

## Implement change

Change continues to be a feature of everyday business – new technologies, new policies, company restructures, downsizings, redundancies, etc. Many employees are beginning to buckle under the weight of it all. Change might offer a promise of improvement, but it doesn't guarantee it. Many people now approach change with scepticism, fear or frustration.

The following principles can assist a manager to introduce change to the business environment:

### 1. Key elements of good change management

Change can be a negative concept for many people and, if you ignore the following essential advice, you'll find the process of implementation more difficult:

- People will change when they see the need for change.
- People will change when they know how to change.
- People will change when they are involved actively in the change process.
- People will resist surprises.
- People will change when they are secure in changing.
- People resist being treated as "things".
- People do not necessarily change on the basis of new knowledge alone – attitudes, feelings and status are just as important.
- People change some attitudes slowly.

### 2. Involve your employees in the process of change

If your employees participate actively in the change process, they are more likely to feel ownership and less likely to resist the change. It is important to:

- Involve employees in the processes of planning, implementation and evaluation. They are more likely to see the initiative as their own, not as one imposed by outsiders.
- Gain the support of opinion leaders in the organisation. Others soon follow their lead, for people tend to model the behaviour of others, especially those they admire or trust.
- Concentrate on the doers, not the doubters; the risk-takers are more likely to support efforts of change.

### 3. Ensure employees clearly understand why the change is necessary

To alleviate employee anxiety and stress, you must explain fully the logic of the change, emphasising both the benefits and risks. New ideas are often misinterpreted, so make ample provision for discussion of reactions to ensure complete understanding and to alleviate any related concerns and fears. During implementation, chart the activities completed and those yet to be undertaken. Ensure you report periodically to all staff on progress. Upfront information and understanding help employees feel more secure about the change.

#### 4. Sell the benefits

How will the changes benefit me? My unit? The business? How will the change mean more satisfying work, greater security, an opportunity to show what I can do, less confusion, less fatigue, greater autonomy, and improved communication? Motivate your employees to embrace the change by putting benefits on a personal level. Also point out any difficulties and disadvantages to ensure employees are aware of the complete picture.

#### 5. Present the change enthusiastically

Resistance to change is sometimes due to the fact that change is half-heartedly presented in the first place. Introduce and implement the change with enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is catching.

#### 6. Provide tools, resources and support

Give employees the necessary implements and information so that they are able to feel confident about the change process:

- If you are unable to resource a new initiative, don't offer it.
- Train employees in the knowledge and skills needed to adapt to the change.
- Listen to frustrations and give time for them to be aired at meetings with staff.
- Arrange visits to locations where the change is operating successfully.
- Show that you understand the feelings and fears of those affected and take steps to relieve unnecessary concerns.
- Praise those who approach the change with a positive attitude. This will encourage others to follow.

#### 7. Build a track record

Concentrate on one project at a time and make it successful. Success, more than any other factor, will show those who might have a tendency to resist that there is nothing to fear. Always be able to explain convincingly and without artificial justification why something new is necessary or desirable. If you develop a reputation for not leaping on every bandwagon, this too will add to your credibility as a change agent. You will be perceived as a thoughtful, deliberate manager so that when you do move in a new direction, there is confidence in your judgement.

#### 8. Foster a supportive climate

Stimulate an ongoing positive attitude to change by regularly discussing new ideas, initiatives and issues with your employees. Celebrate the achievement of goals in the change process. Be flexible and experimental in your approach to the ideas of others, and encourage the risk-takers and innovators. People constantly exposed to ideas and new practices are more likely to favour any call for change in the future.



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## Further information

The following fact sheets provide further information on these issues:

- Business communications
- Business planning
- Change management
- Gain employee commitment
- Leadership - introduction