

Title:

Managing Change and Negative Repercussions

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Summary:

The following article offer guidance on the most common negative repercussions faced by the leaders of change, and end with recommendations for reducing the amount and the impact of these.

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Article Body:

For the leaders of change activity, it will inevitably be necessary to deal with barriers, conflicts, resistance, and other negative effects. There is a tendency to see these as 'disasters' that will cause the change to fail. But by adopting a thoughtful and professional approach, most of the mistakes, barriers, and difficulties that change brings, can be overcome. Some negative repercussions will be inevitable: It will help, at the outset, to prepare yourself for the certainty that you will have made some misjudgements in your planning of the change. Also, despite careful analysis of the likely repercussions of the change, it is not possible to accurately forecast all of these, nor the degree of impact. This means that you acknowledge that you intend to succeed despite the setbacks caused by mistakes that are made, and forecasts that prove to be inaccurate in places. In short, you are allowing yourself to have some weaknesses. Unless you and your leadership team colleagues are blessed with genius, you are highly unlikely to introduce major change without running into some unexpected, or more serious than expected, difficulties.

Forecasts will have flaws: Even if you have researched and analysed as carefully as possible, when you draw up your plans for change you will be basing your planned changes against a background of forecasts. These could include forecasting the behaviour of a wide range of diverse factors such as customer behaviour, supplier behaviour, the reaction of internal individuals and teams to the changes, the impact on motivation and morale of staff, the impact on costs, selling prices, image, the brand, staff turnover, recruitment, and so on. Because of the unpredictability of many of these factors, whilst you must have a plan, expect to make frequent changes to the plan once it is implemented.

Predicting exact timescales, costs, and effects, is impossible. Experience suggests that change will often take longer, be more complex, and cost more than planned. As the change progresses, review the situation, consult with your team and other stakeholders, and be prepared to adjust your original plans.

Stress levels will rise: The leaders of the change activity may well experience increased stress, as they observe and respond to the effects of the changes. The more radical or more complex the change, the higher the pressure will rise, as the organisation is forced to move away from its previous condition and culture. However, for local managers and operational staff, the effect of certain changes can be dramatic, especially where the change brings initially negative effects such as redundancies, relocation, or major reorganisation. At these hierarchically lower levels the stress brought on by the impact of the changes can be severe. You will need to be prepared for this and have plans in place to deal with it. One essential action is to ensure that local managers are fully briefed on the changes and equipped to respond to the concerns, fears, and reactions, of their teams.

Resistance is normal: It is almost impossible to make major changes without generating resistance from some of those affected by the changes. The degree, or severity of resistance will vary, not simply due to the nature of the changes, but also because of the inbuilt fears and concerns of some individuals and groups. Much resistance is caused by the poor quality of pre-change communications, where the change makers have failed to consult and inform effectively. Further resistance can be triggered because of a range of fears over: not believing that the change is necessary, the possibility of losing status, losing income, losing friends and colleagues, losing or gaining responsibility, losing comfortable working conditions, and many similar concerns. Critics will voice concerns: Even if you have consulted and involved key stakeholders, critics and cynics will challenge you. They will be strongest not at the beginning but in the middle of your efforts, when the possible effects of the change become clearer. This is when, with the help of others, you need to respond firmly to criticism, remove obstacles, and move forward.

The unexpected will happen: Be prepared to face unexpected events. It is not possible to predict every single consequence of change. You will almost always be faced with consequences that neither you nor the team anticipated. Don't let these stop you. Be prepared to respond, deal with them, and make adjustments. **Progress will falter:** Inevitably there will be times when the pace of change slows, perhaps because of tiredness, perhaps due to external influences. This is normal, but you will need to manage these times carefully, aiming to get back to the expected level of progress as soon as possible. Communication between managers and specialists at all levels must be frequent, to ensure that the

leaders of the change are aware of fluctuations in the pace of progress, and to enable them to take appropriate corrective action.

As a leader you will have to manage the negative repercussions that the changes generate. The following points give an overview of how best to reduce the likelihood of negative repercussions and then manage any that do arise. Preparation and planning is essential: Whilst it is true that it is almost impossible to introduce changes without some negative repercussions, thorough preparation and planning will help to keep these to a minimum, and enable those that do arise to be managed effectively. The effects of change on people, the managers, operational staff, customers, clients, partners, and other stakeholders, are well documented, and this body of knowledge can help the planners to predict at least the reactions of most of the people affected by the change. Pre-implementation activities, such as a process of consultation and awareness building, should be built into the change plans. Responses to potential post-implementation impact should also be drawn up as part of the planning process. Managers and other key personnel should be fully briefed on this part of the plan, and made aware that it is as important as any other part.

Monitoring and control will be needed: One of the key features of an effective change plan is a rigorous, consistently applied, monitoring and control procedure. This ensures that all deviations from the original plan are identified, analysed, and where necessary, corrective action is taken. There is no shame in having to change plans and readjust forecasts. There are infinite numbers of fast-changing internal and external influences that impact on the planned change from the moment it is implemented, and these must be recognised, analysed and responded to appropriately.

Resistance and criticism must be dealt with: As part of the monitoring and control process, resistance and criticism should be dealt with. The nature of your response will depend on the type and degree of resistance or criticism. Where it is evident that resistance or criticism is genuine and reflects understandable concerns or fears, then a sympathetic approach is required. Often, further explanation of the reasons for the changes and reassurance of better conditions to come, will be sufficient. Where the resistance or criticism is driven by the desire to cause disruption or damage, this must be dealt with firmly and fairly, but in a way which eliminates it entirely. Again, there is a huge body of knowledge to draw on which the local managers should be aware of and make use of.

Seek out positive benefits of the change: As a counter to the negative response that some might feel, find and show evidence of improvements and benefits (there has to be some if your change was necessary!) for example increased security,

better working conditions, improved revenues, lower costs, more progression opportunities, reduced staff turnover, higher levels of customer satisfaction, and so on. Providing hard evidence of positive outcomes of the change is the most persuasive response to negativity and cynicism.

Don't let resistance, mistakes, and conflicts slow you down: When recovering from a negative repercussion there is a tendency to over-react to the issue, to over-compensate for the mistake or error. This is unnecessary and can often lead to greater complications. It is important to put right only what has gone wrong and then move on with the next part of the process. In trying too hard to repair a mistake you will make it more memorable and noteworthy than necessary.

Focus on the future: Focusing on the negative repercussions instead of the moving the change forward is counter-productive. Focus instead on repairing the damage and continue working towards the original goal. Dwelling on setbacks, mistakes, errors, and conflicts gives them more significance than the real objective - deal with them, then move on.