

# Allay the naysayers



Change is inevitable. Unfortunately, so is employee resistance to change. Stuart Smith, MD of Bourton Group offers some tips for getting staff on side.

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Stuart Smith has been managing change at board level for over 20 years. Stuart has particular expertise in delivering large scale, operational performance improvement using Lean Sigma methodologies for some of Europe's largest manufacturing companies.

**MANY** CEOs will tell you that their biggest challenge lies not in knowing what the business needs to do but in getting their people to do it. Resistance to change manifests in every industry and, the greater the change, the more entrenched the resistance. People feel they have much to lose and little to gain. Letting go of old ways is difficult for one person, let alone a whole factory or organisation.

Companies often fail to sufficiently consider the human pressures of change programmes. This approach leads to the high failure rate recorded in every study on change and transformation – they are remarkably consistent in finding that 70% of efforts fail to deliver the changes planned for. There are a myriad of factors to consider; overcoming natural resistance is affected by how you engage people, the management style adopted, the degree of involvement allowed, the amount of resource allocated, and the speed and degree of the change sought.

## Increase the likelihood of success

Before any change programme can succeed, there needs to be dissatisfaction with the current state among the people who are being asked to adopt new ways of working. This may relate to business performance, culture, or working methods. It's essential to be clear

what is causing dissatisfaction at the outset to ensure that the future state eliminates it. Where employees are happy and are not seeking to improve, it may be necessary to fuel dissatisfaction by showing them what "good" looks like to establish desire for the future state.

This vision of the future state needs to emphasise both how the business will benefit and what's in it for the employees. If the individual is clear about their contribution to the future state they will be more willing to take on the extra stress and workload required to manage the existing state whilst building the future one.

## Effective communication of the process is vital

Clear, informative, timely, outcome focused and two-way communication of the planned journey is critical. It is common for the nature of this communication to be sub-optimal. Never underestimate the ability of even a very small number of people to totally misunderstand each other's perceptions when they do not have a common and clear understanding of the steps that are being taken.

### It is critical to:

- Define a vision
- Determine the current state, identify gaps, assess capability for change
- Develop a strategy for the transition, with redesigned processes and behaviours

- Gain the commitment of the key stakeholders – particularly those who influence others (these may not necessarily be reflected in the organisation's hierarchy but are the hidden but highly influential network of people who staff listen to and believe more than official communication channels or management)

By doing this at the very beginning much of the "heat" and natural anxiety is dispelled. Energy is instead directed at finding solutions that meet the business need.

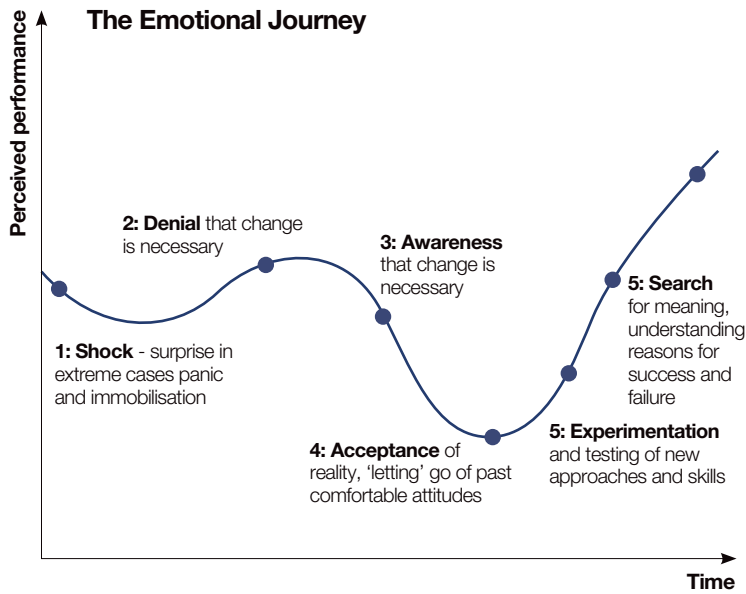
Sometimes, the belief seems to be that the later in the process people are told the less they are able to object. In reality, the reverse is true. By involving those people most affected early, reactions are less extreme, solutions are implemented more quickly at less cost and the business becomes more comfortable with embracing a continuous improvement culture.

Perceptions and feelings are not constant but they are somewhat predictable.

In change programmes employee emotions do not remain constant; everyone involved will experience their own 'journey'.

Outlined opposite is a typical emotional journey:

Individuals go through this journey at different speeds and with varying degrees of severity. Managers who knew about the changes in



<b>Focus</b>	What is important?
<b>Structure</b>	How will it be pursued?
<b>Discipline</b>	Will we stick to it?
<b>Ownership</b>	Do we care about the results?

advance of employees may be at the awareness phase at the point when employees are in shock and denial. Some individuals may remain stuck in the difficult stage of being aware, but not prepared to let go. Being sensitive to the emotional factors in change programmes and factoring in its impact in the execution will significantly improve both the speed and quality of the outcome. Papering over the cracks of these emotions and just telling people to change will ultimately come back to haunt change leaders. Dealing with these issues should not necessarily take more lapsed time.

**Additional resources and sensitive leadership from the top are required**

A key factor for success in change management programmes is whether you have the internal skills and people resources to enable change to succeed, and that you deploy these correctly. If you believe that you lack the resources then seek outside help at the outset. Resist a “suck it and see” approach when you start and then ship in outside help when things start to go wrong. Deploying the necessary resources at the outset demonstrates to the business that this is a priority, builds trust and confidence in the team and sustains early momentum. Allowing stress levels to build through a lack of

resources increases the likelihood that the whole programme will cost more and deliver less.

The style of leadership adopted will to some extent depend on the business culture. Taking a command-and-control, task focused approach will achieve change quickly but may prove difficult to sustain – those involved in the day-to-day running of the activity will feel less ownership. The secret is to balance “transformational” leadership of creating visions and developing ownership with old fashioned “transactional” leadership of getting it done in a structured, disciplined way.

Providing focus and generating ownership alone is not enough. There is a real need for these ‘inspirational’ aspects to be supported by good honest leadership in structured and disciplined approaches.

Generating ownership of goals and tasks requires a change leader to be clear on who has the greatest impact on performance and how to motivate them. Ownership will also come if leaders engage teams in generating a shared vision and help them recognise the contribution that they make to achieving targets.

Above all, the objective of change leadership is the development of higher levels of performance. Change leadership is an active process that uses the best of transformational and transactional

styles to achieve this and in parallel recognises and manages the natural resistance in the organisation.

While the change leadership style should be adapted to the nature of the work, it does not negate the need for sufficient commitment in management time, financial and human resources. As a manager, if the programme is not high on your agenda then it will not be high on the agenda of the team working on it.

**Change management and the future**

One thing is certain, change, as a constant challenge, is something every business will have to engage in more and more often. Businesses will also have to get better at managing change. Consider carefully the need and desire for change, the skills and resources required, the emotional state, the leadership style and the outcomes you seek. As Bruce Barton, politician, author and advertising executive, put it: “when you are through changing, you are through.”



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