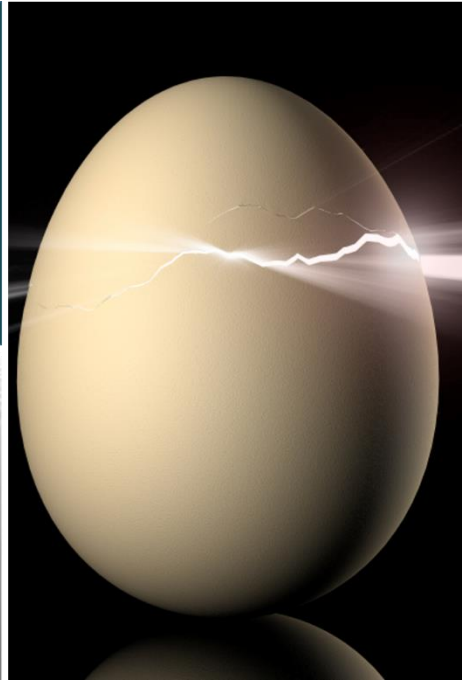


## DIFFERENTIATING ADEQUATE FROM HIGH IMPACT CHANGE WORK



For the past twelve months, my writing has focused on exploring what we, as change professionals, can do to deliver exceptional value to those we serve. Of the two areas that demand advancement, *what we do* and *who we are*, I have given special attention to the role *who we are* plays in being viewed as an indispensable resource. The text that follows is a brief summary of what I have uncovered.

After spending more than four decades observing change facilitators, I've found that those in our profession fall into three categories:

- Inept—Considered useless, if not counter-productive, by the leaders they attempt to serve and therefore, exercise very little influence with them.
- Adequate—Seen as delivering “acceptable” value by the leaders they work for/with and wield a correspondingly “moderate” amount of influence with them.
- High Impact—Viewed as providing exceptional value to the leaders they support and enjoy considerable influence with them.

As reported by the leaders they serve, roughly 25% of those in the change field are cast in the “inept” category; about 65% of change practitioners are perceived as supplying “adequate” value; and the remaining 10% are regarded as “trusted advisors” who deliver unusually strong value and exercise an equally high degree of influence with the executives they assist.

Inept practitioners represent a negative force for those who employ them and a drag on the change profession's brand. Adequate practitioners deliver satisfactory value, but are usually limited to tactical engagements and tend to filter their diagnoses and recommendations so as not to cause too much discomfort. High Impact practitioners are seen as creating extraordinary benefits from their efforts compared to other practitioners, and are responsible for a disproportionate amount of the positive views leaders have of the change profession.

It is important to note that *both* Adequate and High Impact change professionals create value. It is not a bad thing to be an Adequate change practitioner; in most cases, these individuals provide what their clients want and expect and therefore exercise a level of influence that is commensurate with the change projects they work on and the roles they are assigned to perform. That said, it is important to recognize the limitations of Adequate work. Adequate practitioners are simply not as influential as their High Impact counterparts.

10%ers have a far greater degree of influence with the leaders they support, because they are perceived as delivering unusually strong value. This comes from their ability to:

- Successfully apply change knowledge/skills: concepts, tools, techniques, etc. (being exceptionally effective at what they do)
- Successfully leverage their character and presence (being exceptionally authentic in how they “show up”)

While practitioners in the High Impact category enjoy greater influence than those in the Adequate category, these categories are not mutually exclusive. For example, one change facilitator may operate primarily at the Adequate level, with an occasional spurt of High Impact work. Another practitioner might function almost exclusively in a High Impact manner but occasionally punctuates this pattern with Adequate work. However, at the end of the day, every practitioner will default back to the level where they are most comfortable: Adequate practitioners will deliver what is expected and have marginal influence in doing so, while High Impact practitioners will deliver edgier but more influential guidance.

There is no question that Adequate change professionals can make a significant contribution to a wide range of change initiatives. However, when deep transformation is at the heart of the endeavor, leaders need High Impact practitioners—ones who are not only extraordinary at guiding change, but who are also solidly grounded in *who they are*, bringing their character and presence forward to elevate the value they have to offer.



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