



Change is one of those subjects that a lot of people get hot under the collar about. It's seen as something that is difficult to deal with; that most people like to avoid; and that only happens from time to time. It is also viewed as stressful for those who manage it. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Change is a way of life. If nothing changed during our lifetimes, there would be little point in growing up. Over longer periods, change is what enables progress to be made, and society's reaction to change is what dictates its likely success or failure.

This is also true in the workplace, but for some reason, here change is seen as a major project, difficult to achieve and something to be managed. Does this really have to be the case?

Change broadly divides into two types:

- *Transformational or Revolutionary.*
In life, this type is exemplified by births, marriages and deaths. In business, equivalent examples might be launches, mergers and closures. There are of course many others, but what they have in common is that they are a single event which can be planned for, enacted and recovered from.
- *Incremental or Evolutionary.*
In life, this may cover much of growing up, adjusting to the environment and reacting to all those little challenges. In business, the natural growth of the organisation, the ebb and flow of people and the subtle changes of the market-place all represent this type of change. What all these changes have in common is that they build on each other over time, and they can happen in the background, often only being recognised after they have happened.

Typically, the trouble businesses have with the first of these is in the planning and execution of the change – largely because of insufficient communication with, and involvement of, those people it will affect most.

The problem most businesses have with the second type of change is simply not recognising that it is happening, or where it is taking them, until it is too late. This often results from not listening to the people to whom the change is happening.

Another useful classification concerns the causes of the need for change:

- *Repelling or Pushing.*
This is where the change is all about not being able to stay as you are, such as being on a sinking ship, or burning platform. The need is to move 'away from here'.
- *Compelling or Pulling.*
Here there is a desirable destination which you are being drawn towards such as the need to come first, or having the perfect location. The need is to move 'towards there'.

Understanding this, allows businesses to communicate better and take people along with them. If this is not done well, the people in the business can develop very different reasons for changing (or not changing), which may well be at odds with each other and with the business. This is when change becomes difficult.

People need to go through several stages to successfully navigate change. Being aware of this, and helping it along, is one of the most beneficial things a business can do to smooth the path of change. Four key stages exist:

- *Denial:* people feel numb, they discount everything and minimize its impact
- *Resistance:* people feel anger, apportion blame, express doubt, complain about everything and become very stubborn
- *Exploration:* people become highly creative with lots of energy, defocusing their work, exploring the possibilities and realising they'll make it
- *Commitment:* people refocus, take action, build a new vision and grow into their new role

So, managing change is not really about the process, it's more about the people. Also, it's the people affected by change who can suffer the most stress, not the management.

PeakDepths can help make transformational change go more smoothly, by taking the people along with the business. We can also help businesses get the most out of incremental change, by making sure it's recognised, embraced and put to work for the benefit of the business and its people.

Remember to enjoy your successes.