

Making alterations

Involving staff in your plans is the best way to ensure that change is a success

We live in a world of constant change, and even though the vast majority of these changes are for the better, change is still something that many people – and therefore many organisations – can find extremely difficult to deal with. Why is this, and what can be done to help people embrace change, rather than fear it?

THE NATURE OF CHANGE

Change is all around us. Changes can be small or large, but the overall impression they create is of a world that is in a constant state of flux. It may be welcome, but for many of us the reaction to certain changes will be one of automatic resistance which, in turn, often results in stress.

To accept change is akin to getting used to a new pair of shoes. They may be more waterproof, more hardwearing and better looking than our old ones, but they will almost certainly not be more comfortable, until they are worn in. The amazing thing is that (assuming they are the right size and fit properly) we often cannot envisage how or why we were so reluctant to put them on in the first place.

“People need to feel that they have some input to enable them to overcome their fears and anxieties about potential changes”

By definition, going forward involves some change in order to keep on course. An organisation is either continually improving or it is failing, because no successful firm can afford simply to stand still. This is why it's so important that employees are given all the tools they need to help them embrace change and new ways of working (ie, to feel comfortable in their new shoes).

MAKING IT WORK

If your organisation is contemplating a major change, you can help to facilitate this by taking account of the following:

- Think through the change and what's required of the personnel affected, so that a clear plan of action can be created

- Be aware that some retraining may be necessary and have a plan ready to implement this
- People need to feel that they have some input to enable them to overcome their fears and anxieties. If you encourage them through this, they can become great advocates for the change and will work with you, instead of resisting
- Accept that everyone's capacity for change is different and that some will respond quicker or more easily than others
- Try to break the change down into bite-sized chunks so that it doesn't seem too overwhelming. Consider running a pilot operation to smooth out the glitches and allow input from stakeholders
- Even if your staff cannot be involved in all the major decisions, the implementation of these will involve a number of smaller steps, and they can almost certainly be involved somewhere (and add value by bringing in their experience)
- Everyone copes better with change if they feel at least in partial control of it. It's the feeling of being out of control that can be frightening to most of us. Involve your staff in their own areas of the change; set up an implementation team involving a member of staff from each department, reporting up to (and down from) management
- Keep everyone informed, as far as is possible, of timetables and details. The imagination and concerns of staff can run riot when they're kept in the dark – particularly if they're anxious about the change. Regular meetings are essential, and even if time is short, don't abandon them. Make sure that the planned changes are understood clearly at all levels
- Don't give in to the temptation to impose changes without consultation. Unless you can persuade your staff to buy into the change by means of the steps above, they may leave or become demotivated, neither of which will benefit the company. Similarly, a culture of fear (where staff are actively discouraged from conveying concerns or showing vulnerability) is counterproductive
- Everyone works better when they can see the benefit for themselves, so take time to think through not just the overall plan of the change, but how it will affect and benefit individuals, then 'sell' these benefits to those affected. Don't oversell them though, as staff will subsequently disbelieve anything you say. It's far better to be honest and admit that some things

still need to be worked through, as this will help to build up trust with your staff

- Once the change has been implemented, don't allow any return to the old ways or permit this as an option.

PREPARING FOR CHANGE

As change is so much a part of everyday life, your employees will benefit greatly from initiatives that make them more resilient.

At its simplest, this means helping your employees to maintain a healthy mind and body, and the positive mental attitude needed to approach change as a challenge and opportunity for improvement.

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We all know that eating healthily, exercising and not being overweight are important, and we know exactly how to achieve this. To have a positive mental attitude may prove to be more difficult, and many of us are unaware of how to build our inner strength.

Consequently, when there is a problem, obstacle or required change, our internal capacity is not always sufficient and our mental manoeuvrability can be too slow.

BUILDING STAMINA

How do you build your inner resistance and strength? How can you prepare yourself for the challenges and adversities you will come up against in the months and years ahead?

We all know that the only way a skyscraper can remain upright is by having an inherent ability to move, albeit ever so slightly, with the prevailing conditions. We have to learn how to do the same, by working with the forces we meet, and moving and giving a little when the conditions demand it.

We will benefit – and so too will our teams, colleagues and organisations.

The Author

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