

Change

Change Management

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The art and science of change management is due for a change.

- #1 – Quit thinking about change as something that is negative.
- #2 – Stop talking about change management as an event.
- #3 – Use new models and move away from those based on grief management.

Change Management Roots in Studies of Grief

Many change management models and associated processes are based on early learning from grief management. This work, started in the 1960s and focused on the experience of personal loss (e.g. death of a loved one, experiencing significant health problems, etc.), was used to design interventions and change process to help employees accept change. The assumption is that change is bad; employees need to grieve the loss of their pre-change conditions, and through a drawn-out recognition of how negative the change is, employees can learn to move on.

The reason these models were used by organizations was that consultants saw a parallel between grieving loss in health-related issues and grieving loss of a job, department. The grief models applied to business change worked well when change was an event. One could see a clear starting and stopping point of the change event, and then a path for recovery could be plotted out. This change strategy recognized the full range of emotions laid out in the health-related grief models. The concept of mourning the loss of the prior organization and job was quite useful in helping employees move through change.

Cycles of Change are Different Today



However, what we see today in our Leadership Pulse (www.leadershippulse.com) research and client work suggests that these grief-based models are not appropriate 50 years later. Today, the cycles of change have escalated; there is no 'relief' time between change events because business continues to speed up. Leaders, managers and employees need to keep up with the frantic pace of business. Today's global organization does not have time for the long grief cycle-focused change management processes that the earlier models require. It is time for successful organizations to reinvent change management based on what is known about business in 2011.

Today, things are different:

- Change is constant.
- Change needs to be embraced not mourned.
- Resilient employees who know how to make change work for their own careers will embrace change and thrive with new change making skills.
- It is critical to learn how to develop organizational and employee resiliency.

Change Lens™ Research



In a new series of studies done with clients and via the Leadership Pulse we examined how employees respond to various types of change using something we call a Change Lens. Measuring employee perceptions of their personal rate of change and the rate of change of the group in which they are working (e.g. department or team), characteristics of successful change management could be modeled. These studies also involved gathering data on employee energy at work, employee engagement, fairness and confidence in a number of business factors. We tracked employee attitudes throughout various types of change processes.

The studies examined conditions under which engagement, energy, perceptions of fairness and confidence improved as change escalated. Comparing perceptions of personal rate of change and department rate of change, the data suggest that employees have the lowest attitude scores when the gap between personal and department rates of change are higher. Regardless of the amount of change reported by an individual employee, if the employee reported his/her personal rate of change to be the same as the rate of change of the department (context), then the scores on engagement, fairness, confidence and energy were positive and high.

Marketing and Sales Models Replaced the Grief Based Models

Employees were positive about change because the models used were different. One of the theories that we use in change management work comes from protection motivation theory. This theory is useful if a change event or ongoing change process is designed to lead to different employee behaviors. Protection motivation theory has been used to develop interventions for large-scale attitude and behavioral changes in other fields (e.g. for people to stop smoking, change habits to improve health, etc.). The core concepts of the theory are:

1. High emotional charge is needed to get people to listen to the change message. The message must be strong, and it must be targeted or important to the individual.
2. As you raise the emotional charge (sense of urgency to change), people need to feel confident they can be successful in this new environment. Thus, marketing processes become useful in creating interventions.

Organizations spend millions of dollars on change and transformation efforts. If they can take those resources and use them to build an agile and fast organization that expects change, they can stay ahead of the competition. Money spent on getting through one change does not have as high a return on investment because employees are waiting for the change to be over, and it will not happen; change will continue, and it will come around faster every time.

Benefits of Marketing Change vs. treating it like a Death Sentence

As we analyze data in the firms going through change, organizations that did more aggressive and positive marketing of their change campaigns and that raised the level of positive emotion associated with change did much better. Employees recovered quickly if there were negative spikes, and in many cases, employee engagement, energy, fairness and confidence scores were positively rather than negatively affected by the change mantra.

Keeping all employees focused on continuous change is similar to stressing that people take on health habits vs. kicking the smoking habit only. Employees can be tempted to go back to the status quo (just like smokers who quit can go back to smoking). Thus, surrounding employees with messages about movement, momentum and accepting change is like creating a healthy environment. Employees are emotionally charged to think in the right direction, and they build healthy change-ready habits.

The implications for leaders who want to create agile and fast organizations that sustain high change ready people are:

- Increase sense of urgency (or high emotions) targeted at being change ready
- Use sales and marketing models – not grief models
- Build employee coping skills
- Target emotion or urgency at the ‘right stuff’
- Measure employee energy and sense of urgency or readiness for change
- Use data to constantly retarget the message (just like marketing executives do with advertising campaigns).

The challenge for today’s leaders is to determine how to keep overall employee momentum and energy moving forward. Grief-based models and tools suggest to employees that change will end, and that is not the case. CHANGE change management starting today.