

# MANAGING CHANGE OR CHANGING MANAGEMENT



## INTRODUCTION

Managing change is all about leadership. It has to be, because leadership is about creating willing followership, and only when you have willing followership will you stand a chance of success in effecting change. Simple isn't it?

So why do organisations and their managers struggle so much with the management of change? So much so that those "would be" willing followers would suggest that managing change is more about changing management!

As change has been a constant over millennia, centuries and decades why have the truths of change management and effective leadership not sunk in?

The answer is simple. The human race, with all its current sophistication, forgets one essential truth – its all about perception.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF PERCEPTION

How many leaders, and therefore potential change agents, have the right idea, for the right reason, at the right time only to fail because of people's perceptions?

Perceptions are truths for those who have them. It is amazing how often that those endeavouring to lead and manage change lose touch with or miscalculate the perceptions of the very people whose support they need in the changes they want to make. The result? A lack of commitment to the changes and resistance, or at best apathy, in the implementation of the changes.

I may well be right in the changes I need to introduce but if you don't agree with me you will be forever sceptical of my motivations and wary of my plans.

The answer lies in the need for commitment.

## COMMITMENT

Commitment stems from agreement, and agreement stems from involvement. So the solution is simple – involve people, communicate with them, answer their questions, handle their objections, include their ideas, involve them and include them and you are likely to gain their commitment. The problem is that it takes time. It requires a willingness to incorporate others' views into your own, a personal security that can cope with being wrong, and a humility that admits the need for others' contributions.

Gaining the commitment of others is about the psychology of winning people over, and the intelligence to know when to press on, and when to hold back, for the sake of everyone involved.

Quite simply put, commitment is about building coalitions for change and being seen to do it! Over confidence and arrogance will have the opposite effect – the fragmentation of followership, loose coalitions and the seeds of failure, even before the change initiative has begun.

What then is true leadership all about?

## LEADERSHIP

Leadership is complex. Try to unbunble it and you will fail to unearth the essence of it. That combination of timing, need for change, consultation, lobbying, and simply being in touch with the reality of people's thinking is a rare combination for any individual to possess, which is why of course, that great leaders and change masters have a confidant they can trust. Someone who can feed them the current perceptions of power bases and interpret the mood of the moment. Someone who is a champion of the change, but someone who is loyal to the leader and wishes to ensure their success.

True leaders recognise their own fallibility when it comes to being in touch, and are wise enough to have that vitally important mentor, on hand to advise them. But, mentors are not peers, with the same degree of wisdom as their leaders, they are older, wiser, respected "elders" who can match the impatience and fool hardiness of the leader with the experience of years.

Successful leaders pay attention to their mentors, and they may well have more than one of them!

Effective leaders still need a change management process, so what is this process that they knowingly or instinctively use?

## THE CHANGE MANAGEMENT PROCESS

It's quite simple really. The effective leader sees things not as they are but as they could be. The change management process is simple to them. It consists of six steps:

- Define the current SITUATION. What is it, what are the problems associated with it? What are the consequences? Why is change necessary? What are the drivers? What are the benefits?
- Identify the FUTURE PREFERRED SITUATION. What is the vision for the future? What will be different in the future? Over what time-frame? What tangibly will have altered? How will people know and feel the difference? What will they experience? What will be the concrete evidence for them?
- What OBSTACLES will prevent achievement of the preferred future situation? What are the reasons for the obstacles? What holds them in place? What are the key issues which need to be addressed to remove the obstacles?
- What needs to be done to address these KEY ISSUES? Who needs to be involved? How and when do they need to be involved? What is the ACTION PLAN?
- How should the ACTION PLAN be COMMUNICATED? Who needs to know? How do they need to know? When do they need to know? What communication process and techniques will work best?

- How should the ACTION PLAN be IMPLEMENTED? What should be the milestones? What should be the success criteria? What monitoring and measurement methods need to be employed? What leadership style will be required? What culture and environment will need to be created?

Analyse any successful change management initiative, over whatever time-frames, and you will find the above key ingredients playing a significant part in the success.

But change management is not just about process it's about critical judgement.

### CRITICAL JUDGEMENT

Critical judgement has been described as "the art of foretelling the future outcome of a decision with inadequate facts."

Critical judgement is about taking risks with insufficient information, based on an intuition that the outcome sought is more likely to be achieved than not.

Somehow leaders of change manage to see that something is more likely than less likely and this gives them the confidence to act. But how do they do this? Previous experience? Analysis of trends? Courage to move against popular opinion? A desire to be different? A deeply held belief or value system? Who knows? Perhaps the leader himself/herself doesn't really know, but one thing is for sure, critical judgement is something they have grown over the years and it has come to be their staunchest ally.

But critical judgement is fostered by a desire to learn, often from mistakes.

### LEARNING FROM MISTAKES

It's been suggested that what marks out the truly great change masters from those that they have never achieved break-throughs is the ability, and willingness, to learn from mistakes.

Truly great leaders only see themselves learning from mistakes, others (who fail) only see the mistakes and lose confidence in themselves as a result. Very often they give up when unknowingly they are on the verge of a break-through.

Change management, and the leadership skills which go with it, require the persistence and perseverance to treat mistakes as learning, and learning as the only path to future success.

This learning process often requires moments of soul-searching, alone-ness and self-doubt, particularly in the middle of any endeavour. It's at times like these that the leader will need encouragement and support. Not platitudes or fawning, but honest, faithful belief in them from those he/she convinced to follow him/her.

Ironic, isn't it, that those who initiate and manage change successfully, are often in need of the same belief and support they give to others! But maybe that's as it should be, otherwise leadership and change management would be the prerogative of only a chosen few, and it will take more than a few to make the changes required today to survive, let alone succeed!

### CREATING CHANGE MASTERS

Managing change or changing management? Maybe we should just equip everyone to be change masters and avoid the dilemma altogether.

Here are some tips to encourage people to be these change masters:

- Make changing things the norm. Encourage and expect people to change something about the way they do their job, daily!
- Praise and recognise creativity and innovation. They are often the drivers, as well as the deliverers of change.
- Replace blame/fear cultures with learning cultures in which mistakes are treated as learning opportunities.
- Empower people with more information. The more they know, the more they can spot and solve problems; the more they can change things for the better.
- Communicate the need for constant change e.g. continuous improvement.
- Sell the benefits for all concerned.
- Reward the right behaviours e.g. contribution of new ideas.
- Handle resistors to change, quickly and effectively.
- Walk the talk – be a change-master yourself!

Make sure that you create a future of your own choosing; don't become a victim of someone else's choosing!