

THOUGHTPIECE 3

CREATING SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

CHANGE AND TRANSITION

Many Change Initiatives are change-heavy and transition-light.

Change and transition are different, and both are necessary for any significant change to work.

Change is a shift in the externals of any situation: a new boss, setting up a new program, the death of a relative, a move to a new city, or a promotion. By contrast, **Transition** is the mental and emotional transformation that people must undergo to relinquish old arrangements and embrace new ones. It has three phases:

- An Ending,
- A disorienting sort of "nowhere" called The Neutral Zone,
- A New Beginning.

If people don't deal with each of these phases, the change will be just a rearrangement of the furniture.

Managing change is different from managing transition.

Change is the **way** things will be different, and transition is **how** you get people through those three stages to make the change work.

Change is made up of events, while transition is an on-going process.

Change is visible and tangible, while transition takes place (or more often, doesn't take place) inside of people.

Change can happen quickly, but transition takes weeks or months or even years.

Change can, and usually should be, speeded up. Transition, like any organic process, has its own natural pace.

Change is all about the outcome we are trying to achieve; transition is about how we'll get there and how we'll manage things while we are en route.

The most common blockers to change.

Leaders don't recognize that unless people, real live individuals, stop doing things the way they've been doing them, new things won't take root.

They don't understand that "explaining the change" and "justifying it" do very, very little to encourage people to let go of the assumptions they've always had, the relationships they've always depended on, or the behaviors they've always used to get results.

Executives' detachment from the everyday work-work, which is so often defended as necessary to be "strategic," keeps them from understanding what has to happen for changes to work as planned. But it is no accident that the great leaders, from Moses and Caesar to Lincoln and Lee, were people who deeply understood the people they were leading.

An essential Enabler of change

Recognise the transition-dimension of the change in question. Encourage the change leaders to ask:

- Who has to let go of what for this to be successful?
- For this to happen, what has to end?
- What is it time for people to let go of?

These things aren't hard to do, but people don't often do them because they are intent on change and unaware of transition.

ChangeMaker International enjoyed researching these thoughts.

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Things to do

Admittedly some people that we meet would be happy if they could just create change of any sort, let alone sustainable change! Creating change however is no different to creating anything else, you need, the right ingredients and the commitment to follow the steps in the recipe.

Anyone who has ever tried to assemble a piece of IKEA furniture knows only too well the fun that you can have if you've got all the ingredients but you choose to ignore the recipe!

To create sustainable change you need five simple ingredients:

- **Vision** – a simple, clear and tangible description of what things will be like after the change. Explain it simply by using specific examples of employee or customer experiences.
- **Skills** – the skills that you have within your organisation are perfectly aligned to the results that you are achieving today. If you want to change you will not only need the skills to change but also the skills to work in the new world.
- **Incentive** – not only do you need to know what the company will gain from the change in order to keep energy focussed on the change initiative, each and every employee needs to know what's in it for them to change!
- **Resources** – change is an extra-mural activity, you still have to keep the business going! You need the right budget and the right team to ensure that momentum is maintained.
- **A Plan** – not just for the first few months (change is seldom that fast!).

As any good chef will tell you, miss out just one ingredient and the result will not be what you were expecting! So what happens if you miss out one of the **ChangeIngredients**?

(Our suggested solutions are available free as a wall-chart by contacting julie@changemakerweb.co.uk)

And of course it's important that you don't forget careful and frequent reviews of what worked and what didn't. Usually, companies are so anxious to get on to the next change that they fail to learn from the last one.

Organisations won't learn to manage change (and, of course, transition) until they treat every case of it individually:

What worked?

What didn't?

What surprised us?

What 'mistakes' turned out to be fortunate ones?

What assumptions almost sank us?

ThoughtPiece compiled by Andy Neal & Chris Howe

With a little help from our friends:

Sources:

William Bridges: author of *Transitions* and *Managing Transitions*

Victor Faux: INSEAD

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