**Fundamentals of Change**

By

Renée Mickler

The No Child Left Behind Act is probably the most significant change in American education since the creation of the US Department of Education. Its impact will be across the board on principals, teachers, students and parents. The principal will be at the forefront of all the change to be generated. Understanding how to manage change is just as important for the principal as the business manager. This article illustrates the fundamentals of managing the change process and how critical that is to accomplishing change.

Today’s leaders and managers were trained and ‘brought up’ to believe that their primary responsibility was to get work done. For a manufacturing company, this meant getting product out the door; for an insurance company, it was processing and resolving claims; for a hospital, it was getting patients through their surgery or treatment; for a bank, it was processing the transactions that customers initiate; for a distribution company, it was transporting product to the right destination. And for a service company, it meant performing the ‘service’ so the client could be billed.

Even though managers were managing people, their focus was on getting work completed. However, today’s leadership challenges aren’t simply limited to this. Many managers are faced with the challenge of bringing about change in their organizations.

Sometimes these situations are called turn around situations. Sometimes leaders will see change as becoming more efficient and productive. Sometimes it happens after a period of fast growth and the leaders realize that their business processes and systems are no longer effective. Sometimes it’s the result of a merger, acquisition, or sale. Sometimes it’s as normal as the company evolving to the third phase of a business cycle and needing to redefine itself. Companies in these circumstances are challenged to reinvent the way they do business.

This type of change is more than moving into a new building or bringing in new equipment. Those are only first-order changes. If the move into a new building includes reorganizing people into different departments and changing entire processes, then that would be second-order change. Permanent and significant behavioral changes must occur. Second-order change demands that employees at all levels change the way in which they work. Employees must perform their work differently, work with other people in different ways, and think about their work differently. Cynthia D. Scott and Dennis T. Jaffee in their book, *Empowerment: A Practical Guide for Success*, use the analogy of driving a car. Using the gas pedal is a first-order change and shifting gears is a second-order change.

Bringing about change is a different monster than leading and managing workload. Managing people to get work out the door utilizes a certain management approach, one set of daily duties, a task and result orientation. Managing change requires an entirely different management approach, a different set of daily duties, and a process orientation.
The problem is that leaders and managers don't look at these as different activities. They view their jobs the same old way—stay focused on results and get work done. They don't understand that there is a whole other world they need to learn about and a new set of duties or activities in which they need to engage. These new duties require new skills that are often not well developed because they've only been using other skills—the skills that they used to get the work out. Those were appropriate for the past.

The President of one of my corporate clients once said that leading a company through change while maintaining daily operations was like changing the engines out on an airplane while it was still in the air.

The successful change manager is one who has an understanding of the science of change. The topic of change in the workplace became a separate field of study in the early 90s. Universities created curricula around it. Consulting companies created workshops around it and management gurus wrote numerous books about it. Successful change leaders must develop new skills in order to perform the duties relevant to bringing about change. They must also appropriate the necessary resources in training and development in order to teach the employee population to perform differently. To get started though managers need to understand the fundamentals of change.

Fundamental One

Anyone with people reporting to them must understand the difference between change and transition. In his book, *Transitions: Making Sense of Life’s Changes*, William Bridges distinguishes the two with the following chart:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change</th>
<th>Transition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>External event</td>
<td>Internal process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective</td>
<td>Subjective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occurs in a moment</td>
<td>Occurs over time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The change is the external event that is happening or going to happen such as a reorganization or new process. It occurs at a specific moment in time such as the meeting where the change is announced. The change is an objective thought or idea. Usually the rational is that the specific change is best for the organization. The difficulties come when the individual must experience a transition in response to this change.

People must transition from the way things were to the way things will be. These transitions are emotional and there are psychological processes that individuals experience. Most leaders spend all of their energy focused on the change itself and don't understand the emotional part of the transition or even the need to deal with the psychological part of the transition. That is because they already have the end point set in their minds. The change that is being made is logical to them, so they can't understand why it wouldn't be logical to everyone else. They are unaware that in the act of formulating the change, they have already worked through their own emotions, so they can't recognize why others might experience any trauma over the change.

Effective change agents learn how to recognize emotional energy in others. They find ways to channel or direct
emotional energy in order to help people make a successful transition.

**Fundamental Two**

A manager charged with achieving second-order change must get people to think about their job differently, behave with other people differently, and do their work differently. Cynthia D. Scott and Dennis T. Jaffee illustrate this with the following diagram. Change must occur in each of these areas.

![Diagram](image)

Changing mindsets can involve any topic but will predictably cover some specific topics. Leaders find themselves faced with changing peoples' minds about the organization's culture; how things work, what is good for the company, how they evaluate their contribution, what type of performance is expected, how they should interact with people in other departments, how they should interact with their boss, and how they feel regarding a specific person.

Changing mindsets doesn't happen overnight. It is a long process of chipping away old norms and routines. Getting people to change these things, even when they want to, isn't as easy as simply giving a directive. People tend to think that the way it has been done is the 'right' way therefore suggested changes means a deviation from the right way.

**Fundamental Three**

Effective leaders of change learn to think in terms of interventions that force or guide change in these 3 key areas; mindsets, relationships, and processes. They learn to spot and create opportunities for interventions that are designed to change mindsets in the early stages, change relationships in the middle, and ultimately change processes. Interventions designed to change mindsets must occur immediately, continually, and frequently.

Interventions take many different shapes. Sometimes a side conversation in a meeting offers an opportunity to make a connection between the problem that's being discussed and the vision of the upcoming change. In an effort to achieve a shared common vision, leaders must describe it again and again until it takes on its own life within each employee's mind.

Another intervention might be a strategically placed question in a staff meeting. Often, I will use a staff meeting to show a video on a topic and then generate discussion about it in an effort to get people to see the subject differently. Sometimes an intervention is as straightforward as an agenda point for a town meeting.

Yet other interventions take the shape of ongoing meetings. For example, creating a brown bag lunch session for
middle managers to develop new change skills becomes an ongoing meeting to allow managers to discuss common issues.

Interventions designed to change relationships and processes are more project-oriented. Creating a team of cross-functional people who have never worked together before is a very effective way of bringing about desired changes. Inviting people from other departments to attend staff meetings for discussions is a good way to get people to come together. It is important for people to experience things differently. Interacting with different people in new ways is a big shock for many people, but it makes them find new ways to interact. Some do it well and some do it poorly so team meetings can be very good opportunities for intervention.

Major process changes should not begin until managers have guided people through changing mindsets and relationships. If employees don't have a mindset that includes a reason for modifying processes, they won't see possibilities for change. If employees can't interact with people differently, they can't have the discussions necessary to create efficient processes.

**Fundamental Four**

Managers today must accept the reality that emotions are a part of the workplace equation. Most of us developed our habits and behavioral norms in an environment where our business and personal lives were separate. This is not the case today.

The first fundamental of change establishes that the transition an individual must complete causes feelings of pain and agony for them. William Bridges describes the three phases of a transition as an emotional and psychological process.

The first phase involves a letting go of the past; whatever aspect of the past to which an individual might have become attached to. Employees get attached to some aspect of their job such as the way their work is done, the workgroup or team, the environment, the pace of the job, the physical space, or the schedule. It is their comfort zone. Even if they don't like it, they are familiar with it. So, the emotions of phase one are similar to grieving the loss of a loved one.

Any manager that has read about change knows that resistance is the second phase of the reaction, after denial, which they will receive from the people who must make the change come about. Change managers learn to look for ways to help through these reactions.

Many people still try to keep emotions out of the workplace, but it doesn't work. Rather than express their feelings openly such as, “I am feeling a bit unnerved by this new organization because I don't know where I stand in this new structure and I'm not certain I know what this could mean to my future,” they camouflage their feelings with a logical argument against the proposed new structure like, “This isn't going to work because the other departments can't get us the information fast enough.”

Oftentimes, emotional cries are camouflaged by some point of
disagreement or contention that sounds logical and challenges the new direction. Change managers know how to respond to these types of situations, in order to help the person process their transition without becoming their therapist. Change managers understand the impact of emotional energy on motivation. They learn how to cultivate their ability to generate positive emotional energy and ways in which to utilize other people's skill to rally as many people as possible to the new way of doing things.

Managers skilled in the methods of bringing about change know that learning these skills as well as new communication skills is just a part of leading today's workforce. They have accepted the reality that intellectual capacity and intestinal fortitude are now trumped by emotional intelligence as a significant success factor.

**Fundamental Five**

Since most leaders and managers approach the challenge of bringing about change in a mechanistic way, they focus on the mechanical steps of the change and the logic surrounding it. The same lack of understanding about interventions for change prevents leaders from considering human developmental needs in these circumstances. Managers and non-managers alike have needs in this regard.

Just because a leadership team is able to convince the majority of employees that they need to make this change and they get some level of commitment, it doesn't mean that the people have the skills to perform the job at the level of expertise that will be required. Because an individual is bright, gets along well with people, and is creative, we think they can step up their performance level.

My observation is contrary to this. Even bright people need some training and development in several areas. First, they need training in critical thinking, that is, the ability to see a situation or problem from a range of views without strong bias. Peter Senge calls for something similar to this in his book *The Fifth Discipline: Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organization*. One of his five disciplines is Systems Thinking—a way of thinking about, and a language for describing and understanding, the forces and interrelationships that shape the behavior of systems.

Second, communication and interaction skills are a significant area of development that is necessary. Imagine that there were, let's say, 78 different communication skills and they could be placed on a scale of complexity or difficulty. At the lower end of the scale there would be some simple or easy communication skills such as informing, reporting a project status, relaying input, giving information or opinion, etc. Higher up the scale would be communication skills that are more complex or difficult such as convincing, delegating, recruiting, and persuading. Even higher up the scale might be skills such as gaining consensus, disagreeing effectively, and gaining commitment from people in opposition. Today's workplace in general demands a more advanced level of communication skills on a daily basis.

Even the skills needed in meetings are more complex. Sharing knowledge from
your training and experience is not nearly as difficult as actively performing effective discussion duties such as gatekeeping, harmonizing, expressing group feeling, or achieving consensus. The theory behind teams—that two heads are better than one—is only true if both of those heads are talking. Team members need to know methods for group discussion, group decision-making, and group problem solving. Learning techniques of communication that enhance our current skills or compensate for skills at which we don't excel are essential. In order to have productive meetings that produce effective decisions or solutions, all players must learn group dynamic skills and participate in guiding the process of discussion.

**Fundamental Six**

There is a process to the non-mechanical aspect of bringing about change. Most leaders identify the specific systems or processes or problems they want to attack in order to achieve their goal. They make the announcements and assignments, set the new goals—all good things in and of themselves. However, they then fall down at the last step—they sabotage themselves by going back to business as usual. Sometimes they literally go into hiding because they don't want to hear the grousing, complaining, and arguing that they view as resistance to change.

There is actually a process to help people work their way through these predictable reactions. Effective change agents think about another layer of managing and leading. They are thinking about the process of bringing about change. The following is John P. Kotter's **Eight-Stage Process of Creating Major Change**:

1. Establish a sense of urgency
2. Create the guiding coalition
3. Develop a vision and strategy
4. Communicate the change vision
5. Empower broad-based action
6. Generate short-term wins
7. Consolidate gains and produce more change
8. Anchor new approaches in the culture

Each stage involves different activities, messages, and challenges for a manager and failure to follow through results in failure to change.

Managing change is a journey. It is a process of doing and adjusting. Keep in mind that the lifetime batting average of a major league baseball player today is less than one hit in every three times at bat. Not every initiative will be successful. That is why the process of doing and adjusting keeps coming into play.

Renée Mickler is the President of Mickler & Associates, Inc. in Indianapolis, IN. You may contact her at 317.631.6844 or thautwerks@msn.com.