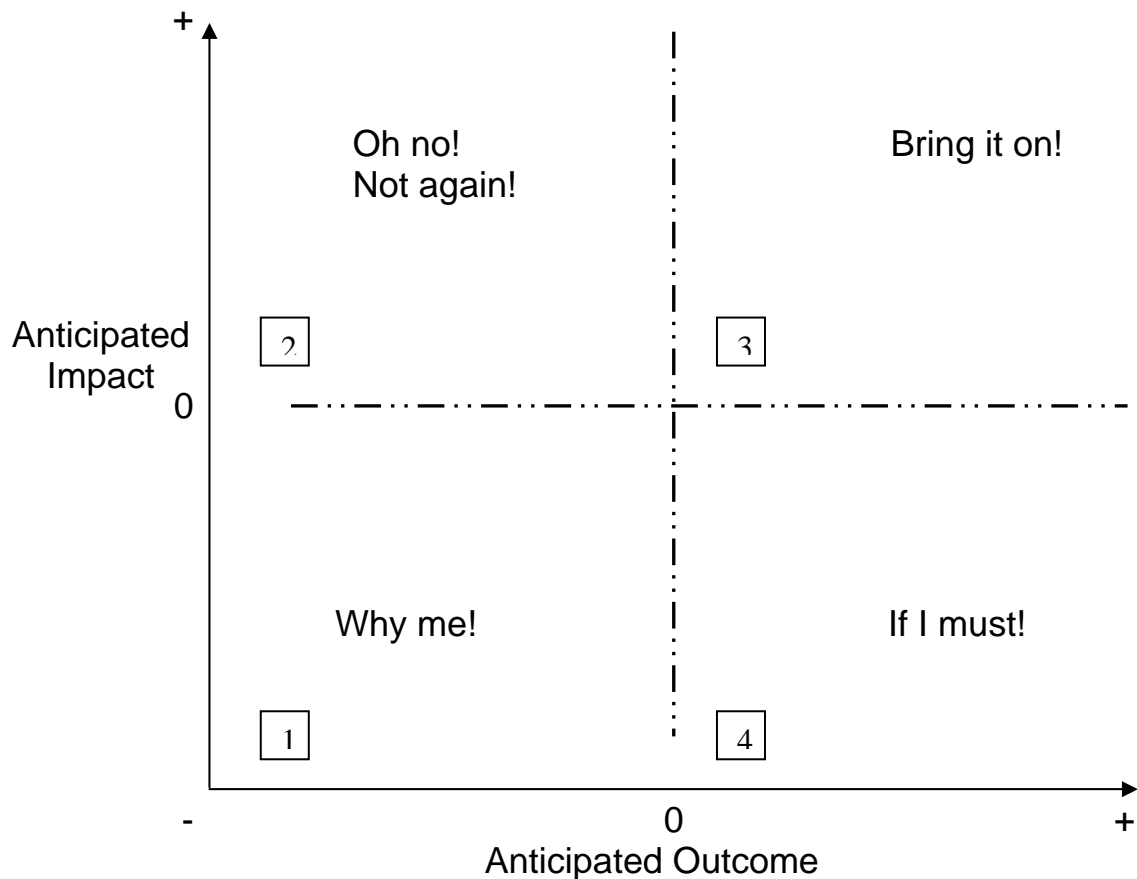


Fig 2: The Anticipation of Change

1 Why me! – if we think the impact on us will be negative and we can only see a poor outcome where we’re worse off than before we’ll fight tooth and nail to prevent it!

2 Oh No!, Not Again! – Here the effort isn’t too much or the overall impact is minimal on me, but their just doesn’t seem to be either any actual benefit to me or, even worse, the change will make my life harder! “I can recognise the need for ... (as long as it doesn’t inconvenience me)” could be the refrain for this quadrant.

On a personal note here I find the new Data protection Act requirements fall into this category. I can see why we need to be careful, but the situation in the UK in 2008 where a mail order company refused to talk to the mother of a child under ten years old about a problem with a “Spiderman suit” because she’d ordered it in the child’s name for his birthday is blatantly ridiculous.

3 Bring it on! - If we think the change is going to result in a better place and that the impact will be positive then we will champion the change and be an active supporter of it.

4 If I must! – Here we see a negative impact (or we have to do a lot of work/exert effort to achieve the change) but the outcome could be positive for us at the end. Here I’ll go along with the change based on the promise of a better future and whilst I won’t actively fight against it I’ll do what I can when I can and if I’m asked.

So for any change we need to plot the potential changes against the grid and if we link it to stakeholder analysis we can start to identify who will help/hinder our change plans.