Tips and Tricks

Managing Reactions to Change

*About this tool*

**PURPOSE**

To explain the four stages employees go through when adjusting and adapting to change and advice on how how to manage employees’ varying reactions

**AUDIENCE**

Managers or supervisors in supporting their employees through workplace changes

**USE**

* As part of a manager’s toolkit
* As part of a training plan
* In meetings with supervisory employees
* In a broader communications plan (emails, communiqués, on an internal website, in blog posts, etc.)

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The Change Curve

Resistance

Denial

Commitment

Exploration

*Performance*

*Time*

*The Change Curve demonstrates the transition employees can be expected to display as change is introduced into the workplace. Every organization needs to support its employees in the process of adjusting to changes implemented in the workplace. It is, however, possible for employees to start at different points in the Change Curve. Consequently, the manager’s response to the employee must identify at which point of the curve the employee stands in order to shape communication and action.*

How to respond

# STAGE 1: DENIAL – “This has nothing to do with me” or “This can’t be happening!”

As a manager, you can support your employees through the denial stage in various ways, including:

* Communicating with them often, listening and asking them questions
* Encourage them to take time to digest the information
* Explain how and why of the changes
* Emphasize the importance of the transition
* Letting them know where to go for more information

# STAGE 2: RESISTANCE – “Is the change permanent” or “I don’t think I can cope!”

Once the reality of change has sunk in, employees tend to start to fear the impact of the change. They may feel threatened or angry about it, and they might even actively resist or protest the change. This is the stage where employees will feel the most vulnerable – it is the “tipping point”. Prepare to support your employees during this stage by:

* Consider how the change will impact them
* Gather information to minimize and mitigate the possible objections
* Clearly indicate the significance of the change
* Take concrete steps to achieve the goals of the change
* Be clear about what practices are ending and what should continue

# STAGE 3: EXPLORATION – “What exactly will it involve?” or “I’m starting to understand this.”

With support, employees can get beyond the tipping point and stop resisting the changes. They will stop focusing on what they lost, stop hanging onto the way things were, and start accepting the changes. They will begin testing and exploring the significance of the changes, and start learning how to adapt to them. As a manager, you can support your employees at this stage of the transition process by, for example:

* Encourage employees to participate in the change
* Provide them with information on training and other resources relating to the change
* Facilitate discussions and have regular meetings to keep your team up to date
* Offer learning opportunities and facilitate the transfer of new knowledge

# STAGE 4: COMMITMENT – “It would be a good idea to work together on this!” or “Let’s try this…”

By this stage, changes are not only accepted, they are embraced. Employees have adopted the changes, and the new ways of working are starting to become second nature. This is what you’ve been waiting for. Your team starts to be productive and efficient and the positive effects of change are apparent. It’s at this stage that you, your team and the organization as a whole really start to reap the benefits of the change.

* Create opportunities for discussion and collaboration
* Discuss and explore ways to improve the transition process
* Celebrate the achievement of milestones

Accelerating Change

Denial

Resistance

Exploration

Commitment

Reducing Negative Consequences

*Performance*

*Time*

*By managing the change, you can minimize the negative impact of the change and speed up the rate of adoption. You can use your knowledge of the Change Curve to get the information, guidance and help you need, depending on where you are on the curve. This will help you accelerate change and increase the likelihood of success.*