

Change management

What is change?

Change is a core part of every business. Your business is constantly changing, and often this is not of your choice. Change can include new regulations, a better procedure or service improvement, a new product line or piece of technology. Managing rapid change in a turbulent environment can contribute to your competitive advantage.

How can you plan for change?

You have to actively lead employees through change, and the old command-and-control approach simply doesn't work if you want people to commit to change. Change is a process that takes planning, perseverance, participation and communication - lots of it.

The following 6 key practices will enhance leadership to enable change:

- 1. Facilitate change:** Help staff meet together to plan change, discuss and carry out various activities like collecting ideas or deciding on what things need changing.
- 2. Leverage culture:** How supportive is your current work culture of the changes you want to make?
- 3. Promote participative change:** Ensure staff are involved in making the changes. Change is more likely to succeed if you involve others in doing it rather than force it on them or try to do it all by yourself.
- 4. Build change capability:** People are more able to change if you give them tools and show them how to. Not just new technical skills to work in the new way but also skills to learn how to change (eg. how to map a work process).
- 5. Monitor change:** Identify performance indicators and monitor activities to determine whether improvements have really taken place.
- 6. Systems redesign:** Redesign systems, structures, processes, products and behaviours to align with the changes.

How can you develop a plan to implement change?

It is important to develop a change implementation and management plan. The following 5 questions should be addressed:

1. Where are we now?

This question requires analysis of the current situation, and provides a solid foundation of facts to decide what needs changing and how much. Actions can include:

- Identify problems in the current system.
- Look at what other businesses are doing.
- Identify who will be affected by this change.
- Collect data on current work problems.
- Talk to staff about what has been occurring.



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2. Where do we want to be?

This is your vision - why you're making the change and how things can be better. A shared vision for the change can educate, inspire and enhance acceptance to enable the change to be effective. Actions can include:

- Set specific change goals and timeframes.
- Clarify benefits and costs you expect.
- Develop a clear business case for change.
- Involve people in developing a vision.
- Run information sessions and have talks with staff to listen to and collect their input.

3. How will we get there?

Plan the activities, goals and strategies to take you from 'where you are now' to 'where you want to be'. Actions can include:

- Form a change team to get staff to agree and accept the change.
- Make up a detailed change plan to follow.
- Run ideas sessions with employees.
- Anticipate obstacles and remove blockages.
- Discuss new methods and procedures with employees.

4. If we do this what might happen?

Research and consider the positive and negative consequences of the change, including any spin-off consequences which may impact your business. Actions you can take include:

- Consider each change option to ensure these will give the desired outcomes.
- Analyse the risks of unforeseen consequences.
- Develop alternative plans for when some changes stray off track.
- Identify current operations the changes will impact and what resources will be needed.
- Run some try-outs and pilot tests if you can.

5. How do we get started?

Planning change is easy – the challenge is putting change into action. Many changes fail in the beginning, therefore it is essential to make significant efforts in the following actions:

- Ensure employees are adequately trained in the new system, procedure etc, before the change is finalised.
- Educate your change team and team-build.
- Find ways to involve employees in the changes.
- Develop a communication plan for the change and ensure employees are well informed.
- Map the work processes linked to changes.
- Develop performance indicators to measure the impact of the change, ensure goals are met, and whether the change has met the ultimate expectations of the vision.



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How can you manage resistance to change?

Resistance is common and should be expected. It is important for a manager to understand that people respond to change differently. When dealing with people resisting change, it is important to use relationship-building skills and show empathy, listen to their views, acknowledge their issues, and enquire about what will help them accept change.

Some pointers for *handling resistance* are:

- Encourage open and honest discussion about change and resistance.
- Involve employees in the change process.
- Listen openly to employees' fears of change.
- Ensure employees are informed about the change, and regularly updated on the status of the change.
- Keep employees focussed on the change vision.
- Alert employees how things are changing and give recognition for the change efforts they make.

Further information

The following fact sheets provide further information on these issues:

- Balanced scorecard
- Benchmarking
- Business communications
- Business planning
- Gain employee commitment
- Implement change
- Manage business growth
- Verbal communication