

**“Change management”, a misnomer:
Rather than “managed”, change needs to be supported**

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Changes, of greater or lesser importance, are a fact of life, whether personal, professional or affecting society as a whole.

In 1789, Antoine Lavoisier, the French chemist, philosopher and economist, re-applied the inspired maxim of the Greek philosopher Anaxagoras to the field of physics and chemistry:

“Nothing is lost, nothing is created, everything is transformed. ”

Faced with these changes, enterprises and organizations must necessarily cope with them.

Hence the “recipes” that have been devised to manage and direct change. However, these recipes, often poorly applied, are only rarely successful.

It is important to understand that change cannot be managed or directed, but needs to be **supported**.

A survey conducted in 2007 by the Department of Sociology of the Technical University of Munich, in partnership with C4 Consulting GmbH, identified the factors determining success or failure in managing a project involving change.

The results were extremely interesting:

- The likelihood of bringing about change with complete success was less than 20%.
- More than two thirds of change processes were regarded as having failed or as having achieved little.

The following problems were identified:

- Lack of commitment on the part of general management
- Lack of clear objectives and a clear vision where change was concerned
- Lack of experience on the part of senior managers in dealing with the uncertainty experienced by the employees concerned
- Disagreement at the highest levels of management (not speaking with one voice)
- Lack of support from the hierarchy
- The information provided to employees was too little and too late
- Lack of appropriate ways of dealing with the fears and resistance of employees
- Neglect of psychological factors in planning for change
- Lack of human resources
- Little trust in communication between employees and senior managers

If you consider your present plans to bring about change, I am sure you will recognize some of these difficulties as relevant to your own situation.

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In addition, the results of the survey show that large-scale projects involving change are difficult for businesses not only in times of crisis, but also when the business is thriving. The survey also showed that there is a clear connection between financial success and positive support for change. The more successful a business is in supporting **radical change**, the better its financial health.

To sum up, the survey reveals three factors that make for success:

1. **Motivation**

Human attitudes are a key factor. If more than 50% of a company's employees are "against" change, it is almost impossible to make it work.

2. **Coherence**

It is not enough for the vision to be understood; each person must be able to see the link between their objectives and the overall vision. Each person's contribution must be clearly defined. Moreover, people's messages, actions and behaviour must also be coherent, at all levels of the hierarchy (being a role model)

3. **Consistency**

The various elements within the enterprise must be consistent with one another:

- communication
- staff development
- tools and processes

Let's take the example of a company's values. If a retailer decides that it wants to come across as "friendly", it will need to define certain behavioural criteria. For example, the check-out staff must look customers in the eye, greet them, smile and say thank you. These criteria will be communicated, the employees will be trained and, finally, these behavioural criteria will be assessed during the recruitment and assessment processes. They can be observed and measured.

This ensures that the system is consistent.

During the transformation of Swiss Life Switzerland, which I supported from 2012 to 2015, these three elements – motivation, coherence and consistency – were invoked at every session and in each of my presentations.

To successfully bring about radical change, close attention needs to be paid to providing support and to the human dimension. The human element is a key factor in achieving success, which is why I suggest we no longer speak about change, but about **transformation**.

Richard Barrett, a pioneer of cultural transformation, makes a distinction between change, transformation and evolution. When discussing the notion of evolution, he speaks of human awareness. I also reflect on the evolution of human awareness in my article: Mindful leadership.

Where transformation is concerned, the image is one of metamorphosis. Think of a caterpillar becoming a butterfly. This beautiful image clearly represents the challenge of transformation. It is important that a change first take place within ourselves if there is to be external, visible change. This really is a transformation.

Self-reflection, work on one's attitudes (role model), values, convictions and fears is essential.

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If you read my article on the agile manager, you will see the connection between agility and attitude.

One of the key factors determining success in a process of transformation is therefore this question of support: putting the emphasis on the human element, on people themselves.

To achieve this, we can also rely on the tools and principles advocated by recognized masters in this field of change.

John P. Kotter and his eight stages of change:

1. Creating a sense of urgency
2. Creating a team to steer change (a coalition)
3. Developing a vision
4. Communicating in relation to the intended change
5. Giving employees responsibility for a large part of the action, removing obstacles
6. Achieving short-term results (winning quick victories)
7. Consolidating gains and building on initial results
8. Rooting the new practices in the culture of the enterprise

Several of my earlier articles indicate ways forward and provide answers regarding some of these stages.

Kurt Lewin and his three stages, based on the image of ice

1. **Unfreezing** means abandoning habitual behaviour patterns and attitudes and instilling the motivation for change. This unfreezing is made possible by group discussion, encouraging people to call the group's norms into question.
2. **Change** (adaptation) is brought about by reducing the forces of resistance represented by attachment to existing norms. This is a transition phase in which there is experimentation with new practices.
3. **Refreezing** – this phase involves the integration of new habits.

But please note: stage 3 has evolved. Given the speed and constant nature of change, refreezing is no longer an option, because we are now in a constant state of movement and change. We shall therefore introduce the notion of **agility** as the third stage: 1. Unfreezing, 2. Change, 3. Agility

More recently, building on John P. Kotter and Kurt Lewin's phases, new approaches have emerged, putting special emphasis on supporting change, though unfortunately they continue to use the terminology of managing and directing change.

The Prosci ADKAR model, for example, is a change-management model based on the objectives guiding individual and organizational changes. Created by Prosci's founder, **Jeff Hiatt**, ADKAR is an acronym for the five tangible and practical results needed to achieve lasting change:

- Awareness
- Desire
- Knowledge
- Ability
- Reinforcement

All of these approaches take the notion of resistance into account. And if you analyse people's resistance, you will find that the element of fear is always present. On this topic, I would advise you to read my article on the notion of courage, which is closely linked to the notion of fear. Other notions to consider where fear is concerned are those of comfort zones and learning new things. If we desire evolution, transformation, change, we must dare to leave our comfort zone and be willing to learn. One of my next articles will be on the subject of comfort zones.

Finally, whatever your involvement with change, you will need to combine the measures you take and the support you give with reflection on the notions of leadership, team work and partnership. Good leaders, good teams and good partners are all vital to the process.

Ensuring you all speak the same language and have a common understanding will enable you to support your teams in the best possible way.

Wishing you every success as you support transformation.

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