Managing Change
By Norb Slowikowski

Every manager or supervisor must learn to deal with change in one way or another. It has been said that either the person must manage change, or change will manage the person. Change is inevitable, but it differs in frequency and magnitude from situation to situation. Those responsible for effecting meaningful change may feel overwhelmed without the necessary skills and knowledge to cope with it. Becoming aware and learning to use these strategies can increase competence for dealing with change.

Changes in organizations usually involve people, or require people to change their habits, expectations, goals and work activities. Change does not occur in a vacuum. Change affects the work life of people; therefore, managing change means that people must also be managed in new and more responsive ways.

Managing change is an innovative process that includes the ability to conceive, construct and convert into behavior a new view of organizational reality.

The manager who has the power to make changes in the organization is a “change agent.” A major part of your job must involve assisting the company and employees to adapt to the ever-changing internal and external environment. In addition, you must be an activator and an executor of the change process. Successful activation and execution of change encompasses the ability to identify develop or clarify a need for change; explore the readiness and resources; define the potential working relationships; negotiate and develop commitment for change; project the desired outcomes of the change effort; plan and design for action; implement action and resolve resulting conflicts; and analyze and assess.

One of the manager’s greatest challenges as a change agent is to figure out what should happen and then causing it to happen. To develop and launch plans for change on a meaningful scale, the manager must contribute fundamental qualities of initiative, ingenuity and commitment to the change effort. These are the prime elements needed to tackle the problem of organizational change.

In the “change process,” you will find that people resist change. Remember that resistance is a “state of mind” reflecting unacceptance of the change, which is manifested either by active opposition or avoidance to change.

Here are 12 reasons why some people resist change:

- They don’t understand the purpose for the change.
- Those affected by the change are not involved in planning for the changes.
- Anxiety of job security
- Poor communication.
- Existing work group relationships are changed.
- Loyalty becomes the paramount reason for change, not goal achievement.
- Fear of failure.
- Work load will intensify.
- Too much personal sacrifice.
- Allegiance to work group.
- Lack of respect for person making change.
- Comfortable with status quo.

When you’re introducing a change, communicate the reasons for the change. Communicate the benefits the change will bring. Let your staff know that “rough spots” will be encountered and that you’ll need the help of everyone to implement the change. The effective manager must have an attitude that constructively questions accepted ways of doing things, belief that he can make improvements, a capability of integrating known ideas and techniques into new combinations, expertise in transferring and applying concepts in various situations, a willingness to search beyond the logical, and a refusal to waiver in the face of difficulty. These are the “change” criteria that breed excellence and growth, rather than complacency or acceptance of the status quo. By dealing with change positively, we’re at least trying to make things better, rather than sitting around waiting for something to happen. Managing change is “making things happen,” and that’s the strategy that will continue to breathe life into the organization and perpetuate growth and success. □

About the Author
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