



Managing Change - Your Key to Success in the 21st Century!

Man's base of knowledge is increasing at a logarithmic rate; in the 1900's it doubled every five years, and after the year 2000 man's total knowledge will double every 20 months!

As man's base of knowledge grows, the pace of change also increases. A recent survey showed that the average worker processes 24 times more information now than just 10 years ago!

The person who is expert at managing change will have a distinct advantage in the 21st century. If you manage change and lead others to manage change, then you have the tools necessary to be a leader in your industry. If, however, you have a high "RC" factor (resistance to change) and are incapable of inspiring others to change you will be left at the side of the road as others speed past you.

If you don't believe the pace of change is increasing, consider the following:

From the beginning of time until the early 1900's man's primary mode of transportation was on foot, or astride a burro or horse. Suddenly, the horseless carriage burst onto the scene, and man all but gave up walking, and his favorite steed was put out to pasture. Automobiles have become interactive computers with their passengers capable of covering in minutes the distance covered in a day by the horse.

But automobiles are nothing compared to the history of flight. Man went from the historic flight of the Wright brothers in 1903 to supersonic flight by 1947 to space probes in 1959 to the first manned space flight in 1961 to manned shuttle flights by 1981.

The pencil, as we know it today, wasn't created until 1564 in England. The eraser wasn't added until the mid-1700's. The typewriter came along in 1867. Now we do most of our work on computers that, thankfully, have a built-in thesaurus and spell-checker. When we're done, we print



out our reports and graphics on laser printers and duplicate them on high-speed copying machines, or simply email them to coworkers.

It wasn't until the late 1700's when microbes were first identified using microscopes. Now if you have a problem with your heart you have a chance to get a recycled one from a donor, or perhaps a metallic replacement. If you have a tumor, you have a magnetic resonance scan which can take pictures of the tissue deep inside your body in measures of tiny fractions of an inch. Then a surgeon goes in with a light carrying tube connected to a video camera and with a laser they burn away the offensive tissue.

Think for a moment about these few changes and how the majority of change has occurred in the last 50 years. Entire industries no longer exist that had been major players in the world economy for hundreds of years. Entire new industries have developed in their place.

Increasing knowledge increases the rate of change. The life cycle of industries is compressing at a rate that is inversely proportional to the rate of change. That is, the faster the rate of change the shorter the industry's life becomes. Dinosaurs are extinct because they failed to adapt. Is your company a dinosaur? Are you?

Anatomy of Change

Understanding the human animal's reaction to change gives us some insight as to how to manage change more effectively in an organization. First of all, remember that change invariably creates stress. Even though we initiate change that is designed to simplify systems we usually have stress manifested as *resistance to change*. Change that complicates systems is almost guaranteed to meet with resistance and increased employee stress.

Author Ken Blanchard identifies seven human dynamics of change. These seven points give us some understanding as to why we act the way we do when change occurs.

1. *People undergoing change feel awkward and self-conscious.* Change requires that people think and/or act differently than in the past. Remember your first day on the job? Did you feel incredibly self-conscious? If you did, it was probably because you were surrounded by people who knew more than you did, and that made you feel insecure. Change makes us self-conscious because we are uncomfortable with our ability to succeed.

2. *People initially focus on what they have to give up.* People undergoing change may feel that they are giving up something in the old system. The list might include old friends, resources, clearly defined roles, etc. People need to deal with the feelings before they can effectively deal with change. Have you ever moved your office? If you have you may have had people complaining six months later that even though the new office is nicer, larger, and more convenient, that it isn't



(fill in the blank). In this case, people may have given up familiar surroundings, favorite luncheon spots, had to learn new routes to work, etc.

3. People feel alone even if everyone else is going through the same change. Have you ever heard the “Why me” complaint? Surrounded by 100 other people who are being moved, relocated, or job descriptions changed, there will be some who say, “Why me?” Reducing the cause of “Why me’s?” will increase your ability to effect change in your organization.

4. People can handle only so much change. Remember, change increases stress, and while stress increases productivity up to a point, too much stress can immobilize a work force. Too much change, whether several small changes or one significant change, can immobilize a work force.

5. People are at different readiness levels for change. People react to change depending on how they think it will affect them personally. If they think the change will benefit them they will usually be anxious to change, they will put forth ideas, and are willing to lend their support. Those who see change as being detrimental to them personally will likely have a high “RC” factor. They can only be brought along with the change kicking and screaming.

6. People are concerned that they don’t have enough resources. Often when change occurs, people assume they will be asked to do more, and they will not have adequate resources to complete the job satisfactorily. Again, people are concerned with how change affects them, so those who see their jobs as staying the same or getting easier will support change, versus those who see change as a major increase in job responsibility without commensurate increases in resources.

7. If you take the pressure off, people resort to their old behavior. This is particularly true when the change is significant and or when the change complicates systems. For example, a significant change that makes the job easier is a change that will endure. But a change that seems to make the job more difficult is one that will take continual reinforcement to make lasting change.

Moses & Change

Imagine, Moses is out there tending his sheep, and suddenly he sees a bush burning that isn’t consumed by the fire. A few minutes later God is explaining to Moses how Moses is to lead Israel out of Egypt after 400 years of slavery. Sometimes leaders initiate change; sometimes it is thrust upon them. After a lot of negotiating (plagues, famine, pestilence) with Pharaoh, Moses finally secures the release of the nation Israel. So, Moses set out as the former slave shepherd leading a nation of 600,000 men plus women and children to the Promised Land.



Despite all the miracles they have just seen the Israelites waste no time complaining to Moses about the conditions in the desert. They would rather go back to slavery than risk their lives getting to their own land! Sometimes people undergoing change can see the benefit of the change, but they don't want to endure the pain and suffering that may be required to achieve the end result. They would rather go back to the "old way" of doing things than work through the change in order to have a better future.

Over the next two weeks, the people complained about the food and the water. They kept thinking about all the meat and vegetables they had back in Egypt. Even in the midst of change people will complain bitterly that the "old way" was better.

Moses, at his father-in-law's suggestion, set up judges to hear the complaints and settle the disputes among the people. Only the most difficult cases were to be brought to Moses. Leaders who are managing change must not get so involved in the details that they lose sight of the vision. On the other hand, leaders need to stay in touch with employees so that they understand what the people are going through.

Moses then receives instructions from God about the way the Israelites are to live (their laws). Moses gives the word of the law to the people and goes back up the mountain. As soon as he leaves them, they begin to make golden calves to worship. Despite the miracles of the parting of the Red Sea, their provision of food and water, and their military victories these people left unsupervised started worshipping false gods. Change, especially significant change, requires constant supervision. Monitoring the organization's progress on an on-going basis is the only way you can be sure to stay on track. Don't initiate a major change with an announcement and then walk away from the people and expect them to manage the change on their own, they need leadership!

It took 40 years for the Israelites to make it to the Promised Land. Most of the changes you initiate will not take so long to complete. But you should be prepared to go the distance to implement your changes. When Moses set out from Egypt, he probably figured the journey would take 2-3 weeks, not 40 years. A leader who initiates significant change will have to deal with bitterness, complaining, unforeseen obstacles, and a myriad of other problems, but if the vision is clear, change can be achieved.

Getting Started

In his book, *Teaching the Elephant to Dance*, James Belasco identified a three-part strategic approach to empowering change in an organization: re-position products and services to build a competitive advantage; have talented people to execute the new strategies, and deploy organizational resources that tightly focus on the new strategies.



Here are eleven steps you can take to promote the acceptance of change in your organization:

1. Knowledge.

When the pace of change was slow, managers could afford to “spring” new ideas on their employees and expect them to work through the situation. Today, and more so in the future, managers who want to help their employees manage change must think through changes first. Managers need to gather relevant facts to make an informed decision, and they need to be willing to share this information with employees.

2. Objectivity.

Sometimes we get so caught up in the greatness of our new ideas that we lose objectivity. Make sure you consider how the changes will play on your “home field.” What works very well for one industry or company may not work at all in yours.

3. Plan.

Plan out how the change will affect your company. This is much more complicated than it might first seem. Recently a major retailer who gets hundreds of calls per day updated their phone system. When people came to work Monday morning, there was the new system. No training had been done, even for the phone operators, and the system had not been tested. Even though the system was easy to use most of the employees had a high “RC” factor because no one had thought through the effect on the employees’ work lives. Had they thoroughly tested the system and provided some training ahead of time most users would have probably welcomed the phones on Monday morning, instead of wanting to throw them up against the wall!

4. Outages.

One of the most important aspects of managing change is for management to understand how the changed system is different from the present system and to communicate those differences to employees. People are not concerned with how something will be the same; they are concerned with the unknown; what will be different, and how it will affect them.

A word of caution here about major changes. If the change is significant and there are many differences be careful not to overload people with information. It will be easiest for the employees if you give them smaller amounts of change information over a longer period of time.



The exception to this is when the life of the organization is threatened. If major changes are needed that will affect most employees in a significant manner; then the best approach is to try to build a team through full disclosure.

5. Nucleus.

It is a good idea to enlist the aid of a nucleus of people from different disciplines who will be affected by the change. This group should be a task force of unbiased, highly visible, and well-respected individuals in the organization. Lay out the change idea, describe the plans to implement the change, define the outages, and ask the group to provide their points of view. Based on their input you will be able to refine your implementation plans and understand the outages better.

6. Eye-witness.

If the change you are considering is significant and the system is in use elsewhere then consider having the nucleus group visit the site to see the system in use first-hand. This eye-witness account will be valuable for three reasons. 1) the nucleus group will see first-hand how the system works, and how it can help your company. 2) they will be able to refine the system even more which will put you in a better position to implement the change successfully. 3) this nuclear will become stronger supporters of the change which will be invaluable as you begin to promote the change in the balance of your organization.

7. Membership.

Once the nucleus has refined implementation plans based on their eye-witness experience, then it is time to present the change to the organization. The key here is to present, not announce. Present means that you present to the employees and listen to their feedback with an ear toward making the change plan even more effective. Announce means that you have already decided to move ahead with your current plans and you really don't care how the organization feels. You cannot fool your organization; they will know whether you are presenting or announcing, so be honest with them.

8. Trial.

Trial is especially important if the change is significant or involves many employees. Small scale trials allow one more opportunity to refine the system so that when you implement the change broadscale, it will be done more effectively.

9. Feedback.

Continual observation and evaluation during the trial period is a must. The whole point of the trial period is to discover all of the potential difficulties and work them out before the change is implemented full scale. Seek feedback from the people involved in the trial, observe the trial



carefully, and provide continuous feedback to the trial organization about their results. Once the change plan has been implemented the feedback process must be maintained to insure that the change is being implemented as intended and that the intended results are being obtained.

10. Expansion.

Once the “bugs” have been worked out in the trial phase it is time to expand the change to the entire organization; begin by explaining the plan, defining the outages, and sharing the trial experience.

11. Re-apply.

During each of the previous ten steps, you and your organization will have gained significant new knowledge. This knowledge must be cataloged for future use. An idea that was discarded as unusable in this change implementation may be perfect for the next change. Search out all gained knowledge with an eye toward how you may re-apply that knowledge to future situations.

One Final Thought

Change is implemented in groups, but it occurs one person at a time. Remember that change creates stress because of the perceived change to the individual. A change that creates little perceived change will be met openly, a change that is significant will likely be met with high resistance. A perceptive manager understands that change happens to individuals and will adapt to help individuals see and accept the need for change.