

# Fact-File 25: Leading Change... Every manager's business



Extract from The Learning-Centred Leadership Series: Module 3

## The Business of Change

Change is now a core part of every manager's business. Big or small, the ability of businesses to manage change and make it happen rapidly and smoothly is one of the keys to keeping up your competitive advantage.

Your business is constantly changing. Whether it's imposed on you or you introduce the change – a better procedure or service improvement, a new product line or piece of technology – change means doing things differently.

Change isn't a 'choice' anymore – something to do on top of your 'normal' management job. No matter what your functional responsibilities are, all managers now need to be change leaders. As the key change driver, you play a critical role in:

- Alerting others when change is needed
- Working out what needs changing
- Planning and designing the change
- Preparing people for the change
- Creating commitment to action the change
- Leading people through the change

## Building Change Skills...

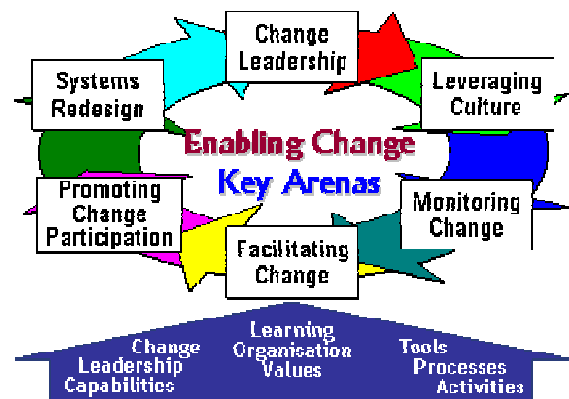
Like all good managers, you probably run things well in normal operational mode. What managers often forget though is that *changing things well involves learning new skills* that are outside the usual range of management competencies.

So what do you have to do to be good at this 'leading change' game? Here's a list of 6 key practice areas for enabling change:

- Facilitating change** You need to help people meet together to plan change, discuss it and carry out various activities like collecting ideas or deciding on what things need changing.
- Leveraging culture:** Very little changes unless the work culture it's happening in gets looked at. Old habits die hard and people's attachment to the current work culture often gets in the way of changes you want to make.
- Promoting participative change** means getting staff involved in making the changes. It's a fact. Change is more likely to succeed if you involve others in doing it rather than force it on them or try to do it all by yourself.

**Building change capability:** People are more able to change if you give them tools and show them how to. Not just new technical skills to work in the new way but also skills to learn how to change (eg. *how to map a work process*).

**Monitoring change:** This means thinking of ways to tell whether improvements have really taken place – indicators to measure whether your change actions have made a real difference.



**Systems Redesign:** When things change, old work systems, processes and procedures need to change too. A big block to change is not redesigning systems and structures that are no longer in line with or even work against change.

## 5 Questions for Change...

Businesses often launch into change without planning a solid foundation first. There's no single, all-purpose model for how to change but this *5 Questions Model* can help you plan and carry out any kind of change you're thinking of.

### 1. Where are we now?

Most change efforts start with a sense that something isn't working – that things could be better or different. This question is the fact-finding phase. It stops you *jumping to change solutions* and gets you to:

- Analyse what's really happening now
- Identify problems in the current system
- Think through who's affected by this change
- Collect data on current work problems
- Talk to people about what's been occurring

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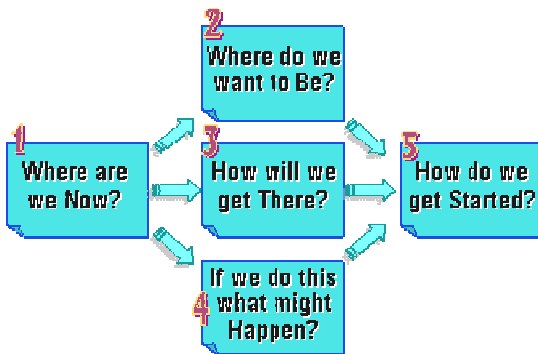


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## 2. Where do we want to be?

This question is the visioning phase – why you're changing and how things can be better. You need to:

- Develop a shared vision – one that educates, inspires, awareness-raises and secures the buy-in you need for change to work.
- Clarify benefits and costs you expect and develop a clear business case for change.
- Set specific change goals and timeframes and work out ways to involve people in developing a shared change vision.



## 3. How will we get there?

In this design phase, you need to plan steps and strategies with others to take you from *where you are now* to *where you want to be*. This means:

- Forming a change team and setting clear change specifications.
- Thinking up ways to get lots of others on-board and meaningfully involved with the change.
- Developing different change options and running ideas sessions with staff.
- Making up a detailed change plan to follow and Talk over new methods and procedures.
- Anticipating obstacles, overcoming resistance and removing blockages.

## 4. If we do this what might happen?

This isn't just a question of benefits. Some changes end up making things worse because we don't take into account unforeseen flow-ons that can have big, negative consequences.

Actions to take include:

- Think through each change option to ensure these will give the outcomes you want.
- Analyse risks of unforeseen consequences.
- Develop alternative plans for when some changes inevitably stray off track.
- Identify current operations the changes will impact and what resources will be needed.
- Run some try-outs and pilot tests if you can.

## 5. How do we get started?

This is the last question in our model but the first you may ask. It's the *doing* bit of the change-work – where you start making the changes you said you were going to. Planning change is easy. Putting it into action is more challenging.

Many changes fail the crucial start-up phase so you need to put a lot of time into this to get your change effort off the ground if you're going to reap returns later. Actions to take include:

- Train staff beforehand in the new work ways
- Educate your change team and team-build
- Find ways to involve staff in the changes
- Have a communication plan for the change
- Map the work processes linked to changes
- Measure what's happening now to see how much you've changed/improved later

## Making Change Work...

There's a raft full of reasons why some changes succeed and others fail. Lack of time is the biggest block. If you haven't got time to plan, consult and do change well, your people will pick up the message that it's not that important.

John Kotter names eight other errors business makes – a handy check-list if you see your change effort going sideways. They also convert into eight things to make change succeed.

### 1. Create Change Urgency:

Change is hard to do if people are complacent – when they downplay problems or dismiss them altogether. Creating a sense of urgency for your change drives people out of their comfort zones.

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For example, inform them of lost customers, competitor threats, crises or consequences of not changing. If you don't keep up pressure, people put off making the change or hope it will just go away.



adapted from John Kotter, *Leading Change*

## 2. Create a Coalition:

No matter how energetic or committed you are personally, you can't lead change single-handed. You need to form a team of committed supporters and empower them to help you lead the change. If they're influential, they model the changes expected and others will follow their lead.

## 3. Develop a change vision:

A clear vision is a powerful tool for change. It helps people see where the change is going and how things can be better. It also channels change into committed action.

## 4. Communicate the change vision – over and over again:

A one-time bit of communication won't cut it if you want people to buy-in to the change. Tell your vision story consistently, constantly and creatively. Keep talking up your vision and don't be surprised if it takes a few goes to sink in.

## 5. Empower lots of others to act:

Involve staff in change decisions and listen to their ideas on how to do it. Encourage people to question, test out new ways and improve on your original change ideas. This means they're buying into the change – and sometimes, if you're open to it, their ideas will improve on your original plan.

## 6. Get short-term wins:

Change doesn't happen overnight or all at once. Find ways to get runs on the board so people see they're changing and encourage them to want to

change more. Without this, they'll lose heart about ever being able to change.

## 7. Don't declare victory too soon:

Be wary of assuming your change is now in place and everything can go back to normal. Change takes time and things can easily backslide. Consolidate on your gains and aim to produce even more change.

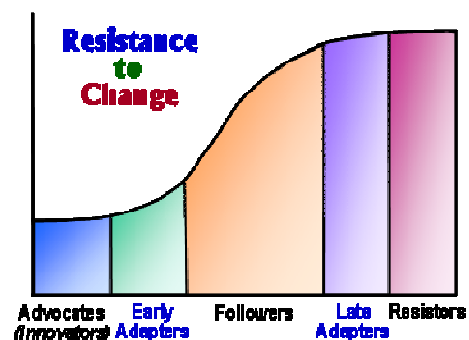
## 8. Anchor change in the culture:

Change won't take if people still stick to the old routines. Identify old things that need discarding – the 'reinforcers' of current ways we do things – and replace them quickly and decisively with new systems and behaviours people can start following.

## Handling Resistance

When it comes to change, one thing that's always at the front of people's minds is: *'What do we do with the change resisters?'* Here are a few ideas:

**Expect resistance and persevere:** A 'no-change' mentality is not uncommon. We all crave comfort, stability and resist change. The unpredictability of change unnerves many people. Denial, resistance, frustration and even a sense of helplessness are normal reactions we all experience.



**Spend more time with change supporters and early adapters:** Don't dwell only on the change resisters. Accept that people respond differently to change. Some embrace it, and adapt early. Others take longer. It takes time for change to sink in. People become attached to the old, familiar way they do things – even if they're more time-consuming, cumbersome, costly or ineffective.

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☑ **Make it OK to talk about resistance:** Don't turn resisters into change pariahs. Listen openly to people's fears of change. Even if you don't emotionally or intellectually agree with them, show empathy: listen to their views, acknowledge their issues, connect with their feelings and enquire about what will help them change.

☑ **Keep people focussed on the vision:** Put around lots of information about change. Involve people in change conversations and keep stressing the vision and benefits, but not to you – to them. Talk up how things are changing and give recognition for the change efforts they make

Organisations don't change, *people* do – one at a time.

You can't force people to change. You *can* change systems, structures, even the environment around them – but not them. They have to do that. Don't ignore how important relationship-building is for handling resistance.

The Change Forum runs a practical, 2-day change clinic for emerging leaders as well as more experienced managers who want to make change work. For a full Brochure on **Learning to Lead Change - Module 3** in The Learning-Centred Leadership Series...

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"I found *Learning to Lead Change* a very positive, interactive and participative experience. I've participated in a number of other workshops around change and what set this one apart was that it was very relevant and practical - providing the necessary knowledge and tools required for managers implementing change and managing the results of change. I'd recommend it to all managers." *Deb Ison, Manager - Disability Services Qld*

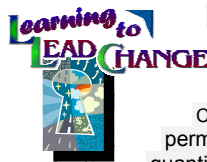
"I'd certainly recommend this program to others. I enjoyed the structure and content, which provided a solid overview of change and was very relevant to current issues in my workplace. The guide is an excellent resource that can be picked up and used when required. Good sequence and quite accessible. I will definitely be using some of the tools in my workplace." *Jeremy Audas - Manager Disability Services Qld*

## Leading People through Change

Change is not an event. You can't just call a staff meeting and tell people to change. You have to actively lead them through it. Some managers take a hard-nosed approach. '*Here's what I want changed – do it this way.*' While this sounds quick and easy, the old command-and-control approach simply doesn't work if you want people to commit to change.

When you intimidate, threaten or coerce people, you only get temporary, outward change. Quick-fix change looks attractive but slowly everything reverses back to the way it was. Change is a process that takes planning, perseverance, participation and communication – lots of it.

**Leading successful change is one of the most critical competencies you'll ever need to learn** to build your business future – to have the ability to identify when change is needed, plan how best to go about it, manage to make it happen rapidly and, at the same time, reduce uncertainty and convert anxiety, denial and resistance into constructive change energy.



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"Thanks for a great workshop - one of the best I've attended over the years. Course structure and content was excellent. The program helped identify a change plan and I'm applying the tools right here and now. My workplace and my own development will gain from the time and money spent (attending) this program. Keep up the great effective work" *Anne Barradeen, Project Manager - The Bremer Institute of TAFE*

"I was extremely surprised and impressed with the usefulness of this program. Well-paced with a good variety of activities and an extremely useful toolkit, that has already been well used within my faculty area. Thanks for running such a useful workshop." *Shirley Booth, Head of Maths - Elanora State High School*