



Managing Change

It may be difficult to envision the pre-pandemic world and the priorities that previously occupied our time and energy. From personal to professional, pre-pandemic challenges carried differing degrees of significance with varied criteria for prioritization and many elements requiring a focus on change and change management. One common characteristic at both the individual and organizational level that may have strengthened for many during the pandemic was our collective ability to adapt to change.

As individuals and organizations evolve to keep up with global and societal concerns, shifting marketplace demands and workplace upheaval, our primary objectives focused upon safety, and seeking new and more efficient methods, processes and procedures. Overall, the inevitability of change was brought to the forefront of daily activities.

While change can signal exciting new developments, opportunities and learning benefitting the organization and employees, it can also evoke deep feelings of insecurity, confusion, grief and fear. Recognizing and acknowledging these natural responses is important. Adding major changes into environments many already view as emotionally and mentally taxing is something that must be approached compassionately, empathetically and pragmatically for best outcomes. Within the workplace or at home, consciously supporting and guiding through change makes all the difference in whether new protocols,

processes, technology, and roles result in emotional discord and lost productivity or, they may result in positive experiences of personal and professional growth. In all cases where change is imminent, there are steps that could be taken to lay a solid foundation on which to build:

Acknowledge that change can be difficult. But stay positive.

We spend huge portions of our lives working, so it's normal to react strongly and in some instances negatively to changes that may include a loss of co-workers, stability or control. The five-stage Kübler-Ross model of the grieving process (where one moves through denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance) is sometimes applied to those dealing with personal and organizational change, further validating how profound these feelings can be.

Regardless of position or status, it's important to acknowledge and convey your understanding of the experiences change may bring forward, while maintaining a positive attitude and approach. Change is often positive and typically addresses where improvements are possible and/or needed, yet change may be difficult and you may be apprehensive. Allow yourself to understand the why, and believe in the change that's happening. Maintain enthusiasm through positive reinforcement and encouragement. Congratulate yourself and others where possible on jobs that are done well. Encourage the transfer of unique skills into whatever circumstances, roles or responsibilities may come.

Nurture trust with open and honest communication.

As we progress through change and the pace of adaptation quickens, there may be a loss of key information and understanding. At both personal and professional levels, it's important to keep those close to you and key stakeholders informed. Through open and frequent communication, we can have a significant impact on fostering trust, goodwill and an overall willingness to embrace change. Make efforts to be more available, visible and an attentive and careful listener. Remember, to listen to yourself and reinforce the why and the how. This allows you to convey accurate information during times of confusion and avoids misinformation or misinterpretation.

Most people aren't fond of change. We like our habits and prefer stability in comparison to the uncertainty and disruptions that often come with change. We prefer to feel secure rather than to feel destabilized. However, we must understand that change is an integral part of life; there's no such thing as a life without change.

Change has always been part of our lives. From childhood, we've learned to live with the changes happening in our body. We've had to manage varied events, some positive, some not, and we often struggle until we regain our sense

of balance. Many of us don't like instability or uncertainty. We prefer to have a clear idea of where we're going. That's why one of our first reactions to change can be anxiety. Our personal and professional lives are sometimes characterized by periods of instability that we work through until we re-establish our sense of equilibrium.

The change process

The implications of change often begin with the realization that you'll have to move out of your comfort zone.

This is a crucial step as you begin to grieve the loss of comfort, and assume the risks of moving forward into the unknown. This frame of mind helps you to look ahead and actively explore what this change will involve, how it will affect you, what behaviours and habits you'll have to change, and what skills you'll need to call upon and/or develop.

Without necessarily realizing it, exploring the opportunities that change presents and developing adaptive skills and attitudes can help you deal with the change. You gradually find that you've established a new sense of equilibrium or stability, and you begin to feel more comfortable with the change and more competent with new responsibilities.

What can you do?

Some people may adapt quickly to change, while others take more time, depending on the magnitude of the change, the presence of other stressors, and personal coping skills and resiliency. There are however, supportive strategies that can help you adapt more easily to change:

- Don't get overly alarmed. It's normal for change to make you feel uncomfortable, at least for a certain amount of time.
- Try to figure out how the change affects you. Adapting to change requires you to leave behind comfortable old habits and behaviours. It also requires you to make room for new behaviours that you don't necessarily feel you've mastered yet. Take the time to understand what aspects are unsettling, this will help you move forward.

- Ask questions where possible. Confront rumours, and clarify the areas of concern. Be informed and involved, participate and without overstepping, try to influence or support the new direction and/or transformation.
- Review your skills, and be proactive to update or improve them. What skills will you need to deal with this change? What can you do to acquire or improve these skills?
- Talk about your feelings and reactions with people you trust (e.g., a spouse, relative, co-worker or friend). This may be a good time to ask trusted others for their support, advice or expertise.
- Take care of yourself. During this transitional period, it's important to enjoy yourself, maintain connections with friends or family, exercise, and pursue your hobbies. These small steps will help you recharge and perhaps even gain a new perspective on the situation.

Workplace change

Successful organizations must constantly change to keep their competitive edge. New technologies, new processes, new personnel, new products and new strategies are always being introduced. These changes may be essential, but they're not always easy to deal with.

Organizational changes can be difficult for employees at every level. Concerns about job security, being transferred to less desirable positions, reporting to new managers, needing to learn new technologies or having increased workloads can trigger many reactions, including anxiety, panic, depression, and anger. These reactions are normal and part of how we adapt to change.

Understanding the process

Change is not always bad. In fact, change can present opportunities that are beneficial to us. As mentioned, during times of change, we often focus on the negative? Because we're dealing with loss, the concepts introduced

by Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross surrounding the grieving process are often applied to other issues involving trauma and/or loss, including those associated with organizational change. Therefore, during times of significant workplace change, it's perfectly normal to feel or experience the following:

- Denial: "Our first reaction is one of shock and denial. "I don't believe this!" "No way. This can't be happening!"
- Anger: "Why me? It's not fair!" or "It's all because of management. They are to blame!" Reality is setting in and we're reacting to the loss of the status quo and our fear of the unknown. We can be angry at ourselves, with others and those who are close to us.
- Bargaining: "I'll do anything to stay where I am for a few more years." "If my job stays the same I'll never complain about anything again." Anger is getting us nowhere and we're looking at ways to postpone what may be inevitable. We're trying to control a situation that is, essentially, out of our control.
- Depression: "All the years I've devoted to this job were for nothing. Why bother even trying anymore?" "I'm so upset because I'm going to miss my old team so much." During this stage, we're beginning to understand the certainty of the situation. We're moving into acceptance by beginning to mourn the loss of the old way of life.
- Acceptance. "It's going to be alright." "You never know, this may be good for my career." We're ready for what lies ahead.

It's important to note that no one moves through these stages in a neat, linear manner. We occupy different stages at different times and can even move back to stages we have been in before. But eventually we're ready to move forward in our new reality. Finally, remember that nothing stays the same. Future circumstances are sure to change. If you maintain a good attitude and strong performance, you'll keep your options open. You might even find unanticipated benefits!