

THE TRUTH
ABOUT

THRIVING IN CHANGE

"Life is 10% of what
happens to you
and 90% of
how you react..."

William S. Kane

Global HR executive, business change expert, and leadership consultant

Book The Truth About Thriving in Change

William S. Kane

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Recommendation

In business, change is constant. Yet many companies resist it or fail to prepare for it properly. To help remedy this problem, leadership consultant William S. Kane takes established "truths" about how to create meaningful corporate change and attempts to bolt them together in a leadership guide. How did he do? The author gets high marks for his extensive research and excellent sources, including numerous business bestsellers and high-profile contemporary studies of change management, corporate performance and productivity. Despite this hard work, the book tends to be very repetitive and breaks little new ground with its prescriptions: "Have a vision." "Demonstrate commitment." "Develop strategic objectives." "Manage performance." "Communicate clearly." While such mileposts may be basic, *BooksInShort* suggests that they will be quite useful to those who want a rundown on the tenets of change management.

Take-Aways

- Change is inevitable in business. To stay competitive, your company must be ready for it.
- To lead and manage change, commit to it, name the reason behind it, examine your firm's purpose and goals, and create a "cultural framework" aligned with organizational values.
- Treat your employees as partners in the change. Show them respect, match them to the right projects at strategic moments, and manage their performance and growth.
- Identify your high, middle and low performers, and make your top workers leaders in your change agenda.
- Also sort staffers by their attitudes. Pinpoint "can-doers, fence-sitters and naysayers."
- Use your can-doers to motivate others. Convert fence-sitters and replace naysayers.
- Guide your firm through change by "telling, selling, participating," then "delegating."
- Keep your change message "candid, constructive, contextual, consistent" and "continuous." Clearly communicate your vision and goals.
- Inspire others by exuding confidence, energy, flexibility, optimism and good judgment.
- Even as your organization changes, uphold your personal values and beliefs.

Summary

A Checklist for Change

Modern business leaders must cope with uncertainty and rapid change. Is your organization prepared to adapt to meet the new external and internal demands that continually present themselves? It had better be. Otherwise, your competitors will zoom past your firm. Though achieving organizational change isn't always easy, it can be exhilarating, depending on your individual perspective. And the payoffs can be huge – from increased profits and productivity to better employee engagement and learning, and beyond. So how should your company handle change? What should it do, and what should it avoid? And, as a leader within your organization, how should you deal with change? Start with this checklist for "leading and managing change":

- Fully commit to the change.
- Pinpoint the reason for change by assessing the firm's "strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats" (SWOT).
- Answer these core questions: "What is the company's purpose?" "Where is it headed?" "What must the organization achieve?" and "How will it attain its goals?"
- Develop a "cultural and operating framework" that supports your company's values.
- Demonstrate your respect for every worker in the organization.

- Match employees to the right projects at strategic moments.
- Manage staffers' performance and monitor their professional growth.
- Improve every day, and always communicate effectively.

Employee Roles in Organizational Change

Your team likely consists of workers with varying levels of drive and talent. To structure your group effectively, evaluate staffers individually based on their “competence, judgment, energy, focus, relationships” and “trust.” Then sort them into three groups. The high-achieving, nimble-minded employees who influence business growth are “A players.” The “solid performers” who account for the majority of your workers are “B players.” And the employees who make only a “marginal contribution” are your “C players.” To propel organizational change, assign your A players to leadership roles. Keep your B players, your team’s “backbone,” in their existing roles or, if necessary, move them to a position that matches their strengths. With C players, either develop their skills, shift them to a more suitable position or ask them to leave.

“Conversion Is for Missionaries and Crusaders”

Managers often try to get all their staffers “on the same page” about business goals. However, this tends to be a fruitless endeavor, because people naturally “fall into one of three attitudinal camps” when confronted with change. Identify each of your employees as a “can-doer, a fence-sitter” or a “naysayer,” then decide what changes you need to make to your team, and when. Learn to spot these profiles:

1. **Can-doers** – These employees will get behind you and your change agenda, and they will even help you motivate other staffers.
2. **Fence-sitters** – These workers vacillate between “ambivalence and negativity.” Convert them quickly if you can. Otherwise, they may one day line up against you.
3. **Naysayers** – These cynics won’t support your change initiative. Don’t waste your time trying to persuade them. Ask them to leave.

Revving the Engines

If you are a new manager faced with pushing a change initiative, you must come up to speed quickly on the industry and its markets, as well as the company’s products and technologies. Learn all you can about your firm’s primary stakeholders, business challenges, strengths and weaknesses. Align your goals, activities and understanding of current challenges with your boss’s point of view. Know what your superiors want you to accomplish initially and over time.

“The mantra of organizational change is ‘better, faster and cheaper.’ Its three most important elements are speed, speed and more speed.”

Carefully plan how you will announce the change initiative to your team members. Use your initial communication to help them understand the need for change, as identified in your SWOT analysis. Make them your partners in the change agenda and encourage their commitment. Clarify all goals, including “improved quality, enhanced product or service offerings, reduced costs, optimal productivity, and the exploration and exploitation of new business development opportunities.” Affirm – or, if necessary, establish – your company’s vision, and identify what steps the organization must take to realize it. Personalize your message by using words like “we” and “us” instead of “you” and “they.”

“Successful organizational transformation is 70% to 90% based on leadership and only 10% to 30% on management.”

Involve everyone in the organization in planning your change initiative. Break the plan down into discrete and actionable portions, but help employees maintain a “big picture” view of the company. Encourage others within the firm to “see, experience and share in the progress.”

What It Takes to Lead and Manage Change

To maintain the trust of everyone in your firm, including your superiors and your direct reports, always be transparent, credible and consistent. Ensure that your actions align with the messages you convey about the business. Every day, set an example for others with your conduct. Don’t ask your employees to make sacrifices that you don’t make. Get to work early, stay late, work hard and be prepared.

“There are only two ways to earn trust – having congruence between your words and your actions and showing that you care.”

You cannot manage change within your organization if you cannot properly manage people. Having stellar “academic credentials” doesn’t guarantee that you will be a good manager. Guiding others through change requires practical know-how, such as interpersonal skills and the ability to execute plans that achieve your goals. Managers also must be proficient at creating and communicating a vision for the company, uncovering innovative ways to accomplish tasks and goals, and negotiating to obtain needed resources. As a manager, you must be an effective teacher and decision maker. Learn to invest yourself in your people so they will invest themselves in you.

“Be more interested in finding solutions through others than in having your own way.”

To “manage change, you must be able to lead change.” That means inspiring others by exuding confidence, energy, flexibility, optimism and good judgment. Play an active, prominent role in developing the organization’s culture, and strive to be a clear communicator. Leadership centers on achieving results, so if you don’t attain your goals at first, persevere until you succeed. Ensure that you are controlling the change agenda you hope to implement, rather than letting it control you. You must be visible to be an effective leader. Mingle with your employees and “manage by walking around” to build rapport and goodwill.

“Feedback is an obligation.”

Guiding your company through change requires four leadership styles. You will use them “in an almost linear manner”:

1. **“Telling”** – Your first objective is to distance the organization from immediate danger. This may call for the “commander at the combat front” approach. Give orders and assign tasks, then supervise their execution.
2. **“Selling”** – Once your company’s direction crystallizes and the firm achieves some “short-term” goals, your role shifts. You now become the “great persuader,” drawing on your personal charm to motivate staffers to support change initiatives because they want to, not because they must.
3. **“Participating”** – As the firm steadies itself, you become a “facilitator.” This involves heeding your employees and customers more closely. Though you continue to make the choices about “strategy and resources,” you give staffers more say in company decisions.
4. **“Delegating”** – Finally, you can let your most trusted workers take over many everyday responsibilities. Within the perimeters you set, they may make decisions about organizational systems, “resources, structure, training” and staffing.

How to Communicate About Change

Employ the “five Cs” when you speak to others about the change initiative: Be “candid.” Keep your comments “constructive.” Make them “contextual” by explaining how the change fits into a broader view of the firm. Stay “consistent” about your message. And communicate in a “continuous” way to maintain support for the agenda. Most important, craft a simple, direct message that employees can easily digest. Focus on what they “need to hear.” Don’t overwhelm them with information.

“Delegation initially works best for simple tasks. As your faith and confidence grow...you may delegate more complex assignments.”

How will you know if you are properly communicating your change message to employees? Seek their feedback. Ask them to describe their understanding of your organization’s change initiative. As a manager, you will need to provide feedback as well as receive it. Regularly let employees know where they stand with you – and with the organization. Tell them if they are demonstrating the company’s values. Always “appraise the performance, not the person.”

Cultural Considerations

Consider your company’s culture. It plays a significant role in determining whether your change agenda will be successful. For instance, only about 50% of joint ventures and about 33% of large mergers are successful. These initiatives, which often unite opposing corporate cultures, represent the epitome of organizational change.

“Time can be either an ally (such as when dealing with an emotionally charged issue) or an enemy (such as when your bottom line is bleeding).”

Corporate culture is a mix of “observed behaviors, norms and rites that involve working groups,” company values, and management approaches and attitudes, among other factors. Organizational culture shapes how a firm operates, including decision-making and communicating procedures. Change initiatives challenge corporate cultures and individuals. People naturally fear and oppose change, and employees may even feel that it threatens their “cocoon of perceived indispensability” within the firm. Use communications and workshops to ease staffers’ fears about change. Engender optimism in your people. Assure them that your organization’s new change initiative will enhance your corporate culture, not tear it down. Frame the change as an opportunity for individuals to build their skills and expand their competencies – then “demonstrate your commitment” to helping them develop.

“Human nature tends to fear and resist change. This is driven by the potential erosion of...our needs for physiological satisfaction, safety and security, love and belonging, and recognition and status.”

Will your organizational structure support or stand in the way of your change agenda? Examine it in an objective, nonemotional way. If it is no longer effective, reorganize. As a change leader, manage and monitor the progress of your initiative to improve your company’s performance.

Self-Preservation During Change

Stress is inevitable in a changing company. To alleviate stress, eliminate as much ambiguity and confusion as possible. Maintain a clear understanding of your organization’s business realities. Stay positive to keep other people upbeat as well. Be compassionate and considerate with your co-workers.

“Complacency is best combated with information.”

“The better, faster and cheaper” business world takes a marked toll on those who labor within it, with long hours and heavy responsibilities. These pressures increase substantially during periods of organizational change. Line up the full support of your family and your personal network to help you cope. Avoid pushing yourself too hard. Get the downtime you need.

“Managing change is complex, fast-paced and dynamic, and it involves many activities such as coaching, supervising and disciplining.”

Always uphold your personal principles and beliefs at work. If your organization’s existing or newly emerging values do not support them, you may need to consider moving to a different firm. Indeed, “matching your belief system with your employer’s is more important than matching your skill set.” Values form the basis of acceptable conduct within the organization and shape how the company makes decisions. They represent your firm’s “core ideology.” Ask yourself whether you feel proud of the values that define your organization. If you don’t, your morale, confidence and work performance could be suffering as a result.

About the Author

William S. Kane is a speaker, leadership consultant and business change expert. He worked with famous basketball coach John Wooden to develop and present leadership training seminars.