

# Changing How You Make Change

*By Michael Haid*



Michael Haid is the Senior Vice President of Global Solutions at Right Management. As a successful senior executive, he is well versed in international business development, organizational and talent development, product innovation and management, marketing, sales and business process. Haid is a seasoned professional and expert in integrated assessment systems and senior level consulting.

Copyright © 2010 by Right Management. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

**Linkage**  
Unleash your full potential.

Change is all around us. It is increasing in velocity and driven by myriad external, internal, evolutionary and revolutionary forces. The need to change how we manage *change* has never been more needed.

For organizations, as much as, for individuals, change begins with desire. Whether in their workplace or their personal lives, people will never successfully negotiate change unless they are truly open to it. They have to be genuinely committed. For this reason, change management has traditionally focused on shaping the attitudes of leaders and employees. It has become something of a cliché to speak of the need to build an agile workforce ready to embrace change with gusto whenever required.

However, it is equally common to acknowledge the challenges of building such workforce agility. In a Right Management poll of senior human resource professionals conducted in 2009, 75% of respondents indicated that their organization's employees were either unable to adapt to change without placing engagement and productivity at risk; or somewhat able to adapt, but not without suffering a decline in morale. Leaders must continue to focus on attitudes, but effective change management requires a more holistic approach in which leaders concentrate on self-management and relationship building as well as on the attitudes of employees.

## The Context: Four Complicating Trends

---

In certain ways, change does not *change*. Our research indicates that the single most significant change faced by organizations in the next six months continues to be restructuring; with the introduction of new leadership and the advent of a new merger or acquisition placing a distant second and third respectively. Organizations are dynamic and evolving; therefore, always managing change events.

What is the most significant change your organization will face in the next six months?

- ◆ Organizational restructure      51.05%
- ◆ New leadership                      20.37%
- ◆ Acquisition/merger                12.65%
- ◆ New product launch                9.60%
- ◆ New technology                      6.32%

Source: Right Management online poll of 427 human resource professionals conducted in March 2010.

Yet workplaces today are subject to long-term trends that are fundamentally altering the way that work gets done and complicating management of more recognizable change events such as a restructuring. Leaders may find managing restructurings and other such examples of acute change challenging precisely because their response fails to account for these underlying long-term shifts in the world of work.

Right Management has identified four key connected trends:

- ◆ Demographic change involving the retirement of large segments of the workforce over relatively short periods of time is leading to an increasing skills shortage and mismatch between talent and job requirements.
- ◆ A workforce consisting of individuals drawn from four different generations is introducing an increasingly diverse set of motivators and preferences into the workplace. Especially where sought-after skills and talent are at stake, organizations will have to work harder to meet individual needs and expectations in a one-size-fits-one world.
- ◆ New technology facilitating unfiltered communication via wide online networks is dramatically increasing the transparency of work arrangements and supporting new more coordinated and collaborative ways of working. At the least, this new transparency is placing an organization's talent practices under greater scrutiny.
- ◆ Sophisticated talent management is becoming an increasing priority in many workplaces as organizations facing mounting competitive pressures seek greater productivity from and returns on talent.

It does not require much reflection to see how such trends are complicating attempts to manage change by addressing attitudes alone. How do you shape a change-ready workforce when it consists of individuals with needs and expectations that may differ widely and even conflict? How do you build support for change when change may disrupt the more connected and collaborative ways of working enabled by the new technology or when the new technology becomes the conduit for the uncontrolled dissemination of information that may be more or less accurate? How do you win over highly skilled and/or talented employees who may have no difficulty finding a new position in a job market characterized by shortages and mismatches? How willingly will employees adapt to change if change strains the organization's capacity for sophisticated talent management?

## The Solution: A Three-Dimensional Approach

---

**Self-Management** The key to managing relationships essential to implementing change effectively is self-management. Leaders must evince the attitudes, behaviors and actions that win trust and confidence. So before any change is undertaken, they would be well advised to evaluate their readiness to lead change. Do they have sufficient self-awareness? Do they have the self-control and the self-assurance? How adaptable are they themselves to change? How aware are they of the impression they make on others? How capable are they of maintaining their composure in response to the inevitable strains and pressures associated with change? For leaders, the road to successful change begins with the self. Once they have developed a clear view of their own strengths and weaknesses—preferably by means of a formal, validated assessment process—they will be able to address potential de-railers and lead change with confidence.

**Relationship Management** As long-term world of work trends increasingly complicate the task of managing change, new more sophisticated approaches are required if organizations are to meet the proliferating challenges. For a start, leaders must place more emphasis on building strong relationships with peers, immediate reports and the broader

workforce. As change looms, they must anticipate that conflicts may arise among different segments of the workforce, that highly skilled employees may want to leave or that false reports may circulate via the new communications networks. From the outset, leaders must clearly and consistently articulate the nature of the change in view and its benefits not just for the organization but also for employees. They must assume a strong role in resolving conflicts and negotiate the specific terms of change in order to win broad agreement. They must make themselves widely available to listen and respond to people's fears and frustrations. Only then will they be able to build the trust and relationships they will need to influence the organization and drive change successfully.

**Attitudes** Influencing employee towards change, the conventional focus of change management, remains an essential part of the process. But once leaders have refined their self-management skills and built strong relationships based on trust, they will find that their ability to shape attitudes is much stronger. Employees who have confidence in their leader's ability to lead change, who understand the advantages offered by change and who trust that their concerns will be heard and dealt with fairly, will be willing to engage in change as full, committed partners. They will be more open, more adaptable and more likely to persevere.

The picture, then, that emerges of successful change management in an evolving world of work involving three dimensions. A leader's effective self-management drives the effective management of relationships, which, in turn, drives the development of positive workforce attitudes on which the successful implementation of change ultimately depends.



# Linkage

Linkage is a global organizational development company that specializes in leadership development. We provide clients around the globe with integrated solutions that include strategic consulting services, customized leadership development and training experiences, tailored assessment services, and benchmark research. Linkage's mission is to connect high-performing leaders and organizations to the futures they want to create.

With a relentless commitment to learning, Linkage also offers conferences, institutes, summits, open-enrollment workshops, and distance learning programs on leading-edge topics in leadership, management, human resources, and organizational development. More than 200,000 leaders and managers have attended Linkage programs since 1988.

**Linkage**  
**Burlington, MA**  
781.402.5555  
info@linkageinc.com