IMPLEMENT
CHANGE

10 STEPS FOR EFFECTIVE LEADERS

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IMPLEMENTING CHANGE EFFECTIVLEY

Managing change effectively is an important skill for all leaders in a society where rapid change has become the norm and new technologies are continually being introduced.

However, research shows that many, if not most, change efforts fail to achieve their objectives, with many leaders falling into common pitfalls that hinder them from delivering their original objectives.

Change management can be a slow, painful and expensive process with many people finding change difficult to handle and may therefore resist or try to hinder the process.

A combination of patience and firmness will help leaders handle change programmes effectively, especially where they are seeking to change attitudes and behaviour. This requires an informed and thoughtful approach to address both 'hard' logistical issues and 'softer' people issues.

This checklist aims to support you with 10 steps to implementing change effectively. I have assumed that a sound business case for change has already been made, and that the scope of the change, its 'why' and its objectives have already been clearly defined and carefully thought through.

Good luck!

Suzanne Sallam

Before you begin to embark on a programme of change, you must have a clear strategy based on the objectives and outline plans which have already been set. The details of the implementation will depend on the desired outcomes and on the approach to be taken, whether this is to be top-down, bottom-up, or a mix of both.

Decide whether to introduce change by division, by department, or organisation-wide. Bear in mind that a 'big bang' approach is not normally advisable as most organisations only have a finite capacity to cope with change.

When deciding which approach to take, it is also important to think about where the key influencers are and how communication channels will work.

Remember, your change programme is unlikely to be the only corporate initiative underway at any given point in time. Make sure that the strategy and goals behind the programme are consistent with those of other organisational initiatives, and that all are pointing in the same direction.

Make sure that employees receive consistent messages about the organisation's core values and beliefs in relation to all the initiative.

Treat change in the same way as you would handle any project or programme. Set your key objectives, milestones and monitor progress in order to keep the programme on schedule and on budget.

Don't assume that change will necessarily be wholly successful or painless. Undertake a risk analysis and make any necessary contingency plans. Keep track of the costs associated with implementing change and ensure that a contingency budget is in place.

Aim to set a finite time span for the implementation, regardless of whether it is being introduced incrementally or simultaneously across all divisions. The timetable must be stretching enough to convey urgency, but attainable enough to be motivating and realistic.

Establish ground rules for the programme team, particularly with regard to information sharing, decision-making and reporting. The team responsible for the changes can act as a source of advice and consultancy when necessary, but line managers should be empowered to determine how to implement the change in their areas of responsibility, in accordance with its overall goals.

Manage your senior management well and lay out how progress will be monitored and whether stage reviews are necessary.

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The importance of good communications to the success of change programmes cannot be underestimated. Good communications should be based on careful stakeholder analysis to ensure the right messages get to the right stakeholders through the best channels.

Identify your stakeholders, map them carefully, and then communicate with each stakeholder group in a manner that will encourage their positive engagement with the aims of the programme.

Do all you can to ensure that employees at every level of the organisation understand the reasons for change and know what will be happening, when it will be happening and what is expected of them. Often, it is uncertainty rather than change that really worries employees. Provide as much information as possible and quash inaccurate rumours as soon as they arise.

Don't assume that everything is clear to everyone after a single message. Communication should be ongoing. Provide opportunities for employees to seek clarification, where necessary and give regular updates and progress reports.

Make sure to report on early wins and celebrate successes.

All change is stressful and it can be especially stressful if it is imposed without consultation or adequate communication. This will have a detrimental effect on how well change is adopted and sustained in the longer-term.

There are, of course, instances when change has to be imposed to address an issue, but mechanisms can be introduced to facilitate the process. Fear of the unknown rather than change itself is often the major stress factor but its impact can be reduced by being as open as possible about the consequences of change.

Make sure you have a strong change champion team that can support your delivery and drive participation and buy-in with the wider teams.

Your change champion team will not necessarily include top management, but will benefit from a board level sponsor.

The team should include key stakeholders involved in designing and delivering the change, as well as those affected by it. This team has a key role to sharing the benefits of the changes and communicating them effectively in their own parts of the organisation.

Individual employees must feel they can take ownership of the change programme as it evolves. This is much easier when they can personalise it and relate it to their own work and team.

Ensure that line managers are able to present the corporate case for change in terms which every individual in the company can relate to.

Consider what change will mean for each individual in terms of: status (job title, budget responsibility); habits (changes to working time, new colleagues); beliefs and attitudes (move to a customer focus); and behaviour (new working practices).

Changes to working practices will need input from the HR department at the planning stage and may require specific change activity or union consultation, for example.

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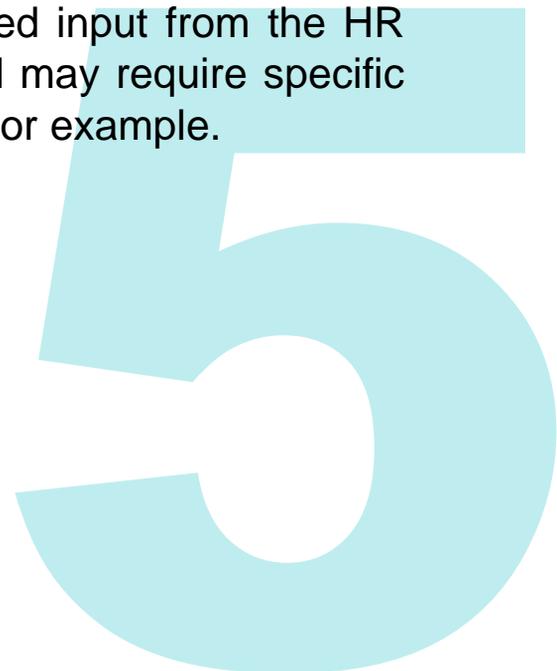
BE PREPARED FOR CONFLICT AND MANAGE IT
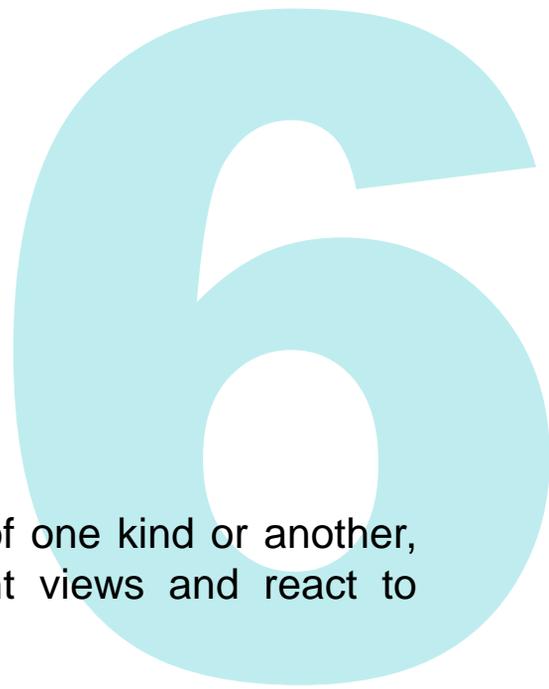
Change usually brings about conflict of one kind or another, simply because people have different views and react to stressful situations in different ways.

Try to bring conflict to the surface rather than allow it to fester; tackle it by examining and analysing it with those involved and seeking ways to resolve the issues.

Conflict can often be put to positive use. For example, open discussion and clarification can lead to the resolution of difficulties and the introduction of improvements.

When conflict cannot be resolved through explanation and discussion, you will have to negotiate and persuade. This means avoid getting into any entrenched positions yourself, and working out how to influence others if they dig their heels in too deeply.

It also means finding ways to reach agreement on the best way forward without major loss of face for either side, while being mindful not to prejudice the underlying change initiative.

MOTIVATE YOUR EMPLOYEES

Sustained change requires very high levels of motivation and this will be difficult without strong relationships of trust and respect across the organisation.

Recognise that employees need to feel valued, to have their efforts and achievements recognised, and to be developed and challenged.

Be aware that different people are motivated by different types of reward, and monetary ones are not always the answer.

Utilise the power of the Band Wagon effect and continue to share the successes no matter how small.

Use your change champions effectively and explore opportunities to covert some of the less supportive team members into champions by increasing their scope of responsibility as part of your change team.

DRIVE A CULTURE OF LEARNING

View the change programme as a learning process. Give attention to developing both technical and interpersonal skills and integrate this into corporate training and development programmes.

Specific training to enable change, such as providing an induction into new systems and technologies may also be needed.

Change also provides an opportunity to build a culture of learning into the organisation. Creating goals and plans that everyone can subscribe to will enable everyone to benefit.

Turn learning into something that people want to buy into, rather than a chore – help people to feel the 'buzz' of discovery and involvement in new developments. Set an example by updating the skills of top management.

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Incremental change is a long process, consisting of very small and, often, unnoticeable changes in behaviour and attitudes.

Accept that change may be a stop/start process. Watch out for signs that initial enthusiasm is flagging and the pace of change is slowing to an unacceptable rate. Plan for this and develop strategies to create a sense of purpose and urgency and give fresh impetus.

To gear the organisation up for renewed efforts after setbacks, seek innovative ways to remind staff of the overall case for change and to reinforce its value to them. A set of quick wins and visible success points is a useful framework for achieving this. Leading indicators of potential benefits are also helpful in maintaining interest and demonstrating progress.

Think about how to address problems which have prevented progress in the past. Ask yourself what and who is preventing progress, and who can help to unblock the situation. Your analysis of stakeholder groups, and of their varying interests and perspectives should help you gain an understanding of the forces in play. Aim to break the code of silence that engenders organisational protectionism and maintains the status quo.

Monitor and evaluate the results of the change programme against the goals and milestones established in the original plan. Are these goals still appropriate or do they need to be revised in the light of experience?

Existing performance measures may not be compatible with the changes being introduced and may hinder change unless they are revised. Check that all the measures used are consistent with organisational vision and goals, and if not, re-design them.

Be honest in your assessment of progress. If there is a real divergence between the planned goals and reality, admit this and take corrective action without delay. Be open about failure and involve employees in setting new targets or devising new measures.

In some circumstances it may be necessary to engage an internal or external change agent as they will have the skills and abilities needed to facilitate a difficult process of change.

Organisations that are otherwise good at what they do may nonetheless find it difficult to manage change effectively.

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