

Leading change in steps

Plan the people side of a change in an order that works: make the need felt, move with support, then make the new way last.

PHASE	WHAT YOU DO	SIGN IT WORKS
Unfreeze	Make the need felt	People can say why, in their words
Unfreeze	Leading group; one clear story	Leaders tell the same story
Move	Clear obstacles; train; pilot	People try the new way
Move	Early wins, used to go further	Wins are seen and credited
Refreeze	Roles, measures; old way off	Use holds after handover

Our summary, after Lewin (1947) and Kotter (1996). Change is rarely linear, so loop back as you learn.

WHAT IT IS

Kurt Lewin (1947) described change as unfreezing the old level, moving, and freezing the new one; the tidy three steps came later (Cummings and colleagues, 2016). **John Kotter** (1996) set out eight steps in three groups: four loosen the old ways, three bring in the new, one makes it stick. The table is our summary. Change is rarely linear, so adapt.

HOW IT WORKS

- 01** Assess first: who is affected, how much, and how past changes went.
- 02** Unfreeze: the need, with facts; one picture, told often; listen.
- 03** Move: clear obstacles, train, pilot; plan early wins.
- 04** Refreeze: change roles and measures; switch the old way off.

MID-LEVEL · WORKED EXAMPLE

Apply it well

The situation: A city team has 8 months to move resident parking permits online; 40 wardens in 9 zones will check licence plates on handhelds, not paper permits.

The sponsor explains why the checks change. Supervisors help design them, the wardens of 1 zone try them first, and the results are shown in the other 8. At go-live the paper checks stop.

In the exam: Walk through your own example: how you made the need felt, what blocked people, and how it stuck.

SENIOR · WORKED EXAMPLE

Design and lead it

The situation: A city is joining 14 online services under one login over 30 months, in 3 groups of services; the old portals close at the end.

The city's chief executive sponsors the change; the head of customer service co-leads it. Early wins are shown to later groups. Roles and measures change before each switch, and owners report use after handover.

In the exam: Show a strategy for many groups: who leads it with you, how consultation fits the timing, how wins feed the next phase, and who sustains it.

WHERE IT SITS

IPMA · ICB4	PMI · PMBOK® GUIDE 8 · PMP® EXAM	APM · BOK 8 · PMQ EXAM
4.5.13.3: a stepwise approach, so early successes encourage more; 4.5.13.4: reinforce new behaviour	Guide: no step model; enabling change merged into Focus on Value (p. 259). Exam outline: Business Environment, task 7	BoK (APM's Body of Knowledge) §1.3.3: change models share elements; §3.1.3: benefits realisation. PMQ (APM's Project Management Qualification) objective 9

Sources: Lewin (1947), *Frontiers in group dynamics*; Cummings, Bridgman & Brown (2016); Kotter, *Leading Change*; IPMA ICB4 (2015); PMI, *PMBOK® Guide*, 8th ed.; PMI, *PMP® Examination Content Outline* (2026); APM *Body of Knowledge*, 8th ed.; APM, *PMQ handbook* (v6, 2026)

Key: IPMA = International Project Management Association; ICB4 = IPMA's Individual Competence Baseline (4.5.13 etc.: its competence elements); PMI = Project Management Institute; *PMBOK® Guide* = PMI's body-of-knowledge guide; *PMP®* = PMI's Project Management Professional; APM = Association for Project Management. Unofficial study material for IPMA®, PMI® and APM exams. Not affiliated with, endorsed by or approved by IPMA, PMI or APM, and not an accredited or endorsed training provider. IPMA® and IPMA ICB® are registered trademarks of IPMA in Switzerland and other countries. PMI, PMP, CAPM and PMBOK are registered marks of Project Management Institute, Inc. APM is a trade mark of the Association for Project Management. Other marks belong to their owners. *PMP®* exam facts are from PMI's public *PMP® Examination Content Outline* (2026); check the current version on [pmi.org](https://www.pmi.org). APM's qualifications are its own; this series is not an APM Accredited Provider or APM Endorsed. Examples use a fictional city and its projects. Levels (this series' labels): Mid-level = moderately complex projects (IPMA Level C, PMI's *PMP®*); Senior = complex projects and people (IPMA Level B, APM's Chartered Project Professional).

All episodes, sheets and handouts: pm.fannarmaximus.com · Watch: youtube.com/@fannarmaximus



Scan for the episode