



Change is hard. Many organisations think they are pretty good at managing change, yet a long-held statistic claims that 70% of change efforts fail. Failure could include the change not being delivered on time, it not being achieved within budget, the quality falling short, or the change not sticking.

What makes change so hard? There are many factors that add complications when handling change. Here are some we regularly discover when working with clients:

- Assumptions are made about how people will react to change
- Leaders know about the potential change for longer so leap ahead to the next thing
- Business as usual has to be juggled alongside dealing with the change
- Change communication lacks quality and frequency
- Leaders think they have buy-in, but not everyone is on board

Top Tips

1. Recognise that people react differently to change

- There is a natural curve of emotions that people move through when faced with change. People navigate that change curve at different paces and may well slip backwards if the change is happening across a prolonged period.
- Be curious about people's reactions rather than critical. Put yourself in their shoes and see the world through their eyes. This will involve asking more open questions rather than constantly pushing out your own energy in the hope that this will enthruse them.
- Understand that different personality preferences receive and compute information in different ways – one way's not right and the other wrong, they're just different. Learn to adapt your style. Although there are some common courtesies in dealing with fellow human beings, the way that you like to be communicated with may not match everyone else's preference.

2. Communication is key

- Being able to describe the need for change and a broad picture, at least, of where you are trying to get to is critical. You may not know all the intricate details just yet, and this could be a positive - perhaps your team can help generate ideas and influence what the future picture looks like.
- Communicate, communicate, communicate, even when there's nothing to say!
- Agree when you will next come back together to further clarify the end goal and progress to date. Don't miss the deadline. Even if there's no new update, stick to the date and explain that. If you don't, people will fill the gaps in communication with their own beliefs about what is going on. This can lead to a great deal of wasted time and effort correcting everyone's understanding.
- Make it two-way communication – pull as well as push. Check understanding and where people are at, re their thoughts and feelings about the change.

3. Remember that it takes time for change to stick

- You may well have leapt ahead to the next thing that needs dealing with, believing that everyone is on board. Remember that you have probably had longer to get used to the proposed change. When you ask questions such as 'Does that all make sense?' or 'All okay?' people are very likely to say 'yes, all fine', especially if they know you are busy.
- The chances are it may not all be 'fine'! Switch to open questions, for example: *What are your thoughts on 'x'?*, *How do you feel about 'y'?*, *What's the first step to get started?*, *What might get in the way?*
- You can write down a new procedure but that doesn't mean everyone will consistently follow it. How will you monitor progress and congratulate and celebrate continued success in making the change stick?

4. Don't go it alone!

- Managers often feel they have to be the key person constantly beating the drum to make the change stick. Identify and use Change Agents or Champions to support others in successfully navigating the change. If you are the only person trying to turn the tide, it will be exhausting and a serious test of your patience.

Finally... Learn about change models such as William Bridges' 'Managing Transitions' model or Kotter's '8 Step Change Process'. Also practise your coaching skills. Regularly coaching your team to empower them, and build their capability and confidence, increases their resilience and ability to cope with change.