



Contribute to Improvements at Work

■ *Scope*

This unit explores the manager's role and responsibilities in improving organisational efficiency and effectiveness through changes focused on continuous improvement and development. In order to do all this successfully, the manager needs to keep his or her eyes firmly fixed on a number of things at the same time – market trends, changing external and internal environments, competition, resource availability – and be able to communicate clearly and sensitively upwards, downwards and laterally.

The unit covers the following areas:

- A4.1 Improve Work Activities
- A4.2 Recommend Improvements to Organisational Plans



Point to Ponder

It is now firmly acknowledged that customers are fundamental to organisational success; that they come first, second and third. Customers have always been important, but what has changed is the urgency with which their needs are considered and the priority given to making changes to meet those needs. It can almost be argued that responsiveness to customers is the one thing that distinguishes one organisation from another in the same business. At the same time customers have emerged as more demanding and they have more choice.

These changes have introduced major shifts in the manager's role: they are required to make decisions often without having all information around them; delegate responsibilities to employees relying on them to make decisions without continually conferring with line-managers, and operate in an environment of uncertainty and continuous change. The customer is now very much a 'stakeholder' by being involved in the quality of product or service. There is a need for two-way communication through customer surveys, complaints procedures, open meetings and the development of a 'customer charter' detailing the standards and levels of quality and service customers can expect. The manager's role in the twenty-first century is greater than the process of organising people in order to achieve certain outcomes; the real challenge is to manage change by leading and inspiring people.

The management of change in an organisation is an area of potential conflict because of the inherent issues of understanding and communication. Sir John Harvey Jones (1993) stated that change is easier to manage when there is an obvious need for change in the organisation: 'It is impossible to change organisations which do not accept the dangers of their present way of doing things.' Charles Handy (1993) also talks about change,

'Differences are essential to change. If there were no urge to compete and no need to disagree the organisation would be either in a state of apathy or of complacency – both of them triggers of decline in a constantly changing world. Change no longer means more or sometimes less of the same. It usually means something completely different.'

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Some organisations change mainly in response to external circumstances (reactive change), others do so because they have decided to change (proactive change); some organisations are conservative in outlook believing in the status quo but others are constantly looking for new opportunities and challenges.

An organisation which can change faster than its competitors has a crucial advantage over them. More than having access to superior resources such as better technology or access to more lucrative markets, an ability to change more rapidly confers a decisive strategic advantage. Change is a process which is rarely contained by functional or specialist boundaries. Cole (1999) asserts the following points:

- **Organisational change can influence and be influenced by several important features – organisational mission and strategy, its structure, its culture, the nature of technology, its labour relations, etc**
- **Change can be triggered by a number of external (change in demand, competitors, arrival of new products or service, changes in terms of trade, advancement in technology, failure to attract skilled labour) or internal factors (need to respond to development of new products devised by research and development, need to improve quality, need to introduce cultural change, planned strategy as a result of revised mission)**

The three sorts of changes are:

- 1. Those that are imposed from ‘outside’, thus it becomes a question of managing the staff through the transition so that they emerge on the other side still motivated and committed to the new state. The manager becomes the ‘change agent’.**
- 2. Those that are initiated by the manager as part of the efforts to develop and improve the services and the ways of working for instance; it is then a matter of having a vision for the future, preparing the ground for change, selling them and managing staff through transition. The manager is the ‘change promoter’.**
- 3. Those that are initiated by staff, thus it becomes a matter of negotiating what is possible (given the manager’s knowledge of wider environmental factors) without letting staff morale down. The manager is the ‘change negotiator’.**

Investigate

- 1. Reflect on whether or not your organisation is affected by the overall trend from external pressures demanding greater quality and greater choice. What are they, how do you respond, and who else will you involve in implementing this change for an improved service or product?*



■ *Reactions to Change*

'There is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success nor more dangerous to handle, than to initiate a new order of things. For the reformer has enemies in all who profit by the old order of things, and only lukewarm defenders in all those who would profit by the new order. This luke warmness arises partly from fear of their adversaries who have the 'law' in their favour and partly from the incredulity of mankind, who do not truly believe in anything new until they have had actual experience of it'.

(Machiavelli, The Prince 1513)

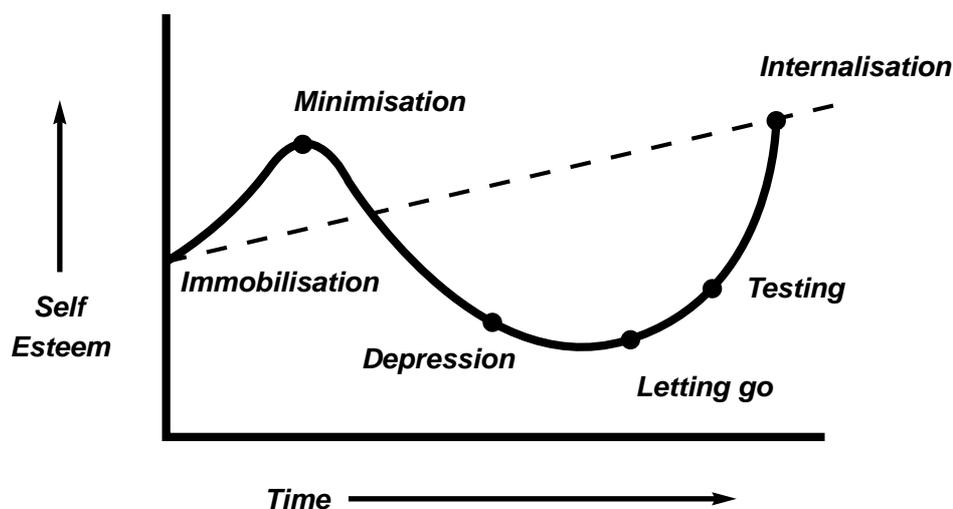
People are likely to experience a variety of feelings and emotions when faced with a change.

- **Steady state (depending on personal and professional goals)**
- **Shock (overwhelmed, confusion, paralysis)**
- **Denial (temporary retreat trivialising proposals)**
- **Reaction (expression of sorrow, anxiety, fear, anger, defensiveness, blaming others)**
- **Acceptance (begin to 'let go')**
- **Internalisation (settling to the new life)**

The manager's role is to recognise these reactions in each individual taking into account that different individuals will move through the process not necessarily at a steady pace or in any particular order or fashion, and apply possible interventions to support or direct each.

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Adams, Hayes and Hopson (1976) offer the 'transition curve' which traces the reaction to change of the individual over time.



Note the 'false dawn' between immobilisation and minimisation as self esteem increases and then rapidly falls off.

Adams (1987) identified five blockages to be overcome if management of change is to be successful:

- **Perceptual blocks** – inability to appreciate the situation from a variety of perspectives
- **Emotional blocks** – ability to tolerate the uncertainty and unpredictability associated with change
- **Cultural blocks** – organisational climate may well encourage resistance to change
- **Environmental blocks** – the organisational support that is provided to face up to change sees it as opportunity rather than as threat
- **Cognitive blocks** – occurs when people's understanding and interpretation of the change are influenced negatively by traditional mindsets



Clarke (1994) argues that the key to dealing with negative reactions to change and resistance is to expect resistance in the first place and to look for reasons for it. By anticipating resistance and locating its source there is a better chance of supporting people through it by being sensitive to their understanding. People resist change through a variety of fears:

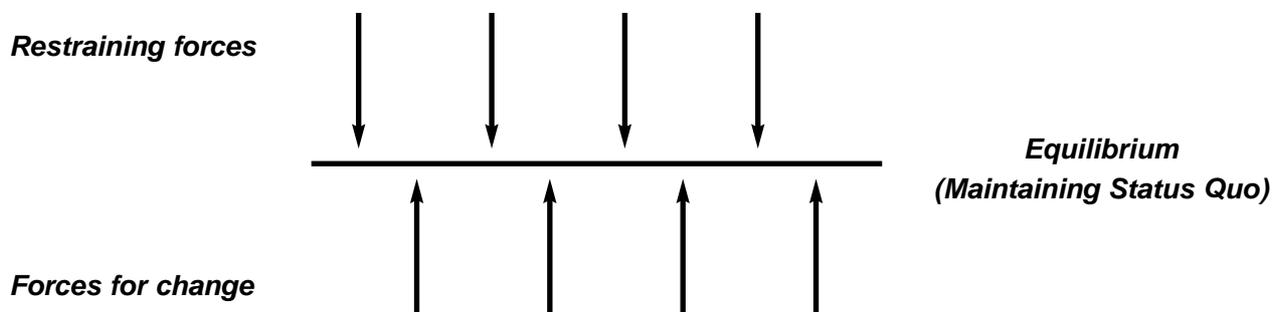
- 1. Loss of control**
- 2. Why are you doing it?**
- 3. Uncertainty and ambiguity**
- 4. Springing surprises**
- 5. Loss of face**
- 6. Can I cope? (Threat to power base)**
- 7. More work**

Ways of minimising or overcoming resistance to change have been developed by Kotter and Schlesinger, two American writers on management:

- **Education and communication** – Educating people before the change takes place is likely to reduce resistance and the potential stress. Managers need to communicate the idea of change so that people understand and appreciate the logic behind it. Often resistance happens because of inadequate or inaccurate information, leaving people to speculate and gossip
- **Participation and involvement** – Having identified the people who are likely to resist, the manager can involve them in aspects of design and implementation of the change. This might transform them from resisters to key players
- **Facilitation and support** – If the proposed change requires new or additional skills, managers should offer training and support thus avoiding the feeling of ‘loss of control’
- **Negotiation and agreement** – It might be possible to minimise resistance offering incentives to active resisters
- **Co-option** – Give a resister a key role with responsibility and status attached, to play in the change process. This might eliminate the feeling of ‘threat to power-base’

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The reality is that every human grouping has some forces which keep it together and provide it with stability, and others which provide it with reasons to change or adapt. Kurt Lewin (1951) illustrated this dilemma neatly in his classic notion of the 'force-field theory'. This theory suggests that all behaviour is the result of equilibrium between two sets of opposing forces – driving forces and restraining forces. Driving forces push one way to bring about change; restraining forces push the other way in order to maintain status quo.



Generally human beings want to 'win' by exerting pressure on those who oppose them, but as this model suggests the more one side pushes the more the other side resists, resulting in no change. The real way to weaken resistance is to focus on weakening the fears and concerns of the resisting side; thus the policy to apply is not 'how to persuade them to endorse change' but 'how do we deal with their fears?' In this suggestion Lewin and Clarke advocate the same principle. Lewin also suggests a three stage approach to changing behaviour which was later adapted by Edgar Schein (1964):

- 1. Unfreezing** the current behaviour, that is disturbing the equilibrium to lessen resistance change
- 2. Move** from old to new behaviours
- 3. Refreezing**, establishing new patterns of behaviour as those that are normal



In a change process, it might be an idea to avoid the following:

- 1. Not taking into account the psychology of change**
- 2. Over-emphasising what we say, people listen to what we do as much as what we say**
- 3. Not framing a 'vision' of the future – from what to what**
- 4. Blaming the change on to others**
- 5. Not creating a change culture – sending a message that change is painful**
- 6. Assuming people are rational**
- 7. Forgetting to invest time with people – selling the change**
- 8. Not selling 'benefits'**
- 9. Allowing people to think in boxes – only about themselves**
- 10. Inappropriate tactics used to overcome resistance – often coercion or manipulation**

Investigate

- 2. Identify a change in which you have been involved but which has not been initiated by you. Make a note of your reaction to that change; make a note of your staff's reactions. Evaluate how you dealt with both. Can you see yourself handling the same situation differently now? How?*

Coping with change demands flexibility. Some managers have a talent for change; they are 'change agents'. They recognise when change is inevitable if not always desirable. They understand the organisation and its culture; they know about its unwritten rules. Usually they are a familiar and non-threatening figure to other people. Above all, they believe in the benefits of change and its positive advantages.

Change-oriented managers have these factors in common:

- **Tolerance to uncertainty**
- **Willingness to take risks and encourage this behaviour in others**
- **Commitment to innovation**
- **Constant search for improvement**
- **Willingness to make decisions that could be unpopular in the short term**
- **Ability to think laterally and ambitiously about opportunities for the organisation**
- **Good communication skills – speaking and listening**
- **Ability to plan and manage change coupled with high motivation**

Clarke (1994) offers a structure around which change may be planned and managed:

- **Step 1** – Preparation and sensitising. Create a climate where there is no fear of change. Influence people's attitudes by open communication, participation and consultation
- **Step 2** – Research the external and internal environment for change and identify triggers for change. Look for possible driving forces when examining staff attitudes and perceptions
- **Step 3** – Anticipate resistance to change. Analyse individual, group and organisational readiness for change. Use the force-field analysis to consider likely success to change. Consult widely (give information, seek feedback and modify plans as a result)
- **Step 4** – Develop a shared vision, communicate widely, generate and evaluate options
- **Step 5** – Mobilise commitment. Sell the change positively and dynamically, stress benefits, acknowledge problems, show your personal commitment, respond to the concerns of groups and individuals
- **Step 6** – Prepare a change plan. Break down the plan into achievable parts to ensure that it is manageable. Make it SMART
- **Step 7** – Reinforce change. Monitor and adapt as required. 'Refreeze' and internalise the change. Celebrate success



According to Gleicher, change will happen if:

$$A + B + C > D$$

where:

- A** is the level of individual or group dissatisfaction with the way things are
- B** is the individual or group shared vision of a better future
- C** is the existence of a safe acceptable first step which will commit the organisation to the change process
- D** is the cost to the individual or group

Investigate

3. *Using the change you have identified in the previous exercise, examine the blockages to it, analyse the resistance and the strategy you used to overcome them. Can you now see any improvements in them and what they are?*

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■ *Guidance for Gathering Evidence for this Unit*

All elements call for a personal narrative from you explaining how you, as a manager, see to changes. You should also clearly indicate where you have provided supplementary work evidence.

Possible Sources of Supporting Evidence		
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<i>Possible Source of Evidence</i>	<i>Used</i>	<i>Location in Workplace/Portfolio</i>
Changes you might have instigated in the workplace such as shift changes, flexible working, changes for quality or health & safety, work practices, changes due to customer requirements		
Records of how you communicated, discussed and involved others – your staff, colleagues and manager, such as memos, e-mails, reports, minutes, presentations		
Evidence of how you might have met resistance from any of the above people and how you dealt with it		
Records of how you managed the change and monitored it, what the benefits are. How it impacted on organisational performance		
Evidence of changes which had to be brought about because of other pressures – from staff (request for flexible working, shift changes, new machinery, suggested changes on behalf of customers) or from the external environment (competition, technology, legislation, customer pressure, organisational changes)		
Candidate's Signature:		
Assessor's Signature:		

