Personal Impact of Change
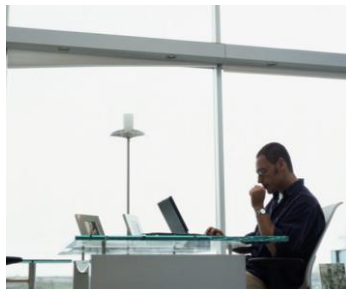
Change Management
A Highlands Group White Paper Series

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Personal Impact of Change

The French writer Anatole France said, "All changes, even the most longed for, have their melancholy; for what we leave behind is part of ourselves; we must die to one life before we can enter into another." Change is not easy for most people because it can impact their ability to remain focused, committed, and engaged. A kind of melancholy can set in as people let go of the past and look to the unknown future. Many of the tools we use during change initiatives focus on organizational change issues such as stakeholder management, communication, and risk mitigation. But remember, individuals change—not organizations. Consequently, leaders must consider the personal impact of change on individuals throughout the organization. Change leaders must think through questions such as:

- How will the change affect how people work?

- What new outputs will they be expected to produced?

- What new skills will they need?

- How will they be rewarded?

The more adept leaders and change agents are at encouraging individual change, the more likely the organization will achieve the desired results defined in the business case for change. Remember that people can and will change on their own, but nobody wants to *be* changed. Most people want to do a good job; they want to make a contribution; they want to be better, stronger, and more knowledgeable. But no one wants to be *forced* to do it. They want to do it of their own free will and choice.

Change leaders should ask employees, "How do you want to develop ownership for and commitment to change?" It is likely that employees want to participate in the thought process, understand the reasons for change, and avoid any surprises or ulterior motives. They want open and honest communication, and they want the opportunity to acquire new skills and knowledge. Change leaders should focus on these areas when dealing with the personal impact of change.

Volumes of text have been written to help individuals deal with change. We do not intend to have this white paper compete with those great works. Instead, we outline four simple steps to help leaders focus on the personal impact of change:

1. Gather data about the personal impact of change.
2. Allow groups to discuss their individual answers.
3. Aggregate the data and determine the impact on the change plan.
4. Deal with "snipers."

1. Gather Data About the Personal Impact of Change

As stated earlier, individuals view change differently. To know how to best help people cope, leaders and change agents can gather data from their key stakeholders (i.e., employees). Typical mechanisms for gathering data include:

- Team meetings

- All-hands communication sessions

- Leadership sessions

- Surveys

- Focus groups

Make sure the mechanism(s) helps the change team to: (1) gather information easily, (2) provide the best forum for people to discuss their answers and learn from each other, and (3) effectively analyze findings and make changes to the change plan.

We have found that when employees think through the questions below, it enables them to make sense of the current situation and define how the change might impact the future.

Personal Impact of Change Worksheet

Current Situation	Possible Impact
Who I work with and report to:	I will no longer work with: New people I will work with:
What I produce now:	New outputs I will be expected to produce:

Current Situation	Possible Impact
What skills and tools I need most now:	What new skills and tools I will need most:
My work environment/conditions now:	My new work environment/conditions:
How I am measured and rewarded now:	New ways I will be measured and rewarded:
Name (optional):	Contact information (optional):

2. Allow Groups to Discuss Their Individual Answers

It is not only important to give individuals a chance to reflect on how changes will impact them, it is also important to give them time to talk with peers and other groups. This learning process helps people share what they are going through, understand that they are not alone, and develop coping mechanisms and support groups.

It is important to note that it is not the responsibility of leaders and change agents to "process" employees' frustrations, anger, or loss. Professional psychologists and counselors need to assume that role. But we have found that group discussions about change help them deal with some of their concerns or frustrations. The process we have often used is to schedule a large group meeting (typically by area or function), give individuals time to think through the change questions outlined above, facilitate a candid group discussion about the personal impact of change, and capture feedback.

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Change Management Series White Paper: Personal Impact of Change
Material proprietary to The Highlands Group, The Cornerstone Group, and RBL

3. Aggregate the Data and Determine the Impact on the Change Plan

Leaders can learn a lot from the group discussions about change. Typically, the issues raised by one group are similar to the issues raised by other groups. Common themes that emerge from the discussions help leaders add clarity and focus to the entire change plan.

To aggregate the data, pull together representatives who participated in different discussion groups to review each group's learnings and capture common themes. Typical tasks include:

1. Set a time to meet to fully discuss and understand findings.

2. Determine common themes and their potential impact.

3. Identify ways to deal with the themes not addressed in the change plan.

4. Draft a communication message to thank employees for their input, outline key themes, and define the action steps to address the themes.

The following example from one of our clients shows how a team might organize its findings and develop action steps to reinforce change.

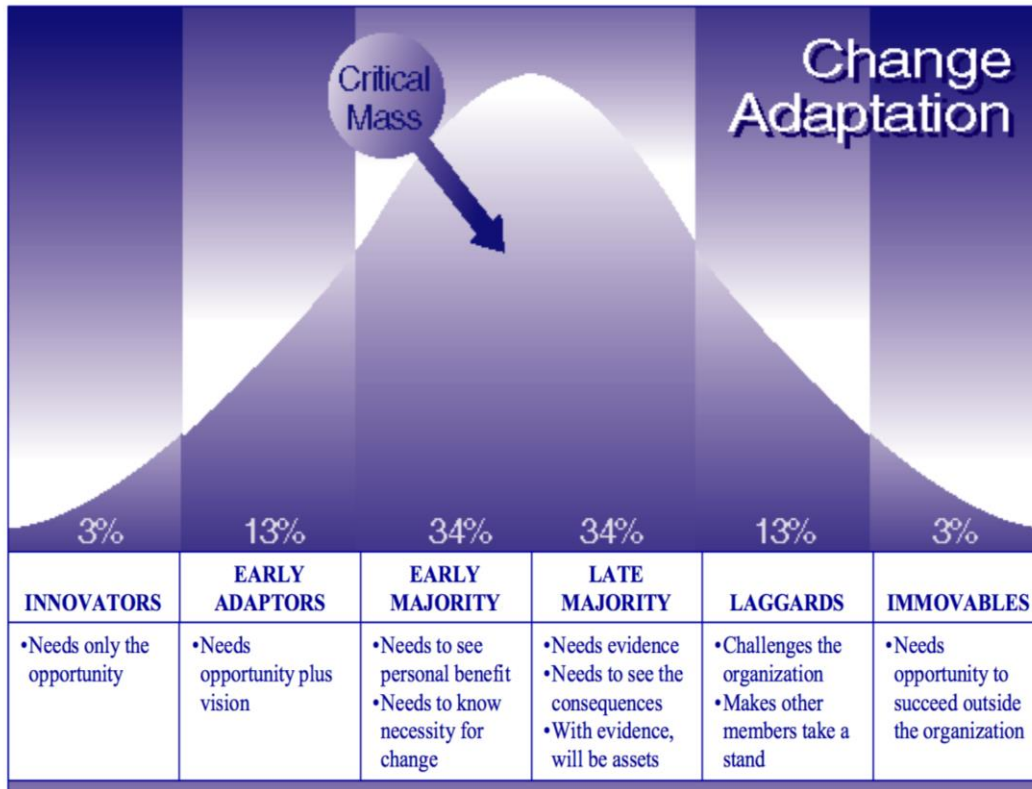| Reinforcers of Change	• One-on-one communication sessions with Plant Manager • Feedback sessions with in-tact work groups • Lunch room videos
Distracters of Change	• Inconsistent communication messages about progress and next steps • Rumors about layoffs • Suppliers resisting changes to procedures
Mechanisms	• Communication plan • Stakeholder management plan
Action Steps	• Create a communication schedule; identify the key messages and determine who will deliver them. • Update the business case for change; communicate it to employees. • Establish a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) process to receive and respond to questions. • Determine specific complaints; engage suppliers in the process of improvement. • Assign "stewards" of key stakeholders

4. Deal With "Snipers"

Concerning a large-scale redesign effort, the CEO of one well-known company said, "We will carry the wounded—but shoot the stragglers." On virtually every large-scale change initiative, some people will strongly oppose it and work to subvert the effort. Often they are extroverted opinion leaders who have tremendous influence in the "rumor mill." No matter what, they will not change—and we consider them immovables (a.k.a. "snipers"). Many change agents and others who are trying to lead the change effort feel as this CEO did and want to get rid of such people. That may be the appropriate course of action, depending on how aggressive they are in their resistance.

But before removing such resistors, consider listening to and learning from their perspectives. Even though the immovables are typically not going to change, you might sharpen your change agent skills from your interactions with these people. They often expend great energy in thinking about why the change effort will fail, what the downsides/pitfalls are, and what all of the negative eventualities might be. Listening to the immovables and trying to understand their objections, fears, and concerns can help you more thoroughly prepare the organization for success. By trying to understand your strongest opposition, your just might become stronger yourself. However, while it is important to listen to the immovables, don't spend large amounts of time trying to convince them to change. Don't allow the "squeaky wheel" to get all of the "grease."

The Change Adaptation Curve on the next page illustrates how readily individuals adapt to change. Research shows that most people in each segment on the graph get their information and ideas from the group in front of them. Consequently, a leader's time is best spent on getting the "swing vote"—the early adaptors and early majority—so those groups can bring the rest of the employee population along.

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3%	13%	34%	34%	13%	3%
INNOVATORS	**EARLY ADAPTORS**	**EARLY MAJORITY**	**LATE MAJORITY**	**LAGGARDS**	**IMMOVABLES**
•Needs only the opportunity	•Needs opportunity plus vision	•Needs to see personal benefit •Needs to know necessity for change	•Needs evidence •Needs to see the consequences •With evidence, will be assets	•Challenges the organization •Makes other members take a stand	•Needs opportunity to succeed outside the organization

One of our clients, a General in the Army, often told his command that there were three types of participants in change: (1) a "parade watcher" who sits on the side and watches the change go by; (2) a "parade participant" who jumps in and makes change happen; and (3) a "rain maker" who complains about and resists change and ultimately rains on the parade.

During change, it will take time for people to adapt to the initiative. The same General used to carry with him "Get Out of Jail Free" cards that he would hand out to employees dealing with change. This type of card allows employees to raise difficult issues, complain, and even "rain" on things a bit before they join the parade.

After leaders have listened to, coached, and communicated with employees, and even "carried the wounded" for a time, some people will still not be supportive. These immovables become "snipers" of the change initiative. In these cases, leaders should be bold and suggest that everyone might be better served if these employees move on to other organizations where they can be more successful.

Conclusion

The great American writer Mark Twain said, "Habit is habit, and not to be flung out of the window by any man, but coaxed downstairs a step at a time." People adapt to change differently and at different speeds. Just because leaders announce change, doesn't mean everyone will get aboard at the same time. Step by step, leaders must coax individuals through change. As the organization's innovators share their excitement with the early adaptors, momentum will build. Then as leaders engage the rest of the organization in the change conversation, old habits will be replaced with new habits until the "swing vote" provides the momentum necessary to propel the organization into the future.

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