NDP Factsheet
Working Through Workplace Change

Managing teams through times of change? These simple strategies below can help your team embrace the challenges, maintain a positive mindset and reap the rewards.

Start with why

When facing significant change, 'leadership is the art of mobilising others to want to struggle for shared aspirations. In his book, 'Start with Why', Simon Sinek highlights the importance of determining the "why" (purpose) of an organisation and communicating the "why" upfront to your team, consumers, and others the organisation seeks to do business with. The "why" drives organisational behaviour, encourages staff engagement and consumer loyalty.

Strategies

- Involve your team in establishing your organisational (or departmental) "why" by inviting them to share their reflections and stories, to get to the heart of what matters most. Use the following questions as a guide.

  » Reflect on a personal experience, a specific moment when you have felt that your role in the organisation made a significant positive difference to your consumers. What is it about this experience that makes you feel proud/gives you a buzz?

  » What is the specific contribution your organisation makes to the lives of others?

  » What does it enable people to go on to do/be?

- Encourage /provide space for staff to consider their own values and how they align with the organisations' "why".

Communicate

Communication is often a bug bear for teams going through change at work. Many a worker has been known to grumble that their manager/organisation "doesn't communicate", and complain they "don't know what's going on".

Communication can be challenging to manage when there are uncertainties surrounding change and differing styles and preferences for communicating.

Strategies

- Find out how each member of your team communicates and tailor your style to the individual. For example, some people like the big picture and a less concerned about the specifics, others drown in detail, some like the specifics as they relate to this current step, others like to see the whole process in a linear fashion and are fans of Gannt charts, process maps…whilst others need a rationale that makes sense.

- Communicate in different mediums e.g. visual charts, emails, verbally at meetings to capture different learning styles

- Let team members know where they can go for information – put a Frequently Asked Questions page on your intranet, and links to external (credible) websites.

- Nominate someone on your team to research and bring back information to the team.

- When you don't yet know the required information, be upfront about it and let your team know when you expect to have the information to hand.

Support

Supporting staff appropriately is key to enabling them to do their best work during the change process. Communication and support often go hand in glove, and support is often the other "bug bear" when it comes to change.

Strategies

- Identify how each member of your team likes to be supported and match your efforts to their support needs (where appropriate and realistic).

- Appreciate that team members support needs may increase if the changes require learning new skills or taking on roles/tasks that stretch their comfort zone, and that this is likely to be temporary.

- Develop peer support mechanisms or buddy systems that encourage teams to self manage.

- Provide team members with information on other supports within the organisation (e.g. Employee Assistance Program etc.)

Priming

Most of us do a mental risk/reward calculation at the very sound of the word "change" (weighing up what we have to lose compared to what we might reasonably gain).

If we perceive the risk to be higher than the reward, we won't take action toward the change. It is only when we see the potential rewards as greater than the perceived risks that we take positive action toward the change.

Strategies

- Clearly articulate the benefits of the change to your team taking multiple perspectives (e.g. consumers, staff, organisation).

- Encourage your team to identify specific changes that could be beneficial, have clear processes to enable staff to put forward their ideas for consideration and a feedback loop.

- Provide opportunities for staff/consumers to explore the potential benefits of change from their own perspective.

- The following tool may be helpful in assisting people to work through potential risks and rewards:

Start by asking your team to identify what is working in the current situation/way of operating. Once you have a good list, then ask them to think about what their concerns are about the proposed change (concerns will often relate to the loss of elements that are working well). Exhaust concerns about the proposed changes.
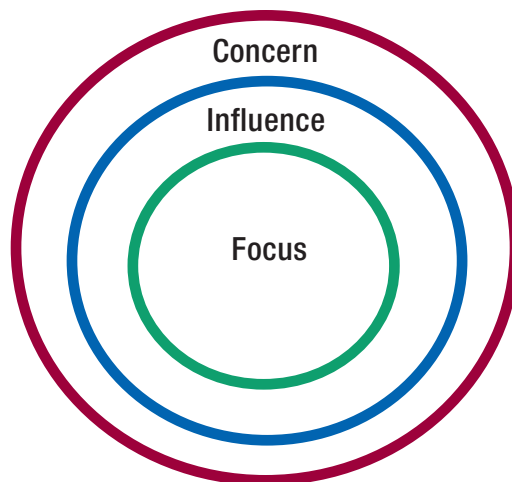
Now ask your team to identify what is not working in the current situation and document their ideas. Then move to the final question – what are the potential benefits of change?

You will end up with a list of concerns (you can plot these into the Circle of Influence below, or develop an action plan). Your team has been able to express their concerns in a valid and constructive manner, which may lead to a greater sense of autonomy and acceptance.

What's working in our current situation?

What's not working in our current situation?

What are our concerns about the proposed change?

What are the potential benefits of the proposed change?

Redirect the focus

If we perceive the risk to be higher than the reward, we won't take action toward the change. It is only when we see the potential rewards as greater than the perceived risks that we take positive action toward the change.

Strategies

Use the following table to help your team identify and clarify what they currently know, where the gaps are, and what actions could be taken to seek out information that is important. The act of clarifying what people do know can reduce uncertainty (you may know more than you think), and developing an action plan can increase the sense of empowerment.

What we do know

What we don't know yet

Actions i can take

The Circle of Influence (below) can be used to direct your teams' focus toward the things they can influence. You can work though this exercise with your team to collectively identify where your energy and effort is best directed to achieve your objectives.

1. Write the concerns that your team can take some action toward, or have some influence/control over in the Circle of Influence.

2. Once you have identified the things you can influence, prioritise them, and write your highest priorities in the Circle of Focus – these form the basis of your action plan. You may also reconsider the items in the Circle of Concern and identify any items you can manage up to include in the action plan.

3. Encourage staff to "let go" and accept those things that cannot be changed at this point in time and redirect their efforts toward the actions they can take – individually and as a team.

Concern
Influence
Focus

Create a sense of safety

Neuroscience research indicates that our brain focusses on minimising threat and maximising reward in social situations, and this drives our motivation.

Neuroscientist David Rock has developed a model (SCARF) for identifying psychological threats and rewards, which can be applied in any situation where we collaborate in groups, including in the workplace.

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The SCARF model involves five domains: Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness and Fairness.

Developing strategies to minimise threats and maximise rewards in each of these domains will enable people to engage more fully in change efforts.

Status: refers to how important a person feels in relation to others. Examples of threats to status might include: concerns about job status (e.g. more flexible work arrangements), pay rates or even moving from a dedicated office to an open plan "hot desk" environment. Strategies may include: paying attention to achievements and positive contributions, asking staff for their opinions, focussing on strengths.

Certainty relates to how much knowledge a person has about what is happening. This can include information about what is expected from them, how the changes might impact their team/role, and what will happen in the future. Strategies include: giving people information about what you do know, being open about what you don't know, focusing on what is certain, encouraging staff to be proactive and undertake their own research.

Autonomy focusses on positive choice and control, and can be undermined by telling people what to do, micro managing and not giving others a voice in the decision making process. Strategies include: enabling people to design detailed changes to their own role, create flexible work patterns, look for ways to provide staff with choices about their role and how they achieve set objectives.

Relatedness refers to the feeling of belonging, comradery and rapport with others. It can be jeopardized by having new people join the team or moving from a site based role to more of a community role where you do not have as much interaction with work colleagues. Strategies: encourage all staff input, set up a buddy system, implement app or web based groups / teams (e.g. Yammer, Facebook etc..) for staff who work remotely.

Fairness refers to the perception that things are fair and equitable. Situations where workers are being casualised, reducing hours or not being chosen by consumers as their worker can elicit feelings of unfairness.

Strategies establish clear expectations, encourage the consideration of multiple perspectives, understand that fair does not mean equal.

Strategies

Consider how the above domains might be impacted by the proposed changes you are making, and what you can do to minimise threats and maximise rewards in each of these areas, using the above examples as a guide.

One tool that can be useful in decreasing anxiety is the Stop, Start, & Continue model (below). Exploring with your team what you will stay the same, (either the things you are currently doing or currently not doing) can help but boundaries around the changes. Once you had a list of things that will remain the same, then move on to any activities the organisation will stop doing, before finishing with what the organisation does not currently do but will start doing as a result of the changes.

Discuss with staff:

- What your organisation currently does and will **continue to do.**

- What your organisation do not currently do and will **continue not to do.**

- What your organisation will **stop** doing.

- What your organisation does not currently do but will **start** doing.

Promote positivity

Dr. Barbara Frederickson suggests that creating a mindset of positivity – cultivating emotions such as being open, appreciative, curious, kind and real can assist us to flourish in our everyday lives and during times of change. Her research with Marcial Losada indicates the most effective teams have a positivity ratio of 5.6 positive emotions to 1 negative emotion. Positivity does not mean "being positive", but includes constructive naming of negative emotions, and focusing on a mindset to cultivate positivity.

Strategies

- Encourage your team to practice gratitude (e.g. share 1 – 3 things you are grateful for at the end of each day before you go home, or share them over your web based group chat).

- Be open to new ways of doing things.

- Approach proposed changes with curiosity as opposed to a predetermined or judgemental attitude.

- Express "negative" emotions constructively (e.g. supervision sessions, journaling).

- Find practical ways to help and support others.

Mind your teams' mindset

The work of Dr. Carol Dweck on mindset suggests many of us have either a fixed mindset or a growth mindset. People with a fixed mindset have a deterministic view of the world and see intelligence as static. People with a growth mindset have a greater sense of free will and see intelligence as something that can be developed.

Fixed Mindset

Leads to a desire to look smart and a tendency to:

- Avoid challenges

- Give up easily when confronted by challenges

- See effort as fruitless or worse

- Ignore useful negative/constructive feedback

- Feel threatened by the success of others

Growth Mindset

Leads to a desire to look smart and a tendency to:

- Embrace challenges

- Persist in the face of obstacles

- See effort as the path to mastery

- Learn from criticism

- Find lessons and inspirations in the success of others

Cultivating a growth mindset can help your team to embrace challenges created by change, learn and grow through change and develop resilience.

Strategies

- Reward/acknowledge staff effort over achievement.

- Create a safe space for team members to take risks and stretch their comfort zone.

- Share success stories so team members can learn from each other.

- Focus on strengths, but acknowledge and accept weaknesses.

- View challenges as opportunities.

- Value process over achievement.

- Cultivate reflective practice.

Apply team strengths

People who work to their strengths experience stress, increased confidence and self-esteem, develop resilience, are more engaged and perform better at work .

What are strengths? A strength is more than the tasks or roles you are good at – a strength is also something that energises you. Those activities that you look forward to, are curious about, and are "in the zone" or "flow" when you do them, and leave you feeling energised when you are finished.

Focusing on your team members' strengths, especially during change, will increase their individual wellbeing, resilience and productivity.

Strategies

- Ask your team members to reflect on the activities and tasks they do well and are energised by. As a manager, you may know what tasks/activities they are good at, but only each individual can tell us what activities get them "in the zone".

- Or, encourage staff to undertake a strengths assessment.

- Identify opportunities for staff to use their strengths more at work.

- Leverage opportunities to partner team members who have complementary strengths.

Promote available resources

Find out what resources your organisation has available to your team to assist them with the changes (e.g. Employee Assistance Program, Human Resources, Change Management, Outplacement services) and access them for support.

Other supports like Lifeline , Beyond Blue, the Black Dog Institute are also available if you are experiencing difficulties coping.

Disclaimer:

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