

## The Cycle of Change and the Reactions

Change brings fear as there is a sense of the unknown and hence a sense of loss of control and is very much part of our working life. It will take time and effort for employees to understand what the change is about and what it involves. The success of the change will depend largely on the commitment of the stakeholders to the change and to making it work. Transparency and understanding the process will help to avoid a over-reaction amongst the team, which often end up with resistance.

Reaction to change goes through a cycle starting with:

### **Here we go again stage -Deny the need for change.**

First reaction to change often starts with denial – we often hear expressions or responses like

*"I've heard these things before. Remember last year they announced the new structure for reporting? It fell flat and this one too will pass."*

*"I'll believe it when I see it."*

This is a coping strategy, used to cope with change by denying that the change is happening, or to deny that it will continue or last.

The rationale behind this denial is often the fear that they cannot cope with it, or that they do not understand it or the fear that they cannot adapt to it.

### **Why me stage -Getting Angry and resisting the change**

The next stage after denial is anger – anger that they have to change or that the change has been imposed on them. The reaction from this anger is to resist the change, which could result in failure to the desired positive outcomes. This stage is the most critical with respect to the success of the change implementation.

Responses at this stage includes comments like

*"What's so bad about the way things are?"*

*"Why do they need us to change? Why not the other department?"*

### **Let us make the best of it stage – Exploring and finally accepting**

If the above 2 stages are properly handled, this third stage indicates a light at the end of the tunnel where there is a beginning of acceptance. They may still be some anger or resentment but it is now receding to the background as they have a better understanding of what is happening. They become more open and willing to explore the change and begin to accept it. There is an open-ness and a slow coming around to working on the change. Comments heard now include:

*"Well, I guess we have to make the best of it."*

*"I suppose the change is not that bad after all. It might even do us some good."*

### **Let's make it work stage – Committing to make it work**

This is the final stage when the people are committed to the change and prepared to work on it and make sure it succeeds. They have bought into the idea of the need for the change and what they need to do. They might still be unhappy about

it, but there is a realisation that change is here and they have to accept it and adapt to it if they wish to reach the next stage in their work. There will still be some who will continue to be unhappy and will always pose a challenge.

Let us now look at what are the ways to cope with these 4 stages.

In dealing with this cycle, the leader will need to:

- help the team understand the rationale for the change, why change is needed and their roles in it. Help them to see some tangible results of the change.
- Help them work out their anger through regular and consistent communication.
- Provide them with support – through training or coaching to help them cope with new demands
- Be patient with them
- Lead by example
- React to their fears promptly and with respect – do not underestimate or belittle their fears.

Remember, change takes time to implement and to stabilise. Expect resistance and challenges – and treat them positively. They can be the light to help you learn and improve on your way to the success of your change.

*Under every dark cloud, there is a silver lining.*

(This article is extracted from Robert Bacal's writing.)