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Change

How to Turn Uncertainty Into Opportunity

Curtis Bateman, Marche Pleshette, Andy Cindrich and
Christi Phillips • Mango Publishing © 2023 • 260 pages

Management / Change Management

Take-Aways

- Human behavior makes corporate change initiatives more complicated.
- Employees react to change efforts with a range of predictable responses. They either “move, minimize, wait, resist” or “quit.”
- To coach employees through change, leaders must address their own emotional reactions.
- Present a “change vision” to help your employees understand and support the future you are proposing.
- Use the “Change Model” to track your firm’s change journey across four distinct zones:
- “The Zone of Status Quo” – Prepare for possible future changes.
- “The Zone of Disruption” – Expect trouble and use information to forestall it.
- “The Zone of Adoption” – Embrace breakthrough strategies if unforeseen difficulties arise.
- “The Zone of Innovation” – Devise and test new ideas.
- The Change Model helped telephone provider Three win the J.D. Power Award.

Recommendation

When Paul Walker became president of FranklinCovey he helped lead a massive change program that upended its business model and strategic imperatives. In this practical guide, FranklinCovey executives Curtis Bateman, Marché Pleshette, Andy Cindrich and Christi Phillips unveil how the company navigated this ambitious shift, which included the transformation of its digital operations to a subscription-based model. The authors share FranklinCovey’s “Change Model” and discuss practices leaders can use to help their employees adapt to and embrace transformation.

Summary

Human behavior makes corporate change initiatives more complicated.

Change management strategies often look great on paper, but when organizations attempt to implement them, they encounter problems. Change becomes challenging because leaders fail to take an essential truth to heart: The outcome of any change effort depends on human behavior.

People’s natural reactions and behaviors can inject unsettling complexities into a change effort. Moreover, for many leaders, that behavior often feels utterly unpredictable. For example, consider an incident from the history of the Rolling Stones: Singer Mick Jagger told the band’s other members he had negotiated an incredibly lucrative deal for future albums. When Jagger explained that the deal covered only his solo albums, drummer Charlie Watts punched him in the face, nearly knocking him through a window.

While Jagger was happy with his contract, he didn’t consider that sudden change could trigger other people’s fight-or-flight response. Initially, Watts found Jagger’s just-for-me deal too much to handle, but he cooled down eventually, and he and the other band members continued to perform with Jagger.

“The most effective change leaders choose to invest their time in their people over following a process.”

Sudden change can feel threatening to your employees, but those who understand corporate change efforts know these programs generally follow a predictable process. Once workers understand how this process unfolds, much of change’s unsettling mystery will dissipate. When it comes to making sure a change effort will succeed, experienced change leaders know they must focus more on “the people side of change” than on the process side. When leaders prioritize employees’ needs above the demands of implementing change, they can transform daunting change-related challenges into opportunities.

Employees react to change efforts with a range of predictable responses. They either “move, minimize, wait, resist” or “quit.”

Any change effort – whether for a business, an institution, a military unit, a sports team, an academic department, a family or even an individual – is a momentous undertaking. Many leaders try to plan the action steps of their organizational change initiative around predictable factors, such as holidays, because they know change is a rocky journey. But leaders often fail to consider the human side of their plans.

“As you learn to manage your own reactions to change, you’ll be able to model and coach your team to do the same.”

If you’re organizing and implementing a change program, you can anticipate that people will have one of five primary responses to a change effort. Each of these five reactions can help or hinder a change initiative, depending on its context:

1. **Move** – Some people respond to change by charging aggressively ahead to achieve the stated objective. This response has two advantages: Participants don’t get hung up on the “old ways” of doing things, and they usually remain energized. Its disadvantages are that they often move ahead without having all the information they need and may become unduly emotional about the change effort.
2. **Minimize** – Some people’s gut reaction is to try to reduce the change effort as much as possible. One advantage of this response is that before implementing each step, those involved will thoroughly test it, and that minimizes disruption. But because those who respond this way are only minimally committed to change, their reductive outlook often can result in a less-than-comprehensive transformation.
3. **Wait** – Those who respond to a change initiative with a wait-and-see attitude may already have watched too many proposed efforts sputter and fail. People with this mindset won’t embrace change until they see others make the first move. This response minimizes risk and maximizes resources; but a reactive – rather than proactive – stance can lead to missed opportunities.
4. **Resist** – People with this attitude go out of their way to doom change efforts as fast as possible. They may ask intelligent questions and investigate reasonable alternatives, but they also undermine morale and can instill fear or opposition among their colleagues.
5. **Quit** – These people want to end change initiatives before they start. They declare, “I’m not doing that.” Their flat refusal to participate gives everyone fair warning about their attitude toward change. They may spur leaders to preserve some resources they wish to protect, but their response undercuts productivity and morale.

To coach employees through change, leaders must address their own emotional reactions.

Change unsettles everyone – even those leading the way. Leaders should remain attuned to their own responses to change and learn to manage any resulting downsides. When leaders understand how to handle their own discomfort, they are better equipped to coach others. To deal with your adverse reactions to change, try the following:

1. Center yourself, pause and breathe deeply.
2. Consider how change makes you think, feel and react, and give names to those thoughts and emotions.
3. Ask if your reactions to change are positive or negative. Do they help you deal with change?
4. Focus on factors you can control – both in terms of actions related to the change and your responses.

Present a “change vision” to help employees understand and support the future you are proposing.

Positive change doesn't simply happen, nor can leaders promote and secure it by mouthing platitudes such as “Embrace change.” Instead, effective leaders share their vision of change – an inspiring view of the brighter future they hope lies ahead. To get team members to buy in, make your change vision compelling and easy to understand. Presented correctly, change visions guide your employees, opening doors that help them understand the value of the proposed initiatives.

“You can't force someone to be engaged.”

Devising the proper vision is part of the change puzzle. To move beyond the initial conceptualization of a change initiative, you must organize your change visions and prepare them to present to your team. Develop relevant communication plans, and prepare and sponsor any necessary team training.

Use the “Change Model” to track your firm's change journey across four distinct zones.

FranklinCovey's Change Model functions as a map of corporate transformation. It depicts your present situation, where you want to end up and what steps your organization needs to take in between. The model helps you chart how your transition is affecting your employees and your bottom line and assess whether your company is making progress. No model can ever be perfect, but as statistics thinker George Box explained, the best change models are “illuminating and useful.”

“There is no single ‘best’ way to react to change. It's all about context and choice. Each reaction may be right in any given context.”

The Change Model sets out a pattern of change that progresses across four distinct zones:

“The Zone of Status Quo” – Prepare for possible future changes.

This zone represents the state of your business before any change. But being static for now doesn't mean you should not be preparing for change, even if it seems improbable. Leaders must always look ahead to see what market trends, new technologies or other disruptions might spur change.

“Without the tension of a threatening change, it's easy for the Zone of Status Quo to create a false sense of security.”

Leaders should gather information, frequently discuss what trends and disruptions they see coming, and solicit others' opinions on how best to deal with possible changes. Then, they can begin taking action to prepare their organization and their employees for what may happen. When change begins, embrace it and manage it; don't shrink from it.

“The Zone of Disruption” – Expect trouble and use information to forestall it.

Chaos and disorder can occur in the Zone of Disruption, alarming people caught up in the change and making them anxious. In this transitional zone, develop and share thorough information about the coming shifts to help people feel secure.

“Change, even change for the better, creates disruption – which means it’s a place you don’t want to stay very long. You can’t skip the zone, but you can reduce the time you’re in it.”

Help your employees answer such questions as, “What’s changing?” “Why is it changing?” and “How will it affect me?” The more clarity you can bring to the potentially disruptive changes, the more quickly you and the members of your workforce can move into calmer waters.

“The Zone of Adoption” – Embrace breakthrough strategies if unforeseen difficulties arise.

The Zone of Adoption is the engagement zone, the period in which people step up and try to execute improvements. This trial-and-error zone is where most change efforts wither away and die. It’s also the zone where people do their best to adapt to the newest challenges.

“The most effective change leaders make it safe for their team[s] to learn from the resulting failures, strengthening rather than weakening their ‘change muscle[s]’.”

On the positive side, this is where the ideal transition graduates from “problems to obstacles.” Here, hopeful leaders no longer must view every step as an unending series of problems, but as a set of processes that offer difficult obstacles they must do their best to overcome.

“The Zone of Innovation” – Devise and test new ideas.

Brainstorming and testing new ideas does not mean you should change your initiative. The new ideas generated in The Zone of Innovation should tie into your existing initiative. The goal in this zone is to move the change forward with fresh thinking, born from what leaders and their teams have learned thus far and building on existing momentum and knowledge.

When the invention of the electric refrigerator undercut the ice-delivery industry, the Southland Ice Company adapted to become a refrigeration company. But it didn’t stop there. It built up from its initial big change from ice to electric refrigeration by transforming its old ice storage warehouses into early iterations of modern-day convenience stores.

“It takes a significant amount of creative thinking and force to lift the innovative idea... off the ground.”

In the Zone of Innovation, leaders and their teams reflect on where their change journey stands and consider all previous and new insights to ensure that they’ve fully capitalized on all of their ideas. They should ask a

crucial question: “How can we take the negative, reptilian-brain reactions out of our future work and create more positive reactions that enable innovation?”

Remember, transition is not a one-off event. Change is a constant, continuous journey.

The Change Model helped telephone provider Three win the J.D. Power Award.

The international telephone services provider Three was always a success, but its business model wasn't a game changer. Its ambitious senior executives wanted their company to become first in its industry, and they wanted to win the prestigious J.D. Power Award, which recognizes quality as determined by consumer surveys.

Achieving these heady goals required considerable corporate change. As part of Three's major change effort, its executive management team published the firm's change vision to enable everyone in the company to understand the changes underway and their purpose.

“Change is at the heart of how people live, work, and achieve individual and collective ‘great purposes.’”

Three implemented an elaborate training program for all managers and employees. It helped ensure that everyone grasped the how and why of its elaborate change initiative. The training program focused Three's employees on upgrading communications, improving team-leader capabilities and minimizing call-center turnover.

During its change effort, Three's management went out of its way to recognize individual employees' special achievements and to promote and publicize their techniques and approaches as best practices for other employees to follow. This multiplied the impact of engaged, top-performing employees. Like all ambitious change efforts, Three's program suffered some mistakes and missteps. But thanks to its change initiative, Three's revenue grew quickly, and it won the J.D. Power Award.

About the Authors

The authors are FranklinCovey executives: **Curtis Bateman** is vice president of international direct offices. **Marché Pleshette** is a consultant, and **Andy Cindrich** is a senior consultant. **Christi Phillips**, PhD is the director of learning, development and inclusion.



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