

# Managing Change

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Change is, and will continue to be, a constant in today's organizations. In fact, change is the attempt an organization makes to improve itself. *In Search of Excellence* lists a bias for action (which results in change) as one of eight attributes of "excellent, innovative" companies.<sup>1</sup>

One of the reasons many people are so threatened by organizational change is that they did not initiate the decision and are not yet comfortable with it. To further their discomfort, they are the ones most affected by it or the ones required for successful implementation of it. When that happens, your responsibility is to build support for the required change—within yourself and within others.<sup>2</sup>

An effective leader—both formal and informal—uses change to make things better, gets those affected involved in changes, and leads them through change by personal example. Experienced change agents not only understand this, but also understand that even the most necessary of changes can be threatening to people. If these feelings are not dealt with effectively, constructive change cannot take place. The consequences of lack of change: the organization stagnates and both it and its people suffer.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, the process of managing change or transitions is vitally important.

Managing changes or transitions is a process of our growth and development, a process that is perfected and improved through practice, experimentation, and feedback. It is not possible to ignore or circumvent the developmental process. The process cannot be installed, borrowed, or transplanted. Each person must become accountable and learn through trial and error.<sup>3</sup>

Everyone must develop a process of change management that works for him or her. The first consideration is that it isn't the changes that cause problems, it's the transitions (see Exhibit 1). Change is not the same as transition. A change is situational: a new job or responsibility, boss, team roles, or policy. A transition is the psychological process people go through to come to terms with these new situations (or changes). Change is external, transition is internal. Consequently, unless transition occurs, the change will not happen.<sup>4</sup>

## exhibit 1—examples of changes and transitions

<b>CHANGE:</b> The external situation is the...	<b>TRANSITION:</b> As a result of the change, coming to terms with the...
New boss	Loss of friendship with and support from your former boss. Feeling of loyalty to your former boss and/or conversely the feeling of disloyalty to your former boss by accepting your new boss. Fear of additional responsibilities.
New team roles or new responsibilities	Fear of empowered staff eliminating your job as supervisor or manager. Fear of failure or poor performance. Loss of the familiar, comfortable "old" ways.
Reduction in staff	Feeling of being overwhelmed or consumed by additional work. Loss of friendship with and support from your former coworkers.
Automated teller machines (ATMs) or direct electronic check deposit	Loss of personal contact with a bank teller. Loss of secure feeling of making a transaction with another person. Lack of trust in ATMs or computers.
New baby	Fear of not being a good mother or father. Lifestyle change.

## Process for Managing Transitions

Although everyone must develop his or her own style and process for managing change, you don't have to reinvent the wheel or start from scratch. Follow these steps to manage transitions:<sup>4</sup>

## Let Go

- Describe the change and its known impact to those affected. Clarify as needed. Answer the questions of those affected (e.g., how the change will affect them) and reduce their uncertainty and fears. Immediately involve and engage those affected and help to reduce rumors.
- Acknowledge losses openly and sympathetically. Expect and accept signs of grieving—anger, bargaining, anxiety, sadness, disorientation, and depression. Compensate for the losses insofar as possible by identifying known and available strengths, support systems, and other resources. Use these to your advantage.
- Solicit ideas and collaborate to facilitate transition. This will speed the transition and engage those affected by the change. The most effective way of overcoming resistance to change is to involve people in the process of understanding where and why change is needed, and how to best implement it. Even when a change is imposed without their involvement, employees often can be given the responsibility for planning and carrying out its implementation. Change then becomes an opportunity for people to contribute, learn, and grow.<sup>2</sup>
- Develop transition steps. Monitor the transition plan/steps and celebrate progress. Obtain feedback in/from all directions and share transition progress with those affected. This will encourage continued support through the transition. In addition, to observe interpersonal actions, use these progress/feedback sessions to gauge buy-in from those affected by the change. For example, listen to what is said as well as what is not said and what messages their body language sends.
- Mark endings. The same way funerals mark life's end for our loved ones, find a way to mark the end of an old process or situation. Transition starts with closure. Marking an end demonstrates respect for the past and paves the road for a transition.

## Manage the Neutral Zone

- Continue to identify known and available strengths, support systems, and other resources. Use them to your advantage
- Continue to solicit ideas and collaborate with others
- Assess transition steps and continue to monitor progress

## Make a New Beginning

- Reassess transition steps and continue to monitor progress
- Establish an icon or symbol for the new identity. Similar to recognizing the birth of a baby or the marriage of a couple, establish a new symbol for the transition
- Celebrate successes and progress

## Non-stop Change

Managing one or two changes or transitions would be simple. The non-stop changes are what employees find frustrating. Non-stop changes comprise an increasing frequency of changes that overlap each other. To illustrate, all of the changes in Exhibit 1 and, subsequently their respective transitions, could happen simultaneously or in a very short time span. For example, a reduction in staff could require a change in team roles and result in a new boss for you. The process of managing transition described above will help here as well. The trick is to create stability through change just like riding a bicycle requires constant steering and balancing adjustments. And just like learning to ride a bicycle, when you manage transitions, you must

- remain focused by clarifying your mission
- take steps to rebuild trust among and with those affected
- respond to the challenge and challenge others to respond

As HIM professionals, each of us has a responsibility to be a change agent or catalyst in our workplace. These changes will impact the whole much the same way as ripples on a lake when a stone is tossed. The ripples—or impact—on the organization can be positive or negative. The choice is yours.<sup>5</sup>

## ***Guidelines for Changing the Way You Handle Change***

### **Speed Up**

A common response to change is caution. Slowing down may make you feel safer and more in control, but the feeling is false. Change won't wait for you. Effective leaders do everything possible to accelerate and create a culture with quicker reflexes (e.g. eliminating "busy work" and breaking down communication barriers). Being proactive improves your position in today's market.

### **Stay Cool**

Panic has a negative impact on your concentration and leads to reckless or impulsive actions. So collect yourself and maintain a clear focus. This focus will allow you to make more appropriate decisions.

### **Take the Initiative**

Ours is a culture of initiative and independence. This means that in a leaner, self-directed work setting, you must determine on your own what the organization needs. Put yourself in charge of problem solving.

### **Get Going**

One of your responsibilities is to help the organization reduce the time it takes to get things done. This means you must be willing to improvise, to feel your way along. You can't afford to stop and study the situation from all angles before making a move. Instead of trying to analyze and plan through problems, learn through the situation. This will create a culture of action that can keep up in a world of non-stop change.

### **Try Easier**

Trying harder—while using the same old tools, techniques, and thinking patterns—creates a culture of desperation. The secret is to simplify. Eliminate unnecessary steps. Ask "why are we doing this?" Innovate.

### **Spend Energy on Solutions**

Acknowledge the loss that will result from a change; but don't wallow in it. Redirect the energy for grief, anger, or worry into finding solutions to the problems.

### **Take More Risks**

A culture unwilling to experiment has little chance to innovate. Be a pioneer. Explore. Use your imagination. Extend yourself.

### **Don't Let Strengths Become Weaknesses**

Keep learning. Don't get locked into a set of skills or an approach because a changing world requires new competencies.

### **Welcome Destruction**

Destruction is one of today's conditions for survival. Just as a snake sheds its skin, the organization needs to rid itself of habits that have outlived their usefulness.

### **Make More Mistakes**

To flourish in a rapidly changing environment, you need to make more mistakes. If it doesn't work, recover quickly and try something else.

### **Shoot for Total Quality**

When people get lax, the organization's reputation suffers. Make no compromises in your ethics, quality, or productivity. Stay on the high road.

**Protect What Can Protect You**

It is the customer who determines the organization's fate. So focus on strengthening the organization so it can better serve. Doing all you can to protect the customer will also help protect your position.

**Practice Loyalty**

Misguided loyalty (i.e. devotion to the old, established ways) cripples the organization's ability to adapt. Be willing to break with the past and celebrate achievements that make the organization more competitive.

**Have Faith in Opportunity**

Mixed with problems, aggravation, and fears, opportunities often come as a result of change. Think in terms of possibilities—not limitations.

**Take Personal Responsibility for Fixing Things**

The organization needs fixers rather than blamers. Blaming uses energy that could be expended on solutions. Package your complaint with a solution.

**Act Like a Child**

Children handle change better than adults do. In fact, they insist on variety as it keeps them from getting tired or bored. They are open to the unexpected and their life is a constant stream of breakthroughs. Consequently, they learn more, faster. Revert to childhood.

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**Notes**

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5. Covey, Stephen R. *Principle-Centered Leadership*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1991, p. 306.

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