

Managing Change



A guide to help you adopt a more structured and streamlined approach to managing significant changes in your business

You will no doubt have had a negative change-related experience at some point in your career and you will have witnessed the damage that resulted from it. Poorly managed change not only causes an immediate impact in the business, but has a longer term effect in that it damages morale and can cause employees to disengage. It is therefore vital to ensure that change in your business is well managed.

Managing Change

This guide is designed to help you to adopt a more structured and streamlined approach to managing significant changes in your business and addresses the following content:

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1. Introduction

Change is a feature of life in all businesses today and you are likely to be well aware of this fact, facing as you do large and small changes with regularity. Yet, for something that is so prevalent in the business world it is perhaps surprising that research continually highlights just how badly change is managed within many organisations. Common pitfalls identified include:

- ❑ Lack of a structured approach to managing change.
- ❑ Poor leadership of change processes, resulting in confusion and drift.
- ❑ Failure to deal with the human side of change leading to lack of buy-in by those for whom the change will impact most.

It is important to make a distinction here between small and large changes at work. Small changes happen every day, but that doesn't mean that they should be implemented in an ad hoc fashion. That said, not every small change should be 'over-managed' to the extent that it appears to be a bigger deal than it really is. When dealing with smaller changes, some common sense principles apply:

- ❑ As a rule, people will more easily accept changes when they are involved in the decision-making process around it, or at the very least understand the rationale for change. Therefore communication lies at the heart of change.
- ❑ As part of that communication process, even for small changes, people need to know what the change is, why and when it is happening, its impact on them, the benefits it will bring, how it will happen and the support they will get.

- ❑ Equally, change always needs to happen in a structured way and again this applies even to very small changes. Implementing something new should be planned, announced, discussed, implemented and reviewed and this process can be managed for small changes in as simple a format as a Daily Briefing.
- ❑ It is always important to recognise that even the slightest of changes provides an opportunity for demotivated or negative employees to sow seeds of discontent, so it is vital that the manager closest to the change takes charge and is seen to lead it from start to finish.

These are undoubtedly basic points but it is not unusual for a small change to be badly handled which results in preventable problems arising. This can be as seemingly minor as an employee who has been off for a few days returning to find that a certain procedure has been changed – but this can grow into something more worrying.

For example, when the employee returns and they haven't been made aware of the change, this can lead them to believe that 'nobody tells me anything around here' and immediately they, and others, begin to view change as a bad thing. Then, when larger changes are proposed, they are more likely to resist them because their experience of change has been, if only in their eyes, negative.

It is therefore vital to manage small changes in a positive way so as to lay a foundation to help facilitate the introduction of larger changes.

2. A structured approach to managing change

There are many models of change and ultimately all cover similar ground, so it's not necessarily the model chosen that really matters but how well you apply it. One straightforward but effective change model is known as The ADKAR model, which stands for:

Awareness of the need to change
Desire to participate and support the change
Knowledge of how to change
Ability to implement the change on a day-to-day basis
Reinforcement to keep the change in place

ADKAR is useful both as a conceptual model to help you think through and plan the change process and it also helpful as a way of defining the key things you must do to make the change happen. It can first guide you as you reflect upon certain vital questions such as what the rationale for the change is, how you will get buy in for it, how it will be implemented (and what implications that has for training etc.) as well as how you will measure the impact of the change over time. Therefore, when faced with a proposed change initiative, ADKAR can in the first instance be a very useful tool to guide management discussions around the formulation of a change management plan.

2.1 Applying the ADKAR Model

Applying ADKAR is not necessarily a step-by-step process, but it is sequential in the sense that you cannot create a desire to participate in the change if there is a lack of awareness or understanding as to the reasons for that change. In applying the model, consider the following points:

1. Awareness of the need to change

This phase requires the implementation of a planned communication strategy which seeks to explain the reasoning that lies behind the proposed change. This should not be an ad hoc activity and must be planned in advance by you and your management team so that consistent, clear and accurate messages are communicated to stakeholders which address their likely concerns. Inadequate communication, mixed messages, or creating the impression that the 'full picture' is not forthcoming will only lead to increased fear and consequently more resistance to the change. Get this phase right and the change process becomes easier to manage; get it wrong and you will face significant problems in making the change happen.

2. Desire to participate and support the change

In this stage you are seeking to build on the awareness you have generated of the forthcoming change to help people understand what the change will mean for them. This is about highlighting the benefits of implementing that change, or the dangers for all concerned of not doing so. It is about trying to give your employees a reason to get excited about what you are proposing; if concrete incentives are available to them for implementing the change then this can smooth the way, but don't make the mistake that you can ever 'buy' change. Bribing people to change is a short term gain at best, what you really need is 'buy in'.

Of course, there will be times when the changes planned will not bring a whole lot of benefits for those involved, for example when having to cut back on hours or staff numbers during tough times, and in such circumstances generating a desire to participate can clearly be more difficult. The best that can often be done here is to discuss proposals with employees, listen to their concerns, tweak changes in response if possible and simply try to let them off-load for a while.

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resistance

The fact that you have done this may not generate huge desire to proceed, but it will reduce the resistance levels than if you simply try to force unwanted changes through. In these circumstances your aim is to reduce resistance, not necessarily to generate

immediate enthusiasm for what is proposed.

3. Knowledge on how to change

A key factor that will help you to manage the change is to ensure that

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approach

people are very clear about 'how to' change, and this will again require a planned approach to training, coaching, mentoring and other relevant forms of knowledge transfer.

Even if people aren't fully onboard with the proposed change, the fact that they can function under the new regime reduces their resistance to it; conversely, if people do not know how to change, or feel overwhelmed by it, then this fuels their resentment of the proposals and increases resistance levels.

4. Ability to implement the change on a day-to-day basis

When people are faced with a new approach, or a new way of doing things and even when they know how to change, it takes time for them to fully accept the change. This is where day to day leadership is so important; it is vital in encouraging employees to stay with the change, in helping to solve problems arising from the change, and generally to deal with the human side of coping with it. Lack of leadership is a common cause of change processes stalling.

5. Reinforcement to keep the change in place

This final stage of managing change is to stick with it so as to ensure it becomes the accepted way of doing things. Many change initiatives fall at the last hurdle in that they are happening, but rather than becoming embedded in the daily routine, over time the focus on the change slips, or something new comes along. This is dangerous for a variety of reasons not least of which is that if it happens frequently it sends out the message to employees that if they wait long enough, a change will eventually disappear. Ensuring that changes stay in place and that employees do not revert to old ways can be achieved in many ways such as positive feedback, rewards, recognition, as well as daily monitoring of performance.

As stated at the outset, one of the primary advantages of ADKAR lies in its simplicity and whether you follow this model or not, it serves to highlight some vital considerations associated with all major change processes, such as the need to plan the change meticulously, to communicate at all

stages, to involve employees throughout, to lead the process every day and to 'bed down' the change. In that sense it is a useful conceptual model if nothing else.

As well as applying a structured approach to managing change it is always vital not to overlook or underestimate the human dimension associated with change. By nature, the majority of people prefer the status quo, or at the very least require convincing that change is worthwhile. Some people cope easily with change, others have a strong fear of it and some can see change as an opportunity for them to act out their dissatisfaction with their leader, the company or even their life.

In fact, the range of emotions associated with change is many and varied and whilst you cannot account for every individual reaction, you can and must be aware of, and respond to, common fears and concerns. A failure to do so not only makes the change process more difficult to realise, but it also causes employees to disengage because they feel themselves powerless to influence important decisions which affect their daily lives.

Activity – Reflecting upon change

As a conclusion to this guide, spend a moment now reflecting upon the following points:

- Think about a recent change scenario you were responsible for leading. What went well and what didn't? What caused the downsides?
- Retrospectively, try to review the change process in terms of the ADKAR model and assess how well the change was handled against the five elements.
 - Did you generate enough awareness about the change?
 - Was enough done to get 'buy in', or at least to reduce fears?
 - Was adequate training and support provided to help employees cope with the change?
 - Was strong day to day leadership shown as the change was implemented?
 - Was the change process followed through to its conclusion?
- When you are next planning a substantial change, what might you do differently in light of your review?



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