Principles of Supporting Change in a Business Environment

**Reasons for change in a business environment**

Change is an important element of our life and therefore an important part of any business. Imaging what would happen if a business stayed exactly the same from the moment it was established. Have a think about the changes that have gone on around you and why these changes have happened. Some changes can be very small and others very large but they all happen for a reason. Ultimately without change your internal/external customers will not stay satisfied with the service/s they receive; the company will not be able to meet its targets/objectives and consequently for some companies there will no longer be the need for the business to exist.

**Reasons for reviewing working methods, products or services**

In a business environment nothing stays the same and therefore it is likely that there will be continual review of the working methods, products or services to ensure that they are still suitable and efficient.

A company will want to review its services and products so that it keeps up to date with the expectations of its customers. This will ensure the company can stay competitive and/or meet its targets/objectives.

A change to a service or product offered by the company could mean that related procedures need to be reviewed to ensure they are still correct. You will find that in most businesses there is a continual process of reviewing the working methods or services, making changes to improve them, reviewing these changes and then making further changes.

**Types of support that people may need during change**

Some people adapt to change very well and others don’t. Where as some people thrive on the challenge of something new, others may worry about it and can become very negative. If team members feel valued and well supported during a change, they are more likely to adapt quickly and be more open to accept what needs to be done.

Theory suggests that people will go through a number of stages when faced with a big change (Change Performance Curve). There are lots of variations to the theory however the main stages are:

1. **Shock** – The initial reaction can sometimes be shock, this will automatically reduce the individuals performance as they will fear the unknown. Shock normally lasts briefly and then individuals move into denial.
2. **Denial** - This is when the individual will stay focused in the past and the ‘way things used to be done’. The fear of the ‘new way’ may cause the individual to continue to complete their tasks the ‘old way’.

3. **Anger** – Once the initial feelings have been dealt with denial slowly turns to anger. The individual will look for someone to blame for the change. The individual maybe stuck between denial and anger at the same time, they will become sceptical and criticise the change.

4. **Depression** - Once the individual finally realises that the change is going to happen, they enter the depression stage. During this stage the individual is at their lowest in terms of performance. The criticism that materialised when they showed ‘anger’ increases and they will become fixated on any problems that are occurring as a result of the change. The individual may consistently still be completing tasks the ‘old way’ like they did during the denial stage.

5. **Acceptance** – The individual accepts that the change is happening. They may feel relief that ‘actually it isn’t as bad as they thought’, ‘it’s saving time’ or ‘they still have work to do’. They will start to improve their performance and this will continue to increase.

6. **Integration** – With continuing performance the individual will again become integrated within the team.

The reason this theory is known as a ‘curve’ is it aims to show the ‘curve’ of individuals’ performance. Performance will start at a normal level, dip quickly during the shock stage then remain at a steady decline until it reaches its lowest level in the depression stage. Performance will then steadily increase again until it reaches normal levels in the final stage. Understanding these stages, helps to identify the type of support people will need. No two people will go through the six stages at the same speed therefore the team won’t necessarily all be at the same stage at the same time. Those that like change and see it as a challenge may go from stage one to six in a matter of days; others who dislike change could get stuck in stages one to four for a considerable period of time.

Good communication can really help people accept a change more quickly. The person implementing a change will hopefully give everyone plenty of warning and also get everyone involved as a team to help make decisions.

Training and time are also important support measures that people will need to adapt during a change. Not everyone will be able to change over night (as can be seen from the Change Performance Curve) they may take time to learn how to complete something new and also need training to be able to do it.

### The benefits of working with others during a change

Working with others really helps to keep a positive outlook on the change. Working together means you can help each other when something may become more challenging. As mentioned before people often adapt to change better if there is good communication. You may find that you will be able to help support your colleagues if they are finding something challenging and vice versa. Remember the six stages of the Change Performance Curve, try to identify if you think your colleague is ‘stuck’ in one of the stages and needs help ‘getting out’.

It is important to remember that to support and work with colleagues effectively you will need to keep a positive outlook. Moaning and continual criticism of what you are doing and why
will not support others and means that you are stuck in stage three (anger) of the Change Performance Curve. Instead of complaining think about how you can get yourself to stage five and six (acceptance and integration).

**The purpose of responding positively to changes in working methods, products and services**

Remember that changes are happening for a reason and it is always a good idea to know the reason so you can think positively about it. It could be that the change will improve the service that you give to your internal/external customers or speed up the time it takes you to complete a task. If you can see a benefit for ‘you’ as to why the change is happening it is often easier to accept, but remember unfortunately the change may not always benefit you directly. In these situations you will need to think about who else may benefit and why this is important. A new procedure may take you longer; however, it could allow a better service to be given to your internal/external customers, which could result in better working relationships and/or customer loyalty.

Responding negatively to a change will influence those around you creating a difficult environment to work in. A positive approach encourages a good working environment and good teamwork.

**Ways of responding positively to change**

The first positive action you can take is to look at the way you view change. Think of the change as an opportunity to gain new skills, improve your working procedures and even achieve career progression.

Attend any training available with a positive attitude, the more knowledge you have the easier you will find doing something new.

Support colleagues if they are struggling, this is a great opportunity to demonstrate different skills to your colleagues.

Don’t get drawn into negative conversations, this will not make you or others feel good about the situation.

Remember the six stages of the Change Performance Curve. If you start to see yourself or others getting stuck in one of the first four stages try to think of ways to move forward, seek support from a manager or colleague if you think you need it.