CONCEPTIONAL©

2025

Conceptional Whitepaper:

How can we Engage consumers in the sustainability transition?

Introduction

Dear reader,

In this white paper, we take you through the complex and dynamic world of sustainability transitions, with a specific focus on the foodservice industry. Transitions are inevitable and touch all aspects of human life - political, cultural, economic and environmental. In this paper, you will explore the different ways in which people and organisations respond to these changes, and be given tools to better understand and effectively navigate these responses.

You will be introduced to the three basic conditions for change: necessity, trust and capability. We show how these conditions are reflected in reactions such as resistance, advocate for transition and paralysis. By understanding these dynamics and the underlying drivers, you as a professional or organisation can better respond to the challenges as well as the opportunities presented by sustainability transitions.
We hope this white paper inspires and supports you in your own journey toward a more sustainable future

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Trends are voluntary. Transitions are not.

Participating in a trend is a choice, but transitions affect us all - whether we acknowledge it or not. We cannot stop transitions; we can only understand and manage our reactions.

Tackling a transition requires a different approach to targeting than responding to a trend. Because transitions affect the whole of society at all levels, customer profiles play only a limited role in navigating these complex situations.

Sustainability has long passed the trend phase and has evolved into an urgent, global transition. This applies not only to individuals, but also to private companies, media, interest groups and government agencies. They have to adapt and act within the context of this societal shift. Take our beloved food & beverage industry, for example. Products and processes previously considered trendy are now symbols of social resistance or catalysts for identity conflicts. For companies that appeal to a wide audience, this can be paralysing. The changes and fickle discussions can strike at the heart of what you do and who you are. Relying solely on customer profiles is insufficient to address the challenges of a broad transition.

Within each profile, varied and overlapping responses may exist. This creates complexity, but also provides overview - as we observe a range of similar responses across different audiences. It is essential to understand these responses and their causes so that your organisation can better understand its position in the sustainability transition. Now the question is: where to start and what do we need to be aware of?

Participation in the sustainability transition is not always a conscious process.

We need to start with the realisation that sustainability is no longer a trend, but an inevitable reality of a global transition. It is easy, and often more comfortable, to think of it unconsciously as a trend we may or may not participate in. However, the scale of the sustainability transition requires an active awareness of its breadth and consequences, as well as a change in approach.

> **“We cannot stop transitions; we can only understand and control our reactions.”**

Transitions take place whether you are a denier, passive, or an advocate: everyone participates, whether they like it or not. Resistance, paralysis and advocating are unconscious, psychological reactions that help individuals and groups understand and adapt to times of change, and ensure that everyone is heard and included. These reactions are not linear or uniform - they can overlap, often in response to personal context and impact. Understanding them ultimately creates a space that leads to conscious acceptance.

Our responses slow or accelerate transitions

The scale and impact of transitions are hard to overestimate - they encompass all aspects of human life: economic, cultural, political, environmental and social structures. Moreover, they involve shifting long-established norms, values, attitudes and behaviours. The world around us shows that this is exactly what is happening with sustainability, both environmentally and in interrelationships. While we may not know what the 'end' of the transition will look like, the transition is underway, regardless of personal resistance. However, our reactions to this transition can influence its speed or direction through policy, regulation or social intervention. Interestingly, reactions of minimising, resisting, paralysing and even advocating for, all can stem from the fear of uncertainty. By understanding our subconscious reactions, both personally and within larger organisations, we can develop our conscious understanding and exert significant influence.

Navigating transitions: Know your own position as well as that of your target audience.

Because it is largely a subconscious process, it is precisely important for organisations to understand how not only the target group, but also themselves, relate to this transition and how this affects communication and actions. Without this awareness, a clear compass is lacking, leaving organisations operating reactively rather than proactively, paralysed by external noise. This stagnation can lead to delays or superficial marketing statements that can damage your perception and trust with your target audience. On the other hand, fighting too hard can be seen as too aggressive, turning a wider audience away from you. Therefore, instead of being led by subconscious reactions, it makes more sense to acknowledge the reality of where you stand and be transparent about it. This provides an authentic compass for a movement that suits the organisation and its target audiences. Especially when addressing a broader target group, it is important to understand that they also represent different stages of reactions to the transition. It is important to take this into account in your communication strategies to successfully navigate the transition.

> **"It makes more sense to acknowledge the reality of where you are in the transition, rather than subconsciously engaging in all kinds of ways to avoid reality"**

Key lessons from trend to transition

1. A transition requires a different communication strategy than a trend.

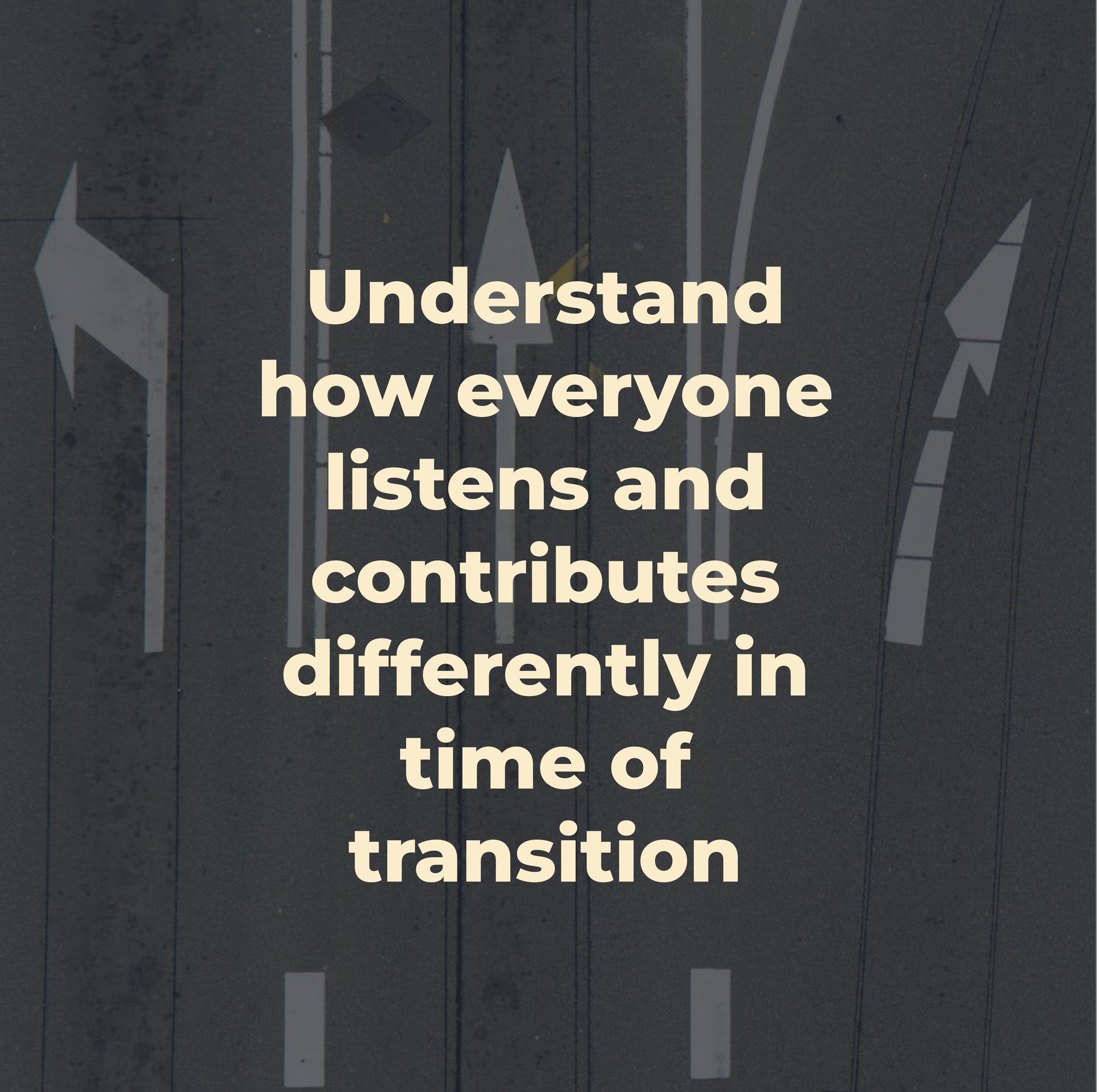
2. Sustainability is an inevitable transition that affects everyone - organisations and consumers react to it consciously or subconsciously.

3. Go from subconscious to conscious reflection on your organisation's response to the transition. Only then can you accept where you stand and communicate transparently about it, instead of reacting from fear or paralysis.

4. For effective communication with a broad target group, it is important to take into account the phase of the transition in which that target group finds itself.

5. Resistance and advocacy are inevitably part of a transition. You cannot please everyone - leadership on an authentic course is therefore essential.

6. The speed of transition within your organisation is determined by four factors: your awareness of the transition, your role in it, your ambition, your organisational capacity and the market in which you operate.



Understand how everyone listens and contributes differently in time of transition

As indicated, participating in a trend is a choice, but not in a transition. When we are in the middle of it, it sometimes seems like we are in uncharted territory, but the reality is that transitions are not new. Throughout history, people have always had the same reactions: resistance to or, on the contrary, advocacy for the transition, paralysis or acceptance. What we cannot stop is the transition itself. What we can do is become aware of these reactions and learn how to choose how to deal with them ourselves.

What follows are tools for understanding these reactions and navigating the sustainability transition more effectively. Here, we follow the structure of three typical reactions, based on the three basic conditions for change. This is especially relevant for companies that appeal to a broad target group.

> **“Transitions are not new, throughout history people have always had the same reactions: Resistance, Advocacy for transition, Paralysis or Acceptance.”**

BASIC CONDITIONS FOR CHANGE

The three basic conditions for change

It is important to realise that resistance, advocacy for transition, paralysis and acceptance are not just reactions to a transition, but a natural process. These reactions help us process change and make everyone feel heard. They vary in intensity, sometimes overlap, but remain constant and unconscious. Uncertainty and fear often play a role here, as the changes can feel unfamiliar and drastic. Understanding these reactions is important for effective communication.

Although reactions to transition vary, there are three unmistakable conditions for change behind each reaction, each with different interpretations:

- Necessity
- Ability
- Trust

NECESSITY

Necessity: The sense of urgency must be strong enough. External or personal pressure for organisations or consumers makes the need for change tangible. If the consequences do not yet have a personal impact, people or companies are more likely not to change. Possible factors that can increase extrinsic or intrinsic motivation are:

1. Inspiration, education and dialogue
2. Regulations and targets
3. Benefits
4. Promotion

ABILITY

Ability: Change must be practically possible, which depends on resources such as time, money, knowledge and competence. Factors that can remove obstacles are:

1. Knowledge and overview
2. Right resources
3. Convenience and support
4. Right powers

TRUST

Trust: Trust is crucial for change. It is reflected in authenticity (transparency), room for emotions and mistakes, and the feeling of being seen (compassion and being heard). Factors that increase trust to proceed to change are:

1. Identification
2. Participation
3. Transparency
4. Inspiration
5. Space/safety

Basic conditions for change

Possible responses of the psyche to transitions

Basic conditions for change and opportunities for increasing necessity, ability and confidence

Possible role when the person feels seen and heard

Resistance	Paralysis	Advocacy
Necessity		
• Inspiration, education & dialogue	• Regulations & targets	• Benefits • Promotion
Ability		
• Knowledge & overview	• Right resources • Right powers	• Convenience & support
Trust		
• Identification • Participation	• Transparency • Inspiration	• Space & Safety
Constructive contribution	**Connection**	**Empowerment inspiration**

Throughout history, people have always had the same reactions in times of transition:

1. **Resistance** to transition
2. **Advocay** for transition
3. **Paralysis** during transition
4. **Acceptance** of transition

1. Resistance

“Someone who feels seen in their reason for resistance can be a constructive contributor to the transition”

REACTION: RESISTANCE TO TRANSITION

The basic conditions for change for someone in resistance

People or organisations in resistance can delay a transition, but they can also provide valuable feedback that promotes acceptance. Resistance does not necessarily mean opposition; acknowledging their feelings can contribute to wider acceptance. For change, they have the same basic requirements as others, but with different priorities.

TIP: When addressing a broad target group, it helps to take communication aimed at people in resistance as a base and then target other responses more specifically. This makes you meet your target audience where they are at that moment and still get ahead of the game.

NECESSITY

People or organisations in resistance need clear reasons to change. If the personal impact is not great enough, external factors such as regulations or targets in particular can motivate them. Education and dialogue help clear up misunderstandings, while showing benefits (financial or practical) increases motivation.

ABILITY

If, in addition to lack of urgency, there are also blockages in the ability to change, this leads to passivity or even ridicule, because people do not feel heard at all and it provides additional argumentation for resistance. This may be due to high prices, difficulties in use, or poor functionality for consumers, and lack of resources and authority within organisations. Recognising these problems is important for this type of response. Inspiration for pragmatic steps can also help.

TRUST

Trust is crucial. People in resistance can easily see through inauthentic communication. They want to recognise themselves in the message and expect promises to be achievable. If the language mainly appeals to idealists, they do not feel taken seriously - which strengthens resistance. Clarity and an honest story work better than an attempt at persuasion they do not (yet) recognise themselves in. Meet people where they stand, acknowledge their concerns, and take them step by step. Vision and inspiration are only effective if there is room for recognition and trust first. Participation is also valuable: internally through involvement in decision-making, externally through pilots or tastings, for instance. This creates experience and ownership, and resistance can turn into curiosity or support. Forerunners and the middle ground are often the first to move. By involving them early on, you create social affirmation that helps this group to catch on later.

Do’s & Don’ts
For someone in resistance to transition

Do’s

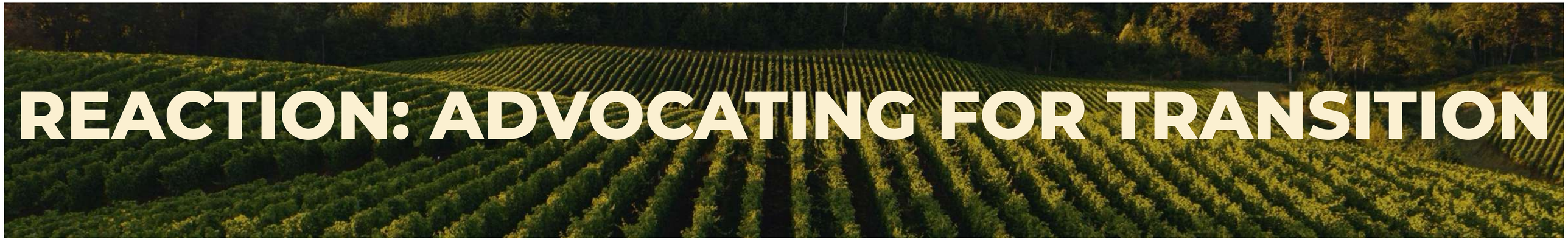
1. Use language and images that the target audience identifies with.
2. Do not stress sustainability as the main focus in your communication, but rather emphasise the dining experience. In direct places, use terms like local, artisanal, fresh and seasonal, or offer more sustainable dishes by themselves. Similarly, the theme of food waste often evokes broad sympathy and is an approachable entry point. Rather, communicate about sustainability at indirect moments or as a supporting message - not as the central story.
3. Offer alternatives to consumers in resistance, so that you yourself do not stagnate in the transition and do not impose anything on anyone. However, avoid emphasising sustainability in products that are already widely accepted, such as vegan mayonnaise.
4. Be authentic and transparent.
5. If necessary, involve people in tastings and pilots, take achievable steps.

Don’ts

1. Do not use arguments that only appeal to idealists and avoid communicating with guilt or pedantry.
2. Try to avoid as much as possible terms such as vegan or vegetarian, which these days are too linked to a specific lifestyle, making it impossible for someone outside that lifestyle to identify with it.
3. Don't create unnecessary barriers that block the ability to change.
4. Don't focus on other benefits before the original concerns/thresholds are removed.
5. Do not communicate out of fear of possible resistance; remain open and transparent to show trust and inspirational leadership.

2.
Advocate for

“Openness and transparency gives someone in advocacy confidence and focus on empowerment and inspiration”



REACTION: ADVOCATING FOR TRANSITION

The basic conditions for change for someone in advocacy for transition

When people feel heard in their advocacy for a transition and gain a clearer sense of reality, they are more able to channel their energy and courage into solutions, progress and inspiration, rather than feeling trapped in frustration and despair. They need the right tools and resources to take effective action. This empowers them and prevents their pursuit of change from turning into frustration, which could further inflame resistance in others. Advocacy mobilise awareness and resources for change. However, without acknowledgement of the issue at hand or without an understanding of the reality others face in the transition, advocacy can escalate and intensify rather than move things forward.

TIP: If you are an organisation that also wants to engage people who advocate, the points alongside show where you can focus your efforts. If you are a company driven by advocacy and wish to reach a broader audience, consider the text below as guidance on how to stay true to your values while demonstrating leadership that resonates more widely.

NECESSITY

People engaged in advocacy do not need further emphasis on the urgency of change; they already feel it strongly. However, they need to recognise that others relate differently to a transition and that alternative perspectives can also provide valuable input. It is important to accept that not everyone perceives the same urgency, sees the same possibilities or even sees what they see. The focus should therefore shift towards progress and inspiration, rather than becoming overly focused on persuading others. People are often more naturally convinced and inspired when those advocating for transition concentrate on empowerment. Within organisations, these individuals can be a powerful force, generating momentum and energy.

ABILITY

It is counterproductive to oppose or shame someone who is advocating for change. The focus should instead be on providing the right tools and resources to enable more effective action towards the desired transformation.

TRUST

What matters most to them is transparency and movement. They are more likely to show compassion and be willing to help when they are presented with an honest message from an organisation. Transparent communication is essential to show that they are being heard. Cosmetic or insincere adjustments are instinctively rejected

“Openness and transparency gives someone in advocacy confidence and focus on empowerment and inspiration”

Do’s & Don’ts

For someone advocating for transition

Do’s

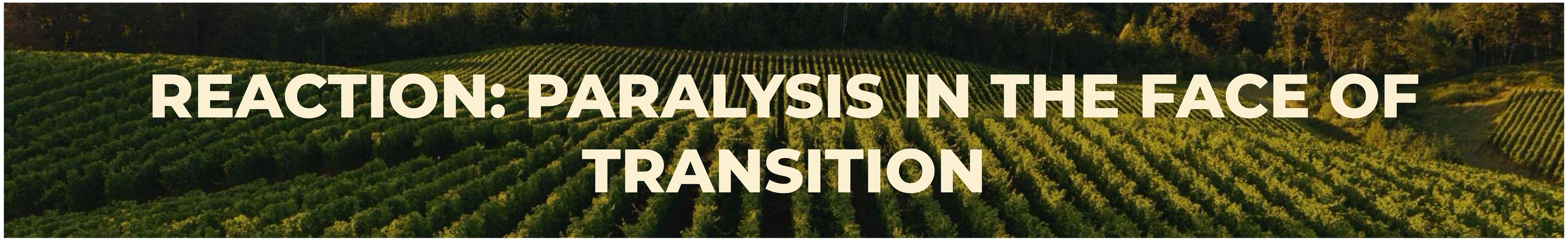
1. Be transparent and honest, even when things are not ideal.
2. Communicate a future vision and concrete steps.
3. It doesn't have to be the main message, but make sure the information is easily accessible. This can be done, for example, by using icons to indicate whether something is plant-based.
4. Remove barriers to change.
5. Communicate the impact of dishes or at least make it easily available.

Don’ts

1. Avoid fear of cancelling driven communication that prettifies reality, as this can fuel further advocacy and tension.
2. Avoid defensive claims, keep the message authentic and aligned with what truly fits and where you genuinely stand.
3. Avoid shifting the focus of reality out of fear; this can come across as manipulative.
4. Don't let idealism get in the way of openness.
5. Be honest and open when challenged about missteps.

3. Paralysis

“Giving someone space and small steps allows someone in paralysis to create connection”



REACTION: PARALYSIS IN THE FACE OF TRANSITION

The basic conditions for change for someone in paralysis

The news often highlights the advocacy for or against change, but a common reaction is often overlooked: paralysis. This reaction arises from a sense of overwhelm and powerlessness. People see both the pros and cons of transition, but lack an overview and cannot accept the loss of control. They feel compelled to choose, but fear mistakes or rejection, rationalising the problems as beyond their control. Organisations can also fall into this paralysis reaction, often for fear of mistakes, leading to loss of connection, creativity and stagnation. However, those who accept where they stand in transition can connect, create room for creativity and act pragmatically. Trust and the ability to change are essential in communicating with people who are in paralysis.

TIP: If your organisation finds itself in a state of paralysis, this offers opportunities to regain control. If, for example, you are a more idealistic organisation aiming to engage this target group, the adjacent points highlight what matters most to them.

NECESSITY

For someone experiencing a state of paralysis, necessity plays a less prominent role than trust and capability. Although the need for change is present, it helps to show these individuals that change does not always have to be immediate or radical. A gradual understanding of the need for change can help lift them out of paralysis by communicating urgency in a manageable way and raising awareness through education. In addition, as with people in resistance, indicating financial, functional or emotional benefits and promotion helps.

ABILITY

People in paralysis need knowledge and a clear overview to make change possible. They must understand which steps they can take and how these contribute to the broader transition. Providing the right tools allows them to overcome inertia and take action in small, pragmatic steps, which builds confidence and enables them to contribute more effectively. Making the process easier and offering support lowers barriers and encourages change. For organisations, it is essential to equip managers and employees with the right tools, support, knowledge and authority. Without this support, stagnation occurs not out of unwillingness but due to confusion. While the path towards financial goals is often clear, transition goals require new knowledge and approaches.

TRUST

Organisations or individuals in paralysis need room to make mistakes and to come up with solutions without being punished straight away. They feel safer to take action when making mistakes is acceptable and when transition is seen as a journey rather than a fixed destination. That is why it is helpful for both organisations and individuals in this state to begin with a clear overview and pragmatic steps. Transparency is key, as it conveys trustworthiness. Overstating or downplaying the message will not resonate or build trust, because they will sense, consciously or not, that it does not align with reality. Transparency, combined with practical steps, is liberating and encourages action. Plain language and familiar visuals support identification. Participation creates space for concerns and solutions. Inspiration can also help, through success stories and relatable examples.

Do’s & Don’ts
For someone in paralysis against transition

Do’s

1. Approach sustainability as a journey.
2. Provide overview and pragmatic steps.
3. Be transparent and open; this offers recognition.
4. Don't always make sustainability the main message; it can also be indirect.
5. Give room for mistakes and learning experiences.

Don’ts

1. Do not punish or shame mistakes; this creates an unsafe environment.
2. Do not create confusion with contradictory communication.
3. Do not use difficult language.
4. Don't keep things vague.
5. Do not dramatise or minimise in your communication.

The sustainability transition is often perceived by opponents or those feeling blocked as having to embrace an idealised vision. In reality, it is about accepting where you currently stand in the transition and how you choose to respond to it. We need to move away from the notion that confident leaders in times of transition are always idealistic or free from fear and frustration.
Historical figures such as Nelson Mandela understood that true strength came from acknowledging emotions like fear, anger and even shame. This awareness enabled them to navigate transitions intuitively and with vision, to build bridges, to truly see others without denying themselves and to achieve meaningful progress. The same applies to organisations: you cannot move forward without first accepting your current position. Within organisations, effective communication is absolutely essential and starts with self-awareness. Are you in a state of paralysis, resistance, advocacy or acceptance? Are you communicating from a place of fear, defensiveness or even denial? Or are you communicating openly, transparently and with a sense of connection? Fear-driven communication not only creates uncertainty, it also undermines trust in the organisation. If you want to gain trust, you must first be willing to give it. That means having the courage to make mistakes and creating space for participation. But it goes beyond communication alone. For genuine change to happen, both employees and consumers need to be equipped with the right tools to truly engage in the transition.
When addressing a broad audience during a transition, intuitive and visionary leadership is absolutely essential. You need to be present where the transition is taking place, while keeping an eye on what lies ahead. It is the level of self-awareness, the willingness to understand others and the strength to take action that determines how quickly the transition truly progresses. If we are unable to understand ourselves, and in turn others, we remain stuck or at the very least in a state of paralysis. And that is the greatest delay to meaningful change.

> **“If we are unable to understand ourselves and therefore others, we stand still or at least in paralysis. And that is the biggest delay for change.”**

A quick check if you are communicating out of leadership or out of fear

1. The stronger your leadership and self-awareness of your own feelings around the subject, the better you can tune in to the person receiving your message.
2. A useful question to help determine whether you are communicating from fear or leadership is: What do you feel when preparing to share your message?
    - Do you feel unheard and want others to see things exactly as you do? (Advocacy or resistance)
    - Are you afraid of being cancelled? (Still in paralysis)
    - Are you afraid of not sounding sincere? (Still in paralysis)
    - Are you afraid of scaring people off? (Still in paralysis)
    - Do you feel a sense of calm or curiosity around your message? (Acceptance or leadership)
3. From a psychological perspective, the difference between communicating from fear and communicating from leadership lies in how much you accept your own reality. That reality concerns how you *truly* feel about the subject and where you as an organisation actually stand. This is exactly why transparency is often best received: it is honest, human and therefore credible.
4. If necessary, rephrase the message from where you really stand, both as an organisation and as a person.

Who are we?

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How can we help?

Sustainable Food Route

The Sustainable Food Route helps food service companies become more sustainable in a pragmatic, holistic, and realistic way that is tailored to their target group.

01 Awareness

02 Quick Scan

03 Baseline measurement

04 Vision, strategy, roadmap

05 Implementation

Our portfolio

Travel

HMS HOST
Schiphol
AUTOGRILL
OMV
certas energy
SSP
tango
Esso
brussels airport the heart of Europe
BRUSSELS SOUTH CHARLEROI AIRPORT S.A.
Avolta
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Mixed-use Developments

MULTI
KLEPIERRE
intu
Meyer Bergman
INGKA CENTRES
CBRE GLOBAL INVESTORS
IKEA
BATAVIA STAD FASHION OUTLET
McARTHURGLEN GROUP
VIA
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FALCON AM
WERELDHAVE
COLRUYT GROUP
de Bijenkorf
Eurofund Group.

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efteling
Roompot.
universe
landal Holiday breaks in nature
CJ LIVECITY
WALIBI
WILDLANDS ADVENTURE ZOO EMMEN
PlopsalandDE PANNE
KONINKLIJKE BURGERS' ZOO
madurodam
CITY CONCORDE LIFESTYLE CENTER
PLAYSWICK PARK
INKA PARK
TIVOLI
Vredenburg
PATHÉ
HUP
THE LAND OF LEGENDS THEME PARK • HOTEL • SHOPPING AVENUE
HOLLAND CASINO
TOVERLAND
HolidayPARK GERMANY

Restaurants, Hotels & Catering

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Domino's
Albron
QSRP
DUNKIN'
BHG
Dat zijn wij!
CAFÉ Americain
Facilicom
KOPPERT CRESS Architecture Aromatique
O'TACOS
SUGO
FOOD&I
La PLACE
Hutten Altijd meer aandacht
MAISON VANDENBOER
crepeaffaire
ibis
NACH
citizen
Unilever
JDE
BILDERBERG HOTELS & RESTAURANTS
Gemeente Amsterdam
crocodile
Leonidas
Lekkerland the convenience company
CSM Bakery Solutions
Lantmännen Unibake
JAVA
Zeelandia
seven happening and food
B.GOOD FOOD WITH ROOTS
EXKi
Loetje
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MEYER BEHEER
Söwl
FLOW TRADERS
CARLTON BEACH SCHEVENINGEN THE HAGUE
blooming
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Interested?
Give us a call!

Do you agree that food deserves the best attention and care in your food service or leisure business? Do you agree that your guests deserve the best attention and care? Are you looking for a reliable, experienced business partner to develop F&B concepts and venues that work? We at Conceptional would be happy to discuss the possibilities with you. Let us understand and surprise you and your guests!

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