

Embracing Workplace Change

Overwhelmed by workplace change? These simple strategies can help you maintain your wellbeing and develop resilience during times of change and uncertainty.

Practice acceptance

Fighting against change, holding on tight to the past, or digging your heels in to maintain the status quo creates unnecessary suffering and angst. Accepting the reality of “here and now” is critical to any change process. No change can happen without acceptance. Acceptance doesn’t mean you have to like the change or even agree with it, nor does it mean surrendering what is important to you or that you are giving up or giving in.

Acceptance does however take considered, consistent effort to unhook from negative thoughts and emotions, perceived injustices and views that things “shouldn’t be this way.” Practicing acceptance involves appreciating that reality “is what it is,” to let go of the struggle and take positive action toward the change.

Strategies

- Try to appreciate (and say) that everything is as it should be.
- Notice what caused the change, and appreciate that what happened, should have happened, given those causes.
- Practice saying “yes” to reality; “yes” to the moment; and “yes” to just what is.

Choice awareness

You have a choice to tie yourself to the past or create your future.

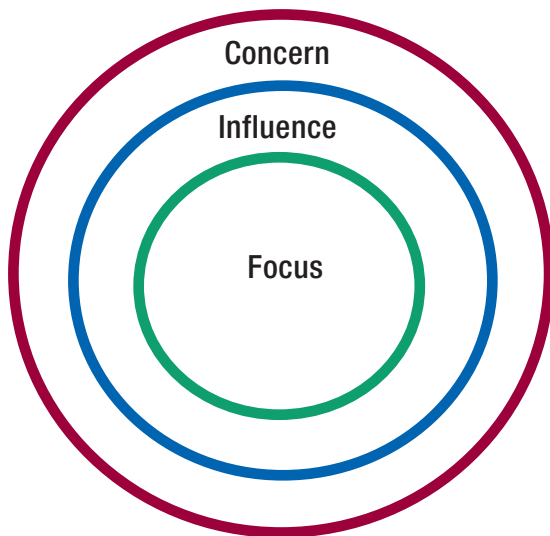
When changes are imposed upon us, there will still be elements that you have choice and control over, even if they seem relatively minor. Consciously making choices about where you put your attention and how you proactively engage with the change can increase your sense of competence and control, lessen any feelings of anxiety, and enhance wellbeing. Take control of the small things that you can influence and the big things will work out.

Strategies

Use the following table to help you identify and clarify what you currently know, where the gaps are, and what actions you could take to seek out information that is important to you (e.g. talking to your supervisor/manager, researching information, attending information sessions). The act of clarifying what you do know can reduce uncertainty (you may know more than you think), and developing an action plan can increase your sense of empowerment.

What we do know
What we don't know yet
Actions I can take to find out what is important to me

The Circle of Influence (below) can be used to direct your focus toward the things you can influence. Write any concerns that you have no control over or can't change in the outer circle. Then write the concerns that you can take some action toward, or have some influence/control over in the Circle of Influence. 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.



Name your emotions

Bottling emotions (e.g. pushing your emotions to the side, rationalising unwanted feelings, trying to “think positive”) can take up inordinate mental energy only to amplify the very emotions you are trying to suppress. This creates a toxic insincerity which is harmful to ourselves and those around us. Brooding (e.g. thinking things through over and over again, or worrying about your worries) is just as exhausting and unproductive, whether we do it solo or co-brood with others (e.g. have coffee with a colleague and vent for the tenth time about the upcoming changes...). Neither of these strategies enable us to be fully present, accepting of the change and proactive in moving on.

Naming your emotions and exploring your feelings through writing about your emotional experiences can increase your mental and physical wellbeing, and even your likelihood of reemployment if made redundant.



The act of writing about our emotional experiences can result in developing insight, gaining perspective and finding ways to overcome obstacles and create opportunities for the future.

Strategies

Write for 20 minutes about the emotionally significant event/change for four consecutive days. Don't worry about punctuation, just write for yourself without judgement. After four days, it doesn't matter what you do with it – bin it, burn it, bury it, delete it or use it to kickstart your memoir!

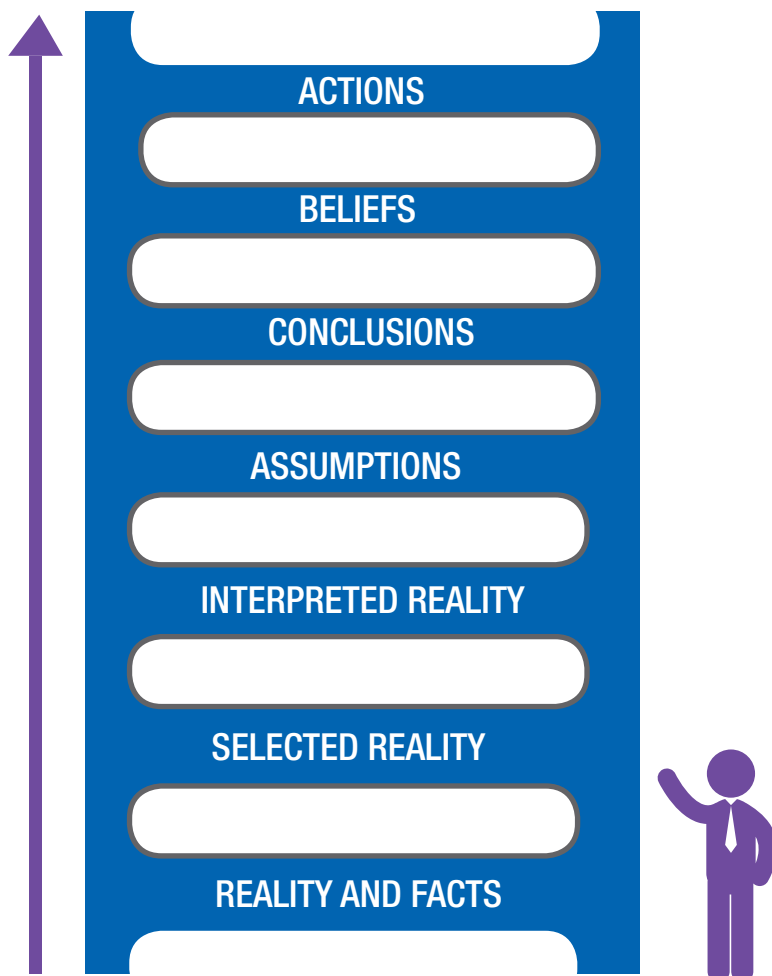
Contain your thoughts

Most of us are guilty of jumping to conclusions based on slivers of information, particularly during the uncertainties of change. Sometimes we don't even realise we are jumping to conclusions until it's too late. Before we know it, we are making decisions and taking actions about our job or career based on selective interpretations of the impending change, false assumptions about what it will mean for our role, inaccurate conclusions about our job security, and unhelpful beliefs about our employability.

This can create a vicious circle, skewing our interpretation of reality, jumping to conclusions and creating a negative thought loop of unnecessary worry.

Strategy

Use the Ladder of Inference (below) as a reflection tool to check your reasoning, stop the runaway train of assumptions, get back to the facts and use your beliefs and experiences to guide your actions to achieve positive outcomes. Starting from the bottom rung of the ladder, work through each of the rungs, asking key questions to challenge your assumptions and test your conclusions (e.g. Is my interpretation of the facts really what is happening? What have I based my assumptions on? Is this a valid conclusion given the current information? Is there something I don't yet know that may change the way I see things?)



Communicate proactively

Communication is often a bug bear for people going through change at work. At times, we feel we are missing information and “don't know what's going on.”

Being proactive in identifying what good communication looks like for you and communicating this to your manager can assist you to feel like you have the right information at the right time.

Strategies

- Think about your preferred communication style. Are you a big picture person who is less concerned about the specifics, do you drown in detail, like the specifics only as they relate to this current step, like to see the whole process in a linear fashion, love a good Gantt chart or process map, or do you like a rationale that makes sense?
- Once you have identified what good communication looks like to you and/or what's important to you – communicate this to your manager so they can tailor their approach.
- Identify where you can go to seek out information e.g. is there a Frequently Asked Questions page on your intranet, and links to external (credible) websites?
- Use organisational processes/mechanisms to ask appropriate questions.

Identify your supports

Feeling supported is key to doing your best work during the change process. Be proactive in letting your manager know how you like to be supported, and take responsibility for getting the support you need.

Strategies

- Identify how you like to be supported and communicate this to your manager / team mates.
- Appreciate your support needs may increase if the changes require learning new skills or taking on roles/tasks that stretch you, and that this is likely to be temporary.
- Develop peer support mechanisms or buddy systems.
- Find out what other supports are available within the organisation (e.g. Employee Assistance Program etc.) and access them as required.

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. A ratio of 3 positive emotions to every 1 negative emotion enables us to flourish and boost our resilience during change.

Strategies

- Start a gratitude diary (think about and write down 3 things you are grateful for at the end of each day)
- 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

Be mindful of your 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

- Focus on your strengths, but acknowledge and accept weaknesses.
- Put your hand up for the roles that will stretch you
- View challenges as opportunities
- Substitute the word “learning” for “failing”
- Seek feedback (not approval) to enhance your growth and development

- Value process over achievement
- Cultivate reflective practice.

Explore your values

Our values or “why” are the things that drive and motivate us, the heart of what is important and sacred to us and our purpose. Values provide an important internal compass for our actions and hold true to who we are, especially when navigating change.

Knowing our values enables us to make tough decisions and to be flexible and open to new experiences. Most of us have general life values, and specific values in particular aspects of life (e.g. life in general, career/work, relationships, finances).

Strategies

- Reflect on, (or partner with a trusted “other” to elicit) your values. Ask yourself (or have them ask you) the following questions:
 - » What is important to me (in the context of my work/career/life)?
 - » Deep down, what matters the most?
 - » When I think about my work, what am I most proud of?
 - » If all the stressors of life disappeared, and I could do anything I choose, what would that be?

Aim to get a list of 8 – 10 values, preferably described in one to two words. Once you have a list of values, prioritise them in order of most important to least important.

Reflect on how you can live your values in the context of workplace change. How might they guide your actions on a daily basis toward what



Apply team strengths

Identifying and working to your strengths will help reduce stress, increase confidence and self-esteem, develop resilience, be 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 strengths, especially during change, will increase your wellbeing, resilience and productivity and provide a cornerstone for identifying opportunities the change may present.

Strategies

- Reflect on those activities and tasks that you do well and are energised by. Identify what it is about.
- Undertake a strengths assessment.
- Identify how you can create opportunities to utilise your strengths more in your current or future roles.

Imagine your best possible future self

There is growing evidence that imagining your best possible life in the future can increase happiness and wellbeing.

Writing about your best possible future life for 15 minutes per day, every day for two weeks has been shown to boost people's positive emotions, happiness levels, optimism, hope, improve coping skills, and elevate positive expectations about the future

1. Focus on the future (you can choose the timeframe, one year, five years, 20 years). Imagine a brighter future in which you are your best self and your circumstances change just enough to make this best possible life happen.

2. Write in detail about this future. This exercise is most useful when it is very specific if you think about a new job, imagine exactly what you would do, who you would work with, and where it would be. The more specific you are, the more engaged you will be in the exercise and the more you'll get out of it.

3. Be as creative and imaginative as you want, and don't worry about grammar or spelling.



Utilise the resources available to you

Find out what resources your organisation has available to you team to assist you 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.

More information on these strategies:

This factsheet has been prepared by Linda Rowley Coaching & Development. Please contact Linda Rowley at linda@lindarowley.com.au for any enquiries regarding the information presented on this factsheet.



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