

THE CHALLENGES OF CHANGE

How to effectively lead your organization through periods of unknown

Managing

a group through major change is like running the rapids, fighting white water. You confront a completely new set of problems as you go along. People act differently. The world around you speeds up. There's less margin for error but more likelihood of mistakes and a bigger price to pay if you do fool it up. Many techniques that worked while you paddled along on a peaceful river no longer apply. Consider these tips for leading change in your organization.

Be decisive

If you are tentative during times of change, you are asking for trouble. If you must err, do so in the autocratic direction. Let there be no doubt about who's in control. Your people need to have a voice, but you need to call the shots. Otherwise, you can expect anarchy.

Management by committee won't work in groups that have been destabilized and changed. For one thing, it's too slow of a process, and you don't have any time to spare. Also, consensus management depends heavily on group agreement — something you will find difficult to achieve, simply because people are protecting conflicting interests.

Be credible

You're effectiveness depends heavily on your credibility among

the employees, and you undermine that credibility when you wallow or waffle. People won't rally behind a leader they can't respect.

Don't confuse respect with popularity. Everyone in your company doesn't have to like you. Forget about being popular for now, and focus on getting results. Do what needs to be done. You can be authoritative without being overbearing. You can remain in control without overcontrolling. Taking charge does not mean you have all of the answers, so be a good listener and hear the clues.

Be clear

Clear priorities are one of the first casualties of change. New problems compete for attention and people pursue conflicting agendas. Some previously hot projects die a sudden death, and other high priorities get put back on hold during this period of change. Common agreement on what most needs to be done gets lost in all of the commotion and confusion. Due to the confusion, your employees can head in different directions, their efforts too random to produce much good. Some people simply disengage and drift, waiting for definite marching orders rather than running the risk of doing something wrong. Others may work hard individually but accomplish

little collectively, proving that good intentions can result in wasted motion unless they're tightly coordinated.

Alignment and clarity of effort depends heavily on your ability to orient the staff and orchestrate a coordinated approach. It stands to reason that your employees can't be effective without a clear sense of direction. As Gen. Patton said, "A good battle plan that you act on today can be better than a perfect one tomorrow." Your plan of action should outline crystal-clear tactical objectives, giving your employees laser-like focus.

Map out priorities. Keep them pure and simple. Tie them to a timetable with short- and long-term goals that your team can achieve quickly. You diffuse a lot of potential resistance when your instructions are clearly communicated and powerfully aligned to your strength as a leader. Even the people on your team who don't like the plan are inclined to follow it when you make it simple, make sure every employee knows about it, and make your commitment clear.

You are the chief architect as the change agent, but you need the key subordinates to play a meaningful role in sharing the priorities and objectives. Otherwise your team will wallow and lose precious time trying to find itself instead of turning the ship around. <<



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