CHANGE MANAGEMENT - QUICK TIPS

Change is hard. Here, we discuss some possible responses to change, why change is hard, and provide some ideas for successfully managing a change initiative. Change is managed best when you plan well, prepare your unit, execute, reward, and reinforce. Remember to pick your battles. Focus on the changes that really matter.

There are Three Kinds of Change

1. *Change people want.* Sometimes people recognize a problem exists or process is broken. While no change is easy, this is the easiest because most people will be cooperative, even excited about the change.

2. *Change people do not want even though they believe will be good for them.* Sometimes people recognize a need for change, but don't want to. Examples: Learning to use a new research software package or technique to remain competitive at the best journals. Here, unit leaders need to encourage the change, but resistance is usually minimal to moderate.

3. *Change people do not want and do not believe in.* This is the most challenging situation. Examples: A bureaucratic university policy or procedure change that addresses issues unit members believe is irrelevant to them or a waste of their time. Here, resistance is high and the onus is on the leader to "sell" and encourage the change.

John Kotter's Eight-Stage Change Process

1. *Create a sense of urgency.* When you introduce the change effort, make it urgent and important if possible. Habits are not easily broken; the sooner and more urgently, and more you focus on changing the habits, the more quickly the new desired behaviors or processes will take root.

2. *Build a coalition.* Find or develop, gather, and mobilize those who believe in the change to assist you in implementation, modeling, and encouraging others to adopt the change.

3. *Create a vision for change.* Make the change a part of the vision. Tie the change to unit and institutional missions, not your own career. Change for the sake of change is disruptive and not easily adopted. Clearly articulating the need for or benefits of a change and how the change improves the unit's contribution to the larger institution increases the likelihood of change adoption.

4. *Communicate a plan for change.* Change attempted with no implementation plan is likely to fail, making future change initiatives more difficult. Unit members are more likely to engage a change initiative when they see there is a clear plan. The plan should provide a sense of the role and contribution of each to the change effort. Role ambiguity that arises from no plan, a bad plan, or a poorly communicated plan decreases the chance of a successful change initiative.

5. *Eliminate obstacles to change.* Especially as a unit leader, you have a responsibility to eliminate reasons for people to avoid change adoption. Eliminating obstacles to your unit members' success is the leaders' job in general, not just when facilitating change.

6. *Create small wins.* Identify milestones along the way to full implementation of the change effort. Celebrate achievements. Thank your unit members for their efforts. Acknowledge their difficulties and struggles in a sincere way.

7. *Build on change.* Self- and team-efficacy research shows that success breeds success. Start with small things that are easier and build up to the larger more difficult and complicated change initiatives.

8. *Make change a part of culture.* As technology and society change increases in pace, institutions must keep up to remain relevant and provide value to society. Research shows that organizations that embrace change as a fact of life are more creative, successful, and productive than those that do not. A culture that embraces change makes any change initiative easier.

Source: Kotter, J. P. (1996). *Leading Change.* Boston, MA: Harvard Business. School Press.

Responses to Change

- *Enthusiastic support*: Some change is received enthusiastically. Examples: a new travel policy that reduces paperwork; providing staff support for reimbursement paperwork; increasing the stipend for PhD students so you can attract higher quality candidates; hiring teaching faculty to teach less desirable courses; introducing a competitive research funds policy.

- *Compliance*: Some change is acceptable; it does not cause excitement or is not resisted. Examples: the building or a room in it is named for a donor about whom no one has any strong feelings except to be pleased in a remote way that the unit received resources; the main lecture hall is refurbished with new AV that is functional, albeit with a learning curve that requires some training; the trees outside the building acquire a fungus and must all be removed; a new keycard system is installed that changes building access procedures.

- *Passive resistance*: This kind of change is very dangerous. Active resistors are easy to detect. Passive resistance undermines change efforts in more subtle ways. Examples: the institution changes its branding and letterhead and some people drag their feet or never get around to changing their websites, presentations, or document templates; department members are asked to help with a recruitment by contacting and being welcoming to someone holding an offer from the unit and do not or write lukewarm responses or provide undermine information; a quorum is required for certain actions and needed members do not attend.

- *Active resistance*: Some unit members may be vocal against change and actively work against it, even to the point of sabotage. Examples: members of the community leak confidential documents, go to the press, violate the confidentiality of P&T actions, share information that was intended to be held only within the faculty with students and encourage their protests; vocally oppose a funded project with the sponsor or donor.

In your unit, you may experience all of these in a given change initiative.

Remember that resistance to change isn't always bad. Listen to your dissenters. They may have valuable input. Vocal employees who challenge change initiatives can force answers to hard questions. Devils' advocates can ward off the dangers of group-think, where unit members know a change initiative is moving the unit in the wrong direction and avoid voicing their opinion for fear of standing apart from the group. Organizational justice research shows that dissenters are more likely to cooperate if they believe their opinions are heard. Your more committed unit members are often the most vocal precisely because they care. This is a good thing! Cooperative unit members may seem ideal for change implementation, yet they can be among the more uncommitted and disconnected unit members. *Do not automatically dismiss dissenting opinions.*

> RESISTANCE TO CHANGE
> Isn't always bad

Understanding Why Change is Hard

- *Required learning*: Change often requires learning new information and/or skills. Especially when the change affects ancillary or minimal aspects of a role, people can be reticent to invest time and energy in change.

- *Habits must be broken*: Habits happen automatically. Change requires abandoning a programmed decision and re-training for new automatic decisions. This requires time and cognitive effort, which can draw energy away from other things. Changing habits can be a time-consuming and frustrating experience.

- *Power change*:Change can reduce power for some and increase it for others. Procedural changes may remove someone from a position of influence. Old knowledge and skills that put people in positions of power may become no longer relevant. Those losing power often resist that loss. Some may resist change because it increases the power of others even where it does not have a personal effect on them.

- *Personality*: Change aversion can be a personality trait. Some people are less open to new ideas and experiences than others.

- *Fear*: Fear of uncertainty and failure often accompany change. How will this change work? Will it really be better? Is all this effort really worth it? What if we can't make these changes? What if we make a mess? Questions of this sort exemplify the fear that can accompany change.

- *Personal cost*: Change can impose personal costs, which can range from trivial to grand. For example, moving offices away from nearby parking to the other side of campus, or to a satellite campus, can increase commuting costs. Changing journal lists can impose costs that can affect promotion and tenure.

- *Quantity of change*: Change is fatiguing. The more change there is, the less people are interested in participating. In the extreme, especially when higher level leaders turn over quickly, unit members can "check out" and become disconnected. Predecessors who initiated unsuccessful change or left prior to the completion of the change can discourage employees from engaging with another new change effort. Some may try and "wait it out," assuming that the new leader, too, will move on and the change will not occur.

- *Change for the good of the leader, not the unit*: Leaders with upward mobility goals may seek to enact change that is perceived to be more about making a name for themselves than for the good of the unit. Leaders often feel a need to "make their mark" through change initiatives, which can seem disingenuous. Unit members often resist such change.

Pick Your Battles

- Prioritize the changes you want to make.
- Deep-seated cultural change are the most difficult.
- Some deep-seated cultural changes are never accepted. If this is not a major impediment, you may have or want to live with it.
- The ideas of political capital and idiosyncratic credits suggest that leaders can only change so much so quickly. Conserve your resources for the changes that matter.