

progressing business

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Resistance to change – a considered approach

Clare Edwards, Principal of Changeworks



Change is often messy, inconvenient, unsettling, awkward and yet necessary.

Our brains are hardwired to resist change and maintain the status quo. Stability and security are considered fundamental physiological needs according to Abraham Maslow's hierarchy, so why would we expect everyone to hang out the flags when we introduce major change?

When we are the instigators of change we tend to see mainly the advantages. When we are the recipients we tend to see the loss – loss of stability, social structure, knowledge and experience, our comfort zone is well and truly shaken.

Here's some food for thought when dealing with resistance to change:

Well in anticipation of resistance, plan how you will communicate, involve and support people. Using the simple 4MAT system from Bernice McCarthy, (www.aboutlearning.com) consider the WHY, WHAT, HOW, and WHAT IF of the change.

WHY, WHAT, HOW, AND WHAT IF OF CHANGE

WHY is the change necessary?

Be as open and transparent as you can about the drivers both from a positive perspective ie, the benefits this will bring and also the consequences of staying 'stuck'. This way you are reaching people who are motivated from either end of the pleasure/pain motivation continuum.

Change will be easier to effect if you already have a clear mission and vision in place that your people believe in and that you can tie the change into.

WHAT are the objectives and outcomes of the change?

What are the key goals and what will people be experiencing differently once they have gone through the process (pain)? What are the key milestones and how will each be celebrated? Expect a drop in productivity, factor this into your plans as it is a high probability.

Often we forget to communicate one of the most important aspects – what is NOT changing. Helping people see what is still a constant and stable influence will immediately help them to feel a little more secure.

HOW will the change take place?

How will people be involved and what level of influence can they have on the approach taken? How will this impact their day to day operations, how do they communicate with their stakeholders about the change and how will they be supported through it? Who will you choose as your change champions to support those who need it?

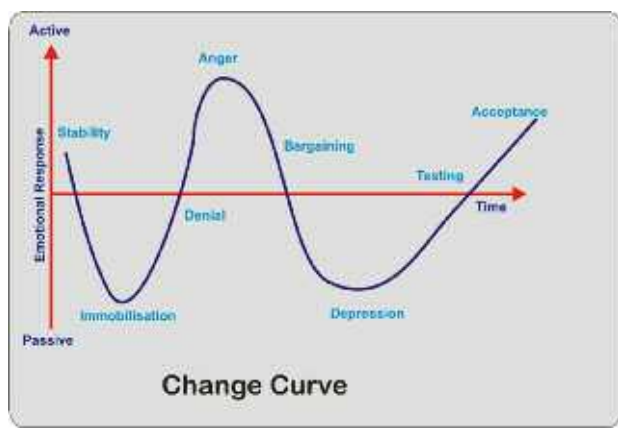
WHAT IF?

This is where we anticipate all the questions we might possibly be asked about the change, for example, what if a key stakeholder leaves? What if we run out of budget or a major threat impacts us from out of the blue?

If communicating in a ‘live’ situation, this is the main interactive section where people are encouraged to ask questions and share concerns. Emotionally intelligent leadership is key here as the bulldozing ‘raze and rebuild’ method leaves many casualties!

Much of this I am sure you already do. You may, though want to focus on an area that you could further improve on and develop.

In the Change Curve diagram, Emotional Response is also directly linked to productivity



WHEN THERE’S RESISTANCE

Consider using the same method of enquiry when dealing with resistance as is used for communicating change:

WHY might these people be resisting?

Enquiring as to their concerns and fears requires active listening and empathetic communication.

Acknowledge, paraphrase, summarise and ask them what it is they need to better understand and cope with the change.

WHAT is it that they need to help them through?

What information, support, clarification or maybe even challenge do they need to help them get more comfortable with the change or rise to the challenge?

HOW can you make life easier for them?

How can they become more involved, will they buddy with a change champion?

How can they develop their self awareness around change and understand that their initial reactions are normal?

How can we help move them along the change curve?

WHAT IF.....ask, listen, empathise, respond.

HELP PEOPLE TO BUILD THEIR EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE SKILLS

Deal with change more effectively both in their work and personal lives. In ‘Thriving in change through building resilience’ workshops, people can be helped to see how they have successfully dealt with change in the past, develop the ability to respond versus react and learn the skills of optimism and reframing.

For larger organisations, partner with highly qualified associates skilled and experienced in facilitating and enabling change.

FOCUS ON PEOPLE’S STRENGTHS

What is it that people do well that you can tie into the change program? Everyone is good at something and being able to achieve and develop in some way will help people progress through the change curve.

PERSONALITY TYPES

Different personality types deal with change in different ways. Use a personality discovery workshop as part of your ‘thriving in change’ program because it helps people understand what their core needs and values are and why they have the response to change that they have. Then go on to help them find coping mechanisms specifically geared to their personality preference. Both Aus Identities and Team Management Systems might be used, but use either one according to specific needs.

For some, change is like death and the response some people have can be likened to grieving. It’s likely not everyone will ‘get on and stay on the bus’ from an acceptance and attitude perspective. When we’ve done all we can to educate, inform, involve and support; for those who don’t want to or can’t join in the new journey, sometimes hard decisions need to be made. This is of particular importance if we keep employees who are making the working environment toxic.

SUMMARY

Whilst we all acknowledge that the human side of change is essential for success, investment in helping people cope better with or even thrive in change is still often ad-hoc and sporadic.

We can plan the most efficient new systems, watertight policies and innumerable organisational changes but unless we take our people with us on the journey, the gap between expectation and reality will always be an expensive and messy challenge that keeps rearing its ugly head.

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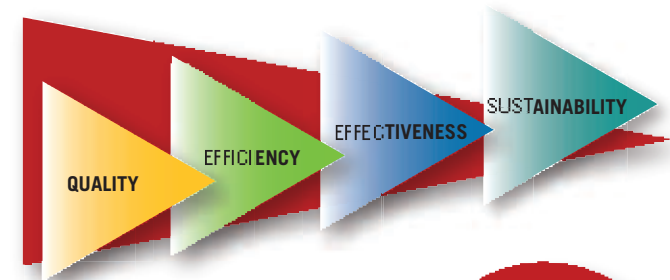
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