

Reactions to Change

Your team probably faces change on a daily basis – the appointment of a new country manager, resignation of a team member, introduction of a new travel policy, or formation of a new project team. Although not always newsworthy, these events are very real, and people's work lives are affected by them.

Regardless of the magnitude of the change, leaders need to understand how people react to change.

The following is a list of 6 typical reactions to change. When you understand how people think, feel and behave in the face of change, you will have a better chance of successfully leading your team through it.

Reaction No. 1: People will feel anxious, self-conscious and nervous. This is particularly true when they are asked to do something different, especially when there is no context for the request.

Reaction No.2: People are concerned with what they will lose. For example, when a corporate restructuring is announced, the first thought is not "this is going to be great for my career". Most people are more concerned about losing their status, responsibility, manager, security, office or team.

Reaction No. 3: People will feel there are not enough resources. When change is introduced, the general reaction is that there will not be enough time, people, systems, market, budget, etc to meet the new demands.

Reaction No. 4: People are at different levels of readiness for change. Some will say it is about time; others will see any change as the worst thing that could possibly happen.

Reaction No. 5: People can only handle so much change. People can adjust to incremental changes; however, if change is too great or occurs in a very short time period, they may become overwhelmed and not adapt appropriately.

Reaction No. 6: People will revert back to the old ways when the pressure is off. Over time when the focus is reduced it is easy for individuals to gravitate to their old methods of doing business.

The first step to leading your team through change is recognising how people will react. Although the above 6 points are useful guidelines, reactions will vary depending upon individual circumstances. Your job as a leader is to understand how the change will affect your team in advance of the change, to anticipate the team's reactions, and to put in place systems and processes to ensure positive opportunities are maximised, while minimising the negative.

“Life is change. Growth is optional. Choose wisely.”

- Karen Kaiser Clark (author, lecturer, consultant)

Next month's article...

Managing Change

Quick Tip

Research suggests that up to 70% of all change initiatives fail to meet expectations of the key stakeholders. The reasons are endless. The implementation plan was flawed, the team did not have adequate resources, the new processes were ineffective, etc. These factors do contribute to failure. However, the leader must assume responsibility for the success or failure of a change initiative. Why have change programmes failed in your organization? Because the management team wasn't committed in the first place, the sponsor changed positions, or because there was never any communication with the people affected? In the final analysis, ineffective, missing or conflicting messages from the leader will cause change to fail.