

# What's Changed in Change-Management?

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Max Ways, the former editor of *Fortune* magazine, predicted 40 years ago, "The main challenge to U.S. society will turn not around the production of goods, but around the difficulties and opportunities involved in a world of accelerating change and ever widening choice. So swift is the acceleration that trying to 'make sense' of change will become our basic industry."

That prediction is an apt description of our current reality. Change is no longer a force in the environment. It is the environment. Organizations around the world struggle to keep their footing in a whirlwind of technological innovation, customer demands, competitive pressures, globalization and economic volatility - knowing that any of these forces can turn a business model upside down in an instant, rendering even the best strategies obsolete.

To succeed during turbulent times, organizations and individuals must find ways to *thrive* - not just survive - amid complexity and uncertainty. Those enterprises that continually transform themselves in response to constantly shifting conditions gain a tremendous competitive advantage.

So what does it take to manage change today?

Managers looking to help their organizations (or teams or departments) make sense of change in the 21st century need a completely different set of skills than their counterparts in the last century. Forget about issuing orders or coercing with threats. Success in the Information Age takes employee engagement and creative collaboration. It takes guidance by managers who know how to harness the energies and talents of others while keeping their own egos in check. It takes leaders at all levels who manage by influence rather than by position.

The dictionary says that *leadership* means going ahead or showing the way. To lead is to help a group define and achieve a common purpose. But look carefully at that last sentence - helping a group define and achieve a purpose is not the same as setting that purpose and then "selling" it throughout the organization. Change driven from on high without significant across-the-board participation is bound to meet with workforce skepticism and resistance. On the other hand, the co-creation of purpose/vision/strategy is an inclusive process that encourages employee engagement from the very beginning.

Effective management of organization change also depends on early, comprehensive, and transparent communication. In most cases, the manner in which change is communicated is more important than the nature of that change. And don't think for one moment that speeches and articles are the only ways leaders communicate. Every action and off-the-record comment carries weight. As one insightful manager told me, "What I do in the hallways is more important than anything I say in the meetings."

Abrupt change that comes as a complete surprise is the hardest to accept. To reduce fears of the unknown and squelch fantasies of the rumor mill, leaders "set the stage" by informing people upfront about the real-life challenges and opportunities that are likely to become the future impetus for organizational transformation. They also make sure that employees have enough business acumen to make sense of financial data. The more everyone understands about the current situation, the trends and forces shaping the future, the economic realities of the business, the alternatives being considered, and the consequences of not changing - the easier it is to accept and even anticipate the need for change.

Respected change-managers are powerful communicators who don't ignore or sugarcoat

negativity. Instead, they help people make sense of it. If a past change effort has failed, it's publicly acknowledged and reviewed so that everyone can extract its lessons and move forward. (Likewise, if a best practice is discovered, it's also publicly acknowledged, reviewed, and learned from.) Candid change-communication means that both positive and negative aspects are disclosed. The most motivational managers are those trusted by their team to share knowledge and "tell it like it is."

Effective managers of change are catalysts, creating synergy in their organizations. They delegate responsibility and authority. They encourage and protect their teams. They model attitudes and behaviors they want to see reflected back. Most of all, they realize that managing change today takes emotional literacy. It is no longer enough to appeal solely to people's logic. Leaders also have to touch people's hearts. And the best of today's leaders do so by revealing their own passion - for the future success of the organization and for the individuals in that organization who face the tough job of transforming themselves in order to collectively create that future.

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