

FACTSHEET – why people resist change

Introduction

A good change management leader must do a few things – envision change, embody it, and propel it forward. But that’s no easy task, of course...

Also, it’s not always easy to pin down the traits that make a great leader. What are the skills that set the change manager apart?

We will discuss that in this document, however, leaders with the right traits can better:

- ◆ Fulfil their duties as change leaders
- ◆ Get others to follow them
- ◆ Successfully accomplish their change management goals

Duties of a Change Management Leader

Create a vision for change. The vision for change is often developed by the change leader. This vision defines what the organization will look like after the change project is complete. It is this vision that stakeholders must strive towards during the change program.

Develop a story for change. With change managers, good leaders should also craft a story for change. This story acts as a map during the change process. This journey map defines the transition between “before” and “after,” offering a narrative that people can easily understand.

Embody and embrace change. Change leaders are the first to embrace change. By embodying their change, they provide an example for others to follow. If leaders don’t embody change before others, then it is likely that no one will follow them.

Earn support and trust. Leaders lead because others follow them – they don’t simply mandate change. With the right emotional traits, leaders can earn trust instead of giving orders.

Propel change forward. Change management leadership must also actively propel the change forward. They must define agendas, be exacting, overcome barriers to organizational change, and push teams when necessary.

Every change project is different, so the duties of change leaders can also differ. However, for change programs to succeed, it’s critical for somebody – or a few people – to adopt change leadership duties. Now that we understand those duties, we can explore what it takes to become a good change leader.

Skills and Attributes of the Great Change Leader

1. Communication has been named the most important change management skill. It is fundamental in all areas of business, of course. But in change management it can determine the outcome of a project. Good communication inspires employees, earns their support, builds trust, and increases the growth potential for change programs. However, communication is a two-way street – it also involves listening.

FACTSHEET – why people resist change

2. Ability to Inspire Others: Inspiration can be accomplished through: Enthusiastically embracing change, proactive communication, offering support and encouragement, and showing the benefits of change. To name a few. Successfully inspiring others can greatly impact your success as a leader.

3. Enthusiasm, persistence, and resilience: Positivity and enthusiasm are also traits that fuel success. Sincere enthusiasm makes others want to be around you and it inspires them to follow your lead, as just mentioned. However, insincere enthusiasm is transparent and can have the opposite effect. Every change programme will go through phases of growth, challenge, move backwards etc. Never will the route to success be straightforward, and so a change manager need tenacity to keep at it. You must keep bringing your best no matter what the ‘nay-sayers’ are saying today.

4. Emotional Intelligence and Empathy In the same vein, emotional intelligence and empathy are great leadership qualities. These qualities improve your ability to understand what people are feeling and thinking, even if they don’t say it. In change management, this can be invaluable. Among other things, it can help you gauge people’s perception of the change program and its health.

5. Strategic Thinking – the business-wide view: Along with emotional qualities, great change leaders must also be business-savvy. Strategic thinking, for instance, helps the change management leader be impartial, logical, and objective. This helps them design appropriate strategies for executing change, overcoming change management obstacles, and dealing with day-to-day change management activities.

6. Forward-Thinking Like an entrepreneur, a good leader has a vision for the future. This forward-thinking mindset helps leaders:

- ◆ Stay focused on the goal, instead of becoming mired in minutiae
- ◆ Communicate clearly about their vision for change
- ◆ Design digital change strategies that will work in today’s modern economy

Part of the reason change leaders are leaders is precisely because they can think ahead – therefore they can create change programs in the first place.

7. Decisiveness Another essential quality for leaders is decisiveness. Decision-making – and the risks that come with it – are a requirement for leaders. Because this responsibility comes with leadership, anyone in a leadership position should cultivate decisiveness.

8. Confidence In every area of business, confidence sells. Words such as “decisiveness,” “bold,” and “confident” are usually associated with leaders. Traits such as these inspire the same in others. On top of that, they prevent unwanted behaviours, such as self-doubt, questioning one’s own actions, timidity, and so on.

9. Strong ethical stance – Integrity: A leader should be sincere and have integrity and always behave ethically. Those who have this quality will earn trust and support. A lack of integrity, however, builds mistrust and decreases support.

Changes may well involve pain in terms of job reductions etc. The ethical leader treats this wisely and constantly balances the ethical scales. This approach although not helping those who are harmed reduces the impact on them and helps the business move forward faster. We all recall P&O

FACTSHEET – why people resist change

10. Self-Improvement Finally, leaders must recognize that they aren't perfect. There is always room for self-improvement. Being a humble lifelong learner isn't just good for personal growth, it also improves one's ability to lead.

Ethics Case study - Change gone wrong.

Management entails some unpleasant conversations, none worse than telling employees that they have lost their jobs. There is nothing enjoyable about giving people this kind of news. But it can be done well, or it can be done badly—or it can be done in the style of Peter Hebblethwaite.

Mr Hebblethwaite is the chief executive of P&O Ferries, a ferry operator that carries passengers and freight between Britain and continental Europe. On March 17th the company told almost 800 of its workers on a video call that they were being replaced with immediate effect by cheaper foreign contractors. Security guards were on hand to escort the dismissed workers from the ships.



On March 24th Mr Hebblethwaite was hauled in front of a committee of British MPs to explain himself. “Are you in this mess because you don't know what you're doing or are you just a shameless criminal?” was the first question. And that was before he made them really angry. He admitted he had not seen a safety-risk assessment into the implications of replacing the original crews with agency workers (two of the affected vessels have subsequently been held in port because of safety concerns). He openly acknowledged that the firm had broken the law by not consulting on the dismissals with trade unions, but that he would make the same decision again because the unions would never have agreed to the plans.

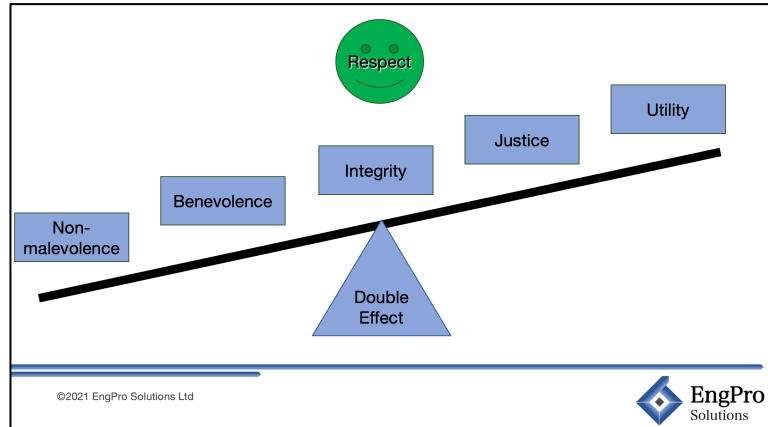
If you want to know what slack-jawed astonishment looks like, watch someone telling legislators that the law is not worth following. But what if you take Mr Hebblethwaite at his word—that the business was unsustainable and that the firm faced a choice between cutting some jobs immediately and losing them all? This is a kind of managerial “trolleyology”, the name given to a set of moral thought experiments involving a runaway railway carriage that is careering towards a group of people. In these experiments participants are asked whether they would intervene and sacrifice someone else in order to save the lives of others. Dismissing workers in order to save more jobs is the workplace version of this problem.

The Hebblethwaite approach to managerial trolleyology is a simple matter of accounting: saving 3,000 jobs is worth the loss of 800 workers. That meant moving fast, and not bothering with niceties like following the law or affording people due process or dignity.

But the point of trolleyology is that the brute logic of numbers often conflicts with moral intuitions. Ethical considerations can involve nuances of behaviour, not just outcomes. For example, people are much more willing to switch train tracks, so the runaway carriage collides with someone else than they are to push someone off a bridge into the path of the train in order to slow it down.

FACTSHEET – why people resist change

In managerial trolleyology, too, behaviour matters—even to staunch utilitarians. It makes a difference how people are treated when they lose their jobs, and not just to those who are out of work. Callousness affects the morale of those who are left behind: recent research suggests that a toxic corporate culture is more likely to lead to employee attrition than any other factor. How firms handle redundancies also sends signals to prospective employees, customers, and investors. Airbnb chose to publish the memo that Brian Chesky, its boss, sent to employees in May 2020, in which he used a blend of compassion and commercial logic to explain his decision to cut 25% of the workforce.



Pressing too hard on either side of the ethical balance will tarnish decision making.

Displays of humanity can be good for the share price. A new study, from academics at the University of Zurich, the London School of Economics and Judge Business School at the University of Cambridge, looks at how chief executives responded to the outbreak of covid-19 in early 2020. The authors review transcripts of investor calls in which bosses discussed the pandemic, and find that whereas virtually all of them referred to its economic impact, only about half of them mentioned the human costs. The share prices of firms run by the more compassionate-sounding bigwigs outperformed the others in the early stages of the crisis and well beyond.

Every situation is different. The P&O debacle reflects specific aspects of maritime employment law, for example. But if you want a steer on how to handle mass redundancies, Mr Hebblethwaite does not provide it. Managers routinely must make tough decisions about letting workers go. Whether to show some common decency in the process is not one of the harder ones.



Extracted from an article in the Economist, 2nd April 2022