

From resistance to readiness: Successfully managing change in the workplace



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Introduction

Shift happens

Change can bring out intense reactions.

We've all met colleagues who seem to relish new challenges and situations and who keep an open mind about the impact of change. They seize the moment, get creative and inspire others to embrace it.

But more frequently than not, the major causes of change - restructuring, a new leader, a new mix of colleagues, a new significant process, or a crisis - are viewed as a threat, leading to stress, fear and change resistance.

The threat may relate to our sense of identity or confidence in our ability to contribute to the new environment. We might worry that disruption will unsettle the team and hinder its progress, particularly when the change feels imposed or enforced.

Emotions during change are complex, dynamic, contextual and personal; no two people will react the same.

So-called 'resisters' may worry about the relevance of their skillset, their relationships, their uniqueness, prospects, self-esteem, and their vision for their own future. Beyond the fear of the unknown, they might also worry about the added workload that often accompanies the practical aspects of change.

Perhaps you're a leader tasked with managing an upcoming change – or more specifically, managing how your team responds to it. With change becoming ever-increasing at work due to factors like the rise of AI, shifts towards hybrid in-office work, and ongoing economic instability, we might all benefit from learning how to be more comfortable with it.



Chapter One

Put people first

“Meet people where they’re at, improve their self-awareness, then move them forward together.”

Greig Johnston, Vidatec CEO

Becoming more comfortable with change means not only anticipating it, but also preparing for its increasing frequency and scale. It’s essential to understand the human side of change – how it affects people’s experiences, emotions, and their ability to adapt.

For professionals ready to embrace this challenge, the rewards are significant. Those who can effectively guide employees through transformation will shape not only their own success but also the success of the entire organisation.

It’s all about your people

The most crucial aspect of change is understanding its impact on the people within your organisation. When individuals face change, they embark on a personal journey of growth and self-discovery, learning more about their needs and identifying challenges. Most importantly, they develop the agility to thrive in uncertainty.



It starts with awareness...

Insights Discovery uses simple language to describe complex concepts. It’s called the language of colour energies, and it enables a common language for describing ourselves and others to spread effortlessly throughout an organisation.

The result?

Productive teams made up of self-aware individuals. Easier (less emotionally charged) conversations where people can feel free to express their thoughts and feelings in a supportive way, confident about the value they bring to the team, and just as important; the value that others bring to the team.

When people have a common and non-judgemental way to express themselves (or to make sense of others' behaviours), those hard conversations that happen during workplace transformations are easier. People acquire a basic toolkit to approach what could be frustrating or awkward situations.

For example, that new P/A clerk who drives you crazy with constant questions or the project coordinator who never stops chatting.

Now imagine if...

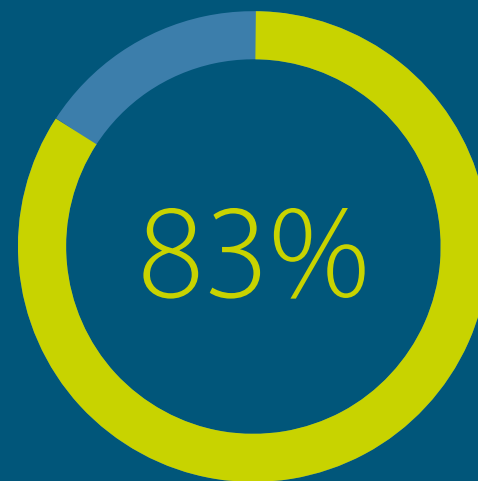
- That P/A clerk led with cool blue energy, which would mean they likely appreciate having enough data to make the right decision. They may feel they're supporting you by asking all those questions – it means they are less likely to make a mistake on your account.

If the questions are difficult to deal with, perhaps you could send itemised emails and that would do the trick.

Or;

- That project coordinator led with a sunshine yellow colour energy, which means they likely value feeling involved and building relationships. They may want you to feel like you are a valued part of the team and do this by chatting.

If the chit-chat is taking up too much time, perhaps you could schedule a dedicated lunch to get to know each other but doesn't interfere with your day to day working schedule.



of workers suffering from change fatigue say that their employer has not provided enough tools or resources to help them adapt

Capterra

Greater awareness = better relationships,
and you never know, that new P/A clerk might
very well become your best ally at work.

**The pitfalls of transformation are complex, especially when
it comes to people**

On the surface, change is a simple concept, yet one that's fraught with complexity in application. Many companies turn to a person-centred approach only after their first attempt at a change initiative has failed.

Our tip? Get comfortable with the complexity of change responses and put your people first.

// This kind of shift requires an engagement programme centred around supporting people and is tied to a larger change agenda. Organisations that are committed to bringing their people along on that journey are, in my opinion, more likely to succeed. //

Greig Johnston, Vidatec CEO

Reduce change resistance

Managing through change resistance, where to start?

A good starting point with change management is to remember that readiness for change is about being people-centric, not change or process-centric.

We need to understand how team members think, make decisions, and perceive their options. It's essential to dig deeper into why change feels so challenging and how we can navigate it more effectively.

It goes without saying that communication and leadership are crucial ingredients in helping people adapt to change. Leaders must share a compelling vision for the new way of working, clearly explaining not just the 'what' but the 'why' behind it and offer practical, personalised support at every stage.

But the other vital part of reducing resistance to change is to get more familiar with where resistance originates in the first place.

'Embracers' can help 'resisters'

Resisting change can cause obstacles to productivity, communication and the bottom line. As a result, more adaptive, responsive leaders and other natural change-embracers may find themselves getting impatient if more cautious team members resist new developments.

Before we judge or berate 'resisters', it's important to look at why change might be a different issue for different people and to recognise that the same support might not be right for everyone.

It's worth also considering how embracers can help resisters.

Focus on change resilience, not change resistance

One of the strongest causes in people frustrated with organisational change is that they expect it to be a linear and direct journey.

Helping people accept that there's not always a straight line from point A to point B can help engage their resilience in the change process.

Training managers and team leaders can help colleagues choose resilience in the face of change by supporting their ability to foster a growth mindset.

We know from psychologist and author Carol Dweck that growth mindset individuals believe they have the ability to learn and develop any skill that their environment demands of them. Adopting this approach helps us gain the perspective and big-picture thinking to not be deterred by the inevitable bumps in the new road.

Change happens; it's the resistance that takes time

In his 1991 book, "[Managing Transitions](#)", organisational change expert William Bridges stressed the importance of transition, not the change act itself.

“It isn't the changes that do you in, it's the transitions. Change is not the same as transition. Change is situational: the new site, the new boss, the new team roles, the new policy. Transition is the psychological process people go through to come to terms with the new situation. Change is external, transition is internal.”

When change occurs, one of the biggest barriers to acceptance is that employees feel unprepared to navigate the transitional period.

We typically go through three phases of transition (**ending phase, neutral zone and new beginnings**), but the amount of time we each take in each phase will vary based on the type of change we're experiencing and on our personality.

Understanding that others around us may be in a different phase is the key.

Help people respond instead of react

If you're a happily disruptive leader, this is more important than ever. For some people, change is an energiser, a motivator; they seek change and appear to thrive on it. For others, change is experienced as exhausting and demotivating, something to be endured.

Knowing how change affects each team member can inform your strategies to develop their resilience to and engagement in change.

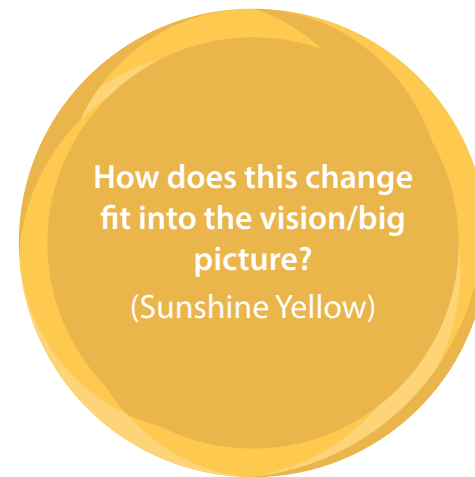
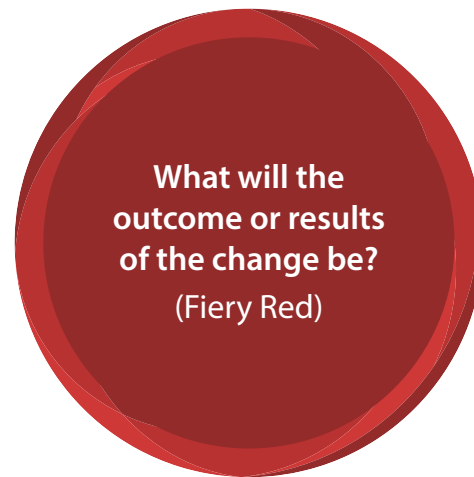
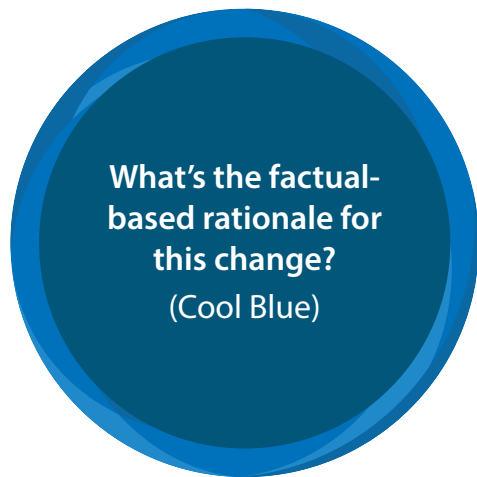
Understanding how different reactions to the stress of change may reflect our personality preferences, and accepting those preferences, can provide huge breakthroughs in productivity.



“Things were fine the way they were...”

Which concern might bother which ‘type’ of person?

Your team members will all have different interpersonal preferences (or different colour energies, to use the Insights framework) and those different colour energies are likely to ask one of these four questions:



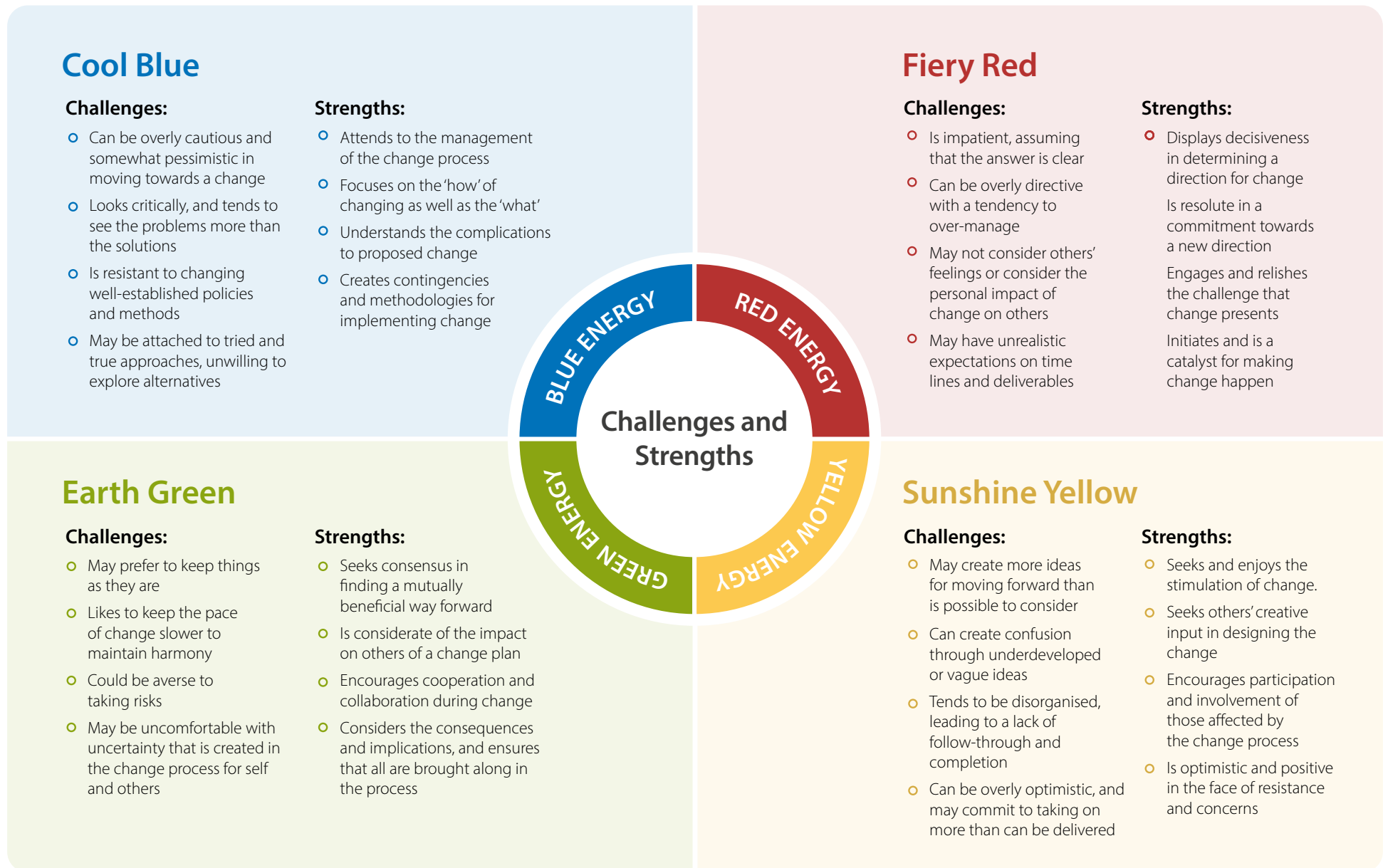
At first sight of impending change, we might instinctively reach for the strengths of our dominant colour energy, but helping people access the strengths of the other energies is like ‘stocking the toolkit’ to tackle any eventuality. That way we have more in our reserves, increasing our coping mechanisms, adaptability and quick response to changing circumstances.

Consider how your different team members, all leading with different colour energies and energised by different scenarios, might react to change.

Ask yourself what questions they will ask themselves, what they might ask you and what they’ll feel most stressed about.

By helping them stretch out of their natural comfort zone and think differently about how they might approach enforced change, you’ll be helping them choose how to respond internally to what’s happening externally.

Colour energies during times of change – challenges and strengths



The roots of resistance

Let's keep in mind too that people tend to resist change most of all because of:

- **Self-interest:** people fear the effect that change will have on them
- **Misunderstanding and lack of trust:** people fear that management don't have their best interests at heart
- **Different opinions:** it's felt that those who are initiating change aren't resolving a problem in the right way
- **Low tolerance for change:** people sometimes feel they cannot change or handle a transition

Ultimately, our colleagues can choose to resist at various points of the process. Whether it is possible to force people to engage is debatable, although it's worth making resisters aware of the consequences of not engaging. Perhaps far more powerful though is to listen non-judgementally and understand the specifics about why someone is finding it hard to engage.

Chapter Three

Leading change – a plan of action

Change-ready leaders improve change-readiness

Readiness for change has become a crucial organisational capability, yet businesses are currently struggling to adapt.

Compounding this challenge is a significant shift in the concept of change readiness. Instead of preparing for a specific change initiative, organisations now must maintain a continuous state of readiness. They need to foster agility and resilience to adapt, recover, and grow amid ongoing transformations. Today's challenge isn't just about achieving a one-time transformation; leaders must integrate the capability for continuous adaptation into their organisation's DNA.

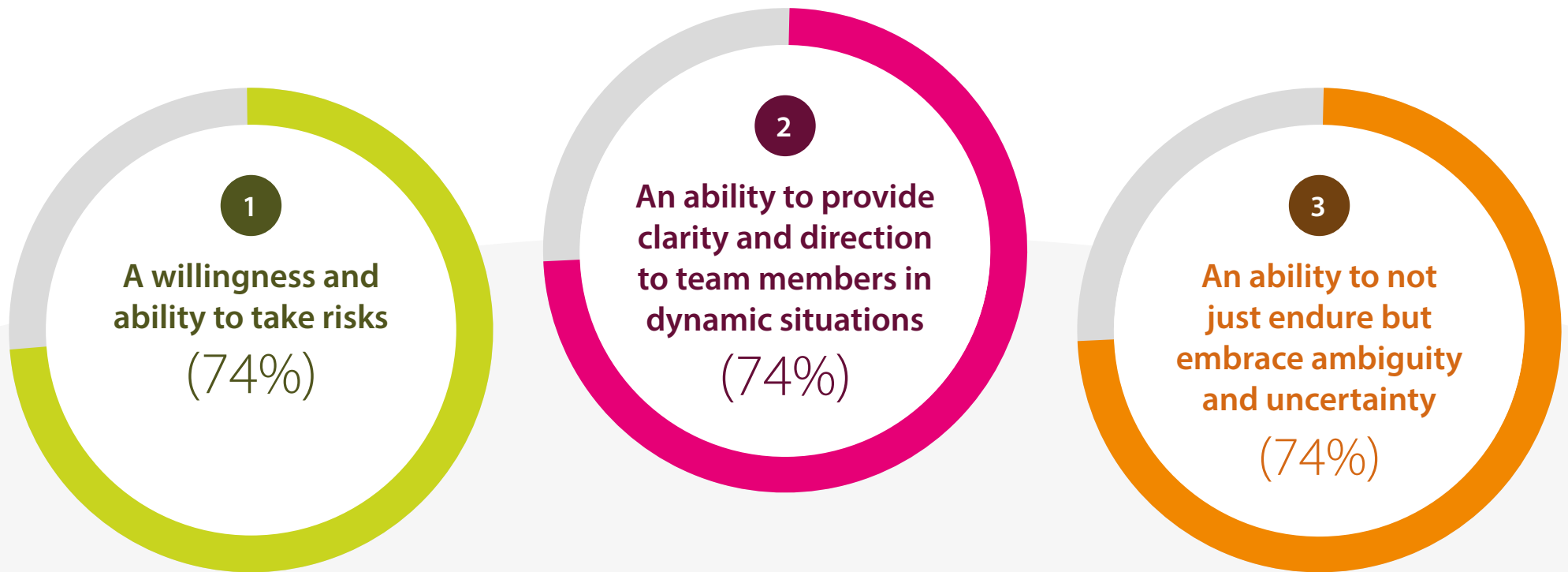
To cultivate this culture, businesses need to develop a pipeline of future leaders who can thrive amidst an environment of continuous change.

“ It's no longer just the C-suite that needs to be prepared to deal with continuous change and disruption. Leaders throughout an organisation are now being expected to effectively plan for and engage with a chaotic, unpredictable, and ever-changing environment- and successfully lead their teams through it, energised and ready to face the next challenge. ”

Harvard Business, Ready for Anything

For a change-ready leader, success involves sparking change and driving transformation throughout an organisation. To make a meaningful impact, they must navigate change and complexity effectively, communicate with impact and adopt new mindsets.

Harvard has identified three essential leadership skills for managing disruption:



With this in mind, how can you effectively lead change in your organisation and transform resistance into readiness?

Tips for leading change:

1 Develop more empathy ...and communicate!

Empathetic leadership involves fostering open conversations, building trust and creating psychological safety so that colleagues feel comfortable expressing what the imposed changes mean for them and their perceived ability to excel.

By understanding and valuing others' concerns and creating opportunities for constructive communication about the changes, rather than lamenting them, we take the first steps towards cultivating a more optimistic mindset focused on growth and adaptability.

2 Understand and value others' concerns

Establish a way to communicate with employees about new initiatives and their progress. Encourage them to share their concerns while outlining the vision behind the changes. This dialogue is crucial for shifting mindsets.

3 Open conversation

Provide as much certainty as possible by sharing information about will happen, when it will happen, which aspects will change, and which will stay the same. When people lack this information, they are more likely to feel stress and assume the worst outcomes, as it can create a sense of loss of control.

4 Understand individual preferences and attitudes to change

Different personality types can experience mental strain in various ways. For instance, a more introverted colleague might require quiet time away from busy or loud team meetings and brainstorming, to process the detail and nuances of incoming changes and decide how they can most efficiently respond while staying 'in control'.

In contrast, more extraverted team members may seek collaborative opportunities to discuss how the proposed changes will impact the team and explore ways to implement them together.

There's no right or wrong approach. It's about respecting difference and leaning into your own **self-awareness as a manager to choose how to respond.**

5 Identify change ambassadors

Change ambassadors are your advocates for new ways of working. Locate these individuals and give them a platform to ensure their voices are heard in forums discussing the changes. Encourage them to share and celebrate progress and positive outcomes related to each new initiative.

6 Equip your team fairly

Employees often feel unprepared to handle ongoing forced changes. As their manager, encourage strategic organisational investment in quality training, resources, and equipment – tools that will help them adapt and excel in an ever-changing environment. Without this investment, your workload may increase as you struggle to support your team in implementing the required changes.

7 Stagger the changes where possible

Timing is everything. Whenever possible, introduce multiple changes in measured doses to allow employees to acclimatise. Making the case for this approach will minimise disruptions to team goals and foster a workforce that is better prepared and more productive. By doing so, employees will feel more equipped and ready for any future changes.



Conclusion

Navigating change in the workplace is never easy, but with the right approach, it's possible to transform resistance into readiness.

By fostering open communication, empathising with individual needs, and equipping your team with the tools and support they need, you can create an environment where change is not only accepted, but embraced.

As a leader, you can play a pivotal role in this process, and by leading with empathy, clarity, and adaptability, you'll help your organisation cultivate a culture of readiness.

Remember, successful change isn't about avoiding challenges- it's about guiding your team through them with confidence and commitment, ensuring they're ready to thrive in an ever-evolving landscape.

If change is coming your way, we can help. When we work with you, we'll always start with what's right at the heart of dealing with change- people. By helping individuals understand how they react to change, why that might be, and why others do it differently, we can help you build in the resilience that is so key to coping with ongoing transformation.

Find out more about how we help our customers transition through times of change and face other pressing business challenges.

[Navigate change today](#)

Our suite of solutions helps your individuals, teams and leaders:

- 1 Understand and manage reactions to change
- 2 Communicate more effectively within teams, helping to sustain cohesion and productivity during times of change
- 3 Recognise and accept that others may react to change differently based on their personality preferences
- 4 Explore how people resist change and view these behaviours through a colour lens



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