

Quick Guide to Leading a Change Initiative

As a front-line manager or team leader, you have a critical role to play in the successful implementation of change in your organisation. Whether you are responsible for taking forward organisation-wide changes or you want to introduce changes at a more local level within your team, leading change requires a specific set of skills and approach.

This quick guide outlines some key steps to help you manage your team through the change process, ensuring you identify and manage resistance effectively whilst remaining a strong advocate for change.

If you recognise one or more of the following situations, then this guide might give you some fresh ideas on how to lead change more effectively:

- You have received feedback from your team which indicates that they feel they have little or no support to help them implement the proposed changes.
- Some members of your team have told you that they do not believe the changes relate to their everyday work.
- Some team members are openly negative and hostile to the planned changes and are unwilling to commit to new ideas.
- Some team members fundamentally disagree with the rationale behind the changes, believing that the status quo or a different approach would be better.
- At a personal level, you are not totally convinced that the outcome of the change will be positive, but you have had little or no opportunity to influence the decision to implement the change.



The following suggestions can help you to guide your team through the change process. Leading your team through the disorientation phase .

Understanding the reasons why people often fear and resist organisational change can help you find the best way to overcome these barriers. You should anticipate an initial shock or denial from team members depending on the level of change proposed.

Your team may feel or voice concern about:

- their own job security
- having to learn new skills
- loss of status or standing
- devaluation of their knowledge or skills
- a lack of understanding of, or agreement with, the change

Some of these suggestions might help you deal with your team's reaction to change.

- Involve your team wherever possible, in formulating the departmental or team change plan.
- Organise regular planning and feedback meetings to discuss the change (or add it as a standing agenda item at regular team meetings). Check to make sure that people know and understand the planned change and their roles within it.
- Help your team to open up. Be sensitive to people's feelings and allow them time for their concerns to be expressed. Be approachable, and make it clear that team members can come and talk to you about the change process if they are worried or have specific concerns. Consider introducing an 'open door' policy, and let team members know that they can speak to you on a 1:1 basis if they don't feel comfortable raising issues at regular team meetings.
- Stress the new opportunities that the change will bring, although you should also draw attention to the things that will remain the same.
- Remain positive. As the team's leader, it is important that you remain positive and act as an advocate for the change, even if you don't fully agree with it. If change has been imposed on you with little or no consultation, whatever you do, don't convey any personal negativity you might feel. Your role as team leader is to sell the planned change and ensure that your team remains motivated to implement it. You may decide to raise your concerns privately with your own line manager or a more senior colleague, but this discussion should never be revealed to team members.
- Ensure your team has sufficient support to help them adopt the changes required. You might achieve this by organising specific training relating to new team responsibilities and creating an informal buddying system within the team as a source of internal support. You could also arrange for team members to shadow individuals in relevant positions to help improve their skills and organise coaching to help team members through the transition phase and beyond.



Helping your team adapt to the change

As the shock of the new change sinks in, people will gradually begin to adjust to the changes. This can still be an uncomfortable phase for everyone as it is unfamiliar territory and team performance can often plummet. Your role here will be critical in helping your team see the light at the end of the tunnel. For example:

- Keep communication flowing. You may need to repeat the reasons for change over and over again. People may need to hear it, even if you feel that the message was clear and consistent the first time. Devote time at team meetings and briefings to discuss progress against the change plan so that team members are clear about what has been achieved and what still needs to be done.
- Provide formal measures of progress towards the change goals that have been made. Share and review them with your team.
- Encourage and support your team as they try out new approaches and skills. Although this phase can feel chaotic, it can also be a time of great creativity. Encourage experimentation and acknowledge mistakes as an inevitable and essential aspect of the learning process. Remember to provide feedback on results, and review what has worked and what has not gone well.
- Encourage self-awareness in others. Help your team to understand the reasons behind their successes and failures, and to adopt the new models and theories that are created. You may find that coaching is particularly useful at this stage of the process.
- Celebrate success. Identify some early milestones and celebrate when you reach them. This will boost the morale and motivation of your team, as well as encouraging them to keep up the momentum and help to embed change.

Embedding the change

- Integration - at this point it is important to help the team integrate their new skills, processes and behaviours. Each person involved in the change should be thinking, feeling or doing something different.
- Communication - as before, communication at this stage will be essential. Use team meetings to feedback progress towards the achievement of goals and to give detailed and prompt praise where due.
- Revisit individual team member performance objectives to make sure that they are aligned with the changes, and that each person remains clear about his/her own objectives. You should also take the opportunity to check that the individual's workload remains manageable.
- Identify any individual or team training needs that arise from the changes and ensure that the training is delivered.
- Document revised processes. As new and improved ways of working are established, ensure these are documented for future reference and to provide a benchmark so that progress does not slip.

Conclusion

As your team commits to the required changes, you will begin to see a shift towards improved performance. Enjoy the sense of accomplishment that comes with this phase. Use this period to review how you and your team responded to and adapted to the change process. This insight can help you to learn from your experience and plan how you can improve your ability to respond positively, flexibly and productively to change that will undoubtedly come around again.

If you would like to find out more about this subject, or how we can help make your business, better then give us a call 01926 633333.

