

Managing Change in Yourself & Others

Change

Change may well be the *dominant constant*.

Everything appears to be in flux. Our increasingly diverse population is changing the fundamental assumptions that shape our American culture.

Organizations, both public and private, are changing their name, size, shape, composition and purpose. The definition of "family" is undergoing a radical overhaul as the frequency of single parents, blended families and other non-traditional family arrangements out-number the "traditional" family. Safe places are vanishing at such a rate that, for many people, personal security can no longer be assured. Our deepest held understanding of the role and expectations of a man and a woman are undergoing radical change. Technology bewilders us by making obsolete cutting edge innovations of just twelve months ago.

Longevity based employer-employee relationships are being replaced with more temporary and fluid arrangements. Health care organizations are downsizing, out-sourcing, and flattening their organization structures to remain responsive to consumer demands and government regulation. At the same time, employees, no longer trusting in the "company loyalty - job security" trade, are forced to take more *personal responsibility for the management of their career*.

The champions of change exalt; "*change is good!!*" But the real human beings who must accommodate the uncertainties and ambiguities of the transition between the old way and the new often feel run-over by a

process they didn't ask for and, don't see a need for.

Yet, as we hurl toward and beyond the year 2000, the pace of change will likely continue if not increase. Managers must simultaneously deal with their own change struggles and manage changes that impact their staff members.

Managing Change

Managing change in oneself and facilitating change in employees is a very complex process. Real change is personal, it can't be ordered or legislated. People change from the inside out. ***Hearts and minds must accept and understand before change can become real.***

The process is made complex by human nature. Some types of changes are welcomed by most everyone. However, more often than not, people are apprehensive to varying degrees about change. Feeling more comfortable and secure with the known and familiar, there is a tendency to "dig in your heels" when change is in the offing.

The Change Process

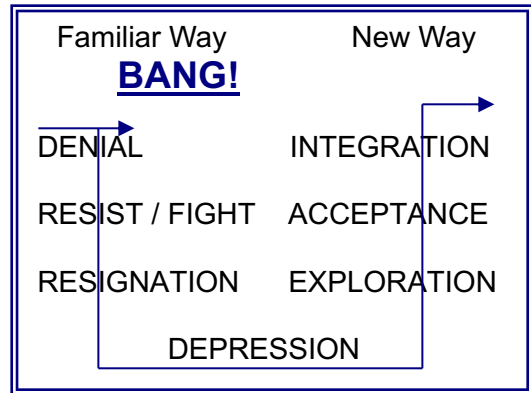
To one degree or another, most people move through a ***process of change*** in somewhat predictable stages.

First there is ***denial*** - "*This just can't be happening. I'll ignore it and it will go away.*" Once denial breaks down, many people become determined to ***resist*** or ***fight*** the change - "*They just can't do this. I won't stand for it - I'll put a stop to this nonsense.*"

Ultimately, the forces of change usually overwhelm even the most persistent resistance. At this point a feeling of smoldering defeat called **resignation** usually sets in. The fight goes underground and becomes passive-aggressive - "Well, they aren't getting my help with this. Let them sink in their own mess."

Depending upon the personality and temperament of each person, the resignation stage can lead to a sense of hopelessness and **depression**. Resignation and depression are stages that many people get stuck in during the change process. Some people never move beyond these stages.

For most people, depression lifts when they allow themselves to consider the possibility that this change has potential. The **exploration** stage begins with the thought, "You know...it is possible..." Exploration generates creative thinking, which produces **excitement** as the person considers new possibilities.



At this point, **acceptance** of the change is nearly complete. The only issue remaining is **integration** - merging all the implications of the change into the beliefs, attitudes, intentions and behaviors of the person.

Facilitating Change

The change process is slightly different for each person. People usually move back and forth between stages, even looping back several stages. Ultimately however, nearly everyone will move through the change process from **denial to integration**. The only question is how quickly. The pace and frequency of change in today's world means most people are wrestling with multiple change issues all the time. The more quickly and competently they can move through these stages the less time they spend exhausting themselves resisting something they can't stop or wallowing in resignation and depression.

You as a manager can create an atmosphere that invites change or an atmosphere that encourages resistance to change. Knowing that people naturally move through the change process can help you structure change initiatives that are phased-in, that give people time to adjust - to productively move through their internal change experience.

Change is welcomed more openly when staff members have a sense of ownership for the decision-making process that lead to the change. Sometimes including employees in this decision-making process is possible, sometimes not. But what is always possible is for staff members to be included in how the workgroup will implement the changes. Empowerment in the implementation process reduces resistance and encourages people to move, more rapidly to the exploration stage.

In situations where the fundamental culture or mission of the organization is changing (i.e., restructuring, out-sourcing, etc.) the dynamics of the resistance to change may be so powerful as to warrant the assistance of a skilled facilitator or counselor. This professional can develop a process through which individuals can, more effectively, move through the change process and not get stuck.

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