

REFLECTIONS ON PERSONAL AND ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE

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FOREWORD

As individuals, we can choose to accept the challenge to respond positively to change. Individuals who recognise that change is the norm will be better placed to minimise stress and make the most of opportunities. As organisational leaders, we must not forget that organisations are comprised of individuals, each with their own attitudes towards change. There are some fundamental principles for organisational change which will maximise the chances of success. There must be clear expectations for staff, clear alignment with strategy, and a reward and recognition strategy that reinforces the desired behaviours. Organisations must also empower staff with the capacity and capabilities to change, and resources must be allocated for this.



Figure 1. Scripting Change

It is a cliché for sure, but if there is one constant in life, it is change. At a personal level, some of us thrive on it, some of us do our best to avoid it and others experience considerable anxiety and stress whenever change presents. At the very least though, as individuals we must learn how to cope with change, lest we lead the most miserable of lives.

For organisations, they either engage positively with change or it is forced upon them - as consequences of ever developing technology and societal shifts, which often relate to or derive from those technological advances. However, changing what organisations do and how they operate is a major challenge in its own right. Success requires the people who make up the organisation to embrace the desired changes. How can organisations influence individual behaviour so that essential change can be coped with at least, and preferably embraced?

As individuals we can choose, to a considerable extent, how we react and respond to change, and how we cope with it. I am reminded of the story told by a graduating high school student addressing her colleagues. "We were out on a hike, the heavens opened up and the rivers rose quickly. We were trapped between two now raging streams. We had a choice: stand in the rain and be drenched and miserable, or stand in the rain." Being miserable was the

optional bit - the choice to be exercised. For sure, some people are wired to exercise the 'miserable' choice, but we can train ourselves not to do so. This is a personal challenge, but one to which we can all rise.

So, what can we do to make the most of change, and to minimise the stresses associated with change? We can take personal responsibility for our thoughts and actions. We can look for the positive in the situations which confront us, and we can choose to use positive language. We can minimise the negative people we allow into our lives and we can surround ourselves with positive people. We can make ourselves see the world through the eyes of others who are much worse off than us, and we can help others with their issues and problems, which is an inherently positive activity. We can engage actively with the changes going on around us, rather than reacting to them. We can reassess and let go of unrealistic expectations of self and others, which are often cause of anxiety, and we can forgive ourselves and others for the mistakes which are inevitably made, thereby creating space for more positivity.

What about producing change in organisations? This is a much more complex challenge because organisations are comprised of individuals, all of whom control their own thoughts and attitudes; by definition, change in organisations means people changing their behaviours - which they can choose to do or not.

There are some basics for organisational change, which if followed will maximise the chances of success. Undoubtedly, first, staff must be receptive to change, and this will only be the case if there are compelling reasons for them to change – reasons which are well understood. Next, staff must actually want to change, which will be more likely if they understand the 'what' and 'why' of change and also the implications - how will they be affected and how will they be expected to behave differently? What are the benefits and disadvantages and, on balance, will they be better off given the alternative of no change?

Receptiveness and willingness to change will not, however, be sufficient. Staff must also have the capacity and capabilities to change – time as well as skills and knowledge - so resources must be allocated for staff training and development, and not as a one-off fix. Once staff have, or are confident they will have, the skills they need for change, implementation can proceed with a greater probability of success. Implementation requires clarity at all levels and the alignment of strategy, organisational and team plans, and individual job descriptions. Accountabilities for new behaviours must be clear; with consequences for not travelling in the agreed direction.

We can see the interplay between personal and organisational attitudes and approaches to change. Organisations that forget they are actually comprised of individuals, each with their own attitudes to change, will struggle to bring about change regardless of how necessary the change might be. Individuals who fail to recognise that change is the norm will likely be destined to a work life from which they struggle to get satisfaction.

Organisational change is notoriously difficult to bed in, with old behaviours waiting patiently to take over again. So, reward and recognition systems must be aligned with the new expectations, and successes should be widely celebrated; the stories of good practices and great results can be extremely powerful.