



Sustaining change



Yvette Lamidey, Director of Free2Change, discusses ‘change fatigue’ and how change can be sustained

It is said that “change is a dynamic system and the only constant is change itself; the primary characteristic of successful systems is change and the ability to change for both survival and growth”.

The pace of change is fast and the current economic climate means organisations must be swift of foot, which potentially results in resilience to change. Organisations may be asking massive and fast change of their staff just to survive, which in itself brings additional pressures and stressors.

In payroll and HR there are constant changes to be effected – driven by a mix of legislation and organisational needs and development. And that is without any streamlining changes that as a manager and leader of the function you wish to implement with the intention of making things easier.

Fatigue

Although you may get fatigued by the changes asked of you, you have to keep yourself and your team motivated. How often have you asked the team to make changes because of change foisted upon you, yet you have neither fully understood the reason for it nor felt that the person seeking it has really thought through all the implications? (Especially if you are still trying to make the last lot of changes work!)

The whole thing can become a cycle to which you see no real end and cannot see the benefits of for the people you work with, thereby making it even harder to share with them and motivate them to make the required changes. Perhaps even worse is where the change is a result of some management report and you have not been given an opportunity to read the report and understand the full context of the suggested change.

And simple things such as ‘management speak’ also impact on perception. More plain, honest and open talking is required – sincere and open communication which is positive and not littered with the phrase of the moment.

The table (source: Figley Institute) reflects some of the ‘symptoms’ of change fatigue.

List changes

Take a few minutes to list the changes that you and/or your team have implemented in the last twelve months and those of your organisation in the last three years. With each item make a brief note about how you feel about the changes and the impact they have had.

Are you surprised by the number of changes? Are you surprised about your feelings about the changes and the impact of the changes?

Now remember the life events you have encountered in the last twelve months, whether or not they have been exacerbated by recent economic events. When coupled with the listed changes it may be unsurprising that you are not as enthusiastic about all the changes that you are being asked to make. If you map this across to the team then perhaps you can see why they too may be feeling some change fatigue and a sense of being overstretched.

Expectation

It is important to think about the impact you have whenever and however you engage with people. Sometimes people

are setting high bars for themselves and sometimes you are also setting those bars.

Expecting people to have an exceptional day every day adds more pressure. So why not give them (and yourself) permission to have an average day? That is not to say that standards such as accuracy should be reduced, but removing the expectation of an exceptional day will mean that people will still achieve and they may surprise themselves as to how much they achieve.

Motivation

Changing motivation comes from within, whilst motivation will be influenced by external factors only you can make that change.

You know what motivates and influences you. If you are going to implement a change which you wholeheartedly believe in and want to believe in then you feel differently to one that you do not believe in where you are ‘just going through the motions’.

It is a chicken and egg situation since motivation is the driving force behind change and change cannot happen effectively without motivation. So if you are showing signs of change fatigue then what do you do that is different? Will the personal motivators that usually sustain you work now? Is there more information that you need to understand about this

Performance of Job Tasks	Morale	Interpersonal	Behavioural
Decrease in quality	Decrease in confidence	Withdrawal from colleagues	Absenteeism
Decrease in quantity	Loss of interest	Impatience	Exhaustion
Low motivation	Dissatisfaction	Decrease in quality of relationships	Faulty judgment
Avoidance of job tasks	Negative attitude	Poor communication	Irritability
Increase in mistakes	Apathy	Staff conflicts	Tardiness
Setting perfectionist standards	Demoralisation	Subsume own needs	Irresponsibility
Obsession about details	Lack of appreciation		Feeling overworked
	Detachment		
	Feelings of incompleteness		

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particular change? If you cannot get out of the change loop and motivate yourself then you will not be able to help others to do the same.

Perception

Try changing your perception about the change. Work through 'what's in it for me' and 'what particular skills and values do I need to use and why do I need to use them'. This is looking at the 'identity' and 'beliefs and values' listed below (source: Gregory Bateman, 1972 and Robert Dilts, 1996). There has to be some of both of these to motivate but if you look for some real positives then it will be far greater than the 'JDI' mind-set (i.e. just do it because it has to be done and there will be all sorts of consequences if it is not done).

- *Identity* – Who am I if I have those beliefs and values and use those capabilities to accomplish the behaviours in that environment?
- *Beliefs and values* – Why do I want to use these particular skills? What values are important when I'm doing these particular activities?
- *Capabilities* – What skills do I need to carry out the actions? How do I need to use my mind?
- *Behaviours* – What do I need to do when I work in that environment?
- *Environments* – When and where do I do the activities?

In changing your own perception you have information that you can impart to those who have to change and give effect to the change. This information can change their perception and help them understand what's in it for them as individuals and as a team.

One of the best ways to do this is to look at how the change can reduce a 'hurt' (i.e. something that causes them additional work, is a boring task or is very labour intensive and seems to have little overall impact or reason). It may be something that is not a hurt to them per se but is a hurt to their customers and therefore one with an overall impact on the organisation. And in implementing a change that reduces that hurt – even if it is ultimately releasing time that can be used to address another hurt – then by reframing the requirement you can change perception and introduce some real motivation.

Team talks and focus

It will be important to find ways to keep morale high and maintain team working and collaboration, focusing on success and not on failures and their consequences as these have to be controlled in a different way ensuring you maintain that overall balance needed for compliance.

Talk to each person on the team to understand what for them is a stress point and talk to the team as a whole to understand the team's stress points. If there is more than one team within the department talk to each team and then bring all the teams together. You may think that you know the answer – you may even know the answer – but talking to them and then letting them know that you know what the stress points are will make a difference.

And remember their customers may also be feeling stressed and experiencing change fatigue which may impact on the team in different ways including the quality of the data they receive or basic processes being followed.

Keeping the team in the loop with what is going on and the overreaching priorities are important but again look at how these can be framed to assist with the 'what's in it for me' view to sustain motivation. It is important that people understand the contribution they are personally making, as well as the team as a whole, to priorities for the organisation and the department.

It will be useful to find ways that make them feel the team's success is also their own success. Talk to the team about how these successes can be celebrated at little or no extra cost.

A strong team focus is pre requisite to managing and delivering change. You and your team manage and deliver change all the time because it is part of the job. Just remember that if you do identify with the 'troops' do not lose sight of the bigger picture and keep reminding them of it in a positive way.

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David Ferret of the Olympic Delivery Authority recently said: "An effective leader enables a project to proceed in an environment of change and uncertainty." And so an effective team, by definition, will deliver projects in times of change and uncertainty.