

**articles**

In this article, =mc's Learning & Development Consultant Yvette Gyles looks at the different roles involved in a change process.

# Change and the role of L&D

At =mc we are increasingly asked by our clients to deliver 'some training on change.' The challenge with such a request is that organisational change is a big topic. Change itself is an ambiguous word and used in many contexts. So depending on where the challenge is, any 'training' could cover any number of issues such as: tools and techniques for analysing what is driving change; making decisions and plans for change; acquiring the interpersonal skills needed to get buy-in and communicate change; developing the emotional intelligence needed to build resilience and support people through change; tools for implementing a change project – and so on.

The key to successful organisational change is making sure that change is happening for the right reasons, that the right change approach is being used, and that the right result will be achieved. At =mc we talk about this in terms of:

- **the driver:** the reason change should take place
- **the purpose:** the outcome you want
- **the task:** the activity designed to achieve the change

Change has been happening for a very long time but has tended to happen slowly – just ask Darwin. However, the issue for many organisations now is that change is happening at a faster rate, and has become more pressing in response to stronger and more threatening external challenges (or drivers).

When we ask our clients what are the challenges that they are experiencing with change, we tend to hear the same three things:

1. **There is no choice – change has to happen** because if it doesn't the organisation will fail in some way.
2. **Change is often uncomfortable and messy** and without the tools and techniques to manage the process properly it can quickly derail.
3. **People don't like change** – it means having to adapt to new ways of working, undertaking new work activities and sometimes adapting to new cultural values that might not sit naturally with their own values.

To respond to these issues, it's really important to understand who is responsible for what during change. From there, we can begin to diagnose what interventions may be useful.

## Roles & Responsibilities during change

At a recent =mc thought leadership event, we asked L&D practitioners from organisations from the **MS Society** to the **British Red Cross**, and **Marie Curie Cancer Care** to **ActionAid** what they thought different people in their organisations were responsible for when it came to organisational change.

There are three key groups they were asked to consider:

### Frontline

Any organisation's biggest staff group, these people play a key role in delivering your mission and achieving your vision. Without them, the work doesn't get done. Without them, whatever it is that needs to change won't actually happen. And yet they typically have the least input into a change process unless there is a legal requirement for consultation. Organisations neglect frontline staff in times of change at their peril. Once a change is decided, they play a critical role in its implementation – how it can actually be effected at a very practical level. For change to be successful, it's essential for this group to get involved, to actively participate in what is happening and to adopt new ways of working.

## Middle managers

These are the people whose primary role is to support the change, and consider its implementation for their function and/or team. They need to operationalise the strategy that's been decided, and they have a key role in communicating the change. Often seeing themselves as the 'squeezed middle' they have to both influence upwards, **and** engage downwards — supporting and questioning the decision-makers, and supporting and answering questions from the frontliners. They need to represent the views of each group to the other whilst carefully managing expectations.

## Senior managers

These are the people who set strategic direction and focus on the big picture. They horizon scan the external environment and assess the strengths and weaknesses of the internal environment. Their role is to decide that change is going to happen, and why, and to what end, and to articulate the drivers for change in as transparent a way as they can. They are responsible for driving the change. Ultimately they are responsible for ensuring that change happens. It is **not** their role to decide how that decision will be implemented or what it means at a practical level. This is delegated to the next tier down.

We then asked our L&D practitioners to consider how these groups might be feeling about change and what principles should guide them through it. Here's a summary of the discussion:

| Role   | Responsibilities   | Feelings   | Principles   |
|--|--|--|--|
| <b>Frontline</b>   |  |  |  |
| To contribute the detail and deliver practical solutions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active participation</li> <li>• Clearly articulating concerns or questions (who, What, Where, When, Why, How)</li> <li>• Small picture</li> </ul> | <p><b>-ve</b><br/>Powerless, Helplessness, fear, anxiety</p> <p><b>+ve</b><br/>Excited, motivated, engaged</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have trust in decision-makers</li> <li>• Champion changes to beneficiaries / external customers</li> <li>• Engage in what's happening</li> <li>• Strive to deliver high quality work in support of the organisation vision</li> </ul> |

| Role  | Responsibilities  | Feelings   | Principles   |
|---|---|--|--|
| <b>Middle managers</b>                        |   |  |  |
| To communicate, implement and engage others   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Express views and ask questions for other group</li> <li>• Communicate on behalf of other groups</li> <li>• Diagnose, plan and deliver the 'how' or operational elements of the change</li> <li>• Collaborate with others across the middle managers group to ensure consistency</li> <li>• Big and small picture</li> </ul> | <p><b>-ve</b><br/>Frustrated, anxious, fear, pressured, put upon</p> <p><b>+ve</b><br/>Supportive, involved, motivated</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be courageous and ask difficult questions</li> <li>• Be neutral and strive to keep things objective</li> <li>• Be honest about the process and its impact on others - balancing this against keeping confidential information confidential</li> <li>• Be open to change and to challenge</li> </ul> |
| <b>Senior Managers</b>                        |   |  |  |
| To spot the need for change and set direction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make external connections and respond to external forces</li> <li>• Understand the organisation's strengths and weaknesses</li> <li>• Openly communicate drivers for change</li> <li>• Provide strategic planning</li> <li>• Be available for question and comment from others</li> <li>• Big picture</li> </ul>             | <p><b>-ve</b><br/>Fear, sadness, needing to prove oneself, lonely</p> <p><b>+ve</b><br/>Empathy, excitement</p>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be open and transparent</li> <li>• Act with integrity</li> <li>• Be mindful of others</li> <li>• Be authentic, not ego-driven</li> <li>• Lead by example</li> </ul>   |

These guiding principles for behaviours in change are just that — a guide. The range of negative as well as positive feelings people can experience during change means putting the principles into practice may need some additional help, which is where L&D comes in. L&D can offer support and provide tailored interventions for each group depending on their needs. Over the page are the suggestions our professionals came up with about how L&D can help in change...

|                 | L&D role   | L&D interventions   |
|-----------------|--|---|
| Frontline       | <p><i>Reduce the fear, increase the excitement</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support in getting questions answered</li> <li>• Support in developing the competencies needed in the new world</li> </ul>   | <p><b>Coaching</b> — to help individuals assess their capacity for change, and create individual development plans for what comes next.</p> <p><b>Drop-in sessions</b> — so individuals can ask questions, communicate their feelings, and get help accessing information.</p> <p><b>Training programmes</b> — helping individuals develop the skills they need — from emotional intelligence to project planning to personal effectiveness.</p>                                    |
| Middle managers | <p><i>Show empathy and help think things through</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Act as a critical friend — provide advice and act as a sounding board</li> <li>• Support in dealing with pressure and frustration</li> </ul>   | <p><b>Mentoring</b> — organise time and space for peer mentoring or coaching for this group, giving them a confidante they can share their concerns with. Provide them with the coaching skills needed to support such conversations.</p> <p><b>Build resilience</b> — through workshops, training and regular contact and forums for discussion.</p>   |
| Senior managers | <p><i>Champion and supporter</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be available as a confidential critical friend — provide a sounding board and show empathy for those making difficult decisions</li> <li>• Assess and feedback the internal picture — what is working well and what needs improving — be the ears on the ground, providing advice and clarity on issues where possible</li> <li>• Act as a translator — help to articulate the vision</li> </ul> | <p><b>MBWA</b> — manage by walking around - creating opportunities for senior management to be seen and available to others, even if that means booking rooms and organising coffees!</p> <p><b>Storytelling</b> — help to bring the new values, beliefs and culture to life so people feel a closer identity with the change.</p> <p><b>Executive coaching</b> — organise external coaching to help hone the ideas into clear decisions and to get individual tailored support</p> |

Finally, change can also be tough for L&D practitioners. While providing support to everyone else, it's equally important you get support and recharge your batteries. Make sure you are clear on the change proposition, and don't forget to ask the questions you need answering. Take good care of yourself.

## What next?

If you need extra support, do join our networking group to share ideas, challenges and gain new insights. Contact **Yvette Gyles** for more information on +44 (0)20 7978 1516 or email [y.gyles@managementcentre.co.uk](mailto:y.gyles@managementcentre.co.uk)

Or if you'd like further information on this article, call the same number to talk to one of our experienced management consultants.

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