Managing change

Introduction

Change is everywhere, and affects everything we do. The challenge of change is to recognise the need for and inevitability of change, and to learn how to manage it, and make the best use of it that we can.

Managing change requires that you think about the nature of change, how it affects your work and your personal life, and how you deal with it.

When you have completed this section, you should be able to:

- recognise the inevitability of change
- identify the need for change
- plan to manage change
- use change to enhance your personal and professional life.

The main topics in this section are:

1. Change
2. Change and the workplace
3. Change and others
4. Change and self

Change

Change occurs throughout our lives. It happens at work, it happens at home. Our personal lives constantly evolve. Often we have only limited control over when and how changes happen.

Some changes we welcome. Many just happen, whether we like it or not, and a few cause us anxiety. They all have to be handled, and while we often cannot prevent change, we can manage how we deal with it. Often we also have to manage how others handle the change - sometimes a challenging job!

The subtopics in this section are:

1a. What is change?
1b. Handling change
1c. Preparing for change
1d. Resisting change
1e. Implementing change
What is change?  

Change can be seen as:
- the ending of a task, activity, relationship or procedure
- a transition period allowing adjustment, learning, coping, training
- embarking on a new activity, relationship, process.

Change can relate to:
- individuals - e.g., changing a problem behaviour pattern (say arriving at work late)
- tasks - e.g., the manner in which inter-library loans are dealt with
- organisations - e.g., moving from providing ‘free’ services to user pays
- societies - e.g., the move away from the ‘bush’ into the cities.

Handling change

As we have noted, controlling change can be difficult, and may be impossible. But often, while the change itself may be inevitable, we have some control over its timing and the way in which it happens.

Do not avoid change and hope it will go away or not affect you. It probably will have some effect, and you can’t ignore it. So to help control the situation:
- Find out what is happening: get as much information as possible.
- Talk to others and speculate on the nature and extent of the change - the more you discuss, the less threatening it will appear.
- Compare the proposed change with the current situation - usually, change is supposed to improve something!
- Think how you will feel in six months’ time, after the change. Concentrate on positive outcomes - there always are some!
- Try to prevent too many things happening at once. Ideally, handle changes one at a time.

In many situations, you can negotiate the speed and intensity of the change.
See change as providing opportunities, not threats.
Is it really a change? Or more an evolution of an existing process? Radical change is rare; evolution is common, and easier to deal with. Look back at how this present situation has come to be - it can be reassuring.

Remember that change happens regardless, but you can control how you handle it.

**Preparing for change**

Most changes can be prepared for and managed. Planning is a crucial element. Planning will:

- make you think through the impact of the change and its ramifications
- assist in identifying issues affected by the change
- allow you to monitor the change and the associated costs and benefits
- help reduce surprises and shocks
- help ensure that everyone who is affected is prepared
- aim to make the change as straightforward as possible.

The extent of the planning will be greatly influenced by the nature of the change. A minor change might require just a few moments’ reflection by one person. But a major change which can make a great impact on individuals, organisations or societies requires considerable thought, discussion and evaluation.

**Resisting change**

Resistance to change is common. Routine is an important part of our lives. We may be anxious about coping with the change, unsure of its impact, and worried about how long it will take to learn new tasks or implement the change.

Change can also alter individual status and power, and challenge personal or group interests. Thus, depending upon the level of your control over implementing the change, consider the following.

- Introduce change gradually.
- Make sure everyone is well informed of what may happen and why.
- Listen carefully to the concerns of those affected.
- Encourage feedback and two-way communication.
• Encourage their involvement in managing the change process.
• Minimise disruption.
• Be positive and enthusiastic.
• Try to maintain momentum and interest in the change.

**Implementing change**

Proper planning for change will help greatly in its implementation. Accept that at first, significant change may cause disruption and have a negative impact. In order to minimise this, and for change that you can control, consider these strategies.

• Prepare for the change as much as possible - there should be no surprises for anyone affected.
• Talk with others, involve them, and brainstorm ideas where practical.
• If it is a major change, can a pilot project be conducted first in order to highlight any potential difficulties?
• For major change, can it be introduced gradually, perhaps in stages?
• Allow enough time to handle the change properly.
• Regularly review progress - keep an eye out for trouble spots.

For major change, steps such as these should followed quite formally. For less dramatic change, use these points as guidelines to bring about a smooth transition to the new way of things.

**Change and the workplace**

Managing change in the workplace is a key task for a supervisor. Coping with change and developing with it is essential for employees. In today’s workplace, change is constant and inevitable - ‘the only thing that stays the same is change’.

Identifying and implementing positive changes, avoiding negative ones, and coping with those that are imposed upon us are difficult tasks. In the workplace they can determine the success of an organisation. Meeting these challenges requires a flexible organisation with a supportive and involved workforce that appreciates the difficulties, but understands the necessity of altering its work processes.
The subtopics in this section are:

2a. Identifying the need for change
2b. Evaluating proposed change
2c. Involving staff
2d. Involving clients
2e. Making it happen
2f. Following up

**Identifying the need for change • 2a**

Often change is imposed on an organisation, completely beyond its control. When this happens, as with the implementation of the GST, organisations have to deal with it. However, change may also be deliberately sought in order to improve efficiency, meet the needs of our clients, or be more competitive in a global market. The following situations suggest the need for some level of change.

- Users ask for products and services we have difficulty providing.
- Users are not satisfied with the quality or timeliness of our service.
- A fall-off in users or unplanned change in the make-up of users.
- Work has become routine for many staff, with a loss of enthusiasm.
- Good people leave your organisation for jobs elsewhere.
- There is growth in competition in our market place.
- Rapid technological developments directly affect our industry.

Remember to listen to your users. They are crucial in understanding changes in your industry and in planning to meet their evolving requirements.

**Evaluating proposed change • 2b**

Generally, we assume that changes in the workplace are made to improve things. Alas, this is not always the result! It is thus useful to evaluate the impact of any proposed change before putting it into practice. This can be done by:

- Having clear goals: what do we want the change to achieve?
• Having a clear understanding of the current situation and exactly what impact the change should have.
• Setting in place processes to assess the impact of the change.
• Trying to assess the cost of the change with its benefits.
• Monitoring the change closely, particularly in its early stages.
• Encouraging staff and users to provide feedback, good or bad.
• Looking for any unexpected side effects.
• Remembering that initially a change may cause productivity to decline.

Involving staff

It is usually appropriate to involve staff in any type of decision-making - particularly for anything that will affect the way they work or aspects of their work environment. By involving staff from the beginning, they can contribute ideas and suggestions which may improve the proposed change. They are also then very aware of what is going on and how it will affect them. This is important in getting their support.

Staff representatives should be included at an early stage and encouraged to tell others what is being proposed. In some situations it will also be appropriate to include union representation in discussions.

Thus supervisors and managers may need to negotiate change, taking into account the legitimate concerns of others. Negotiation involves planning how to achieve your ends while trying to meet the needs of others. It should not be a win/lose process, but one where everyone has something to gain from a successful outcome.

Involving clients

If clients or users of your services will be affected by the proposed change, they need to know what is happening, when it is happening, and what they can expect. Like staff, clients generally prefer not to be surprised. For any major change, advise users of what will happen and when the proposed change will take effect. Encourage users to provide feedback on the proposed change and, for important clients, discuss this with them personally. Management studies have shown that the level of 'customer connectedness', that is, how much
customer contact an organisation has, is directly related to how well customers adapt to change.

Importantly, point out in any communication why the change is being made and how it will improve the service.

Once the change is in place, be sure to provide enough staff to help users handle it. Training might be required to help users with a new system. New signage may be necessary and leaflets can be useful to explain new procedures.

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**Making it happen**

Once decisions on change are made, they have to be implemented. This can be simple, or involve lengthy planning, trial runs and major publicity and information programs. Whichever approach is taken, it is important to remember the following.

- Schedule your time so that you can concentrate on making the change work in its early days.
- Ensure that training, information sheets, etc. are provided.
- Provide backup to help with complex changes.
- Allow for the additional time that the change may add as people get used to it.
- Be patient - you may often have to explain the change and the reasons for it.
- Accept that some users and staff may not welcome the change.
- Provide a high level of support for staff who are least confident about the change.
- Understand that some will adapt immediately, while others will take longer.
- Look out for problems, listen to concerns.
- Don't necessarily change things immediately if there are complaints - wait and see if the concerns continue. It may be just the adjustment period as people get used to the new systems.
- Ensure some formal evaluation after the change has had time to settle down.

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**Following up**

Once any change has been introduced, it is necessary to evaluate whether it has achieved its objectives. Change can be
costly and disruptive in the short term. It is essential to know that, in the longer term, it has made an improvement.

The success or failure of a change needs to be evaluated from three perspectives: staff, management, and clients. Staff need to have actively implemented the change, feel positive about its effect on their work, and support the changed environment. For management, the change has to have brought benefits that outweigh the cost of introduction. For clients, the change should either bring obvious benefits in user-friendly systems or better services or, at least, be transparent to them - i.e., have no impact (if the change has benefited management or staff).

Measuring these outcomes can be done via observation, surveys and questionnaires, statistical methods or anecdotal evidence gathered in day-to-day discussion. The extent of the evaluation will depend upon the nature and extent of the change. Whatever method is used, allow sufficient time for the change to settle down before proceeding with formal evaluations.

Change and others •3

Initially, change usually causes some discomfort to those affected. The level of discomfort rises if you have had no input to the change, or have not had it fully explained. This can easily be forgotten by those bringing in the change, who have been closely involved. They are familiar with it and can’t see how it might be seen negatively or as a threat. A major part of bringing about change successfully is to involve (or at the very least, inform) others as much as possible beforehand.

The subtopics in this section are:
3a. Change and perceptions
3b. The psychological contract
3c. Dealing with concerns
3d. Building support
3e. Creating a development-centred culture

Change and perceptions •3a

We all see things in different ways. Because of our personality (optimistic, pessimistic), our life experiences, and the situation, we react to events in very different ways. This applies when looking at how people react to change. Some welcome any change, most are apprehensive, and some are completely hostile.
Creating a positive perception can help make the introduction of major change successful. These actions can help.

- Ensure as much information as possible is provided to those who will be affected.
- Promote the positive aspects, but also deal honestly and openly with the negative ones.
- Listen carefully to others’ concerns, and be ready to answer them in a positive way.
- Do not ignore or belittle negative attitudes - deal with them in a constructive manner.
- Allow enough time for people to come to terms with the change, and for you to promote it.
- Be strongly enthusiastic and supportive yourself.

The psychological contract

For change to succeed, it helps to build commitment in those affected. This is not easy, but can be encouraged by involving people. Involving people - asking for their opinions, getting their help, seeking their advice - builds a positive view of the change. Because of their involvement, a psychological contract develops which can be a powerful force in developing loyalty to the process.

Known as participation and trust, this approach requires time and patience in working through issues with those affected, but it is very effective. For changes that will be inherently difficult or disruptive and likely to cause concern, this approach is a key tool in helping to minimise these concerns.

Dealing with concerns

Introducing change raises concerns with those affected. Involving them every step of the way will alleviate their concerns, but will not make them disappear. Some problems need solving straight away. Others are related to getting familiar with the change. Remember this and avoid knee-jerk reactions which may complicate things and raise concerns that the change is out of control. In order to minimise concern, the following steps can be taken.

- Provide adequate, timely training before the introduction and after.
- Quickly follow up any difficulties that result from the change.
- Take all concerns seriously, even if they appear trivial.
• If one person is having difficulty, pair them with someone who is managing well.
• Do not expect everyone to adapt at the same pace.
• Make sure that team leaders are confident and supportive.
• Call regular evaluation meetings, particularly in the early stages, to assess progress and highlight problems.
• Celebrate small achievements (e.g., a morning tea after the first week of operation of a new system).

Building support

Building support for change is the first step in creating support for the change to be implemented. Once again, the involvement of those affected is a powerful tool. However, support is also necessary from senior staff, from users of the service and, depending upon the nature of the change, from others in the profession who may be interested in this initiative.

Support from these sources can be encouraged by taking the following steps.

• Publicise the proposed change, and the reasons for it, as widely as possible.
• Ensure senior management are fully aware of the goals of the change, its short- and long-term impact, and how difficulties will be handled.
• Where appropriate, provide to senior management a cost/benefit analysis on the impact of the change.
• Warn users of the change well in advance and asking for their input.
• Establish a client feedback system that enables them to question and comment on the process.
• Discuss the proposal with similar organisations doing the same work.
• Contact other members of the profession, outlining the proposal and the reasons for it.

Creating a development-centred culture

In our rapidly changing environment, any organisation will be in a continual process of change. This brings stresses and strains that require flexibility and responsiveness from staff and organisations. In order to create an environment that welcomes change and profits from it, an organisation needs to
foster a development-centred culture. These are some of the ways staff at lower levels can encourage this.

• Being prepared to take on new tasks and welcome challenges. Try not to be too negative or cynical.
• Get involved at an early stage. Understand what is proposed, and don’t be afraid to speak up.
• Seek full support from supervisors and proper training.
• If levels of support are not appropriate, discuss this with managers.
• Try to see the ‘big picture’. The change may be difficult for you, but offer dividends organisation-wide.
• Be willing to negotiate, compromise, and seek alternative options that meet all groups’ needs.
• Accept that the organisational structure will not stay rigid and that major changes will inevitably occur.
• Think about your personal development needs: how do they relate to the needs of the organisation?
• Manage yourself, and help others, in coping with the pace of change.
• Follow what is going on in your profession or work. Look out for new approaches which others are implementing.

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**Change and self**

Accepting, adapting, and thriving on change is a challenge for us all. From our earliest years we have to adapt to change over which we have no control - moving from kindergarten to primary to secondary schools are all major changes that are thrust upon us. As we grow, we may have more control in some situations but in many others, it happens again, whether we like it or not! Developing coping skills is vital for comfortable lives. Remember, everyone will feel stress related to any change. Managing stress levels, and moving on, is the important thing.

The subtopics in this section are:

4a. Change as opportunity
4b. Change as threat
4c. Change and your future
Change as opportunity

Viewing change as an opportunity is a powerful approach. Think about how any proposed change can benefit you. Is it an opportunity to expand your skill base, making you more attractive to employers? Can you say goodbye to a part of your life and do those things you never had time for? Does it open possibilities you had never thought of?

When changes are proposed, particularly significant ones, think about how they may be of direct help to you. Thus consider:

- how you might get involved to build your skills and experience
- how you might use the proposed change to advance your career or personal life
- how involvement might help you in your profession or your social circle
- the advantages of having some say in the change
- whether the change will help overcome or minimise problems you are experiencing
- the advantages for others, if not for you
- the cost of apathy in the face of proposed changes.

Finally, do not be afraid to initiate change.

Change as threat

Change can be seen as threatening. This is particularly true if change is imposed upon us. The full extent of the change may not be clear and the reasons behind it not explained. The less that is known of the background, the more intimidating the change.

In reality of course, some change does cause discomfort or distress. While you may have little or no control over the change, you do have control over how you deal with it. Remember not to let external forces drive your reactions. Think through and discuss with friends or family the reasons behind your concern. It may be that you are getting things out of proportion, or making incorrect assumptions. Give the change time to settle in - maybe its impact will not be as bad as you think. As human beings, we are adaptable - in a few weeks’ time you may find your initial concerns laughable. Try to understand why the change was made. Are the aims threatening to you? Or just the process? If it is the aims, then examine why. If possible, discuss it with others involved, and try to work out some compromise. If it’s the process, then
hang in there - you’ll probably get used to it, and it won’t last for ever.

Any change can be daunting, but keep it in perspective and ask, if you look back in five years time, will you recall what the fuss was about?

Change and your future

Change and your future are inextricably entwined. If nothing much changed, it might all get boring! Seek change in order to try new experiences, gain new skills, find out if something is as easy (or difficult) as it seems. Taking this approach is a powerful means of building self-confidence.

Never assume that change will be bad. Look for the positive until it is proven otherwise. Plan your future, but also allow for changes that you can’t foresee or control. When they happen, be flexible enough to adopt or adapt to them. Consider the options open to you. At first glance they might not seem attractive or appropriate, but further thought might show new possibilities.

Change is your future. Get involved, take chances, make mistake, learn by them, and carry on. It is change that makes this such an interesting life!