



Managing Change

Change is a fact of life! Things change around us all the time. In our personal lives we continually accept endings and embrace new beginnings. We start new jobs; tasks and projects with regularity; we move house, town or even country; discover new recipes, wines, holiday destinations and technologies that we may not have tried before. We change what we've previously done even if that change is a small or subtle one – we are, as people, conditioned to *change*.

Change in the workplace too is inevitable. You can guarantee that, even if we can't see it, change will be happening all around us. New products, services, technologies, competitors. A change in our clients businesses, a change in our clients' clients businesses; any of these might result in change for us too. The current financial climate too easily shows us the sometimes fragile commercial world in which we live and the importance of being able to face and manage circumstantial change. Change is vital to business survival and any business will have developed natural skills and abilities in handling change to do just that – survive.

But what about pro-active change? Changing for SUCCESS not just survival. Changing to REALISE POTENTIAL not just maintain the status quo. Changing to ACHIEVE not just to stand still. Is that different?

Well, yes it is. People are quite ready to accept and embrace the need for change when threatened in any way as we are focused and motivated by our need for 'protection' and 'safety'. Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs' model demonstrates our base needs for safety and security and of course our basic physical requirements such as to feed ourselves. If these are threatened we are quite capable of embracing change. We are, as I said before, conditioned for change to *survive*.

However if we try and *initiate* change a whole raft of challenges frequently present themselves. And it's understandable – people who have change thrust upon them instinctively look for the threat that has forced the need for change, if there isn't one then resistance to change is quite naturally going to be higher. If we 'create' that threat and maybe a climate of 'fear' of not changing and that threat then doesn't materialise then our credibility is of course undermined. You have to be a pretty strong/confident individual to *initiate* pro-active change in any working environment. It is therefore perfectly understandable that we often find ourselves and our people literally paralysed by the consequences and fear of change UNLESS there is a very good reason.

Often we can see the need for change whilst others around us cannot. Often we can identify the potential consequences of NOT changing but are unable, for fear of creating panic, to be candid as to the reasons why. But we know we still HAVE to.

The good news it's manageable – as long as we are aware of the likely reactions to change and the dynamics of change itself.

Although change management can be a complex process we can simplify the way we view it by just focusing on 4 stages of change

CONTENTMENT DENIAL CONFUSION RENEWAL

Think of your business today and in particular your people (this can be a team, department or region too not just a wholistic view). How *comfortable* are they? How prepared are they for change to occur? How robust are they to manage change? How have they managed change before? Are they managing change now? If you are lucky you will have people (or departments/teams/regions) within your business who operate in a continued state of RENEWAL i.e. they are conditioned and positive about the need for both re-active and pro-active change both to survive AND to prosper. You will see positive communication and a general state of 'constant and positive challenge' within your team as well as a difference in their attitude towards the future as well as the present.

If however tough you look at your team and you don't see that state of RENEWAL then there is a high probability you will see them in either a state of CONTENTMENT or indeed DENIAL. People or teams who operate in an environment of CONTENTMENT will often say things like;

- We are the Market Leaders
- We know our Customers
- We have a great track record
- It is a stable industry
- We are the most profitable
- We achieve our budgets
- We are the best
- If it's not broken, don't fix it!

They literally do not see the need for change. They like it the way it is.





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People or teams who operate in an environment of DENIAL will often say things like;

- Our business is different
- It is a short term issue
- It is a passing trend
- We have always done it this way
- Our customers will come back to us
- Our competitors have got it wrong

They literally do not *accept* that there is a need for change even if they can actually see changes going on around them.

So what can you do about it? And what about CONFUSION?

Well firstly you have to identify the reasons for change in the first place. If you see that without change your very survival is threatened you have to make decisions about the detail and level at which you communicate the motivation behind changing it all. If though you see change for a more positive/aspirational reason, then you must accept a different level of 'buy-in' may take place. Either way you should expect to go through the same process.

Your objective for change is to take your team to an environment where RENEWAL is the norm: where change is regarded as a positive reaction to you realising your potential as well as dealing with challenges. Whether you start at CONTENTMENT or DENIAL (or a mixture of both) you will inevitably travel through a period of CONFUSION.

Confusion occurs when people move away from their normal operating zones and start to become uncomfortable. They question why? They seek a return to their normal, comfortable environments and often try and find a way back! They say things like:

- How did we get into this mess
- What is happening
- What have I done wrong
- I've been saying that for years
- We did that years ago
- It's all my fault
- Help!

Leaders of change are those who are strong enough and motivated enough to support and drive people through this period; they adapt the way they communicate, what they communicate and generally how they manage people until they arrive at RENEWAL. Confusion though WILL occur and individuals will move through it at varying pace and

levels of motivation. Just recognising it though is a good start.

Before any change process takes place then it is important that these considerations are made. Change has to be for a reason and that reason has to be clear and communicated if you are to *establish* AND *maintain* buy-in.

Previously, we've written about the crucial importance of setting business goals and some of the process we use when working with our customers. Goal structure and change management go hand in hand. Setting new goals will require us to do something differently and will inevitably challenge the 'business as usual' environment many of you find within your business today. Likewise, change without well structured objectives and goals also has the potential for failure. This in turn has an impact on how people view the business and their emotional response to it!

When working with our clients we use our 'rooms for change' model which maps our emotional response to change in business and the actions we should take in order to deal with effectively with them:

If your suppliers, customers and employees are aware of their part to play in delivering change then it becomes *accepted* rather than a project or communications nightmare!

