FAQs

Here are answers to some of the questions about change management that aren't dealt with in the text of *Changemaking* or *The Changemaking Checklists*. These are drawn from discussions with colleagues and clients, from MBA classes, and from a wide range of people and groups involved in organizational change. By all means send additional questions to info@changestart.com. We will send you a response and add the Q&A to this resource.

How do you drive commitment to change?

Be clear not just about your goals, but also about the status quo that needs to change. Identify the needs, issues, and gaps to better understand the challenge.

Provide reasons for change, and establish the broad vision as well as the specific objectives; then ensure that your plans and actions are fully aligned with that vision.

Involve your constituent groups (stakeholders). Identify and understand their questions and concerns, including providing an answer to the recurrent question, "What's in it for us?"

As you communicate, ensure that messages are closely targeted to your audiences, and that you have embedded a feedback loop to test effectiveness and guide corrections.

Identify and provide the needed resources and capabilities; show that you understand the challenges faced by those in the front line of change.

Lead change respectfully; provide guidance and support, and show empathy, where there is a negative impact on some.

Measurement supports commitment: seek internal and external feedback, and evaluate results. Be candid about setbacks, and the steps taken to address them; also report successes widely, and celebrate significant steps in the process.

Share information and ideas about best practices. Return often to the goals, and to the case for change, to refresh and sustain the motivation to make it happen.

How do you filter out irrelevance, keep it simple, and know what to manage?

Don't lose sight of ongoing operations and the core business as you focus on the goals of your change management effort; create the vision for the end point and manage within and toward that.

Test every idea by asking if it will clearly advance you toward the vision; if not, reject the proposed action or plan. This is a way to limit the number of activities you're trying to manage and coordinate.

Keep the change effort in perspective and keep it in proportion; continually assess progress and reactions so that you can focus on the issues that matter.

Retain the initiative; stay ahead of rumor and speculation.

Understand where resistance is coming from, and why; address concerns so that minor objections don't evolve into major issues.

Listen to and understand the constituencies that believe a change isn't needed. Do they have a case? What can be learned from them? Do we need to more fully engage those groups?

What kind of metrics can be used to measure the effectiveness of change?

Develop a scorecard that identifies the goals and desired outcomes, and the metrics you will use to assess results. Measurements will vary widely depending on the nature and purpose of the change.

Some of the more readily measurable outcomes might include order response time, attrition/turnover rates, job offer acceptance, absenteeism, growth rate, and profitability.

Outcomes calling for research among stakeholders might include customer satisfaction, employee engagement (e.g., commitment to the goal and the team, likelihood to stay, attitudes to leadership), and service quality.

Data-collection methods include surveys of employees, customers, and others; focus groups and interviews; informal assessment in the course of other meetings or discussions; and gathering input through online collaboration tools.

Engage sponsors of the change and key leaders in defining metrics by asking them what's important, and to describe the outcomes they envisage.

How do you communicate when the direction is set, so you can't really involve people in decision-making?

Even if you can't engage stakeholders in the decision-making process, you can certainly make sure that they are well informed, that their questions are answered, and that they have opportunities to contribute to the implementation process.

Develop and document the case for the change; create a clear, concise, convincing business rationale.

Adapt communication to the situation/stakeholder, starting with those most affected; for each group, identify concerns, and what's in it for them; define the message you want to leave and how it'll be delivered.

For example, in communicating with employees, a key issue may be job security and professional development. The appropriate focus will be on messages about expanded career opportunities for most, and outplacement/severance packages for the rest.

Be candid about the process; the decision has been made, but you are looking to them for input and guidance to make sure that it is effectively implemented.

Ensure that communication is timely, constant, consistent, complete, and open.

How do you overcome resistance (to change) in a non-receptive organization?

Expect that introducing change will generate resistance; try to channel that energy into developing ideas and tactics by consulting with and engaging those resisting.

Be very clear about the business rationale and the urgency, describing the negative consequences of failure to change.

Support the commitment by ensuring that change-ready and change-committed leaders hold key positions.

Sustain the process: Follow up and measure; identify problems and sustained challenges; course-correct as needed.

How can change be managed in a widely distributed organization (e.g., many small, distant offices)?

Web-based communication can bring distributed organizations together in online meetings, calls, and through other collaboration methods.

Ensure that core activities (establishing focus and purpose, engaging people, communicating, building alignment with systems and processes) lay the foundation for successful collaboration.

Support the effort by creating needed links and relationships. Send individuals or teams to different locations to communicate and listen. Face-to-face connections are important.

Use conference calls, video, online meetings, social media, and other forums; hold regional meetings where multiple locations can gather.

Ensure that local leaders are engaged, committed, and accountable; help them to customize the process for the local environment.

How can a mid-level manager, not involved in planning and implementation, adapt to leadership transitions during challenging change?

Be ready to change, and change fast; be open and flexible; recognize that change creates opportunities.

Listen to the new leadership and understand their goals and their approach to achieving them. Apply their ideas and process to your own team.

Support leaders and their goals; if you have concerns and questions, raise them with the change team or your manager—don't share skepticism with your own team.

Be sure you understand the vision and direction. Ask questions, and identify obstacles—but also offer solutions.

Forget the past and don't hold on to old roles that should be evolving and changing. Be a team player: Adapt to, and align with, the new direction.

When and how might external advisers be used to plan and implement change?

There are times when bringing in an outside resource can have a favorable impact: A consultant can bring a wider industry view, another pair of hands, experience with similar changes in other organizations, objectivity, and a framework or approach for managing change.

Such advisers can be useful in establishing clarity of purpose, gathering data (e.g., stakeholder research), building systems and plans, and creating communication systems and content.

At the same time, there is a risk that an external group can limit the opportunities that your own team have for learning and growth through the change management process.

Accordingly, clearly define the area of expertise that you need—scope, timing, and deliverables—and be very clear about how the advisory role will mesh with the internal resources.

Ensure that you keep your own team fully engaged; have your own people fully involved so that they learn and develop, and remain committed to the process.

Wherever possible, assign internal resources rather than engaging additional consulting team members.

Build an open, effective relationship. Make sure that what you see is what you get; define the deliverables and establish clear performance expectations.

How can an individual or organization stay alert to the need for change?

Remember that change needs to be continuous to keep pace with developments in markets, customers, technology, the legislative environment, and societal and other changes.

Look for improvement when things get comfortable and success seems normal.

The idea is not to engage in change for change's sake, but to strive for continuous adaptation and increased readiness.

Build a change-ready, adaptive culture so that when a critical, unanticipated threat (or opportunity) arises, the organization is trained and conditioned to respond.

Deploy metrics that recognize and reward continuous improvement; encourage experimentation targeted at improvements; don't punish failure of a genuine effort.

How can you approach widespread skepticism or even cynicism about change ("we've seen it all before")?

Be clear about why earlier efforts fell short, including loss of focus, limited resources, lack of clarity, or other primary causes.

Demonstrate that the lessons learned will be applied to avoid the same mistakes and implement a viable plan.

Seek input and guidance from those expressing doubts as a first step to engaging them in the process.

Commit to a robust and fully resourced process; continually evaluate and course-correct; sustain the effort, including seeking feedback on progress from the skeptics.

Which of the factors in the change framework are the most critical and deserve the closest attention?

All are important, of course, but three factors tend to drive all the others: strategic clarity, stakeholder engagement, and sustained communication.

Strategic clarity is the platform on which change planning and execution is built. The sponsor needs to express clearly and concisely what's changing, why, and how it's going to be accomplished.

Engagement of stakeholders is the process through which issues and concerns are identified, ideas are developed, and questions are documented. Resistance to change develops from concern, uncertainty, and distraction from those involved and affected.

Effective and sustained communication means listening as well as telling, together with discussion, persuasion, and feedback. It's a continuing purposeful process, not a single step or action.