

HELPING MANAGERS TO MANAGE CHANGE

Moving the organisation to more flexible working arrangements involves change. For hard-pressed managers this can involve the double burden of coping with their own change while supporting their staff. Successful change management involves recognising the additional (short-term) pressures on managers, and providing them with appropriate support mechanisms.

Change and the individual

- It is completely natural to resist change, although individuals will vary in the degree to which they do this.
- People tend to see the disadvantages of the new more clearly than the benefits. Conversely they will usually overvalue the comfort of the habitual and familiar way of doing things.
- Evolutionary (gradual) change is more easily accepted than revolutionary change.
- Change threatens individuals at the security level and they need to be supported through it.
- Research suggests as little as 5% of our behaviours are consciously self-directed. We are creatures of habit and as much as 95% of what we do occurs automatically or in reaction to a demand or an anxiety.
- Because change requires moving beyond our comfort zone, it is best initiated in small and manageable increments. Growth and change won't occur unless you push past your comfort zone, but pushing too hard increases the likelihood that you will give up.

Change and the manager

- Managers are key to the successful management of change.
- They will need to cope with change themselves as well as managing their team through the change process.
- Managers may have to cope with more complaints from staff, and may face an increase in their own workloads.
- Some barriers to acceptance of change may be only 'in the mind' but they will feel real to the managers expressing them. In particular managers need to feel their personal security and esteem is not in doubt (and that they will retain their credibility as managers). Managers also need to feel they have an influence and can control the process.
- The typical acquisition period for new behaviour is from 30 to 60 days.

Communication and influencing change

- Helping managers to understand why the changes are taking place, supporting them through the transition, helping them solve the problems that arise, getting people involved and committed are all about communication.
- It is good practice to treat complaints about impending changes as requests for explanation, and to respond positively. If a complaint is met with information the dialogue is moved into more productive territory.

Learning new skills and roles

- All change involves some learning. This may be to acquire a new combination of knowledge, skills or roles. The commonest cause of failure in change initiatives is that when it finally comes to implementation, the people who are supposed to make it work do not know what they are supposed to do.
- Learning new ways puts additional pressure on the time and attention of managers. As a result it is often left to the last minute and rushed through. Managers go into the new situation feeling ill-prepared with predictable consequences.
- Make sure learning time is built into the change process. Ask managers “What will you/your staff have to do differently?” “How will you/they learn that?”.