

# Managing Change: Love or Hate Relationships

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## Abstract

The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of the latest developments in change management worldwide and to identify practical implications arising from leading-edge research. The methodology for this briefing involves an independent writer adding impartial comments and contextualising the articles. The article examines the importance of having a high-quality management team in evaluating, designing and executing successful change strategies; specifically, the team's capability to structure the organisation in a way that is responsive and progressive is crucial for successful change management. The article also discusses creative problem-solving and its limitations, and indicates that an independent facilitator could promote creative problem-solving. The authors opine that business leaders must have a better understanding of the different roles they can assume to make sure that initiatives are sustainable and successful. Successful change leaders attribute their success to leading change rather than managing it. This article offers deep insights into newest developments in change management and underscores the importance of effective leadership in achieving successful change initiatives.

## Keywords

Change initiatives, change leaders, change management

## Introduction

Humans have exhibited a love-hate relationship with a change during the course of their lives; people have been shown to display love, indifference, dislike and even hate towards change at different points of time. While it may be said that individuals' response towards change is rather unpredictable, it may be said with

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certainty that change is inevitable. Businesses and managers are faced with highly dynamic and increasingly complex operating environments. Thus, they must almost always not only be prepared to cope with, but also expect sudden changes in the business environment. Indeed, change is an essential aspect of everyone's work experience. The key is to be able to manage change in a dynamic environment without compromising with control over the organisation and existing core competencies. The acronym VUCA, with implies volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous, represents the types of challenges associated with change faced by businesses today; firms and managers must adapt and learn to manage these types of change to survive, compete and excel. The capability to evaluate, design and implement successful change strategies significantly depends on the management team's quality, particularly their capacity to structure the organisation in a fashion that supports a responsive and progressive change process. Changes that an organisation faces could be several and wide-ranging. While some firms successfully manoeuvre through the tides of change, many organisations perish. Whether an organisation survives and thrives depends on a multitude of factors. An organisation and organisational change are viewed in relation to people and culture; organisational change is not abstract with respect to the organisation, it is essentially for people within the organisation.

### **Identifying the Change: Organisational Intentions**

The first question of course is whether an organisation is successful in identifying the changes coming its way, whether the leadership is able to foresee changes in economic factors, market needs and sentiments, and consumer behaviour that might lead to disruptions in the organisation's business, and the directions of these possible disruptors. It is also important for firms to recognise the direct and indirect effects of disruptions that have already taken place. Technology, for instance, brings in something new every day, and the rapid rate of change it introduces implies far-reaching consequences for business. For example, while Amazon, Uber and Airbnb revolutionised organised retail, the way we commute, and the way we book accommodation, several businesses shrunk or disappeared, like bookshops, black and yellow taxis/cabs, hotels/guesthouses, etc. These are examples of businesses that witnessed disruption. It is during these times that how organisations respond assumes utmost importance.

### **Responding to Change: Determining Factors**

When the survival of a business is dependent on its ability to effectively respond to change, being unresponsive does not remain a choice. Sometimes, companies struggle to meet external market forces. Innovation and good leadership are desired at such times. The ability to foresee change, identify it before it overwhelms the organisation and take the necessary steps to steer the company forward is a sign of great leadership. Organisations witness changes stemming from internal as well and external factors. Internal changes may include changes in leadership, improvements in processes and changes in the way tasks are executed. On the

other hand, external changes like market consolidations and mergers with other firms could substantially affect the workforce. Apart from the obvious effects on the market, such changes can result in major workforce transformations. For example, mergers and acquisitions could cause changes to organisational structure and hierarchy, leadership, business direction, company culture, redundancies, job insecurity, resistance to change, talent attrition, low motivation and stress on the system. In light of the above, business leaders must understand the various roles they may assume to increase the chances of success and sustainability of change initiatives. Strong change leaders attribute their success to leading change rather than managing it.

Change management is in itself an area of expertise. Substantial data point to the fact that poor change management has led to the failure of several mergers and acquisitions. An effectual communication strategy is important to success. A lot of problems encountered during any change in an organisation is usually due to lack of adequate, timely and effective communication.

Communication must clearly indicate the purpose of change, and how it would impact the organisation as well as individual employees. In light of change, aspects such as employee role, compensation and benefits, new reporting and hierarchical structure, new leadership, etc., must be clearly communicated. Whether there would be new policies and processes that would change and significantly impact way of working should also be clarified. While a degree of resistance to change due to a sense of familiarity and comfort with existing routines and habits is expected, unclear or ineffective communication would aggravate such sense of discomfort and hinder effective working. Early and effective communication would go a long way in helping cope with change. Leadership is related to change. Given the sheer pace at which change is happening, having an effective leader is vital. An excellent leader not only is a great change manager himself/herself but he/she can also create change for the better. Change leadership refers to the ability to inspire and motivate others towards a shared vision for change, while effectively leveraging available resources to establish a solid foundation for that change. A successful change leader is not only capable of guiding their team through the change process but also remains on the front lines to confront the consequences of their actions. In this context, there are three distinct roles that change leaders can adopt, which have been shown to yield positive outcomes for organisations (Anderson, 2022):

- **Agitator:** This role brings to light the grievances of individuals or groups, raising awareness and often leading to proactive organisational change. The agitator serves as a disruptor, acknowledging challenges and committing to action towards change that ultimately results in practical solutions.
- **Innovator:** While the agitator uncovers grievances, the innovator creates actionable solutions to address them. This role also involves careful planning to ensure effective implementation of the proposed solutions.
- **Orchestrator:** The orchestrator takes the innovator's plan and coordinates actions across groups, organisations and sectors to scale the proposed solution. This is often the most visible function of effective leadership.

Successful change leaders must embody all three roles, as each plays a crucial part in the change process. Without agitation, it can be difficult to identify grievances and the need for change. Innovation cannot thrive without a proper understanding of what needs to be changed. While innovative ideas and solutions are essential, they cannot make a significant impact without proper orchestration and implementation.

## The Impact of Change

To achieve effective change implementation, change leadership should prioritise expediting and fine-tuning the process. Instead of dictating what people should do during times of change, it is more effective for leaders to focus on how people behave and communicate in organisations, as this reflects the organisation's identity construction. In response to the ever-changing organisational environment, leaders should adapt to the dominant organisational discourses to better manage change. A crucial aspect of leading others through change is shifting the language used to discuss it. For instance, leaders can encourage the language of change as a new beginning rather than an ending (which can evoke negative emotions and resistance). Navigating change in any aspect of life can be challenging, particularly in organisational settings where the scale and complexity of change can be significant. Once the change objective is clear, it becomes a project that requires effective management.

Change is

- Inevitable
- All pervasive
- Embedded in everyone's work experience

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