

# Positive Change

Practical Ways To Identify, Cope With And Implement Change

Patrick Forsyth



PATRICK FORSYTH

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**POSITIVE CHANGE**  
PRACTICAL WAYS TO  
IDENTIFY, COPE WITH AND  
IMPLEMENT CHANGE

Positive Change: Practical Ways To Identify, Cope With And Implement Change

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# THE AUTHOR

Patrick Forsyth is a consultant, trainer and writer. He has worked with organisations large and small and in many different parts of the world. He is the author of many successful books on management, business and careers and prides himself on having a clear how-to style.

One reviewer (“Professional Marketing”) commented: *Patrick has a lucid and elegant style of writing which allows him to present information in a way that is organised, focused and easy to apply.*

In this series he is also the author of several titles including “Your boss: sorted!” and “How to get a pay rise”. His writing extends beyond business. He has had published humorous books (e.g. *Empty when half full*) and light-hearted travel writing: *First class at last!*, about a journey through South East Asia, and *Smile because it happened* about Thailand. His novel, *Long Overdue*, was published recently.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION: CHANGE – A SYNONYM FOR SUCCESS

*If in the last few years you haven't discarded a major opinion or acquired a new one, check your pulse. You may be dead.*

Gelett Burgess

Change is a good thing: it prevents stagnation, it prompts improvement and it links directly to the ongoing success of organisations – and of individuals. Are we all agreed on that? Change is good, right? Surely any aware and effective person would see this to be true. Most people do not want to be characterised as a Luddite and they are in favour of the concept of change – right up to the moment someone walks up to their desk and says that there are going to be changes made *here*. Then most people's instinct is to be suspicious and defensive; they get ready for something negative and make ready too to try to fend it off. Such attitudes make for a curious contradiction.

But change occurs; indeed it may need to be anticipated, prompted and certainly to be worked with and coped with when it is thrust upon us – and changes, positive changes, need to be made to work and work effectively if they are to move us forward. And in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (and in the U.K. just as we have voted to exit the E.E.C.), this is the case perhaps more than ever before.

## **Change is the norm**

The quotation above could not be more apposite and makes a fair maxim to take on board at the start of this review. That change must now be regarded as the norm is not just because of the general competitive nature of markets and for that matter of the modern work environment, but also because every aspect of an organisation and its work can become more volatile following any particular economic upheaval. And economic upheaval seems to have been much in evidence so far this century and it would be a brave person who would predict that the future will become suddenly more placid.

Let us be clear about this immediately: change is going to be the norm for the foreseeable future. We can expect change to continue and for the pace of change to continue to increase. As Steve Case, Chairman, AOL Time Warner once said, “There will be more confusion in the business world in the next decade than in any decade in history. And the current pace of change will only accelerate.” This comment will remain relevant for a good while and certainly such a situation affects everything that follows here.

Change may seem a fairly benign word, but it can be almost normal for disaster to stalk the land. Certain industries, like banking, once seemed stable, but they are as subject to difficulties as any other sector and have recently changed radically. Change can move us forward, but there can be casualties both corporate and personal along the way, and so the process of change must be well handled so that matters go smoothly and change works.

### **Examples of change**

Consider first a couple of examples of areas of change, which both show how changes can influence things radically in the long term:

- Staff recruitment is a good example. Employment legislation has created much greater fairness but it has also made recruitment far more difficult and time consuming to carry out: sometimes the result is that recruiters play it safe or easy (hiring the best of a poor bunch of candidates rather than re-advertising perhaps) and make appointments they end up regretting and creating poor performance and difficulty over a period while matters are sorted out; this seems to me to be a negative result of changes which aimed to be positive. The same is true of dealing with poor performance: it can be such a complex process to dismiss someone that poor performance can continue for many months when in the long term it is in the interests of both employer and employee to make a prompt change
- A positive result comes from the advent of electronic communication. We can now be in touch virtually instantly across the world and the advantages of this are legion, think how much more smoothly international customer relations runs now we have left telex and fax far behind. But there are downsides too, emails tend to be written with insufficient thought and breakdowns in communications can be more common as a result; and sometimes the damage done can be considerable. Similarly, the absurd picture of people emailing to others in the office a few metres away can be detrimental to ordinary communications, collaboration and understanding.

Adding some more specific examples will broaden the description of the effect of change, for example:

### 1. Defining the business

The thinking demonstrated here is an excellent example of how the most basic element of planning – just defining the business – can focus the mind, change a whole business and lead directly to new opportunities and growth.

Imagine a company, let us call them Scaffolding R' Us, which rented scaffolding; they defined their business very simply and directly as *the provision of scaffolding to the building trade*. Just rethinking this took them through three stages, each of which resulted in distinct changes which had a positive effect on their business growth:

1. First, they replaced the description *building trade* with *construction industry*. This broadened the market at which they directed their marketing efforts, taking them into selling to companies constructing, for instance, motorway flyovers, or to oil rigs (where there is copious amounts of scaffolding used) – effectively a different market and one of potentially larger order size. A learning curve may have been necessary to deal with a different type of customer, but the business grew
2. Secondly, they moved on and described their business less in terms of what they did, and more in terms of what it provided, in turn, for customers. This they said was to – *provide temporary access and support*. This took them into the leisure market, providing scaffolding to support seating at sports events and parades. Again new customers needed new approaches, but business expanded in this substantial sector
3. Thirdly, they again refined the description, this time with more confidence, stressing *their skill and expertise in providing temporary access and support*. This, in turn, prompted them enter export markets. Not erecting their scaffolding overseas (clearly shipping heavy steel poles is prohibitively costly), but running training schools for local organisations and their staff in new markets, including the Middle East, where building was a rapid growth industry. This was a change that would never even have been guessed at early in the process.

Here change was created intentionally as an inherent part of an organisation's ongoing strategic planning. Such thinking can be very productive, and it is sometimes surprising how the status quo acts to blind an organisation to new opportunities when it only needs a fresh look and an open mind to spot some, and then to create significant and positive change.



## 2. An accurate basis of information

The next example shows how change can creep up unobserved. It is illustrated by a personnel recollection: I was working with a medium sized firm of Chartered Accountants (several offices spread across one U.K. County) and asked about their “typical client”. The senior partner described a family business of a certain size and type (the details are unimportant). I asked what proportion of their clients fitted this category and was told it was “about two thirds”.

Subsequent analysis – simple analysis – showed he had overestimated by twice the number, in fact only one third of their clients fitted the description given. He was both out of date and had not troubled to check. Of the clients he *personally* handled, two thirds *did* fit the description and up to a couple of years previously the proportion stated would have been right across the firm. Times change.

This is not just a matter of getting a few numbers wrong. It matters. In this firm decisions about marketing and promotion were being made on the assumption that the higher figure was right – and promotional materials were being designed largely for the wrong kind of people. Probably their effectiveness suffered as a result. Moral: planning, and the strategic decisions that follow it, *must be based on accurate information about what is happening*. Here a gradual change to the way the firm related to the market went unacknowledged and ultimately a rapid programme of change had to be put in place to reflect the actual situation.

## 3. A necessary skill

Change is necessary not only at corporate level (for an organisation as a whole or a department or division of it) but on a personal basis. Again let me describe a personal situation. For some years I have listed writing alongside my work as a consultant and trainer. But when I was asked to write a book for the first time it was a real shock to the system. I did it and the book was duly published, but I realised all too easily that it was not as well written as was really necessary. I had to change. I took a variety of actions to develop my writing skills and my next book was very much better. Having acquired a new, or upgraded, skill (albeit one that stood further refinement) I was able to change my whole work pattern and found, especially some years later when I set up my own business, that my new work portfolio worked very well, both in terms of job satisfaction and convenience (I can write at home and only have to walk down one flight of stairs to my study), but also as a business activity. The process of doing this sort of writing changes too: I wrote my first book longhand (yes, it is a while ago!). For a long time now I could not have continued this work without a computer (and certain computer skills). Manuscripts are delivered by email, and increasingly the finished book or article is available to be read in electronic form too – or like this book exclusively in electronic form. I was not the first and will certainly not be the last person to have to adapt to be able to do the job in hand; change is often necessary at a personal level.

These examples show something of the long term and wide ranging results of change and how downsides can occur even when positive change is the plan; the effects of every kind of change can be significant and perhaps radical. A manufacturer of fax machines may have had to change radically or go out of business when email burgeoned and any organisation faced with a merger or takeover is going to spend some time getting used to change in every part of their operation. Clearly dealing with or making any change needs careful consideration.

So, with uncertainty being the order of the day, good implementation and management of change is essential and should smooth the path towards continuing, if different, success.

Some people may view all this, look back and hanker after a return to “better days”, but waiting for things to “return to normal” is simply not one of the options. There are currently few, if any, safe havens, and few, if any, organisations that seem likely to be so again in a situation where change is the norm.

All sorts of factors contribute to the current nature of the organization and how it must operate, such include:

- Organisations being under greater market and financial pressure
- Changes in the way business and organizations operate (think of the IT revolution or international pressures, for instance)
- Lower staff numbers and more pressure on individuals
- Reduced budgets and thus a reduced ability to fund personal development
- Changed terms of employment and staff policy (think of how the pension schemes offered have changed in the last few years)
- Technological development across a wide canvass
- A general increase in both the amount and speed of change
- The greater likelihood of having to make rapid change being necessary (and thus sometimes made without careful consideration).

You can probably add to this list and events will certainly add to it as time goes past. There is therefore an increasing need for many managers and executives to be able to deal with change. This leads us to two overall areas of consideration:

1. Change must be an integral part of the way an organization operates, yet little or none of it happens automatically. Essentially it is only individual people who can deal with this, make change occur and make it positive and effective
2. Individuals must themselves be open to personal change; the only way forward may demand acquiring new skills, knowledge and attitudes and some of that may demand taking individual initiatives (because an employer will not do it all for you).

In light of all this, the message of this book is addressed to the individual rather than the organisation: essentially on you and what you can do.

The book looks at change in the round: that is it is concerned with the process of change and what is formally called change management, but it also considers other changes that may be necessary – large or small, personal or corporate – and how to view them and how to deal with them. It looks at how you can instigate change, make it acceptable and make it effective; and it shows how you can make what you do and how you do it successful; and how to make the process go on being successful over time.

## 2 THE NATURE OF CHANGE

While attitudes to change may be confused in some senses, as was said earlier, the fact of change makes dealing with it a necessity. Doing so is not an option. No one can say that because change can be difficult they will “simply stay as we are”. So if managing change is part of the current (and future) remit, then what makes it possible to embrace this and cope with it effectively? Perhaps the first thing is to recognise the nature of change: change is made necessary for a variety of reasons and comes in a variety of forms. Understanding why change may be necessary and also what can prompt unexpected change is the first step to anticipating, initiating or reacting to it.

The first categorisation that should be noted is essentially straightforward: changes can be prompted internally or externally.

### For example

- External factors may present threats (challenges?) that necessitate change (like a competitor taking action with which you must keep pace or aim to leapfrog), or may simply provide opportunities (for example, once computer technology made it possible to access a whole address from a post code this was gradually taken up by more and more organisations aiming to improve customer service and/or contain costs)
- Internal factors where circumstances may necessitate change (such range from growth necessitating a relocation of premises to a shortage of specialist qualified staff necessitating new ways of recruitment, training or doing things)

It is clear even from such examples that delay can make for difficulty. For example, customers might get impatient with an organisation demanding that they spell out their every contact detail when others – competitors – can access them automatically in a few seconds. Such could result in changed image and lost business. So there is merit in being alert to such things and making sure that broad, objective and regular review is part of the management process. As at every level – individual, departmental and corporate – the focus may need to be on the short term and on immediate activities; this may mean some specific steps need taking to make sure ongoing longer term review happens. This may only mean the inclusion of a dedicated “change spotting” item on the agenda of departmental or Board meetings.

## Why organisations must change

Any organisation must remain successful to survive. For many in the private sector that means that they must be profitable: with profit coming from outside the organisation to fund growth and development and satisfy stakeholders such as those owning shares in the company. In non profit organisations, ranging from charities to government departments, they too must succeed in achieving their objectives whatever they may be; and such must necessarily involve financial ones in some form.

The pressure on both kinds of organisation has never been greater, certainly competition has broadened and intensified and, in a world where ultimately huge businesses can operate from someone's garage and trade over the internet, non-traditional competition can be as threatening as those operating in like manner. More competition is international too, old borders and restrictions are disappearing and more and more operators see the world, or a major part of it, as their market; here too the IT revolution has provided more and different methods of communicating with and servicing markets than ever before and this compounds greater competitiveness. Such trends and developments mean that change is needed more often than in the past to keep pace, and that such change is often greater, more radical, and often more urgent too.



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So organisations constantly find themselves looking to make changes, particularly to:

- Find new and improved ways of operating
- Revise their product or service to better satisfy customers or avoid competitive threats
- Reduce operating costs
- Improve employee efficiency and productivity in every department
- Better achieve specific objectives (for instance profitability)
- Take advantage of potential changes in everything from markets to technology.

Although change can involve as wide a variety of activity as can the organisation, two main categories of change, each a little different in nature and thus in how it must be dealt with, can be regarded separately in a way that helps deal with them.

### **Strategic change**

This kind of change affects the whole direction of the organisation. It involves doing something new or different to safeguard or take forward the organisation's success, and thus may affect anything from the design, production and marketing of a product or service to the overall business philosophy. Defining this brings to mind the old saying that while a local taxi company may develop quite widely (offering long distance courier services say), only an organisation that defines its business more broadly as "transportation" – will ever go to the moon.

Strategic change is essentially economically driven. For instance in a commercial firm success is normally measured by profit (only generated in the market). As almost every market is nothing if not dynamic, and customers seem ever more demanding and fickle, changes are regularly necessary if profit levels are to be maintained and grown. In the public sector profit may not be involved, but there is always a financial position – for instance the balance between service levels and government funding – that needs to be achieved and this too is subject to change.

### **Innovative change**

Here the kind of change referred to is designed to improve what is currently routinely done. So this includes changes to working practices within the organisation, particularly those that improve productivity and which are concerned with how people work together or how working processes and systems affect the way they work and what is achieved as a result. Innovative change can affect any part of the organisation: design of products, levels of service, distribution, marketing techniques, pricing and more. Ultimately the intention of all such changes is to better satisfy the various stakeholders of the organisation and, where appropriate, to maintain and increase profitability.

In all cases certain factors are of common importance.

### **Changing behaviour**

Whatever kind of change may be involved, strategic or innovative, they appear first and foremost to be tangible: an organisation's product undergoes change, the growth of the internet necessitates rethinking distribution, international competition creates a need to change price and much more. But no change happens automatically or in a vacuum. All have practical implications and all involve and affect people.

The nature of a particular change will affect which people must change and in what way. Thus a change to manufacturing processes will affect shop floor staff and a change to the way things are done, customer advice being given on line instead of by telephone say, will affect a specific set of customer service staff; in both cases managers may have to change too and, of course, someone must be the initial catalyst. The integration following a company takeover or merger will affect everyone and very different ways of working may be necessary all round; as well perhaps as a reduction in staff numbers.

If people are to change then those instigating the changing must understand what influences the way people behave currently and what forces motivate them to accept change and preferably to make change willingly and well. Let's consider behaviour, then in turn the motivation that can influence it.

## Influences on behaviour

All sorts of things may influence the behaviour of people, but five major influences cover most.

1. *Attitudes*: beliefs are instrumental in creating particular attitudes and peoples' attitudes exert influence in every aspect of their behaviour. This is an area demanding realism: attitudes are the most difficult of all the influences to change and if change is possible then it may take time. Real understanding is necessary. For instance, consider a simple example: if people believe that a manager is unsympathetic (perhaps with some evidence), then any change that manager instigates is likely to be seen as unlikely to be in their interests and resistance may be a reflex. It may take a good deal of explaining or action to show that a manager's motivation is being misjudged, that they do value their staff and only then can explanation about a proposed change be given with any real chance of being listened to, accepted and acted upon. Certainly this area must be considered: if an underlying problem in accepting and supporting change lies in the prevailing attitudes of those involved then no amount of action in other areas is likely to produce results until this is dealt with satisfactorily.
2. *Vision*: this too is perhaps a background factor and linked to attitudes too. Hardly a single organisation does not have a mission statement these days (though not all are good or even clear) and such a statement is something that highlights the issue here. If people have no clear understanding of the purpose of the organisation, or indeed department, for which they work, then any change is seen as irrelevant – a “what's it all for?” attitude prevails and changes are likely to be viewed in isolation and thus the meaning and usefulness of them is missed. Corporate vision stems from the top of course, so there is a senior responsibility here, and it is one that well executed will certainly help facilitate change. A clear and attractive vision tends to make change easier to achieve, not least because it puts whatever it is in a positive context.



3. *Knowledge*: this is the easiest element to change. Taking on board new knowledge may be entirely uncontroversial and need no more doing than reading a memo; though more may be necessary of course, and this links to the whole area of development and training. Sometimes a small amount of additional knowledge can be instrumental in executing a significant change; for example a few extra options in a computer process may change the whole way that a process works, making it more efficient, faster or more accurate. Knowledge, or rather the need for new knowledge, tends to go hand in hand with other changes; and again computers and the learning curve that goes with any upgrade, new development or application is a good example. Additionally here, if people have the relevant knowledge that will need to be drawn on after a change, then it is one less thing for them to worry about as change approaches.
4. *Skills*: the tasks most people carry out necessitate skills being developed to enable them to undertake the tasks effectively. This is true of a wide range of activities: computers again make a good example, but so do the skills necessary to write a good report or make a powerful presentation. It is the combination of knowledge and skills that enables people to work effectively and achieve the results with which they are targeted. Skills are easier to acquire than attitudes are to be changed, but some time and effective methodology are needed. Like knowledge, if skills needed following a change are already in place then the transition will seem easier. In addition, once acquired skills must be kept up to date or one skill may become redundant and need to be replaced with another.
5. *Environment*: the culture of the workplace is also an influence on peoples' behaviour. For instance the manager of a department must set the form on which things are done. If people are working well together there is pressure for everyone to fit in and work similarly (a group normally hates anyone seen as a "passenger", who does not fit in and does less than their fair share). If people are encouraged to behave, and work, effectively then results tend to reflect this. Conversely, organisations that have a *laisse fair* attitude and tolerate poor behaviour and thus performance, tend to achieve only lack lustre results; in this context avoiding making changes has direct negative impact.

It is the combined effect of all these various influences that creates both effective operation and a willingness and ability to accept change and make it work. Attitudes, beliefs and the way the work environment operates create the backdrop, and the tangible knowledge and skill that people bring to their tasks complete the picture. When all these influences are "programmed for change" as it were then change is easier and more certain to be implemented and implemented successfully. Thus even difficult or controversial changes can be made to work if everything is primed to make it so.

The second factor identified also has a bearing.

## Peoples' motivation to change

Because there is a natural tendency to resist change (certainly initially) it is important that people see it as offering some personal advantage. Such advantage can be positive: something that provides a gain; or alternatively it can involve the avoidance of a negative. Often both pain and gain are involved, though sometimes the pain is primarily in the anticipation of something unknown or in the early stages following a change. Any manager working with a team of people should see active motivation as part of their job because it makes a difference to day to day operations and is especially important in face of changes. Then this needs to be addressed in three ways:

1. *In the run up to change:* initially the need is to make clear the positive side of changes as they relate to individuals. Benefits to the individual may be minor, involving say a change to a process that makes it just a little easier or quicker to undertake, but should still be clearly spelt out. Benefits can also be in a sense once removed: for instance a change to some aspect of customer service may benefit customers in an immediate way, but more satisfied customers are easier to deal with and that then benefits those individuals who have customer service tasks to perform. Even negative change can have longer term benefits to individuals: a change that involves redundancy may be unpleasant, but could contribute to a more secure working environment for those remaining in post; indeed for a moment just being one of the survivors may be motivational.
2. *After change has occurred:* every aspect of change that affects people from consultation to the change itself and dealing with any hiccups that go with it demands extra of them. This should be acknowledged and, when all goes well, praised or even specifically rewarded. A change that results in different or extended responsibilities might warrant a salary increase, but any kind of reward from extra holiday allowance to an annual team conference being held in an exotic venue might be appropriate.
3. *Relating one change to another:* the success, and the contributions that made it successful should be noted and used in future communication. If it is simply said that something needs to change then the instinctive reaction as we have seen may be negative. But if explanation refers to a known quantity – *it can be handled rather like the way that X was changed, and that went very smoothly* – then something people have experienced is substituted for something totally unknown and, while there may still be questions, reactions are likely to be more favourable.

Exactly how motivation is undertaken is beyond our brief; but two overall points are worth making here:

1. There is (sadly) no magic formula guaranteed to motivate people in a moment; many methods are available and many may have to be used over some time to achieve the desired result
2. The need for motivation should be recognised and action about it must not be skimmed or regarded as a chore; motivation is important, indeed a change is far more likely to be well executed by a well motivated group of people than those in a negative frame of mind. Spending time on it can pay dividends.

### **How motivation assists change**

What is most important to a manager intent on ensuring that staff support change? Without meaning to negate other factors, ten keys to successfully adopting a motivational management style may be summarised as follows:

1. Always think about the people aspects of everything
2. Keep a list of possible motivational actions, large and small, in mind
3. Monitor the “motivational temperature” regularly, and especially do so ahead of any change
4. See the process as continuous and cumulative; it should simply accelerate in a time of change
5. Ring the changes in terms of method to maintain interest
6. Do not be censorious about what motivates others, either positively or negatively
7. Beware of panaceas and easy options
8. Make sufficient time for it
9. Evaluate what works best within your group
10. Remember that, in part at least, there should be a “fun” aspect to work (and that it is your job to make sure this is so).

Make motivation a habit, and make it effective, and you may be surprised by the results. The motivation for you to motivate others is in those results and, in context here, in how well a change is then executed.

Overall motivational action must be:

- *Well judged* – the right action, at the right time (and thus at the right moment as any change is occurring), carried out in an appropriate way
- *Creative* – finding new and different things to do as well as utilising tried and tested methods
- *Balanced* – using a mixture of methods all well matched to the individuals involved
- *Continuous* – motivation must be an inherent, ongoing part of any manager's job, not a “when there is time” thing (though the general level may need to be cranked up in times of change).

If people do not believe a satisfactory change is possible, or that they cannot cope with their part in it, then it can be doomed before it begins. The manager who motivates gives themselves, and their people, an edge; an edge that in times of change can make all the difference between success and failure.

The moral here is clear: in any organisation that seeks to make changes, especially if this must be done on a regular basis, managers should address motivation issues on a regular basis. Some stem from specific moments and processes, like the link between job appraisal and the subsequent development of skills. Others are ongoing issues that need to be in mind constantly. In a hectic work place it is easy for action here to be skimped – how many managers asked if they can honestly say that they have said “Well done!” sufficiently often in say the last month can answer “Yes”? (Can you?) Yet managers who are on top of these things will always find they have created a situation in which it is easier to instigate change and do so without undue hassle.

Next action preparatory to change.

### 3 PREPARING FOR CHANGE

Here a variety of considerations that must be considered in the run up to change are set out ahead of reviewing the implementation stage. The different aspects involved overlap and together make clear why people talk of “change management”. There is a process involved here and the various matters that affect likely success must be dealt with systematically; and this all starts in the preparatory stage. The danger to consider is the very real likelihood of poor results if preparation is delayed or skimped; time spent up front pays dividends.

Any change should prompt positive benefits and in many cases these need to be long lasting. Preparation should make this more likely. It should also smooth the process, ensuring that the fact of change does not cause disruption of operations or upset to people (who may then perform less well). Essentially change aims to move people and processes to a new way of thinking and operating and to do so in a manner that is compatible with the structure of an organisation, its strategy and the processes and systems that are currently in train.

Because any organisation is nothing without its people, making changes demands taking the people with you. Unless everyone, at every level, understands the change and is committed to it and motivated to want to make it work then it will fail or at the very least be diluted in its effect. Similarly if changes are in conflict in some way with existing culture or processes then it will be more difficult to implement in a straightforward manner.

#### **Barriers to change**

If change is to be made successfully then it must be prepared for realistically in a way that takes into account the things that may make it difficult. Of course, difficulties can be many and varied; for instance I once saw a major change held up by one key player only because the date of implementation clashed with a special holiday they were planning, though this was not voiced up front. But the main areas that cause problems are:

- Employee resistance (often prejudiced and/or ill-informed)
- Culture disruption (which can increase peoples' resistance)
- Lack of agreement and vision (especially at senior/strategic level)
- Ineffective planning
- Poor, confusing communication
- Lack of appropriate skills (especially if new skills will be necessary in changed situations)
- Current pressure, which can all too easily mean changes that should be made are delayed or rush through on an ill-considered basis that causes problems.

People and cultural factors predominate here and everything mentioned suggests the need to consider how things will work in advance and think it through in terms of the broad picture and the long term implications. It should be born in mind that many changes seem to go well initially, but problems appear down the line because things have not been thought through. As one brief example as so many companies began to create web sites in the early days of the IT revolution it was common for the job of keeping the site up to date to be underestimated in terms of both cost, time and specialised skills.

Barriers are inherent, but once identified they must be addressed, that is removed, reduced or worked around.

### **The success factors**

While care is assuredly necessary, it is not right to labour the difficulties of change. Changes are made, and made successfully, in organisations around the world every day; albeit when their doing so looks straightforward it is because someone is planning carefully to make it so. The factors that tend to influence success most, and thus need most attention in preparation, spell out, in the way much beloved of trainers, the word SUCCESS. When everything is well in all of these areas then the chances of success are maximised. The letters stand for:

**Shared vision:** there needs to be a clear, positive statement describing where the change is taking you and why and this must be understood and appreciated by all

**Understanding of the organisation:** sound analysis of the organisation is necessary to ensure that the identification of salient factors is done, especially anything that will need special attention

**Culture compatibility:** any change must be implemented in light of recognition of the nature of the organisation and how it works so that change can be made to fit the current style and methodology

**Clear communication:** this is essential throughout the process (further details are described in Chapter 5)


**Expert assistance:** the way change is undertaken must be that which is most likely to create success and if that needs some outside assistance then so be it

**Strong leadership:** change goes better with a sponsor (someone sometimes referred to as a champion): this is someone at a senior level (or with suitable influence) who is manifestly, even enthusiastically, in favour and makes their views known (however much they may or may not be involved in the actual process)


**Stakeholder commitment:** when it is said that everyone must be involved what this means must be worked out carefully in terms of who needs to be included; for instance, employees, management, shareholders, external people such as government, customers and suppliers – and more.

Three overall factors predominate here: people, organisation and corporate culture factors. Each is worth a word.

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## People factors

Clearly people must be considered. Their acceptance and support is necessary to success. People are individuals. They will react differently – depending on their character, circumstances and position in the organisation – and their reactions can sometimes be difficult to forecast. For instance, peoples' reaction will vary in terms of the personal and corporate view they take of something. One might expect more senior people to take a more corporate view of things, but this may not always be the case.

Everybody involved needs considering by those instigating change, and that means both those seemingly supportive as well as those where the likelihood of resistance is obvious. In considering people it is worth both anticipating some resistance and also trying to ascertain just why and how any resistance might be expressed. Such may include people:

- Not seeing the point of change: which may mean they do not understand or simply prefer things the way they are despite a rationale argument
- Being busy: and either not giving the matter the attention which would allow it to be explained or feeling it constitutes “the last straw”
- Feeling threatened: directly or indirectly and in major or minor ways, from losing their job to losing a perk – such a threat can be real, imagined or real but overrated
- Anticipating cultural problems: for instance seeing their team or support system changing
- Simply being against change on principle (and not just older people) or, in some instances, resisting as a gesture in the “war between them and us”.

*Note:* the question of *how* resistance might show itself is important: this can range from rumours and rumblings that do little real damage to orchestrated attempts to derail plans, perhaps by a formal group like a union. Different manifestations of discontent will need different tactics planning to combat them.

Negative responses can be almost like grieving: that is mourning the status quo which is safe, familiar and non-threatening. This kind of reaction goes through several stages:

1. *Immobilisation:* a stage when people simply ignore what is going on, doing so on an “out of sight, out of mind basis”
2. *Denial:* then people begin to resist, their response becomes more active and can link to the third stage
3. *Anger:* if denial turns to anger responses become more active and more disruptive (and are often ill-thought out)



4. *Negotiation*: anger, especially if it gets them nowhere, can then turn to attempts to change the change, perhaps diluting its effect (for example, requesting a trial first rather than a full, permanent change)
5. *Depression*: if negotiation fails then people are apt to go into their shells again – a stage where there will be little active collaboration
6. *Testing*: finally, if the inevitable is recognised or if explanations finally get through, people reluctantly try the new ways
7. *Acceptance*: if the change is well judged then, while there may still be some (personal) downsides, people find that it is sensible and accept it for the future.

Clearly recognising where people are amongst these seven stages is useful in pushing things forward. If people are in favour and initial reactions are favourable, this too may go through five stages (which might be visualised as a classic bell curve with initial pessimism first rising and then moving to acceptance and compliance):

1. *Uninformed optimism*: at this stage people react positively at least to the extent of being confident that a change will be good
2. *Informed pessimism*: as information is provided and understanding begins realism takes over from bald confidence and this can raise negative issues
3. *Realism*: as understanding is completed any lingering pessimism is replaced by confidence
4. *Informed optimism*: then as the process of change moves on information and understanding finally prompt full optimism – *this will be okay* – and involvement is engaged
5. *Acceptance and support*: finally full support and cooperation is the order of the day.

This transition may take a while, the time varying depending on the nature of the change and also, of course, how it is handled; equally it may be almost instant for straightforward change. Understanding peoples' likely reaction and following their actual one is the first step to moving them more rapidly and easily to acceptance. For instance, if it is recognised that people are sticking, failing to move from stage 3 to 4 (in which cooperative action begins), then additional or revised communication may push matters on.

**Organisational factors**

The organisation itself is also instrumental in influencing how easy it is to change. First, the nature and purpose of the organisation is relevant. In some fields, perhaps IT is a broad example, change is an accepted part of normal operations; certainly it is said that if your computer works well, it must be obsolete! A new model seems to come out before you have an initial one run in and operating as you want. In such an environment change should be well accepted, but even in this case there can be problems if change goes beyond what people are well used to or if it is seen to be more personal in effect.

Secondly other factors about the nature of the organisation contribute. As change means changing peoples’ behaviour, it is how the organisation affects people and conditions their attitudes that is crucial. For instance in a flatter organisation structure, one where the hierarchy has few layers, it may be inherently easier to find senior champions for change as the senior people are not out of reach. Sheer size is a factor too, more people, more locations, more management layers and everything from consultation to communication is likely to be more complex and take longer too.

Certainly some thought about how ready the organisation, or part of it if not all, is to adopt and work with change is sensible and useful. One measure that is now common (and was originated in the work of Harvey and Brown) categorises readiness for change into four levels, arrived at by comparing two factors – Stability of the environment(left vertical axis) and Management adaptability to change (lower horizontal axis) – each high and low in a matrix.

Low	Proactive	Reactive
High	Average	Static
		Low

## Management adaptability to change

The four types thus described are then defined thus:

1. *Proactive*: because of the dynamic environment in which they operate, in these organisations change is the norm, management, including top management, promote a vision of action to keep ahead of the game and change is seen as an inherent part of that
2. *Reactive*: such organisations change only when they have to, and sometimes they react to environmental factors (such as competitive threats) only grudgingly and with change being imperfectly executed
3. *Average*: most organisations are like this: they do change and they do keep up, but change causes some difficulty and is sometimes late and poor in execution
4. *Static*: common in organisations with a rigid hierarchy and a fixed style of management, the need for change can cause difficulties here and it is difficult to get acceptance for it.

Clearly there is merit in an organisation acting to ensure that it is open to change and of moving actively towards that if necessary. In the meantime it pays to recognise how any difficulties will show themselves and allow for them, or indeed to build on the strengths of a group used to change and able to adapt quickly.

For an individual designated to head up change programmes, the “good change” organisation will promote feelings within them likely to assist the process, such a “change agent” will:

- Be motivated to be involved and in charge of change
- Feel they have appropriate responsibility and authority to effect the change (or seek and secure it)
- Be confident of the hierarchy around them, knowing who they report to and who they can call on for assistance
- Have been well briefed, and if necessary trained in any specific skills necessary for what must be done.

Thus those designating someone to head up a change programme must make sure that they are well equipped and confident to run it, and if they are seconded to this it must be made clear that this is a vote of confidence and that they are regarded as well able to cope. That said if anyone seconded to a change role should have reservations, gaps in their knowledge or skills or concerns about what support may be available they should raise it up front. There is no merit in trying to wing it and then foundering half way through a project; executing change is difficult enough without embarking on it poorly briefed or with an inadequate armoury.

The nature of the organisation is characterised in a considerable way by the culture it embraces – how it works. So it to this we move on.

### **Corporate culture factors**

A prevailing corporate culture consists of:

- The various ways in which operations work in an organisation, or a part of it (departments or divisions can vary)
- Practices that are normal, acceptable and those that are not
- Formal rules of operation and the second layer of norms that usually underpin them.

Everything combines to make organisations very different culturally and the options are many and wide: retail chain Marks & Spencer does not run its operations like a bank, nor Holiday Inn like budget airline Ryanair. What makes each individual organisation well, individual, stems from a number of factors, and these include:

- The prevailing management style: this can vary enormously from dictatorial to heavily consultative. Vision and forward thinking are an important part of this in terms of promoting change
- History: a long established organisation can reflect lessons hard learnt and that can affect current operations; a newly established organisation is likely to be different
- Ownership: a family business is different to one with shareholders to be satisfied and ownership that is distant, dictatorial or both will certainly affect an organisation's ability to change easily
- Purpose: different missions – profit, charity, growth, quality and so on – tend to foster different styles and thus different cultures
- Scale of operations: whether operations reflect a global presence or a small scale local one will clearly have a bearing.

The above are prime but other factors can be added. These days an organisation's facility with IT is a factor, so too is the kind of people they employ (their level of qualification, skill and proficiency). All this certainly results in there being outward signs that indicate the kind of culture at work. Such signs include:

- Style of premises (location, type, decoration and design)
- Staff attitudes (customer service can measure this)
- Working habits (hours worked for instance)
- Appearance and conduct of people (even in less formal times people must normally be smart and always caring and efficient).

Such things can be powerful in their influence. For example, smart offices no doubt make everyone feel good; ones with an even stronger element of design and grandeur may impress both staff (perhaps boosting their confidence – *we must be good!*) and customers alike; but go too far and the message becomes one of arrogance and can be off putting. I once saw someone quoted as saying “never do business with a company which has a fountain in reception”; the implication being that such means that they are unlikely to deliver value for money.

The precise nature of the culture within an organisation can affect how change is handled within it. While every one is different, there are said to be four overall cultural types:

1. *Centralised power culture*: in many organisations, especially well-established entrepreneurial ones, power and decision making tends to be centralised, that is heavily influenced by a small number of people at senior level. In such organisations decisions may be easy to get, though they may be primarily based on a combination of experience and hunch (and so may not always be the best as they will often involve little consultation). Nevertheless to prompt change it is especially important that such senior people are involved and give their support to whatever must be done.
2. *Functional culture*: in this type of organisation communications is good within functions and up and down the organisation, but is poor across functional boundaries. Faced with change, achieving accord can be time consuming and effort must be well placed to follow current practice and yet get messages around the organisation; again senior commitment helps.

3. *Task based culture*: here the predominant factor of the way the organisation works is the project or task. Communication is flexible and there is little rigid hierarchy; in terms of change it means that many people at all levels may need to be involved and that while communicating with them is easy efforts must be made to include everyone necessary despite the low incidence of formal structure.
4. *Individual focused culture*: this is typical in service companies, where professional staff members pursue their own projects and interests and yet must link to organisational goals as well. This is the least common of the four types, and organising to involve everyone in such a disparate situation needs care and effort.

As you plan to instigate change, it does help to make the process of change easier if you are clear just how your organisation works in this sort of way; you need to know what the so called “levers” are, where and how influence can be brought to bear – what buttons to press as it were.

Preparation, careful, systematic preparation which is given sufficient time is something that will assist many activities; its positive influence is very obvious when it is absent. This is rather like the situations when someone stands up to make an important presentation and has not given preparation its due. It is also something that experience shows it is all too easy to skimp in the heat of the moment as many of the prevailing pressures demand action “now”.

As change is rarely easy, it is worth making some resolutions about your commitment to preparation and remembering that ill considered initiation of change is likely to be downright difficult.

Preparation smoothes the way and what is done also acts to guide things along as matters progress. Ultimately a checklist is needed – a classic action plan that specifies:

- What will be done
- Who is responsible (for both initiating matters and the tasks necessary along the way)
- When things will be done (all aspects of timing, sensibly including some contingency).

The actions can vary enormously and many concern the necessary communication change involves. In the next chapter we look at the practicalities of making successful change and the sequence of events that it necessitates.

## 4 PROMPTING SUCCESSFUL CHANGE

Preparation is very important, as stated: it means thinking everything through, anticipating problems and objections and it also means adopting a considered and systematic approach and it is this that we consider next.

### Factors facilitating change

Let me say again, for the most part, change does not just happen, certainly well ordered change does not. It needs to be prompted and an active approach to initiating it is necessary. What conditions need to be satisfied if change is going to be successfully made? Several things are important and these apply to one degree or another whatever the scale and nature of the change is and whether it will affect an individual, a small group, a department or the whole organisation. These main factors are:

#### 1. Clear purpose

It is axiomatic that change is hardly likely to be made successfully on an ad hoc basis. There needs to be defined purpose behind it, indeed defined purpose should direct it. This in turn means that change must:

- *Relate to overall organisational goals:* the reason for making any change must link to measurement. This may be personal: management on a profit sharing incentive will be motivated to make changes that increase profit and in such circumstances it is always much better to say that profits must be lifted by 10% or whatever rather than some vague statement such as aiming to increase “as much as possible” (this tends to be a self-fulfilling prophesy, however small the increase actually proves to be). Whatever the mission of the organisation and whatever senior officers of the company are motivated to do, a change will stand the best chance of speedy implementation if it is tightly bound to this
- *Be well defined:* changes can be positive or negative in the sense that they may be designed to take advantage of an opportunity or to combat a difficulty; in either case they will only go well if they are clearly defined and have clear objectives. Whatever is necessary must be done at this stage: consideration, consultation, assessment and reassessment – but no further action should be taken until it is clear what the intention is. The core of this is setting objectives. This must be done right and is a whole new issue, suffice to say here that they must be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timed.

- *And the desired outcomes of the change should be specified:* this too links to objective setting. It is axiomatic that a change requires something to be different after it is made. This ties in with principles of objective setting, mentioned earlier, and designed to prevent vagueness. You need to describe what will come from the change and what is more describe it in a way that those people affected by it and whose support you need to make it work, can visualise it. It is useless to say only that things will be “better” or that a process will be “more efficient”; the specifics must be spelt out. It can help here to identify a bench mark: thus as part of the description to say that things need to change so that it (the organisation, department or whatever) is like...something else with which people are familiar.

*Note:* it may be obvious, but it is sufficiently important to state: in part all of this is for the instigator of change. Someone intent on change may feel they are clear what they want to do and achieve, but the thinking that defining the situation and setting objectives demands is invaluable in clarifying intentions, identifying things overlooked and clarifying exactly what will be done and why. That done change can be embarked upon with confidence.

There may be no need for elaborate documentation here. On a small scale any objectives and any plans may be purely for your own guidance, but a few notes on paper may be useful and there are times (when major change is afoot and many people will be involved) when your initial thoughts need formalising into a plan, report or proposal and setting out chapter and verse as it were. If you not only know which road you should be on, but have taken steps to make sure you go purposively along it, then that is a good start as you contemplate any change.

Every (significant) change initiative needs someone to support and actively lead the process. This role may be combined with the hands on one of actually project managing the change and attending to the details. But it may not and thus it is useful to consider the role of leading change in isolation before going further. Leadership is the second factor facilitating change.

## **2. Defining the leadership of change**

Leadership can be defined as inspiring people to do (willingly) what is required; in this context to make the changes that are necessary, promptly and effectively in a way that links to results. This in turn means ensuring that people are confident that things will be improved by the change and can see clearly the route that needs to be taken to get to the better future. Whoever does this, and perhaps the first job here is to make sure it is not a role that is falling between the cracks, they must be correctly positioned. If a change is to be organisation wide then the leader must be at, or close to, the top. If it is more local then the appropriate level of manager needs to be involved.

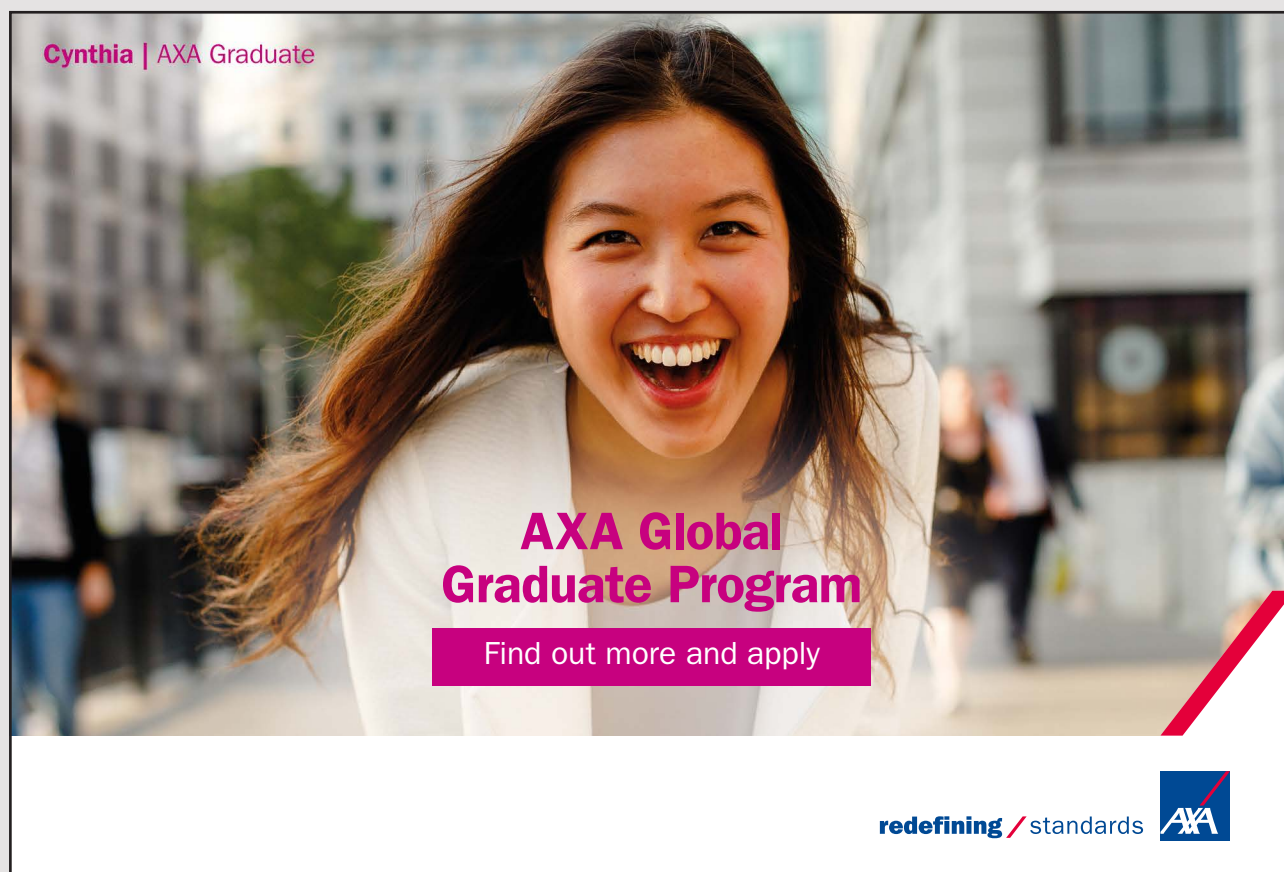


That said change leadership must:

- Relate clearly and accurately to the objectives set
- Orchestrate the needs, wants and feeling of the people it aims to lead towards those goals.

In turn this style of change leadership must relate to both the level of perceptions and behaviour and to the actual methods and “mechanics” of putting the change in place. So with an eye on the behavioural side of things the leader should:


1. Exercise professionalism and clout to ensure they are seen as the leader
2. Respect and empathise with the people who are affected by the change (and be seen to do so)
3. Communicate clearly and prompt trust through genuine consultation
4. Recognise and use the experience, knowledge and skill of others
5. Remain visibly involved throughout the process
6. Be easily accessible: to answer questions and confer in any way necessary. Your availability must be genuine: too many managers say that their door is always open and are then never behind it.



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As the actual project progresses they should:

1. Be sure it fits with the overall corporate vision for the longer term future
2. Define and communicate clear and specific objectives
3. Put in place any controls necessary to monitor progress
4. Consult as necessary before finalising what will be done and how
5. Set out clearly the methodology and timing and specify the roles and tasks of everyone involved
6. Manage and monitor the process along the way to ensure all goes well
7. Communicate clearly and regularly throughout the duration of the project
8. Providing feedback afterwards about how things have gone (all being well this should consist of motivational messages praising how people have ensured matters concluded successfully; though any lessons learnt may need flagging too).

All this adds up to a not inconsiderable task. The leader's role is vital. On some scales one manager, you perhaps, combines the role of leader and project – change – manager. Alternatively there may be a whole team of people involved in implementation and change may run across hierarchies and functions. *Note:* the note in point 2 in the first list above to be “seen to be doing so” really applies throughout the piece. Leadership cannot be exercised from the shadows.

### 3. The people factor

Here three issues are important.

1. *Behavioural considerations:* aspects of peoples' behaviour when faced with change have been commented in the last chapter. Essentially two factors must be accommodated. First, likely reactions, what they are likely to be and why and what should be done to get people on side. Secondly, attendant changes that may be necessary to make things work. For example, if it is necessary to improve productivity and cut costs. Doing so may mean redundancies. Additional changes alongside the new work practices of those remaining may increase acceptability (an example of this might be new incentive payments).
2. *Involvement:* it has been said that understanding of planned change must be rapidly followed by support and cooperation. This means involving people, and perhaps giving them ownership of the change: meaning that they do not just support it but begin to think of it as “our idea” and thus will implement it with more enthusiasm. Different stakeholders may need approaching in different ways and each must be hooked by something that is truly relevant to *them*.

3. *Briefing*: beyond this anyone – everyone – who has a role to play needs a thorough briefing both about what will happen and, if appropriate, what they need to do. This means significant, systematic and careful communication put over in an appropriate fashion; everyone has heard horror stories of the reverse, people fired by text, say.

#### 4. Selecting the methodology

Any change is in a sense a project and large scale ones need project managing. The two different kinds of change identified earlier need different approaches.

- i) *Innovative changes*: here changes are related to ongoing processes so there is, or can be – or indeed should be, regular ongoing processes in place to identify the need for change and set things in train. For example, a scheme designed to improve performance while linking positively to regular monitoring of customer satisfaction. Other changes are instigated on a one-off basis and may involve any method that fits the area of operation in which they sit.
- ii) *Strategic changes*: these are by definition more likely to be one-off in nature, and they may be more all embracing and substantial than innovative changes. Different types of strategic change demand different approaches. First there is *management change* – that is changing the way the organisation, or part of it, is managed or structured in terms of organisation, hierarchy and roles and responsibilities. That said it is possible that some changes here have both innovative and strategic scope. Secondly there are *procedural changes*. These affect the way things are organised and done: and involve everything from standards to information systems and processes. There are clearly a plethora of ways of handling systems and processes and thus many opportunities to change them. Thirdly, a large and ongoing area of change, *technical change*. Such can involve different ways of doing things – classically computerisation – but may also focus on a range of operational factors from organising production (such an area presents many options for change right through to moving production completely to a low cost country) to identifying and exploiting new markets.

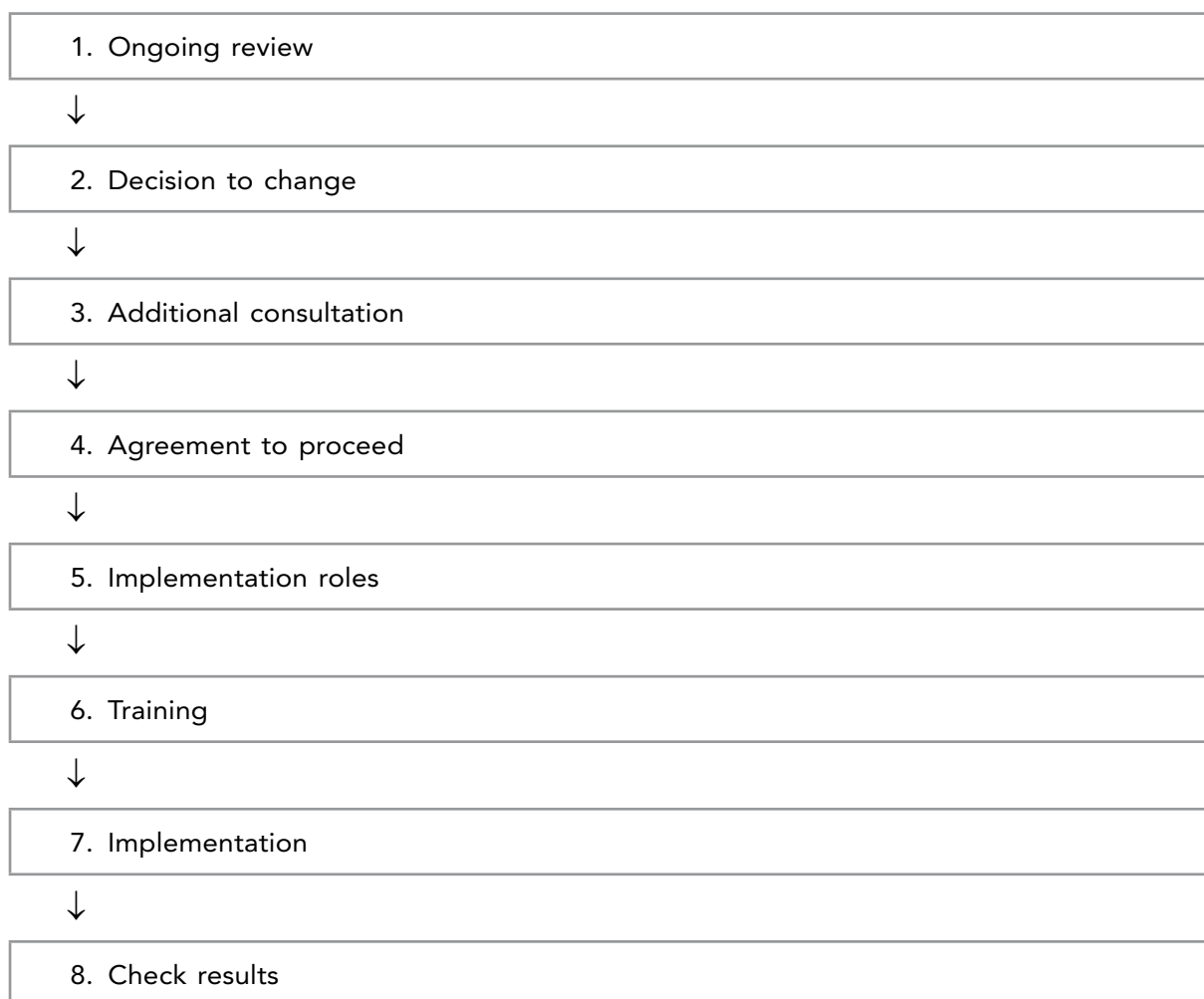
#### Making it work

Whilst every individual change needs individually approaching, it is useful to start with a common framework: that is a sequence of stages that will carry you through most programmes of change. Such a sequence may provide a sensible approach even to simple areas of change, one needing little consideration or time. More often things are more complicated and going through carefully in this kind of way is more of a necessity. The main stages are set out below and then a more detailed picture described for both innovative and strategic change.

1. *Analysis*: investigating what needs changing, why and whether the organisation is ready for it
2. *Designing the change*: fitting what will be done to the circumstances and the people
3. *Planning*: setting out the detailed approach and methodology
4. *Communications*: specifying when, how and to whom the change must be communicated
5. *Selecting the people*: who will be involved in any way in implementation
6. *Obtaining senior support*: what is often called a champion of change
7. *Consultation*: something that may well need to predate the rest of the process (or be part of analysis) and continue in various ways throughout.

### Implementation of innovative changes

Innovative changes are those to practices and processes that can be regarded to some extent as routine; certainly in most organisations a great many such changes are usually necessary to keep operations at peak efficiency. A typical sequence here might be as follows:



Some detail of each of these stages follows:

1. *Ongoing review*: most, but certainly not all, such changes will come from various ongoing processes of review and consultation. Such include schemes such as Quality Circles and more routine departmental meetings, which should have an eye on change as well as acting to review short-term operations and performance. From such deliberations ideas occur to make positive changes that will affect performance in a variety of ways: efficiency, effectiveness, cost-effectiveness, product performance, profitability and more.
2. *Decision to change*: this is the point at which a specific decision is made to go beyond the idea stage and investigate or implement something. This can be made at a variety of levels, but is probably typically at department head or middle management level. The decision may need documenting: that is recording (this may be no more than the minutes of a departmental meeting or could be more formal) and, at the appropriate moment, circulating (perhaps as the first stage of further consultation or explanation).
3. *Additional consultation*: with matters agreed in principle it may be politic to consult further either generally or with those who will be specifically involved or affected. This may also be the stage to think about any benchmarking that might be useful as a comparison as the change process continues.
4. *Agreement to proceed*: this takes the decision to act to the next stage. Here the methods to be used are agreed, that's the how, and what will happen when is also specified to ensure it is clear exactly how implementation will proceed.
5. *Implementation roles*: as part of the plan developed in 4 above, specifics need to be added in terms of *who* will do what and when. Then people involved will need briefing – jointly or separately – so that they are clear on what their roles entail.
6. *Training*: this stage is not always necessary, but should be part of the overall assessment: if new knowledge or skills are going to be needed they should ideally be developed ahead of going further. Certainly it should be considered as it is not uncommon for a change to be made, a potentially good one too, and then for it to founder in some way because this has not been done.
7. *Implementation*: here the various actions are project managed through: the list of things to be done clearly varies depending on what change is being made.
8. *Check results*: this should be built into the plan from the beginning, specifying who will do it and when. Any lessons learned should be fed back into the ongoing review process (the first point in this list).

Alongside this list is one more stage, added here as it runs in parallel with the sequence above: and that is *communications*.

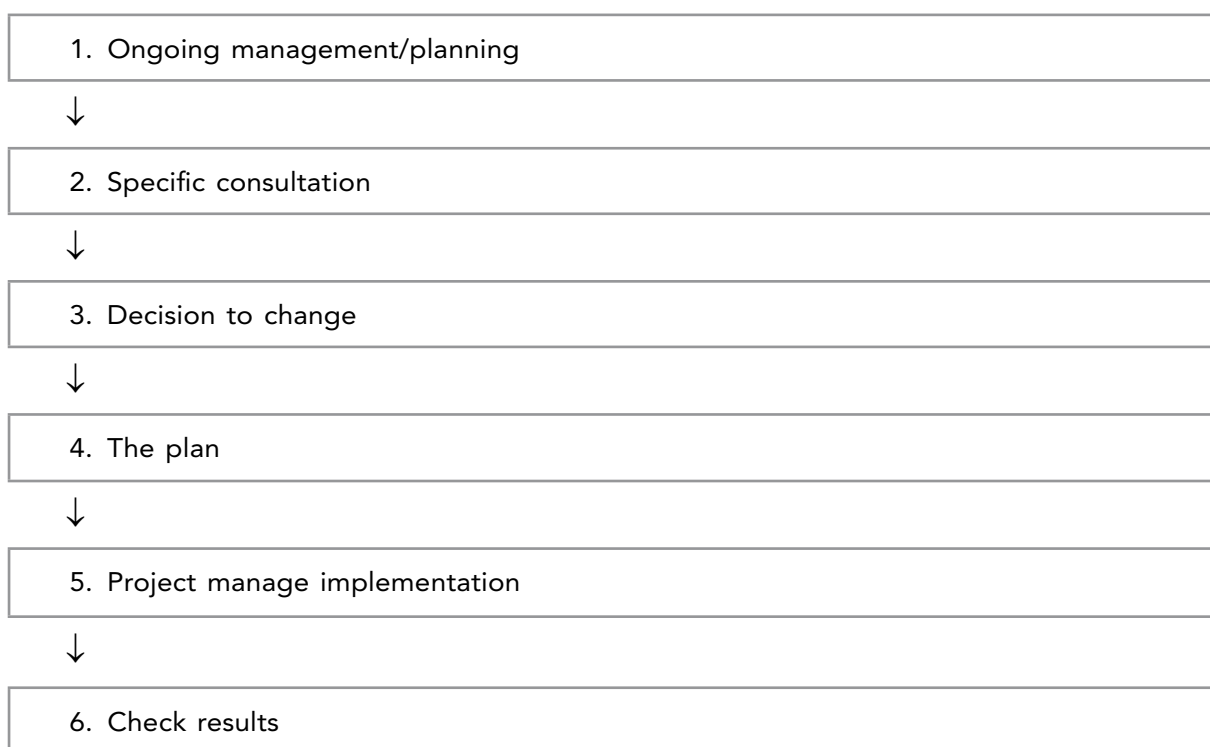
*Note:* the complexity here in planning or timetabling terms is obvious. It makes sense to highlight the key steps in writing and in checklist form. This can be done in two ways either:

1. Listing the actions chronologically
2. Or listing each stage as a group of actions (again in chronological).

The choice here is simply personal: what seems most straightforward to you and is most manageable.

### Implementation of strategic change

Strategic changes, those affecting longer term, broader and more radical matters demand some differences, thus:



Again each of these stages is commented on in turn:

1. *Ongoing management/planning:* at senior level, certainly at Board level, and in conjunction with the ongoing cycle of business (and marketing) planning matters of strategic change will arise; indeed it may be a specific intention that they do.
2. *Specific consultation:* an idea may immediately need investigating, refining or confirming by others within the organisation who are more immediately involved so that the necessity and practicality are verified.

3. *Decision to change*: following stage 2 a formal decision may need to be made to move ahead (one that may well need to allocate funding and thus may need to follow some costing). This stage confirms the senior support necessary and also needs to brief and involve others who will be involved in seeing the change through.
4. *The plan*: the how, when and who aspects need timetabling (as for innovative changes) and wider communication may start in earnest here too.
5. *Project management/implementation*: here the actual work of implementation starts; in terms of a strategic change this may be both substantial and take place over a significant (long) span of time.
6. *Check results*: again monitoring should be built into the process and feedback should be arranged so that it can inform future decisions.

*Note*: it should be noted that *communications* is essential to success and must range through, and alongside, the process as necessary.

However systematic and well-organised the process of implementing change may be, it is important to bring a positive approach to it but, because resistance to change is so common, overcoming that is a prime skill of communication for any change agent.

### **Overcoming resistance**

There are some changes that are instantly welcomed, sometimes even in a long anticipated way – *at last, thank goodness*. But this is by no means always the case and resistance may well be a natural reaction, whether ultimately justified or not. For instance, it can often be no more than a vote for the status quo and keeping things as they are, just for the sake of familiarity. Often the job is to carry people with you through the process, moving them through three states:

1. *Defiance*: initially people are often simply against the change and express this either openly or in a covert manner
2. *Compliance*: at this stage people adopt a grudging acceptance; they go along with the change, but a lack of enthusiasm may slow progress and some active action against it can persist
3. *Agreement*: now, careful persuasion having worked perhaps, there is cooperation: a change is being organised and people are involved – working with the instigators to actively see it happen and make it successful.

Only when the third stage is reached is change likely to be made successfully in a way that works and which keeps working. Achieving the transition from one stage to another is assisted primarily by the nature and style of communication used during the run up to change, though ill-considered change that everyone can see is bad may not be saved by any kind of communication. In context here we focus on the active techniques of overcoming resistance.

First bear in mind one overall factor about agreement, because most often people do not make snap judgments. Instinctive resistance to change is a snap judgement, but it is one based only on assumption and perhaps prejudice. People normally weigh things up before agreeing and like to feel they are making an informed decision. An analogy helps illustrate this:

### **Deciding to agree**

Consider: agreeing to go along with or better still support a change requires a decision to be made. How exactly do people make decisions?

The answer can be summed up succinctly, people:

- Consider the options
- Consider the advantages and disadvantages of each
- *Weigh up* the overall way in which they compare
- Select what seems to be, on balance, the best course of action to take.

This does not mean that the option of change must have no down sides; realistically this may simply not be possible. It means assessing things and deciding something presents an acceptable option, one where the pluses outweigh the minuses. The analogy of a balance or weighing scales is a good one to keep in mind. Imagine a set of old-fashioned scales with a container on each side. One contains a variety of plus signs, the other minuses. The signs are of different sizes because some elements of the argument are more important than others are – they weigh more heavily on the scales. Additionally, some signs represent tangible matters. Others are more subjective – and some, for instance assessing where you will work following an office relocation have both tangible and intangible aspects to them. Both can be powerful component of any case and help people decide what to think about a change.



A final point completes the picture here: some decisions are more important than others and therefore may be seen to warrant more thought. Where a decision is of this sort people may actively want it to be *considered*. They want to feel that the process of making it has been sensible and thorough (and therefore their decision is more likely to be a good one); and they may want other people (their manager, say) to feel the same. In either case, this feeling may lengthen the process of persuading them.

The moral here is that overcoming resistance means persuading people that the balance they are forming a picture of in their mind is a positive one; overcoming resistance means dealing with the minuses (and perhaps also enhancing the plusses).

Before any point of resistance is addressed it should be considered and regarded as a source of feedback. There is after all a chance that if a significant number of people do not think a change is a good idea, then they may be right: perhaps it's *not* a good idea. So some objective review (or re-review) may be necessary and perhaps some fine tuning too.

But if the change is right and must be made to go well, then resistance must be changed to support. But first consider whether it can be avoided through anticipation.

### **Anticipating possible resistance**

You will know from experience that objections are not just possible, they are likely – indeed many say that receiving none is a sign of a total lack of interest. And if people are simply not engaged then they are unlikely to give the support you may well need. As your experience with this sort of thing grows few objections should come as a complete surprise to you. You come to know the sort of thing that gets raised. Further you learn the kind of things different types of people raise – the ones who are obsessed with every last tiny detail, the ones who are suspicious of any management promise, and more.

So to some extent you can, as you prepare to initiate change, anticipate what may be asked; and be ready to deal with it effectively. Of course, sometimes something will come out of the blue, and always the objection may be put in a different way from how it has occurred in the past. Preparing for them does not mean you can stop thinking during the process to come or that you always have a “pat” answer ready, but it will make dealing with resistance more certain and make it less likely that it will unbalance the case you present so that staff or others reject it. Some objections you may be able to prevent arising at all by thinking ahead. Prevention may be used as effectively as cure in this area.

A further consideration is that there may be objections that remain unspoken. This does not mean they are not in peoples' minds, some will be and will form part of the balance upon which they will ultimately decide to accept the change or not. Where experience shows that this is likely to be happening it may be necessary for you to raise the issue yourself, perhaps early on or during the consultation stage, in order to deal with it and get a point out of the frame. This is best approached head on. In a meeting you might say: *“You have been wondering about...I'm sure – let me spend a minute explaining how we deal with that... You have not mentioned...do you have any questions about that?”* And if you have thought through the answer, or at least the kind of answer necessary, then you can deal with the matter and perhaps also make it seem reasonably inconsequential.

### **Providing an answer**

Never attempt to deal with an objection until you have sufficient information. If you assume wrongly exactly what is meant or treat a serious point superficially you will quickly be in trouble and make matters worse. Resistance must not be allowed to put you on the defensive. What is called sparring helps set the scene. Thus any acknowledgement should be positive and in a meeting can usefully give you a moment to think. Thus if something is raised, perhaps a sceptical comment about timing, saying something like: *“That's a good point, timing is key here, let me explain in more detail how we aim to deal with this ...* ahead of any comment makes it clear that you are thinking about the point and treating it seriously. You will find that another useful device to unashamedly respond to a question by asking another question. This will be understood and accepted, after all how can you be expected to comment sensibly about a point until you know exactly what lies behind it? More than one question may be quite acceptable, though you should make it clear what you are doing: *“That's a fair point, let me make sure I understand exactly what you mean, can you tell me...”* This is an important point as simple questions or comments may either disguise a deeper point or, more often, can have many interpretations. Consider an example. If someone comments on cost – always important – saying something like: *“That is very expensive”*. What do they mean? It is a comment, one not even phrased as a question and could mean many things, for instance it could mean:

- *“It is more than I expected”*
- *“It is more than current costs”*
- *“It is over the budget”*
- *“I'm not convinced it is value for money”*
- *“Can it be reduced?”*
- *“I'm not clear what we get for it”*
- *“It is a lot to pay out at once”*

- *“Doesn't this rule other things out?”*
- *“I don't understand”*
- *“I don't agree”*
- *“Can the methodology be changed to cut costs?”*
- *“It needs more consideration”*
- *“It should not be done this year”.*

You may be able to think of, or have experienced, more. Clearly many of these interpretations need answering along different lines; this example makes the point clearly that you have to understand exactly what is meant before you deal with it.

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Secondly, if something is thrown out as a comment or challenge, just like “*But that is very expensive*” in the above example, and in a form that is not a question, then it may be turned back to the questioner as a question to clarify. Thus “*But that is very expensive*” could be followed by the question: “*Yes, it is a considerable cost, though I would suggest, of course, that it’s a good investment, but what exactly are you saying? Is it more than the project warrants?*” This kind of approach does a number of things quickly:

- It acknowledges the point (in the cost example, there is no merit in denying it is a great deal of money if someone clearly feels it is)
- Suggests you will be pleased to deal with the point
- Makes your asking for more information about a concern seem helpful.

Once these preliminaries are out of the way, you can move on to actually address the objection. If you continue to keep in mind the image of a balance, referred to earlier, and bear in mind that there will be points – of varying importance and substance, on either side – then the job is one of ordering the balance, or reordering the one you have described, so that it presents a favourable basis for a positive decision, one that accepts the change (if not approving it one hundred per cent). Sometimes, of course people will not agree even if the balance is positive, they are only going to agree if your described balance stacks up better than those of any different approach which they may also be evaluating.

You have four options in rebalancing, to:

1. Persuade objectors that their objection is false, in other words it exerts no weight on the minus side of the balance
2. Concede that they have a point, but explain that the effect on the balance is minimal
3. Concede completely and in this case – and the others – combine within your answer a re-emphasis on the plus points, that is the benefits that the change will bring
4. Explain that the negative effect they see is actually a positive (something that is sometimes possible when there is significant misunderstanding).

This really is all that it is possible to do, so at least mechanistically the options are not too complicated. Complexity is added by the lead times and other matters involved in the project: for instance it may well be that a change is not seen through by one meeting of one group. The process of recognising and handling resistance may have to go on over a period of time and in a way that involves many different groups and individuals.

Essentially, the instigator of change must first identify why there is resistance: for example that people fear the change, the uncertainty, increased workload or complexity of operation and so on. Secondly, they must recognise that the answer may need to incorporate not only communication and explanation in all its forms, but also training, suggesting a shared vision and the involvement of people in various ways. One additional trick is to involve those who support change early on in the process of persuading others that it is necessary, good and should be accepted.

Overall, success is made more likely by going about things in the right way and orchestrating the whole approach. To summarise at this point remember the mnemonic SUCCESS, mentioned earlier (Shared vision, Understanding the organisation, Corporate culture, Communication, Expertise, Strong leadership and Stakeholder needs).

## 5 A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH

We return now to the list of six positive measures that change necessitates in terms of communication (whether what is being communicated is good or bad news).

### 1. Who should be informed (and maybe who should not)

Given the problem of people feeling alienated by being “kept in the dark” as they would see it, you perhaps need to resolve to communicate with everyone in any way involved. This should include anyone who has any role in what will follow (even in an intangible sense – for instance asking who might spread positive, negative or inaccurate messages about what is happening). It is better to over broaden the list with which you communicate than risk people feeling left out; perhaps it helps to start from the other end in your assessment asking who definitely has no interest in or need for the information.

### 2. When people should be informed

The rule here is to communicate promptly. However having said that matters must be at a stage where there is something definite to say; though once it is clear something is going on, a preliminary announcement may help even if it is clearly not the full picture. In this case it is always more acceptable if the fact that there is more to come is made clear and the time scale is indicated as far as possible. Then, if you say that there will be a further announcement by the end of the month, make one. Even a few days beyond what is expected – or promised – will be resented and rumours, negative ones, will begin to fly.

Additionally, aim to tell everyone affected at the same time. Again rumours will fly around if one group are informed and others are not (but quickly grasp that “something is up”). There may be a stage when some people who will be key players in a project must be briefed ahead of, or in more detail than, others. If so then this must be done very carefully. Make sure that no external announcement of anything is ahead of internal ones. Even something like a sales person having a new advertisement pointed out to them by a customer when they have seen and heard nothing of it internally may cause embarrassment and thus resentment.

A suggestion here is to link one announcement to another. For example, if a company’s results are announced then news of a change may be linked to that in a way that allows the first, more general announcement to set the scene. Good results lead logically to changes to take the organisation forward further; bad ones need action to redress the situation. Change then at least has a real logic locked in up front.

### 3. What they should be told

The rule here is to tell people sufficient detail to make sense and carry them with you, and almost always this is made better by your being sure that *why* something is done is well explained. For example, a change to customer service methodology may be planned to keep up with or overtake competitors. If so then that should come first, then the details of whatever it is that will actually be done in terms of practice or procedure can be taken in context with the reason behind it already made clear.

That said, time makes a good basis on which to divide matters up: tell people what is planned (and why), tell them what is happening now and spell out what will happen next; if necessary with a timetable to give details.

### 4. How often they should be updated on progress or developments

The timetable just mentioned ties in here. The scale of changes varies greatly: a change may be a one-off action implemented overnight, or it could be a multi-stage process spanning many weeks or months (or longer).

The timetable needs to provide a thread to this when the time scale is longer. Think of the perspective of those involved. A manager may be paid to think in terms of financial years and long term planning, but someone in the sales or packing department may think the Friday coming at the end of the week is long term. Regular updates in light of assessing the people involved in this way are important, and it is useful too if this is flagged ahead – *I'll update you in three weeks' time.*

*Note:* communications is, of course, vital to the whole process. Clarity is essential, unsuitable secrecy can easily cause problems and clearly skills such as proposal or report writing (which cannot be gone into here) may need to be deployed effectively.

# AFTERWORD

*When you're through changing, you're through.  
Change is a journey and not a destination.*

Robert Kriegel

As this text has surely shown change is important, necessary and ongoing. Despite the necessity it is not always easy to instigate change and doing so can be downright difficult. Even simple, perhaps that should be written as “simple”, changes can be uncertain and major ones can be challenging and risk much if they either are not made or are made late or inexpertly executed.

Amongst the portfolio of skills a manager needs to be successful and also, let it be said, to make progress in their career, the ability to recognise the need for change and to set out to instigate changes and implement the process successfully is surely an important one. If you are early in your career and have escaped this so far, the likelihood is that you will find more and more that this is necessary as time goes on. As this book has made clear you need to be an agent of change and you need also to see yourself, what you know, the competencies, skills and attitudes you bring to bear on the job, as dynamic too. In life scientists tell us that virtually every cell in our bodies is replaced every seven years or so. We are, all of us, literally not the same person that we were seven years ago. This happens without you even thinking about it; the changes discussed here do not happen automatically, but changes do need to be made. You will not be the same manager in a few years time either; but make the right changes and you will find you are a better one.

## Key questions

As a final checklist the following list sets out a series of questions that you can usefully use either to assess how well something already executed was done or to assess the way you plan to make a future change and make sure that it is likely to be successful. These are arranged broadly chronologically and divided into logical stages; all rate yes/no answers.



**DEFINITION: what is to be changed?**

- Have you defined clearly what situation needs either overcoming (problems) or exploiting (opportunities)?
- Is the focus right (for instance is it on root causes rather than just on the symptoms of a problem)?
- Has suitable levels of consultation been involved in arriving at a clear definition of the change to be made?
- Do those involved understand and agree the situation?

**OUTCOMES: what is to be achieved?**

- Have objectives defining what will be different after the change is made been clearly stated?
- Is there a clear and satisfactory link with overall corporate goals?
- Again, have these issues been discussed, understood and agreed by all concerned?
- Is there a means in place to measure success?

**COMMITMENT: are people in favour?**

- Do people not simply understand and agree, but actively support the change and what it involves?
- Have any doubts they express been addressed?
- Is there suitable, powerful, senior support in place?

**SHAREHOLDERS: are all such informed and committed?**

- Have all potential and actual stakeholders been identified?
- Has appropriate consultation and communication been undertaken with all involved? (If necessary this must involve different process for different groups)
- Has feedback from this process been accommodated and any doubts addressed?
- Is their agreement and support in place?
- Are they positively motivated regarding the change?

**METHODOLOGY: how will things be done?**

- Is the kind of change this is well described? (For instance, innovative or strategic)
- Does the methodology chosen for use in implementation match the nature of the change?
- Has how things will happen been well communicated?
- Is the expertise of those involved (good or bad) allowed for in the implementation planning?
- Are you content the implementation methods are well chosen and will work?

**IMPLEMENTATION: an action plan for change**

- Is there a (written) action plan specifying exactly how the implementation will proceed?
- Does it specify *what* will be done, *who* will do it and *by when* it is scheduled to take place?
- Is there someone clearly “wearing the change implementation hat” to oversee the whole process?
- Are regular ongoing operations safeguarded during the process of change?
- Are all concerned well informed?

**MEASUREMENT: how will success be measured?**

- Are measurement processes in place?
- Do they monitor progress during implementation (in order to allow fine-tuning) as well as success at the conclusion?
- Do elements of measurement link to the future so that later change programmes can learn from this one?

**LOOKING AHEAD: ongoing review**

- Are regular procedures in place to spot the need or opportunity of future changes and feed such information into operations?

The answer to all such questions should be yes. The above questions are chosen to illustrate the process, but such a list, in tailored form, may form a useful checklist in your planning for any specific future change.

In addition, and to emphasise the last heading above, perhaps you occasionally – regularly – need to ask what areas within your organisation have not been changed for a while and might benefit from review. There is an old saying that says that – if it ain't broke, don't fix it; perhaps in this era of change the opposite is worth a thought too – if it ain't broke... break it – and then make it better. As has been made clear change is not only a reaction to the changing environment around you – in future it is likely to be those organisations seeking out opportunities for positive change that succeed best. And that means working at it. Sometimes change is one jump from here to there, sometimes it is a series of steps.

The moral here is clear: a number of steps may be involved to get where you want, in which case each one must be made with due care, but sometimes also a great leap is the only way.

To end, let's reiterate two points:

First you must recognise that making change and making it successfully is not necessarily easy. You cannot instigate change just by snapping your fingers and shouting "All change now!" What is necessary is a careful, planned and systematic approach with every detail well worked out and implementation designed to be effective in creating the desired results and, not least, to carry people – preferably happily – with it.

Secondly, though we might sometimes feel that change is what we want *other* people to do, make no mistake, change *is* the order of the day. It is not an option. If you work in an organisation that wants to survive and thrive and indeed if you want to do so yourself then you must cope with it, and it is best to embrace its necessity and view it positively. I would go further: success in future will go primarily to those that not only deal effectively with change but *who actively seek it out*. Because it is the changes that are made then that are likely to be most important and have the greatest impact on future success.

I surely cannot put it better than management guru Tom Peters, who said: *Life is pretty simple: You do some stuff. Most fails. Some works. You do more of what works. If it works big, others quickly copy it. Then you do something else. The trick is the doing something else.*

Doing something else...that is a philosophy that in these dynamic times we must surely all embrace.