



The Times They Are A'Changin' – part 1

In this first article on change management, Mark Rendell, independent trainer and project manager, ponders the tricky territory of “change management”...

The saying goes, that the one constant factor in life is change¹.

And in the 21st century, the pace of change appears to be getting quicker. Technological and scientific advances have impacted on all of us, in both our personal and professional lives. In the past 10 years, developments in communications and the internet have revolutionised the way we organise our lives, communicate with people and carry out our work. We now live in a global economy with round the clock impacts on our organisation, our workplace, our staff, our resources and capacity to deliver against strong and diverse competition in the marketplace.

According to Ray Kurzweil², the progress made in the whole of the 20th century is now achieved in a fifth of the time, in just 20 years. And soon it will take just 14 years, then 7 years and so on until we find that the 21st century will be equivalent to 20,000 years of progress at today's rate!

And yet, many of us will go out of our way to try to keep things the same: yesterday will be like today will be like tomorrow. Why is this? There are many reasons for wanting to keep things essentially the same, 'resisting change', and understanding these motivations in the workplace is essential for today's L&D and HR practitioners.

One thing that many change management practitioners are agreed on is that you have to understand where the resistance to change is coming from before you can effect successful change in the workplace. There is an oft-quoted statistic³ that around 80% of all change efforts fail. The reason for this high rate of failure generally stems from a lack of attention to addressing internal (psychological) factors towards the change. According to Kotter and Schlesinger (1979), there are four reasons why people are resistant towards change:

1. Parochial self-interest
2. Misunderstanding
3. Low tolerance of change
4. Different assessments of the situation.

It will come as little surprise to many of us that 'effective management of change' is the top 'HR skill for survival' in a recent CIPD online poll⁴. CIPD estimates that organisations undergo significant change every three years on average, whilst smaller changes are occurring almost continually⁵.

¹ Attributed to Herodotus.

² Originally published in [Perspectives on Business Innovation](#). Published on KurzweilAI.net May 1, 2003.

³ www.changingminds.org/disciplines/change_management/change_imperative.htm

⁴ Extract from the CIPD Factsheet on Managing Change (May 2009)

⁵ www.cipd.co.uk/subjects/corpstrtgy/changemmt/chngmgmt.htm, accessed 06.05.10

As L&D and HR practitioners, we have a pivotal role in successfully establishing an agreed change into the organisation. But how prepared are we when major change is required?

According to the CIPD, many things cause organisational change, including:

- Challenges of growth, especially global markets.
- Challenges of economic downturns and tougher trading conditions.
- Changes in strategy (and vision).
- Technological changes.
- Competitive pressure, including mergers and acquisitions.
- Customer pressure, particularly changing markets.
- Acquiring new behaviours and skills (e.g. cultural shifts).
- Government legislation / initiatives.

And it's important to understand the type of 'change' that the workplace is embarking on. In basic terms, 'change' means an alteration to a currently existing state. By implication this involves a *transition* (from the previous state to the new one), which, in other words, means a 'journey'. It is the *effective management of the transition*, where the L&D and HR practitioner will need to excel, deploying a range of skills and behaviours, including tenacity, patience, clarity, empathy, communication, motivation, listening and problem-solving skills.

So, what do we need to do to support and maintain high levels of support, resilience, trust and capacity to adopt change in the workplace? According to Alan Chapman, of www.businessballs.com⁶, the key to effecting successful change in an organisation is to avoid imposing the change in the first place (workers rarely respond to coercive approaches), to align the desired change with aims and values as expressed by the workforce (the workforce are unlikely to align with 'bad' aims) and to consult regularly and honestly with the workforce (on the best ways to achieve the change).

So, what types of transitions are organisations likely to face when undergoing change? There are four major transition types⁷:

1. Organisation-wide v. Sub-system – this type relates to the *scale* of the change – affecting the whole of the organisational culture, its procedures and working practices (e.g. merger results in changes in reporting procedures and styles) or a single department or work group (e.g. outsourcing function returns to in-house).

2. Transformational v. Incremental – this type relates to the *impact* of the change and can affect the whole organisation dramatically (e.g. Business Process Re-engineering – analyzing and rearranging business functions to match a new vision or emphasis within the organisation) or gradually (e.g. a Kaizen approach of continual improvement through quality circles and work groups increases the efficiency of particular work processes).

⁶ Online free ethical learning and training resources for people and organisations, started in 1999.

⁷ Adapted from 'Field Guide to Consulting and Organisational Development' at www.authenticityconsulting.com

3. Remedial v. Developmental – this type relates to the *purpose* of the change and requires a problem-solving mindset. A remedial change may be to address increasing obsolescence in a product range; a developmental change may be to promote a product range towards an entirely new marketplace.

4. Unplanned v. Planned Change – this type relates to the *predictability* of the change. Unplanned change by its nature is disruptive, sudden and surprising (e.g. an important member of the team leaves, a product fails without warning). Planned change occurs when management have articulated clearly the intended transition journey, has consulted widely and has applied an appropriate level of resources to the change (time, staffing, finances etc.). It should be stressed that planned change does not eradicate the threat of disruptive or unpredictable events during the transition journey!

A great deal of work has been done in the field of change management to establish key steps that the majority of organisations and individuals need to pass through in order to fully embrace and establish the intended organisational change. Perhaps the best known example was developed by John Kotter:⁸

1. Establish a sense of urgency
2. Creating a guiding coalition
3. Developing a vision and strategy
4. Communicating the change vision
5. Empowering employees for broad based action
6. Generating short term wins
7. Consolidating gains and producing more change
8. Anchoring new approaches in the culture

These eight steps are equally valid for any of the transition types described above because they anticipate and address the psychological needs of the people impacted by the change at every stage. For L&D / HR practitioners, the key message is that change is as much an internal transition as it is an external one – work from the inside out.

For further information: www.markrendell.co.uk

In the next article, Mark proposes a blend of Kotter's Eight Steps and Kaizen to create an itinerary and a vehicle to drive organisational change in the modern workplace.

⁸ Kotter, Prof. J.P, 'Leading Change', 1996