



Managing the **change** journey

By Weelan Ho

Over the years, I have come across a number of quotes relating to the subject about “change”. Some of the more interesting ones are:

- *“Change, change – who wants change? Things are bad enough as they are” – Lord Salisbury’s reputed remark to Queen Victoria*
- *“The one unchangeable certainty is that nothing is certain or unchangeable” – John F Kennedy*
- *“They always say that time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself” – Andy Warhol*
- *“The world is moving so fast these days that the man who said it can’t be done is generally interrupted by someone doing it” – Anonymous*

These quotes capture the essence of change. Most people dislike change. It is usually this human inertia about change that makes implementing difficult; and yet change is inevitable. The human race could not have progressed if we had not been able to overcome our resistance to change.

Reasons why people are afraid of change

- **Fear of the unknown.** Most people don’t like an uncertain future which they cannot control.
- **The reasons, objectives, and the vision for change have not been clearly communicated.** Consequently people are unable to buy-in to the ideas of change and therefore do not commit to the vision.
- **People are not involved in planning for change.** This has a number of consequences including not knowing what is going on, poor communication, lack of commitment and support, and therefore not wanting to contribute to the process of change.
- **Fear of losing their status, rights and face.** Change

often requires a transformation in job roles and responsibilities, alteration of compensation package, and sometimes even the work location. Such change also creates inconvenience to a family when other family members need to adapt to a different lifestyle.

- **People resist change simply because it is *change*.** Human beings are creatures of habit. Deep inside, there is a little bit of us that doesn't like change and prefers the status quo. Have you ever wondered why you keep eating the same kind of food, buy similar sorts of clothing or go to the same restaurants repeatedly instead of venturing out and try new places and experiences?

Manage the change journey

Understanding the reasons for resistance to change is the first step towards overcoming our inertia to change. It helps us develop a better change plan and navigate the change journey better. It is dangerous to embark on a journey without first knowing the end picture and the intended outcome. How do we know we have deviated from our goal if we don't have a plan? Thus developing a blueprint or a change plan is a must.

While change is dynamic and full of uncertainties, it can be managed. Planning and having the right measurements so that we can monitor the progress of change will help to minimize risks of failure.

No change project can be successful without sponsorship from top leadership and management. Top leadership sets the tone while management and team members plan as well as carry out specific implementation.

How quickly we can get the things done depends on our ability to mobilize the change plan. Apart from getting sponsorship, we also need to identify change champions

who have the passion to drive change and change agents who ensure change takes place within their local function. They are the catalysts and role models for change. They help to demonstrate the ways change can be achieved, motivate people and provide the proof that it is possible and beneficial to change.

We can only get people to buy-in and be involved if there is sufficient communication. There are no short cuts. Communicate, communicate, communicate – that's the key to generating involvement and commitment. So, don't fall into the trap of "we will communicate when we have the time", for you will never have the time as change takes a lot of time and effort. Make sure you have structured communication sessions and share the progress and results with all the people concerned.

Organizational change must be accompanied by organizational development. Address people's needs and concerns, particularly those whose jobs will be affected by the change. Be open and honest but do not breach confidentiality or tell lies. It is important that we help people to re-orient or get re-skilled so that they are able to cope and ready to work in a new environment. It pays to be considerate and compassionate.

It is often said that change is a process; it is not a singular event, and the change journey can be painful, exhausting and time consuming. It demands a lot of management's attention and sometimes creates and results in conflicts. But it is also true that there is "no pain, no gain". And whether we like it or not, change is here to stay. **T/D**

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