

Rural Palliative Care Resource Kit



Adelaide Hills
Division of General Practice Inc.

Management

Managing Change

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April 2007

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Acknowledgements:

The funding support from the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing for this program is gratefully acknowledged.

Managing change

"It's not the strongest species that survives nor the most intelligent, but the ones most responsive to change"

(Charles Darwin)

Introduction

Change management has been described as a future state to be realised, a current state to be left behind, and some structured, organised process or transition for getting from one to the other¹. A common reason for failure of organisational changes is in not planning to manage the impact on people, and in the realisation that people have to let go of the present first². The first task of *change management* is to understand the destination and how to get there, the first task of *transition management* is to convince people to leave home².

It has been said that change is not easy³. It is not surprising therefore, when managers find implementing change to be challenging in the workplace, with poorly managed change actually leading to adverse outcomes.^{4,5}

Whether attempting to change one aspect or process within a small organisation, or implementing sweeping changes across a healthcare system, the same processes for change management need to be in place. Organisations have been described as dynamic entities comprised of inter-related people, structures and processes. Any attempt to intervene in one part actually affects all aspects of the system.⁴ This 'ripple' effect, without benefit of a broader consultation or communication process, can be detrimental to a wider audience than was perhaps intended.

Bringing about change

Planning change means extensive consultation, not only with the individuals concerned, but within the organisation where the changes will take place, and should include both formal and informal arrangements⁶. It is important to understand and account for culture and behaviours at each level of an organisation, including the local politics, which can be critical to success.^{6,7}

Establishing stakeholder expectations is one of the first and most important parts of the consultation process. A stakeholder is anyone who will be affected by the proposed changes and they need to be assessed for their commitment and potential influence in the process⁶. Identifying key people who can influence the outcome, both positively and negatively, is essential⁵. Individuals will question to what extent change is needed, whether the organisation is headed in the right direction, and whether they want to commit to making change happen⁷. At the end of the day, organisations don't change, people do.....or they don't⁸.

Bringing about change needs a description of the future, with a convincing need for change although as has been demonstrated over the years, even sound reasons for change don't automatically translate into a change in behaviour or practice^{4,6,7}. It has been said that those implementing change should not underestimate the time it takes to build and maintain consensus and commitment to changes⁹. Employees need to be motivated by believing that the benefits of the change will outweigh the cost³.

Establishing a sense of urgency is crucial to gaining the needed co-operation to bring about the change coupled with the need to show some tangible results as soon as possible, especially if they show how the new approaches and tools help people personally^{3,9}. While keeping the momentum going, be wary of too many changes at once, as people who have already brought in to the new system may opt-out when they realise its' impact on current working practices⁹.

Reactions to change

People react to change differently because of who they are, how they will be affected, and because their perceptions and knowledge about the change will vary^{6,8}. People tend to feel safe with what they know. A common resistance is due to a lack of understanding as to why change happens⁵. Change can take people out of their comfort zone and raise their stress levels, with even small changes causing anxiety¹⁰. Whatever the scenario, staff need to have their fears allayed⁵.

Change can be a mental, physical and emotional process, and is both an organisational and a personal journey. People spend many hours at work each week. Work can play an important part in their lives, with changes in the workplace triggering emotional reactions and affecting individuals very personally^{5,7}. Leaders can facilitate the process of acceptance to change or ignore it⁸. People may resist change for many reasons and their difficulties should be respected and dealt with, not ignored⁶. These reactions should be recognised as normal, requiring understanding of their very real concerns. If staff don't trust leadership, don't share the organisation's vision, don't buy into the reason for change, and aren't included in the planning, it is unlikely there will be successful change, regardless of how brilliant the strategy⁸. Fighting resistance is about getting people to see change as an opportunity rather than a problem⁵.

Communication

In times of change, people have an intense need to know what is happening and how it will affect them. Any decision making and change process needs to be as transparent as possible, and while this will not guarantee success, it will give better prospects with those involved knowing what is happening and why⁶. It is important to be honest, and communicate openly about the proposed changes⁵. Share the opportunities, risks, mistakes, potentials, failures and invite people to work on these challenges together⁸. Develop and communicate a clear message about where all the effort is leading and why⁹.

Too often managers make the mistake of believing that others understand the issues, feel the need to change and see the new direction as clearly as they do. There is a need to communicate the message through regular, timely advice, minimising the rumours and allowing time for adjustment^{6,7}. People will react to what they see and hear around them, and need to be involved in the change process⁷.

Managers must be clear in their communications and a formal communication plan can be helpful during a change initiative³. This needs to take into account that communication doesn't just happen via formal mechanisms. Informal communication such as casual remarks and activities also deliver a set of messages⁸. This necessitates the use of multiple communication channels and much will depend on the reliability and extent of information

networks^{3,7}. It should be recognised that formal communications may not target everyone, and there could still be those who will be affected by the change, who aren't fully aware of the facts⁶. Planning should take account of all scenarios.

Many change interventions fail because companies don't plan and manage communications, with the change program not gaining the awareness, support, involvement and commitment needed to succeed³. Investing time in communication, to keep stakeholders involved and informed is vital to the success of the change^{5,9}.

Consultation and leadership

The majority of people will automatically resent changes that are imposed on them. With any new initiative, there needs to be a consultation process, with all staff invited and encouraged to participate in discussing and implementing change⁵. Sharing the bigger picture works better than a closed, prescriptive approach. Allowing for greater creative input from staff and helps build their commitment⁵. People are most induced to change if they feel they are allowed to actively influence the direct outcome of that change⁹.

Supporting the champions or enthusiasts for the change can motivate them to help drive the change^{7,8}. Recognising staff skills and experiences, involving them and giving them more responsibility can create ownership. It is often the organisations' own employees who have the information, intuition, ideas and instincts necessary for implementing change effectively^{7,10}. The potential of the workforce really is an organisations' greatest asset⁸.

Change is unsettling, and all eyes turn to leaders for strength, support and direction, and to motivate the rest of the institution⁷. Senior management then needs to support and drive the change, communicating this to staff and giving them the opportunity to contribute³. They are able to feel that they have joint ownership of the change being implemented¹⁰. Performance of staff can drop significantly if they feel unappreciated or taken for granted. If they know their employer cares about them as individuals they will be more likely to care about the employers' interests¹⁰. Offering incentives as a part of the change process may help, although sometimes staff will resist no matter what is offered.

Most changes within an organisation create a need for training, and it is important that managers anticipate this, and that staff are given reassurances that they will be supported through the change process⁹. They may benefit from opportunities to attend information sessions, counselling sessions and workshops⁵. Revised roles need to be clearly defined and understood.

Review and evaluation

The entire change process needs to be critically reflected upon and reviewed, to learn lessons from the way in which changes were managed. The knowledge gained will help to improve the process next time around⁵. Effectively managing change requires continual reassessment of its impact and the organisations' willingness and ability to adopt the next wave of transformation⁷. Ideally organisations should aim to create a culture of continuous improvement and that means continuous change, although it is important that continuity and tradition are not destroyed just for the sake of it^{5,6}.

Projects

Change management is inherent within project management, and not merely a phase within any given project. A change is a project, and a project is a change⁹.

Change management is about championing the project, and ensuring that the project is understood and accepted by the stakeholders. However, stakeholders can be many and varied within projects, representing different organisations not only across healthcare, but also the wider community and beyond, many of who will have conflicting expectations.

Difficulties can be encountered when implementing changes across organisations to which the project manager is not affiliated. Changes can feel imposed, with staff feeling threatened by outside influences and not necessarily supported by their managers in the process. Any stakeholder communication strategy will need careful consideration as changes affect more than one organisation or one group of individuals. Project success relies on the project manager's ability to implement change, so credibility with stakeholders is needed, or finding champions within organisations to help manage the process⁹.

Summary

The requirements needed to implement change within an organisation are often underestimated, under planned, under budgeted, and often under-sold. Resistance is not generally expected, especially when there is a demonstrated need for the project, or apparent organisational support. Change can only ever be effectively implemented through proper planning and communication, involving those who will be affected by the change in this process³.

Whatever the size of the organisation, successful implementation of change involves introducing and embedding new norms, involving every layer, so that change cascades through the organisation, and is embedded in the culture of the organisation^{5,7,10}.

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