

Creating Advocates for your Change **Are you ready for change?**

By Warren Scott
Oakwood Learning Ltd 2008.

Why is change so in fashion?

All organisations seem to be talking about these days are efforts and programmes in relation to **change**, and how to enable change to happen effectively. So much in our working world is uncertain. Never has it been more true than to say *'The only constant is change.'*

Businesses have to change just to survive. The business journals are full of stories about organisations that failed to change quickly enough, resulting in poor performance, poor cost/income ratio and sometimes complete failure. The statistics are disconcerting, with somewhere between 68% and 84% of change initiatives failing to reach their stated goals. Of these 'failures' nearly all the organisations surveyed stated that the problems with the changes have not been structural, or procedural, or technological. No, the issues faced in change management are predominantly focussed around people. Any attempts to treat people as a business 'item' are doomed to failure. People are individuals who will act and react uniquely when faced with change. Why is this?

The Change Gap

Consider the people that you have worked with over the years, On average how much change would they choose to have? Compare this to how much change your organisation is demanding of its people? In nearly all cases I have encountered, there is a gap between these two aspects of work. This is called the change gap. It summarises why this aspect of change is so difficult, the amount of change desired by people is less than the business wants from them. Leaders/managers/supervisors are constantly trying to bridge this gap, to find ways of both expectations being met.

Change at an individual level.

Let's not fool ourselves, we can all react negatively to change, (and sometimes this is useful). I rarely believe anyone who says 'I love all change'. It probably means that the changes they have experienced have not meant enough to something they hold dear or consider to be precious.

What needs to be in place for us to buy into change? Kurt Lewin shares a useful summary of this in the 'change equation'. In his work he outlines the elements that need to be in place for people to buy into the change. The 'equation' looks like this:

If we have

V (Vision) +

D (Dissatisfaction/understanding the need for change) +

C (Capacity for change)+

S (A plan of the first few steps)

and these are greater than \geq

P (the perceived cost of change)

Then change will happen.

- 1. Vision** – We each need to understand where the change is attempting to lead us to. What is the future goal? We do not need to see every detail of the future, but enough for us to understand where we are heading towards, and what it will look/sound and feel like. This is both at a organisational/departmental level, but also at an individual level. What will my world of work look like once this change is implemented? When this aspect of the change is not clear, then changes tend to get a fast start and then fizzle out. We have all experienced that change with a big announcement that a year later is forgotten!
- 2. Understanding the need for change** – We each need to realise why change is imperative. This can be immediate i.e. why we need to start or stop doing something now. Alternatively it can be based on the premise that what we are doing now will not work in the future, i.e. It is a burning platform that will only support us for so long. For this then we need to understand the dissatisfaction with the current way of doing things. If we can feel the dissatisfaction ourselves, then we really will buy into the change. When this element is not in place the change often gets put to the bottom of the priority list. Why would I bother changing if I cannot see a good reason for doing so?
- 3. Capacity for Change** – We need to see how we can operate in the change individually. There are two key aspects within this. Firstly have I got the necessary skills, knowledge and attributes to operate in the new changes? If not, is it clear how I will gain these? If I think I am going to fail in the new changes due to lack of skills, then I will fight tooth and nail not to change. Secondly, have I got the time and resource to carry out the changes? If this aspect of the change is missing then it leads to anxiety and frustration. I know what this change is about and that this change is important, I just haven't the skills or time to do it.

4. **A Plan** - To buy into the change I do not need to know every single detail that will carry the whole change through. However, I do need to know the first few steps. What exactly do I have to do, to go with this change? What is expected of me now? Most of us are happy to go with the change if we know what we have to do. After a few early successes then I am much more likely to go into the change wholeheartedly. When this element is missing from the change, there tends to be a lot of haphazard activity in relation to the change some of which is needed some of which is wasted.

5. **Perceived cost of change**- The forces from the elements above all need to be in place and need to be stronger than my perception of the cost of change. It is the perception not necessarily reality that I will act on. If I perceive that the changes mean the loss of livelihood, then I will have a different reaction than if I perceive the changes to mean that I will need to learn some new skills in order to facilitate a different way of doing my work.

What is it that persuades people to be advocates of the change?

Robert Cialdini (Harvard Business Review October 2001) outlines a number of principles to persuasion that will help:

- Informal relationships, - People follow the lead of similar others.

People are more persuaded when they hear points of view from people they like informally rather than just formal channels. Relationships are key in getting people to buy into change. We need to use our existing advocates of the change to persuade others of its usefulness.

- Reciprocity - People repay in kind.

We are more likely to do something if there is some reciprocated element to it. Do we feel loyal to the company/our boss/our colleagues? Have they treated us well in the past?. Are they doing things for me? In which case I am more likely to do something positive back.

- Consistency. - People align with their clear commitments

Evidence suggests that people are likely to action the change, if they have said they will to others. People will act consistently with their commitment if we get the commitment to be active (they play a part) public (they tell others) and voluntary (they have a choice).

- Authority;- People listen to proven experts.

People will be convinced by others if they recognise them as having expert knowledge with a track record and evidence. Gather data on early success and use it well.

- Scarcity;- People want more of what they can have less of.

People value something that is scarce or special. If they feel that the changes are groundbreaking, exciting and new, then they are more likely to feel it is an opportunity.

Jay Conger (Harvard Business Review May – June 1998) adds to this by including:

- Frame goals to emphasise common ground.

People will own the changes if they can see a link between their own personal goals hopes and aspirations and those of the change. We therefore need to ensure that people realise not only how the changes will benefit the company but also how it will benefit them as individuals.

- Vividly reinforce your position.

Use data, anecdote, evidence and metaphor to bring the changes to life. Some people deal well with numerical data, others prefer a metaphor to bring the change to life. Using both is a powerful combination. We need to connect emotionally as well as logically with peoples decision making process.

Creating the organisational conditions for change.

Of course the above elements to enabling people to buy into the change only work if the organisational conditions are right. The work by Andrea Shapiro outlines the 7 levers of change, that is, the strategic decisions that need to be taken in change for the conditions to be right and the change to be sustainable.

These levers are:

Lever 1. Contacts between advocates/supporters of the change and others who may not yet know about it.

How can we use and encourage the informal network (where most persuasive communication happens) to communicate a message that is accurate, positive and which will be remembered?

Lever 2. Communication strategy

How will we formally communicate our change? Will we go for the 'big bang' announcement? Or will we drip feed information as and when needed?

Lever 3. Recruiting advocates

How will our recruiting process reflect what we are trying to achieve in this change? Will we hire people, contractors, consultants to support us in this change? Will we recruit people purely on skill or also on their level of advocacy for this change?

Lever 4. Removing resistors.

What is our approach to dealing with resistors to this change? Do we move them or sideline them? Do we use them to understand pitfalls of the change? For either of these do we do this immediately or over time?

Lever 5 Walk the talk

How can we get our senior team genuinely living the values? Really demonstrating to the organisation that they are both formally and informally fully supporting the changes?

Lever 6 Reward and recognition.

How will we ensure that people are formally and informally given recognition for driving this change forward in their own work?

Lever 7 Infrastructure

What processes, equipment, structures are we willing to invest in to support this change? Is there a sufficient budget to allow this change to have the infrastructure it needs?

Summary

Change happens when people change. Change is complicated and often difficult. However if we think 'systemically' about change (that is, we consider change from many angles and aspects and see all aspects of the change as interrelated) then we have greater chance of success.

Two key elements of thinking this way are:-

1. For the individual, what will allow them to really want and own this change? What will influence them? What has to be included in the way we lead change for individual buy in to happen? The change 'equation' outlines some key elements for this.
2. Secondly how can we create the conditions in the team/department/organisation which will allow the change to happen? The exciting new work on the 7 levers of change allows us to think strategically in a structured way. It allows teams to enter into dialogue in an informed way.

Focussing on only one aspect of change alone (such as structure) will never achieve the stated goals. We really do need to start by looking at the question of people and how we can get them bought into, owning, and wanting the changes. After all, no change works without the people.

More?

If you would like to discuss any of the above approaches to change and how they can be practically used in your team or organisation then please contact us

Oakwood Learning Ltd
01672 810699
www.oakwoodlearning.com