Skillbook

Managing Change

Project Management
Skills

mindtools

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1. Introduction

Change management is the process of helping people to accept and work willingly with the changes that must continually occur for organizations to be successful. It's a concept that's familiar to most of us, but people often refer to it without knowing what it really means.

Change has an impact on most businesses, so it's important to understand how it can affect your team, and your organization as a whole. But don't worry, you don't have to be an expert to appreciate the nuances of large-scale change.

This Skillbook will encourage you to think about what change management is, and improve your awareness of what's involved in heading up a change initiative.

By working through this **Skillbook**, you'll:

- Understand why organizational change can be so difficult.
- Learn about your own tolerance for ambiguity.
- Discover how to use a model to communicate change.
- Find out more about how you can implement change smoothly.

By the end, you'll have improved your understanding of change management, and you'll be better equipped to implement change successfully in your organization.

Next time you're facing a change, use this knowledge with your whole team, so that you can help everyone to understand the challenges that lie ahead.

2. The Difficulty With Change

People have to think and act in a way that they're not accustomed to during change. Because of the uncertainly that goes with this, there's often a great deal of resistance to it.

However, the change process is a necessary part of growth and advancement, and it can provide new and improved ways of working. Unfortunately, simply telling people that change is a good thing doesn't mean that they'll accept it and embrace it enthusiastically.

Sometimes, reflecting on how change has affected you in the past, and communicating this to your team members, is the best way to convince people that it can be a positive experience.

When you do this, you can bring a new, positive attitude and perspective to change.

Action:

Use the following exercise to think about a change that you've experienced in the past, and consider the resistance you felt initially. Then, use the benefit of hindsight to put the experience into perspective. (Do this for a change instigated by someone else, rather than one that you implemented yourself.)

Think of a major change that "happened to you" at work. Describe the situation briefly:

What direct impact did the change have on you?
How did you first learn about the change?
Think back and describe how you initially reacted to it.
How did your feelings and perceptions change over time?

What triggered your revised view?
Think about how you feel about the change now. Describe the process and the outcome again, but this time from your current vantage point.
Note how you reacted then, compared with how you do now. What do you attribute this difference to?

Now that you've completed this exercise, you should have a much better understanding of how people react to change. It's normal for them to be upset, wary or even hostile at first. However, as time goes by and they see the outcome, they'll likely adopt a more positive attitude.

By working through this activity and remembering your own reactions, you can start to empathize with what others are going through. This prepares you for handling the objections and resistance that you'll likely encounter during the change process.

Tip:

This is a great exercise to do yourself, and with your team members, whenever you're tasked with implementing change. When you understand your own reactions, it's much easier to relate to others who are being asked to change, and to help them through the process.

You might also like to reflect on how your experiences map onto the change curve – a model that describes the stages that people go through during change. You might find that your reactions (set out on the previous pages) match the stages of the change curve quite closely.

3. Tolerance for Ambiguity

While it's useful to understand your own reactions to change, it's also helpful to know how well you tolerate uncertainty and ambiguity in general.

Everyone has a different capacity for dealing with change. By looking at your personal ability to cope with it, you can better understand your own reactions, and those of your team members or others who are affected.

This increased self-awareness helps you to prepare people for change, and it could also put you in a better position to lead a change initiative.

Most of the tests on tolerance for ambiguity are self-report questionnaires. Although there has been more recent research, one of the best-known and most well-used measures remains Stanley Budner's, which he wrote about in his 1962 article, "Intolerance of Ambiguity as a Personality Variable." The questions below are based on Budner's scale of intolerance for ambiguity.

Action:

How far do you agree or disagree with the statements below? Use the following rating scale:

7 – Strongly agree.
6 – Moderately agree.
5 – Slightly agree.
4 – Neither agree nor disagree.
3 – Slightly disagree.
2 – Moderately disagree.
1 – Strongly disagree.

Rating	Statement
	1. If someone is considered an expert but can't provide a definitive answer, he or she probably isn't highly knowledgeable.
	2. It would be interesting to live in a different country and experience a foreign culture.
	3. Every problem has a solution.

	4.	You miss out on the joys of life when you live in a scheduled and regimented way.
	5.	I prefer jobs where my duties and responsibilities are very clear and certain.
	6.	I like trying to solve complex problems.
	7.	Breaking down a complicated problem into small, simple chunks rarely leads to success in the long run.
	8.	Originality and not being afraid to be different are traits found in the most interesting and inspiring people.
	9.	It's always better to face the known than the unknown.
	10.	If a person sees an issue as black and white, they're failing to appreciate its complexity.
	11.	If you have a predictable life, you're in an enviable position.
	12.	Most of the important decisions that we need to make in life are based on incomplete information.
	13.	In a social setting, I prefer to know people rather than to approach a group of unfamiliar faces.
	14.	When you're given vague directions, you have an opportunity to express your creativity and innovativeness.
	15.	An ideal world is one where everyone has similar values and morals.
	16.	A good leader challenges you to see the world from a different perspective.
Total:		

Based on: Budner, N.Y.S. (1962) 'Intolerance of Ambiguity as a Personal Variable,' *Journal of Personality*, Volume 30, Issue 1, March 1962. Available here.

Scoring

The scale is designed to measure your intolerance for ambiguity. The higher the score, the more uneasy you are about uncertainty.

Before you add up your rating scores, take each of the even-numbered statements and "reverse score" them. For instance, a "7" becomes a "1," a "6" becomes a "2," and a "5" becomes a "3."

Calculate your score using the reversed numbering.

A typical score falls between 44 and 48. If your result is higher, it's an indication that you have a lower intolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty than most people. This may mean that your perception of change is less favorable than average.

Remember, this is strictly a self-awareness test, so it's important to treat your answers as a guide to discovering your attitude to change. This will help you to start working toward being more positive about it in the workplace.

Tip:

This is a great tool for sharing with co-workers. It will help them to identify how well they cope with uncertainty, and this self-awareness can lead them to develop greater tolerance. Another similar concept is locus of control: a measure of how much a person believes they can influence the things that happen to them.

4. Preparing People for Change

Once you understand your own feelings about change, you can anticipate how others might feel. This means that you're more able to help them through the transitional period.

You can also support others by making the idea of change real and tangible for them. Too often, change is a dreaded unknown. However, by expressing it in terms that make sense to people, you can start an honest dialogue about what's happening and how they're feeling.

A well-known way to consider change was proposed by change consultant William Bridges. His model, published in his 1991 book "Managing Transitions," highlights three stages that people go through when they experience change. These are:

1. Ending, losing and letting go.
2. The neutral zone.
3. The new beginning.

Bridges says that people go through each stage at their own pace. For example, those who are comfortable with the change will likely move ahead to stage three quickly, while others who are less comfortable will linger at stages one or two.

Stage 1: Ending, Losing and Letting Go

People enter this initial stage of transition when you first present them with change. This time is often marked by resistance and emotional upheaval, because they're being forced to let go of something that they're comfortable with.

Action:

Think of an upcoming change at your workplace, or one that you've recently experienced. Briefly describe some of the emotions that people may feel, or have felt, on the next page. These could include fear, denial, anger, sadness, disorientation, frustration, uncertainty, and a sense of loss.

People have to acknowledge that something is ending before they can begin to accept a new idea. If you don't appreciate the emotions that your team members are experiencing, you'll likely encounter resistance throughout the entire process.

It's important to accept people's resistance, and to understand their emotions. Allow them time to consider the change and let go of the past, and try to get everyone talking about what they're feeling. In these conversations, make sure that you listen empathically, and communicate openly about what's going to happen.

Emphasize how people can apply their skills, experience and knowledge once you've implemented the change. And explain how you'll give them what they need to work effectively in the new environment, for example by providing training and resources.

People often fear what they don't understand, so the more you can educate them about a positive future, and communicate how their knowledge and skills are an essential part of getting there, the more ready they'll be to move on to the next stage.

Stage 2: The Neutral Zone

During this stage, people affected by the change are often confused, uncertain and impatient. Depending on how well you manage the situation, they may also experience a higher workload as they get used to new systems and ways of working.

Think of this phase as the bridge between the old and the new. In some ways, people will still be attached to the old, while they are trying to adapt to the new.

Action:

Think about the same upcoming change at your workplace, or one that you've recently experienced. On the next page, describe some of the emotions that people may have felt – or will likely feel – in the neutral zone stage.

Depending on your situation, you may have included examples such as "resentment toward the transition," or "low morale and reduced productivity." Other common emotions include anxiety about roles, status or identities, or skepticism about the change.

Your guidance is incredibly important as people go through this neutral period. This can be an uncomfortable time, because it can seem unproductive, with little progress being made.

Because people might feel lost, you need to provide them with a solid sense of direction. Remind them of team goals, and encourage them to talk about their feelings.

Meet with team members frequently to provide feedback on how they're performing, especially regarding the change. It's also important to set short-term goals during this stage, so that they can experience some "quick wins." This will help to improve motivation, as well as give everyone a positive perception of the change effort.

Also, do what you can to boost morale and continue to remind people of how they can contribute to making the change successful. If necessary, you may also want to help them to manage their workloads, either by deprioritizing some types of work or by bringing in extra resources.

Stage 3: The New Beginning

The last transition stage is a time of acceptance and energy. People begin to embrace the change initiative. They build the skills that they need to work successfully in the new way, and start to see early wins from their efforts.

Action:

Use the same example of upcoming change at your workplace, or one that you've recently gone through. Describe some of the emotions that people may feel – or have felt – at this stage, on the next page.

You might have written that people will likely feel more positive emotions. Your example may have included feelings of high energy, openness to learning, and a renewed commitment to the team or roles.

As people adopt the change, it's essential that you help them to sustain it. Take time to highlight stories of the success that it has introduced, and reward your team for all their hard work. However, don't become complacent – remember that not everyone will reach this stage at the same time, and that people can slip back to previous stages if they think the change isn't working.

5. Implementing Change Successfully

When you've prepared people for a change, you need to embed it into your organization's culture. For this, it's useful to understand more about some of the tactics that you can use.

The most recognized authority on change tactics is John Kotter, a Harvard Business School professor and respected authority on leadership and change. He's the author of the highly respected 1998 article, "Winning at Change."

These are seven of his eight steps for implementing successful transformations (we talk about the eighth step on the next page):

1. **Establish Urgency** – motivate people to change by identifying and communicating the realities of the situation. What are the forces that make this change imperative? Outline the consequences of staying the same, and bring the idea of successful change to life.
2. **Form a Guiding Coalition** – put together a team of leaders who have the ability to inspire others and encourage everyone to pull together. These people need to have an emotional – as well as a rational – commitment to the change, and be willing and able to spread their passion throughout the organization.
3. **Create a Strategic Vision** – decide where your organization is going, and develop a strategic plan to get you there. Make sure that your change leaders are clear about the vision.
4. **Communicate** – use all the means available to communicate what, why and how you intend to change. Remember that one of your key approaches is to have your leaders model the desired behavior.
5. **Empower Your Team Members to Act** – pave the way for change by removing obstacles and giving support and feedback, and by providing as many resources as you can. Be sure to recognize your team members' efforts, and allow them to implement the changes in their own ways.
6. **Create Short-Term Wins** – set easy-to-win change goals, so that you can enjoy success early on. This builds the momentum for change, and encourages everyone to press forward and participate.
7. **Consolidate Your Gains** – as your change momentum builds, use your success to generate more ideas for change. Evaluate all of your current systems and policies to identify any inconsistencies with the new initiative.

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Tip:

Think about a time when you felt frustrated or disempowered because your voice wasn't heard. Why do you think you lacked influence? What did you do about it?

Action:

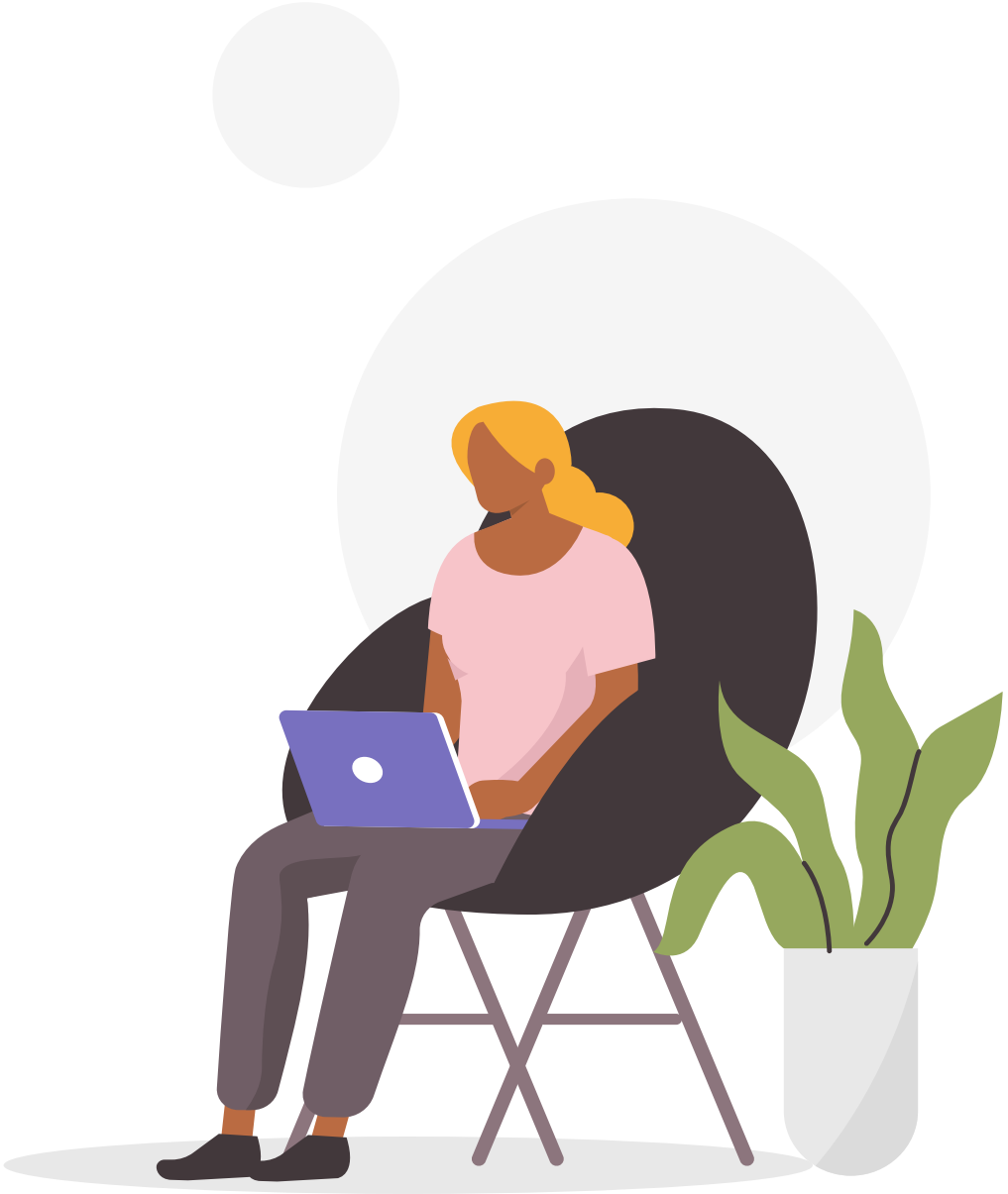
Think about Kotter's tactics and decide how to help your organization implement the desired change. What do you expect to happen, and how do people need to act and think to make it a reality? What can you do to help this process? Write down your ideas below.

For long-lasting results, change must become embedded in the corporate culture. Kotter calls this last step (the eighth in his model) "Anchoring the Change." For instance, you need to:

- Align the behavior of new team members with the changes.
- Ensure that leaders continue to show support.
- Connect the changes to organizational success at every opportunity.

Action:

Think of ways to incorporate the change into the fabric of your organization. How will you apply it to your reward and recognition program, for example? When will you announce the change? How can you instill pride in, and ownership of, the change in people across the organization? Write down your ideas on the next page.



6. Key Points

Whether you're the leader of a change program or part of a team that's implementing it, understanding how change is perceived – and knowing how to support others through the transition – is a useful skill. By learning more about how you react, and what your personal tolerance for change is, you get a valuable insight into how others might see the situation.

You'll probably have the opportunity to participate in change management in one form or another during your career. When implementing a project, use Bridge's model to prepare people for change throughout the different stages of the process, and Kotter's model to implement change successfully.

Now that you're ready to manage change, for yourself and others around you, you'll be able to play a positive and instrumental role in any future change initiative, and make it a long-lasting success.