

Change management

In this special feature, we present summaries of three articles previously published in Training Journal on the subject of change management.



Are you ready?

Geoff Atkinson
March 2000

Much attention has been given to delivering successful change projects. Less has been written about how an organisation can develop its ability to evolve naturally whenever change is needed.

Geoff Atkinson guides you through the maze

For the organisation that can reach a state of change readiness. In this state, the whole organisation is working together on the assumption that change will happen without necessarily knowing what that change will be. It is then in the best possible state to respond effectively whether stimulated from inside or outside of the organisation. An important role for development specialists is the proactive unfreezing of people and processes at all levels to the notion that change is inevitable, healthy, developmental and positive in the long run. This, of course, is in addition to the traditional, more responsive role of delivering development interventions in support of business and personal needs. Some challenge.

Any organisation, or part of it, that is change ready will have an appropriate balance of resource and management attention between the two. This balance should depend largely on the extent of change – whether in the environment or driven internally.

One example of a fairly pure business as usual team is the call centre handling a reasonably predictable number and type of queries. Here the issues are essentially about balancing the service perceptions of the customer with efficiency, stability, reliability and process operation being the order of the day.

At the other end of the scale is an IT development department. Here the whole workload is concerned with delivering change. If no system changes or new developments were required, then no development team would be needed. In such a department, issues of programme and project leadership from the perspectives of flexible task and resource management are critical. Somewhere in the middle might be the HR team, structured with account consultants facing each major internal customer, with a more centralised

support team. This team would often be re-configured to take account of operationally driven workload changes and a changing project workload.

In practice, of course, any organisation needs to be formed from elements in all parts of the spectrum. The key is the balance for the organisation, and the appropriate alignment of each team and department. The implication is that most managers will need to manage both types of work and the skills required are different. Managing this balance at an organisational level is a critical task for top teams. Developing change readiness is itself a change process. At a simple level, four steps are needed:

1. Specify what your organisation will look like when it is change ready.
2. Audit where you are against that in terms of the new, not the old.
3. Prioritise the gaps and plan.
4. Implementation.

An important early step is to decide who should be involved in the various stages. There has been much support recently for processes that seek to involve many (sometimes all) members of the organisation in this stage of change.

While improving the commitment to the end result, and usually its quality, there is inevitably a large investment of time at the start. Often the decision is taken on the basis of the values of those involved. Facilitating the whole process requires a mix of personal and technical skills, which have been well covered in other Training Journal articles. Often, external resources will be used at some stages. But if the skills exist and the politics allow, then using internal skills may well be the right choice.

nt: three perspectives

Driving a WEDGE into change management communication

Ian Scotland
December 2000

Ian Scotland explains the meaning of WEDGE, a method for understanding and implementing the importance of communication in change management.

As a change agent, I believe that change management stresses the importance of clear and constant communication as a lever in achieving effective change. The 'gurus' – Charles Handy, William Bridges, Tom Peters *et al* – write about the need to keep people informed and to 'share the vision'. Despite this – and despite the recognition of the need by almost every change agent – we still see some change programmes start with a great flurry of activity and publicity, only to fizzle out in a few weeks or months.

Many change agents make the mistake of starting well, but not finishing. Projects begin enthusiastically, but as they meet the natural resistance to change from which almost everyone suffers, the momentum is lost. In part, this resistance is a desire on the part of those affected to stay in the 'comfort zone', and in equal measure there is generally a fear of the unknown. Together these two attributes combine to produce the two most common reactions to change – 'denial' and 'paralysis'.

While working recently with a group of senior leaders from a UK bank, I was looking for an analogy to illustrate the common mistake of putting too much emphasis on the initial communication of change – where insufficient attention and resources are devoted to maintaining the communication channels throughout the life of

the change, resulting in an incomplete change programme. The WEDGE model was the result.

No communication model should be without its mnemonic, and so we arrive at WEDGE – the content and process of effective change management communication. Let's break down the mnemonic to see what it means.

- W = the vision (this is based on five of the author Rudyard Kipling's 'six honest serving men' – what, where, who, when and why).
- E = everything.
- D = depth of communication.
- G = graduate
- E = evaluate.

This process of communication has had an impact with a number of different client organisations. Many senior managers are relatively inexperienced in change management and simply fail to understand the impact that poor communication can have. As one manager admitted: 'I didn't realise until now why my people found change difficult. Now that I understand what they're feeling, I can adjust my message and make it easier for them. Since I've started to focus on communicating in greater depth and really trying to listen, I've found that our level of understanding is much greater. We're achieving more, and my people are happier and feel more involved.'

Making change work: how to engage people's hearts and minds in change

Di Kamp
October 2001

Di Kamp offers a common-sense route that will help you through the process of change.

Change is the only constant. Yet we have not become significantly better at handling change in the workplace. There are still many people who are sceptical about change and even more who find it a cause for anxiety. I believe it is possible to engage people fully in change and through the process bring out the best in them. It requires some recognition of our cultural tradition and of how people manage change in their everyday lives. It also requires a broader approach to change management that encompasses the engagement of people's hearts and souls, not just their rationality. This means that the process needs to engage the right-hand side of their brains – their creativity, imagination and passion – not just their logical and analytical part.

We are not brought up to be flexible, to look for opportunities or to consider options. The reaction of most people to change is driven by something they are not even conscious of. We need to get people consciously to face and discuss it.

First, we look at the general context of a changing world, making it fun but also real. Next, we look at people's personal experiences of change, so that it becomes directly relevant for them. When we come to look at the change they are now facing, we need to ensure that a number of questions are addressed. These questions include examining why we need to change, what's in it for us, what the change will be like, what we already have that we can build on and what we can do to make the change work.

Through dealing with these questions, people gradually become more convinced that they really can handle this change well and be proactive in making it work. You can literally see them move from being anxious about, or resistant to, the change, to being eager to get started. And when they have been

through it once, people begin to apply the process for themselves, so that gradually they become true change agents and the traditional stance of resistance is left behind. In our world today, this is far more useful to them as well as to their organisations because change is the only constant. ■

Di Kamp is a senior consultant at the Change Management Centre, a leading UK change management consultancy. She has over 15 years' experience in change management and has worked with a wide range of organisations across a variety of industries. She is a frequent speaker at conferences and seminars and has written several books on change management.