Navigating change: a guide to successfully introducing and implementing innovation in the workplace

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Why change management matters

Change management refers to the approach of transitioning individuals, teams, or organisations from a current state to a desired future state. It involves managing the human and operational elements of change to ensure that new processes, technologies, or strategies are effectively implemented, and their benefits are fully realised.

Whether it's introducing new technologies or streamlining processes, change management ensures that these efforts are adopted and sustained, becoming embedded into an organisation's day-to-day operations. In today's fast-paced business landscape, effective change management is critical for organisations wanting to gain a competitive advantage, improving efficiency and safety, and driving business growth.

The importance of change management becomes clear when we consider the risks of neglecting it.

Studies show that around 70% of change initiatives fail, primarily due to a lack of engagement[1]. There are numerous reasons that employees resist change. Without a clear understanding of why change is necessary, or adequate support to navigate it, organisations miss out on the full benefits of innovation.

To address these challenges, businesses must take a strategic approach to change, using clear communication, leadership involvement, and sufficient training.

Successful change management is not just about implementing new systems, it's about managing the human journey through change. People naturally dislike disruption. Leaders must support their teams through the difficult stages by investing time and resources so that progress is made at a comfortable pace. By acknowledging the emotional and psychological barriers to change and providing the right support, organisations can ensure that innovations are fully integrated into daily operations, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and ensuring long-term success.

[1] Kotter, J. P. (1996). Leading Change. Harvard Business Review Press

Understanding barriers to change

Barriers to change often stem from deeply rooted behavioural and psychological reasons, embedded in how the brain processes uncertainty and change. Kurt Lewin's Force Field Analysis[2] highlights that organisational change is influenced by driving forces (those in favour) and restraining forces (those against), with human resistance often the most significant restraining force. Some common barriers to change include:

Employee resistance
Fear puts the brain into a threat response - freeze, flight, fight - when people are in survival mode they use energy to resist the threat.

Poor communication
Humans are wired to create certainty, so that they can control what is happening to them - uncertainty makes us feel vulnerable.

Lack of leadership support
Congruence from leadership, e.g. words, tone and body language, will determine how much credibility workers give to the change.

Cultural barriers
Culture has a bigger influence on behaviour than any overt rules or instructions from management, and lays the foundations for reaction to change.

Change fatigue
This causes initiative fatigue, where people are depleted of adaptive energy, which they use to respond to new situations or processes.

Inadequate resources
The effect of not having enough of these will cause stress hormones to be released and will be debilitating to varying degrees.

Inadequate training and support
Building confidence and competence isn't a 'one size fits all' and often people who are less adept with technology will need more time to adjust than is usually given.

Misaligned incentives
Rewards release pleasure hormones that motivate us to repeat the experience. If this is repeated often enough, the unwanted behaviour becomes a habit.

Unrealistic expectations
Managers have good intentions to make improvements, but underestimate the impact of change on workers - creates a 'them and us' culture.

Technical challenges
The brain will take the path of least resistance to save energy and this inevitably means that it will default back to old, familiar ways of working if there is confusion.

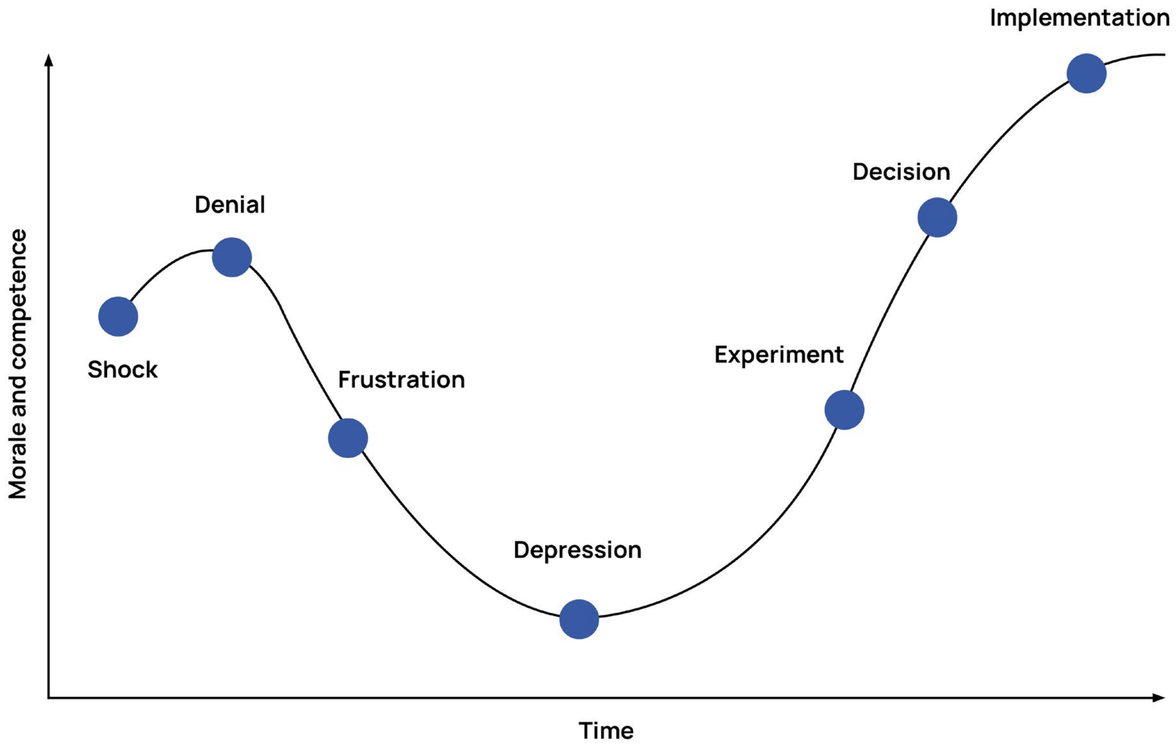
[2] Lewin, K. (1951). Field Theory in Social Science: Selected Theoretical Papers

How to manage change effectively: the Kübler-Ross Change Curve

One of the most widely recognised models for understanding how individuals respond to change is the Kübler-Ross Change Curve[3], which is a model that outlines the emotional journey people typically experience during transitions.

Managers must recognise that resistance to change is normal and not necessarily a sign of failure. Rather than viewing push back negatively, it can be an opportunity to build stronger relationships. Conflict, when managed with respect and integrity, can strengthen bonds between employees and leadership. Whereas handling challenges with judgement and ego can fracture trust and lead to a 'them and us' mentality*.

*A "them and us' mentality is where employees or departments see themselves as separate to others, leading to mistrust and reduced productivity, hindering change.



To navigate resistance effectively, managers should seek to understand the underlying concerns that employees may have. Many workers simply need reassurance that their time and energy won't be wasted on a change initiative that might fail. Providing employees with a platform to voice their concerns and offering consistent communication about the purpose and benefits of the change is essential. Remaining calm, positive, and committed will show employees that you are there to guide and support them through the process, ultimately leading to a more successful and harmonious change journey.

[3] Kübler-Ross, E. (1969). On Death and Dying. Macmillan

Stages of the Kübler-Ross Change Curve

Shock
Initially, the brain experiences shock and perceives the change as an energy drain, triggering resistance as a form of protective mechanism.

Denial
Employees may hope the change is temporary, denying and avoiding it in the belief that things will soon return to normal.

Resistance
As the reality of the change sets in, frustration and pushback emerge. This phase represents a critical moment for managers as resistance is often high-energy with employees pushing back in hopes of maintaining the status quo.

Low mood
When resistance doesn't reverse the change, employees may feel defeated, leading to a dip in morale and engagement. People can even cycle back to denial if this isn't handled well.

Exploration
Gradually, employees begin to consider the possibility that the change might have merit and start exploring ways it could work.

Acceptance
Over time, the new behaviour becomes integrated into daily routines, conserving energy once it turns into a habit, and the change becomes part of the organisational norm.

For a more thorough insight, watch the below video where Tended's Head of Behavioural Science Jules Reed talks through each stage of the change curve in detail.

Stages of change management

Implementing change requires a structured approach, that can be broken into three stages:

1. Start of the change process

When it comes to change, the most challenging time is when the technology is first introduced to the workforce. This is why it is essential to prepare them ahead of implementation. Arguably the investment of time and effort at this stage is the most vital, as it sets them up for success. It's the upfront investment in time and effort that makes or breaks the change process.

- Define the vision: Clearly outline the purpose of the change and its benefits.
- Communication: Be open and transparent, involving employees early on. Address concerns, outline the scope, and highlight personal and organisational benefits.
- Leadership engagement: Ensure leadership visibly supports and models the change.

2. During the change process

It is important to monitor fade* at this point. Employees are at risk of fade because during this stage, the brain is still having to consciously think about applying the change, which is harder than if it were a habit. This is why it is important to work cooperatively with employees and value their feedback.

- Monitor fade: Use techniques to manage concerns, such as active listening, addressing concerns, and demonstrating empathy. Constantly remind employees of the benefits of the change to combat concerns.
- Collaborate and engage: Involve employees in the decision-making process wherever possible. Provide training, collect feedback, and adjust change management strategies as needed.

*In change management, 'fade' refers to the gradual decline in the adoption or usage of a new process, technology, or behaviour after its initial implementation. This often occurs when, after the initial enthusiasm or push, employees revert to old habits or the new practices are not consistently reinforced, leading to a loss of momentum.

3. End of the change process

Change management often stops short, before the initiative is fully embedded. A fade, after the initial push, can still happen all too easily. Until it is used habitually in all appropriate circumstances it is beneficial to have change agents within your organisation to continue to drive momentum.

- Review progress: Regularly assess the implementation process, making adjustments based on employee feedback and performance.
- Make it business as usual (BAU): Once the change is in place, integrate it into standard operating procedures. Consistency and persistence are key at this stage to prevent regression.

Measuring success

After stage 3, it is important to continue to measure success to ensure that the desired outcomes are being achieved and sustained over time, and successfully embedded into BAU. To do this, organisations need to implement clear metrics and frameworks that monitor both immediate and long-term outcomes.

By fostering a continuous learning environment[4], organisations enhance their resilience and adaptability, ensuring that innovations remain effective in driving long-term success.

Track KPIs
Establish KPIs that are both quantitative (e.g. productivity, cost savings) and qualitative (e.g. employee satisfaction). For example, organisations can monitor time savings or customer feedback to gauge effectiveness.

Employee feedback
Regularly gather input through surveys or focus groups to understand employee experiences and challenges with the new processes. Monitoring engagement levels can also indicate whether staff are embracing the changes.

Cultural integration
Ensure that innovations become standard operating procedures within the organisation. This involves reinforcing positive behaviours and aligning rewards with the desired outcomes, making new processes part of routine operations.

Continuous learning
Establish a culture that encourages ongoing feedback and improvement. By refining innovations based on employee input and performance metrics, organisations can stay agile to future changes.

[4] Fostering a culture of continuous learning and improvement, Britts Imperial University

Real-world examples

Microsoft's shift to the cloud

Background

When Satya Nadella took over as CEO of Microsoft in 2014, the company was seen as stagnant and struggling to adapt to cloud computing and mobile technology, losing ground to competitors like Amazon and Google in cloud services. Nadella's vision was to shift Microsoft's focus to cloud computing and embrace a 'mobile-first, cloud-first' strategy. He made a significant cultural shift within the company, moving away from internal competition towards a more collaborative and growth mindset culture. This change required retraining employees and altering leadership approaches.

Barriers to change

Microsoft had a deeply ingrained culture of competition between internal teams, which had stifled collaboration and innovation. To succeed, they had to rebuild the company's culture from the ground up. Changing this dynamic was a significant hurdle, and some employees were resistant to the new direction.

Successful change management

However, Nadella's change management strategy was highly successful and today, Microsoft is one of the largest cloud providers in the world[5]. Nadella's cultural transformation also revived innovation within the company, leading to the development of products like Microsoft Teams and during his leadership, Microsoft's stock price tripled, proving the success of both the strategic and cultural transformation.

Key takeaway

A clear vision, combined with cultural change and retraining, can reinvigorate a company's approach to both internal collaboration and external competition. Leadership buy-in and transparent communication were essential to driving this success.

[5]How Satya Nadella's leadership style catapulted Microsoft to a trillion dollar valuation, Business Insider

Siemens implementing geofencing technology

Background

Siemens Mobility is a leading provider of transport solutions, providing services to infrastructure managers, including Network Rail, Transport for London and London Underground. A champion of innovative technologies, Siemens was looking for an effective solution to improve safety and operational efficiency for its railway projects and, in 2023, set out to implement Tended's geofencing technology on their railway sites.

Barriers to change

Siemens faced resistance from its trackside workers, who thought that their wearable geofencing devices were being used to track their location at work, instead of its actual purpose; to help keep them safe and out of the path of hazards such as moving trains.

Successful change management

Leaders at Siemens worked hard to combat this. With the support of Tended's behavioural science team, they delivered situational awareness training ahead of deployment to provide the workforce with reassurance and understanding that the technology is worn for personal safety. Along the way, Siemens collected employee feedback, implementing additional training and engagement tools where needed.

Today, geofencing technology is used by all of its railway teams to enhance site safety and improve project efficiency, with Tended recently being awarded the prestigious Siemens Supplier Award for Technology and Innovation in October 2024.

Key takeaway

Through great leadership, dedicated training and employee engagement strategies, Siemens successfully addressed employee concerns, leading to the company's widespread adoption of geofencing technology and improved safety.

Successfully navigating change in the workplace

Successfully introducing and implementing innovation in the workplace entirely depends on effective change management. By addressing both the human and operational elements of change, businesses can overcome resistance and ensure that new processes and technologies are embraced by employees. Understanding the psychological and emotional responses to change, offering strong leadership, clear communication, and comprehensive support throughout the transition are crucial.

Ultimately, you want to be able to introduce more innovations in the future and the experiences we give workers during this change will either make them look forward to the next one - or dread it - and this is another good reason to get change management right. Fostering a culture of collaboration, continuous learning, and employee engagement leads to successful integration of innovations, helping to drive long-term organisational success.

Tended is successfully navigating change by:

1. Building innovative solutions with human fallibility in mind

2. Implementing innovative change processes to navigate human behaviours

With this approach, Tended is successfully integrating geofencing technology into organisations' BAU processes to enhance safety and operational efficiency. This includes customers such as Siemens, Network Rail, SPL Powerlines, Irish Rail and AmcoGiffen.

Learn more in our case study video with our customer Siemens Mobility: