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Change Management – Going Outside the Comfort Zone
by Barry Tuckwood



We all have a comfort zone, a physical or mental space within which we are happy to operate. As we grow we develop and stretch from proximity to parents and relations to encompass friends and colleagues. If things are too complex or threatening we may panic. We all know of people who hate new technology, who can't work the video, who actively dislike or avoid driving in urban areas or on motorways.

A small number of people require a strict regime but most of us can come to accept the need for change which is especially necessary in the delivery of the jobs that are a major part of our lives. The faster that individuals can change, the quicker the organisation as a whole can progress, and the better the service we can provide. Managing beneficial change requires rapid promotion of the benefits and accurate judgment of what is acceptable and achievable. Will our colleagues want to remain comfortable, accept something that is stretching, or become over-awed by expectations and panic?

On accelerated learning programmes it is common to expect the participants to be stretched if they are to accomplish their set task. But it is equally essential to that accomplishment that they do not panic. The manager's role is to strike a

balance between making something too easy, and providing a target that is stretching but will not induce panic. Too easy and the person becomes complacent; too hard and the person gives up.

For business change the judgement is complex: we need to consider all of the people affected by the change. People may interact with the change on several levels: as individual users of new equipment; as team leaders working with groups of people; as customer service managers explaining the changes to the public; or as the public trying to use the new or changed service from home or as part of their own jobs.

We therefore need to communicate a similar need in a way that is appropriate for the different stakeholders all of whom will have a range of questions:

- If it was OK before why does it need to change?
- What do I need to learn and why?
- When is all this expected to happen, and suppose it doesn't?
- Perhaps even, "But I am used to doing it my way, I can't do it any other way and won't even try".

As an example of how change affects us all consider what happens when you introduce staff, suppliers and customers

to flexible and mobile working. Are you comfortable working from an office? Would you be more comfortable working from home? How do you think your colleagues might react if you were only in two days/week? What about customers and suppliers, how would they react? Could the organisation's support systems cope with the changed working arrangements? What about your home life – how would that change? Many of us spend a significant part of our day away from our own desk and perhaps away from the office completely as part of our role; could that provide a model for wider application?

Whatever the change, we need to think through the impact it could have on all of the people who will be affected, as inevitably all changes affect people's comfort zones. What can you do to make the change easier for them all?

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