

YOUR GUIDE TO QUICKLY & SUCCESSFULLY IMPLEMENTING CHANGE IN YOUR TEAMS.

The expression “a smooth sea never made a skilled sailor” will have taken on new, personal significance for many this year.

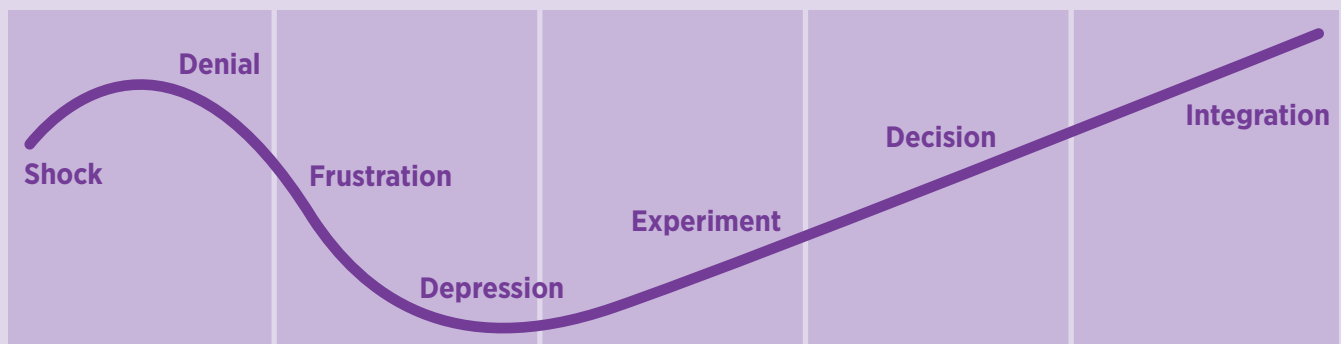
However, whilst Covid-19 may have prompted some big changes within your organisation, leading through change successfully – gracefully, efficiently and most importantly, with the wellbeing of your employees in mind – is a skillset that will continue to be vital to all people managers and leaders as the world of work moves forward.

No matter who they are, you will find that when faced with change people go through a cycle of emotions, from shock and denial at the outset, moving to frustration and fear as they try to work out what’s happening, through to experimenting to find new ways of working and finally accepting the new normal.

As a leader, your role is to ensure that your team get the right support at the right time to enable them to move through this cycle as quickly and painlessly as possible.

LEADING YOUR TEAM THROUGH A CRISIS

The way people react in a crisis is similar to how they react when they are facing a change, and therefore the same basic principles apply in how to effectively lead people through to brighter times.



1. Listen and then listen some more! Let them vent. Patience is the key.
2. Sell the benefits, explain the rationale and offer clear direction.
3. Help the team to brainstorm ideas to help them move forward. Let them know you are there to support.
4. Let them take ownership as they start to accept the change and find their way to move forward.
5. Highlight the benefits you are seeing, celebrate success, capture lessons learnt.

TAKING ONE STEP AT A TIME

This guide will take you through the key stages of the change curve, highlighting the considerations and actions leaders should be taking at each point to support their team and enable success.

MANAGE YOUR OWN REACTION FIRST

You may not be in control of a change, but you can control your response. People watch leaders to see how they react, so it is important to try to deal with your own response first so that you can maintain balance, positivity and calm in your outward behaviour to give reassurance that all will be well.

Your initial reaction may be one of anxiety and apprehension, but it is important to challenge your interpretation of events with the following questions:

1. **Is your interpretation rational, objective and based purely on the facts?**
2. **Can you challenge it with an opposing argument?**
3. **What's the alternative perspective?**

The way you interpret facts and information, and the meaning you give to them, is what will determine the course you take, the way you approach change, and ultimately how successful the change will be. By objectively examining a challenging situation and doing our best to remove existing preconceptions, we can work towards channelling our emotional reaction positively and, subsequently, settle on a productive outcome with practical steps for getting there.

4 WAYS LEADERS CAN PRACTICE SELF-CARE WHEN LEADING THROUGH CHANGE

Whilst your own anxieties and focus may understandably lie with leading your workforce through any big change, don't forget to prioritise your own wellbeing too. Taking care of yourself is often the difference between being overwhelmed by the pressure, and performing at the best level you can:

1. Make sure you have an outlet

Ensuring you have an escalation point or someone to turn to internally who will understand the context of the challenge is critical. Use them to bounce off ideas and discuss any difficulties you are facing.

2. Have a mentally-healthy routine

Keeping to a routine will help you avoid burnout, and this means getting at least seven hours sleep a night, eating regularly and as healthily as you can, and 'switching-off' after working hours.

3. Talk to your friends and family (about something other than work)

It's important to distinguish your work life from your personal life, particularly in the current challenge, so however busy you might be, make sure you set aside time every day to talk to those closest to you – and make sure it isn't work-related!

4. Make time for daily exercise

Though difficult to do from the confines of home, try to make time for some gentle exercise at least once a day. This could be something as simple as an online yoga routine.

PHASE 1: INTRODUCING A CHANGE

How you communicate and support your team during the early stages of a change will set the tone for how successful it will be in the longer term. When introducing your team to any change, you should expect a mix of different reactions. Some may be excited and positive, but you should also expect a degree of shock and worry. Your job is to lead and support them through this, whatever their reaction, so they understand why the change is happening and what the benefits are so that they are ready to start integrating the change into their daily lives. Here are some important things to do when introducing a change:

Listen, then listen some more: During the early stages, people often need to vent. It's important to let them do so. Now is not the time to challenge or dismiss fears as unjustified, as this leaves people alone with their worry. Instead, you can acknowledge people's anxieties whilst also gently supplying them with the information they need to put their immediate fears into context and dispel unhelpful rumours and myths.

Only say what you know to be true, but do it as speedily as possible: Do your best to supply your team with as much information as possible (as long as it's accurate), as vagueness will only serve to exacerbate any anxiety they are feeling. If they perceive you to be in control this will bring calm much quicker, so make use of all channels you have – distribute videos internally providing business updates and send emails clearly explaining your reasoning. Even if you don't have an answer immediately, make it clear that you are working to find a solution – myths and rumours may start to circulate if there is a radio silence!

Make clear what support is available: Now is the time to make use of any employee assistance programmes you have available. This could be anything from financial or legal advice to the provision of mental health support services, which not only help to alleviate some of the pressure on you, but also allow your team to come to terms with the change and reach out for help in their own time, should they need it. [Our free training portal Hays Learning](#) can be accessed anywhere to help you support your employees, by giving your team access to wellbeing, remote working and health and safety courses.

PHASE 2: MAKING IT REAL

Once the initial shock has passed, your team should be ready to process what the change actually means for them. At this point, you need to ensure your team is aware of the plan going forward, the rationale for key decisions taken, the key benefits and most importantly what they need to do.

Acknowledge individual differences: A one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to be effective when it comes to managing a team through change. Work with team members on an individual basis to understand their concerns about the changing situation and their own emotional response. Identify what each individual needs in order to feel confident about moving forward. For example, some may want increased guidance on ways of working, and others may relish the opportunity to work more independently.

Focus on the opportunity: Help your team to draw on the positives that come with change and focus on how you can all emerge stronger, more productive, and more capable than you were before. Try to also see change as an opportunity to identify strengths and weaknesses in the established way of doing things. For example, if frequency of communication between managers and employees is currently a weak spot then a change in working practice may expose this quickly, and it will turn into an opportunity to identify a new, more effective way of working.

Create a safe space for questions and feedback: Actively asking for feedback and inviting questions from your team at every stage of change not only gives them a voice in the change but is critical in ensuring they feel engaged and involved. For example, making time for questions after every briefing should be standard practice. Distributing employee questionnaires and feedback forms through your internal communication channels also provides a way to measure the success of the change you are implementing.

Address ways of working, giving clear direction but getting your team involved: Many changes can mean that processes need to be reviewed and your team will need to work differently. Approval processes, for example, may need extra steps added to mitigate early mistakes, or people may have new responsibilities. If you require your team to work differently they need clear instruction on what they should be doing, however, it is also important to give people the opportunity to add their own ideas. Reaching a shared solution will generate a sense of ownership in the team which helps people to get onboard and could provide members of your team with the additional responsibility they have been looking for.

Make sure your team has the skills and knowledge to be successful: Nobody comes to work to do a bad job so they want to know that they will still be able to operate successfully following any change. They therefore need the reassurance that they will be given any skills, knowledge or support required for this to happen and they will not be abandoned.

HELP YOUR TEAM TO THRIVE FROM HOME

As we work through these unprecedented times, we have launched Hays Learning, a free training portal for organisations of all sizes and sectors to provide staff with the skills needed to thrive in the face of the challenges of coronavirus and remote working.

Sign up today ▶ to access 16 free training courses, including staff wellbeing, remote-working skills and vital Covid-19 health and hygiene techniques.



PHASE 3: EMBRACING THE NEW 'NORMAL'

With time, communication and clarity of vision, a new 'normal' will be established that will feel natural to your workers. Familiarity is key to making people feel safe and calm, so try your best to implement a new routine quickly so that people have structure to work around and can start to build some stability:

Ensure new ways of working are established and being utilised:

Make sure guidance on how people should be working is clear and maintained, alongside what they should be focusing on and how this will be monitored. Use well established channels within your business and team to clarify and reinforce these messages early and throughout the transition so that everyone is on the same page.

- Hold a daily team meeting to maintain visibility and address any issues – this will be an opportunity to more closely monitor progress as your team get to grips with a new way of working as well as quickly identifying and resolving any problems
- Address any team changes by clarifying responsibilities and reassigning tasks depending on who has capacity and what the priorities are
- Explain the desired outcomes behind any new actions so that everyone is aligned to a common goal i.e. 'we will increase email communication with our database from once-weekly to twice-weekly to maintain engagement'

Always remember that just because you put it in an email somewhere, it doesn't mean that people have read, absorbed and understood everything!

Demonstrate patience: Change takes time, many will struggle to get everything right first time and mistakes will be made. Whilst it is important that business stays on track, work hard to develop a positive working environment where your team feel able to talk about mistakes and challenges, safe in the knowledge that they will be treated as learning opportunities for everyone rather than a judgement on capability. Encourage perseverance and a culture of everyone being in it together providing support as and where needed on an ongoing basis.

Celebrate success: Take the time to let your team know that you do not underestimate what a challenge this has been for them and how much you appreciate their hard work. Pencil in regular catch ups (drinks optional!) and use the opportunity to share individual wins and successes. Highlight how far you've come as a team and an organisation in terms of implementing the change, and how their positivity, resourcefulness and innovative approach has made this possible.

So, in summary, as a leader in your business you play a critical role in supporting your people through change, addressing their evolving needs at every stage. Start applying these tips today to get your team on the front foot.

If you have any further questions or concerns about hiring in the current climate, please contact your Hays consultant, email clientmiddleeast@hays.com, or visit our remote resource hubs to access a collection of resources that will help you to manage your team through this time of change.