

change management

The ability to support employees through change while achieving organisational outcomes

The ability of an organisation to successfully manage change plays a strong role in employees' perceptions of their organisation's performance, and potentially, that organisation's long term survival. Poorly handled change has the potential to wreak havoc on the wellness and engagement levels of even the most resilient workforce, and negatively impact the performance of an organisation.

suggested actions

- **develop a comprehensive plan** A well thought through strategy forms a strong foundation for the change management process. Change is more likely to be successful when the strategic plan is developed based on some evidence (e.g. market research, customer data, employee survey), communicates clear goals and accountabilities, and is translated into day-to-day operation.
- **establish governance structure** Implementation of organisation-wide changes can be facilitated by establishing a change governance structure. Such a structure, spanning across different levels of the organisation, typically consists of a cross-functional steering committee, change sponsor and agent(s), and various project teams. Individuals in this structure help oversee, coordinate and monitor changes that are being implemented, enabling the change approach, strategies or priorities to be adjusted in a timely way to achieve the desired outcomes.
- **demonstrate management commitment** Senior leaders of an organisation play an important role in the change management process. They should be visibly involved, clearly communicating the change vision and directions, role-modelling, and providing support throughout the project. A strong commitment by senior management helps encourage acceptance of change, drive engagement and sustain the momentum.
- **consult and communicate with stakeholders** Ensure that relevant stakeholders are extensively consulted and have input into decisions that will affect them early on in the progress. It is important to communicate various aspects of the change to these stakeholders including timeline, responsibilities, impacts and progress.
- **provide sufficient resources** Funding and staff are required to support a range of activities that come with organisational change, such as planning, internal communication, and updating policies, processes and practices. Management may consider redirecting resources from existing projects and functions, recruiting temporary staff and getting assistance from external consultants. Failure to provide the required resources may result in work stress for stakeholders involved, delays in delivering change, and inefficiencies in core organisational functions.
- **embed change in organisational structures, systems and practices** Modify organisational structure, systems and human resources management practices as needed to effectively institutionalise and embed changes. Practices such as recruitment, learning and development, rewards and recognition can be altered to motivate and foster the desired behaviours and values.

case study

For almost 30 years, SGCH has aimed to improve people's lives through quality, affordable housing. Their first employee engagement survey with Voice Project indicated that SGCH could perform better in its change management practices. Over the next year Suellen McCaffrey, General Manager - People and Communications, worked on SGCH's change processes and helped to strongly improve its change scores. This has been achieved while driving changes in a range of areas including the organisation's structure and the way teams work together.

Suellen emphasises the importance of aligning systems, processes and structures for achieving organisational goals. For instance, during a significant restructure – the success of which won them the Australasian Housing Services Award – SGCH sought staff feedback on how to align their new structure with internal customer focus values. They then formed new teams with specialist roles to help tenancy managers service challenging or vulnerable tenants. SGCH has also substantially improved cross-unit cooperation by creating team-leader networks, pairing these with training programs, and fostering cross-team projects using their existing project management framework.

SGCH also uses a change management framework aligned with their culture and approach to leadership development. Based on Ken Wilber's four quadrants, it focusses on the internal/external and collective/individual aspects of change, covering a range of different viewpoints from which to consider change and its implications. This process has highlighted to managers in SGCH just how differently people think and respond to things, and has helped to shape their decisions and approaches. Right from orientation, SGCH familiarises staff with this framework and explains why it is used. Suellen also runs workshops when a change is taking place, helping staff to understand change and giving them space to discuss their reactions to it. "That's all part of the plan so that people can help themselves through change. It kind of normalises change, they can see that they're not the only ones who might feel like this and they can support each other through the change".

Suellen also emphasised the importance of consultation and communication, explaining that the main change they made was in the way they talked about things, in other words, "communicating process, not just outcomes", such as what was going to happen with the information provided, and when staff could expect to be updated. Suellen believes that even telling staff you have no further information is better than not communicating at all.

Of course, like many organisations who have experienced significant change, SGCH has had its own challenges with change resistance. Suellen believes you have to develop an awareness of what people are protective of, and walk with them to a new place. "I think people don't resist change. They resist loss. So if you can understand what it is someone perceives they're actually losing and help them to see how they can get that met – that's the key thing."

useful resources

- Shea, G., & Solomon, C. (2013). **Change Management Is Bigger Than Leadership**. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2013/03/change-management-is-bigger-th>
- **Change Management: Making Organisation Change Happen Effectively**. Retrieved from http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newPPM_87.htm
- Langford, P. (2011). **Achieving change from employee surveys 101 & 102**, presentation prepared for Voice Project's Change Challenge. Retrieved from <http://www.voiceproject.com/services/changechallenge>
- Oakland, J. S., & Tanner, S. (2007). **Successful change management**. Total Quality Management, 18, 1-19.
- Harvard Business Review (2011). **HBR's 10 Must Reads on Change Management**.