



## Change is all about your people

How many change management programmes will achieve their objectives this year? That all depends on how well their people have been engaged in the change! Research shows that you can develop the best change plans using the most innovative methods but if you haven't involved and really engaged with your people the failure rate can be as high as 80%!

The way we plan and manage change has become an essential skill for all leaders. In this article we will share some key messages that emerge from our 'change' workshops.

**When people react to change** they don't start when the event takes place, nor do they stop when the change has happened. They start reacting as soon as they get a whisper that there may be some change around the corner and the impacts of the change can last weeks if not months after the change has taken place. William Bridges calls this the process the 'transition'. As leaders we need to recognise the elements people are letting go of, or leaving behind, to enable them to make the change in the first place. We then need to provide encouragement to make the change in small steps, so that they feel supported whilst learning something new. Once the change has happened it's down to us as leaders to reinforce the actions, attitudes and behaviours that we'd like to see and recognise our people when they demonstrate these traits.

**We all say communication is important** but how many organisations do you go to where the leaders feel as if they've given the 'all important' message but those around them don't seem to know what's going on? When you give a message, however clear, you need to recognise that it won't all be absorbed. Each person will pick out something that is important to them, the WIIFM (What's in it for me?). And because it's vital that everyone receives and understands the same message, it means that you will have to increase the amount of communication you make as well as the format in which you give it and then check to see how it's been received. Don't fall into the category of thinking 'I've got nothing else to say'. If you leave a gap in communicating your people will fill the void with their own words and more often than not, jump to the wrong conclusions.

It's also important to realise that communication is a two way process and the lifeblood of any change programme. It maintains energy and momentum throughout a period of change, so make sure it's at the top of your agenda.

**You're ahead of the pack** - As their leader, you're often a little ahead of your people in the knowledge of the impending change. It may only be five minutes or it could be as much as five weeks or months, but remember that this is the first time your people are hearing the message. Even if you think the change is welcome or has little impact on your people, you need to be aware that they may see it in a different light to you and may react differently to you. Think back to when you first heard the message – what was your initial reaction? With this in mind, you may be able to anticipate some of their concerns and reactions and prepare for them in your communication. It will show that you have thought through the consequences of how the change will affect them positively and negatively and help them to understand what you see the next steps being as well as the timescales you are working towards.

**Even when it's positive change, we still travel through all the stages of the change curve.** No matter how small or large the change is, you need to go through all elements of the 'change curve' before you have totally accepted the change. And of course the smaller the impact of the change for you, the faster your journey will be through the curve. On any one day we all experience various stages of the different changes in our life. So when you see someone reacting differently in your team to a communication that you expected to go very smoothly, you may want to investigate further. It may be the final straw to an already huge amount of change that the person is already experiencing in their life.

**Spend time on the issues you can manage and influence** because it's too easy to get stuck on the things we can't do rather than focus on what we can do. Stephen Covey, author of *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (amongst many other titles) introduces us to the concept of Circles of Concern and Influence, which is a great tool to help you direct your time and attention. If you sat down with your people and asked them what was concerning them about the impending change you could help them to focus on things that they can do to move forward. Try this exercise with them. Get them to write down their issue and then look at activities that they have in their control, those that they can influence and highlight what is out of their control. It will help them to see and feel that they have many more options available to them.

**Resistance is good.** We often view resistance as a negative trait; a bit of a trouble maker. However there are some really positive points to resistance. As a leader, if you experience resistance from your team, it shows you that your people are taking the change seriously. They are thinking how it will impact them individually, as a team and as an organisation. It also helps you to understand where they are on the change curve! You can also use resistance as your 'steadier'. Use your people's resistance to understand their perceived issues and concerns and then work through them together.

Change is the certainly the norm for us all now. The more fleet of foot we become at embracing, leading and managing change the quicker our organisations will adapt. Engage

with your people, let them know what it is you are trying to achieve and they will help you make it happen.

If you found these messages struck a chord and you'd like to find out more about our change workshops, please email Jane or contact us via our website [www.kclimited.org.uk](http://www.kclimited.org.uk).

### **About the author**



Jane Hirst is a consultant with KC Change Consultants. She has gained her passion for working with people over the last twenty five years and truly believes that a business achieves its potential through its people. Having led Operational areas as well as HR functions including Learning and Development, Culture and Internal Communications, Jane has not only experienced what makes people tick, but has also enabled them to become more self aware fostering their own resourcefulness and resilience throughout the process.

Her success is attributable to her ability to develop cultures that achieve their strategy with the full engagement of their people. Whilst having excellent man management skills and being able to effect change within the front line, she also has the gravitas to influence and manage change within senior management teams.

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