

## Managing the Process of Change: Ensuring a Successful Transformation through Training

When the purpose of a training program is to teach employees the skills and technical abilities required by their job description, then expectations and measurements of results are usually straightforward in nature. This represents the traditional training function of the business operation, and it is vital for a company to ensure employees have all the technical tools and know-how required to effectively perform the job tasks assigned them. When delivering such programs and measuring success, it is sound management to analyze costs and benefits through direct empirical means.

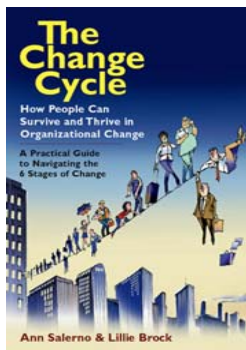
However, so often these days we discover that our clients are attempting to use existing Training and/or Human Resource department functions to execute company broad change initiatives. In such cases, leaders often expect to measure the same old “before and after” results of interventions. Rarely does such action reap the desired outcomes. This is because successful change management is based on a complex process, one that cannot be completed through a series of “punctuated events” such as one or two company meetings or re-training sessions. (Refer to **Figure 1** below to view the phases of transformation). This is also because substantive culture change—even when the change itself is absolutely the best course of action—carries a temporary drop in productivity and morale. Thus, whenever an organization undergoes culture change, it creates a natural drop in workplace efficiency which has nothing to do with the quality of training being offered to employees.

This does not mean that training interventions aren’t helpful. In fact, they are a critical part of the change process. However, what happens *before* and *after* each intervention is every bit as crucial as the change event itself, meaning that meetings and workshops must be linked to a strategy for managing the phases of change. Training, re-training, and cross-training employees to reflect the “new reality” is certainly one positive step forward, but successful cultural transformation requires long term planning and perseverance from leaders at all levels of the organization. If managed correctly, the process and strategy of the change is communicated within the context of workshop interventions and meetings. In addition to understanding the new reality, employees have a need to understand historical events that created the need for change, and what will be different once the change is implemented.

**Phase I - Planning for change.** Whether the change is based on acquisition, major technology-driven changes, or a reduction of employees, a fundamental requirement of successful change depends on the keen awareness and recognition by leaders that the organization will be entering uncharted waters from the very moment people are cognizant that a change is forthcoming. For this reason, smart companies control the message from the beginning. Although many companies try to keep a lid on information and try to keep a change secret until the very moment it needs to happen, this is rarely a wise course of action. The best advice is to keep people informed on “*what you know, when you know it*” at all times. This means letting people know that there are strategic plans in place, that change is forthcoming, what propositions are on the table, and lastly, that the company is committed to keeping everyone up to date as soon as possible. This eliminates the death spiral anxiety of speculation, the water cooler gossip, and most importantly, it will help keep unproductive behaviors to a minimum.

**Phase II – Alignment.** Once the strategic plans for change are complete, it is important to ensure the actual impact to the organization is fully understood by all impacted employees before tactical adjustments are actually made. There will be different approaches to this depending on the type and the severity of the change, but this phase follows the wisdom of the first phase by keeping everyone on the same page immediately on the heels of decisions as they develop.

**Phase III – Implementation.** At a critical point, it is important for leaders to address teams as a group to recapitulate the change strategy, and to announce the specific changes that are taking place. Skilled facilitators from Human Resources or the Training Department can be used to conduct workshop sessions at this time. Workshop sessions are a useful tool not only in communicating the change itself (change in staffing, change in how work is being done, change in business ownership and strategy, etc.), but more importantly, to help people prepare for the normal impact of change, and ultimately, to build positive energy around change through open communication and exploration of ideas and feelings. We highly recommend the book “The Change Cycle” by Ann Salerno and Lillie Brock to consider as a very simple yet elegant illustration of what happens to people in organizations during times of significant change. The change cycle consists of 6 stages that every employee and work team will muster through:



1. Loss
2. Doubt
3. Discomfort
4. Discovery
5. Understanding
6. Integration

**Phase IV: The Revitalization.** The main point of going through a change is to achieve specific business outcomes. Perhaps it is to streamline the operation, to lower costs, improve customer service technology, etc. However, often leaders forget to measure a critical outcome: Raising productivity and morale levels to meet or exceed pre-change levels. There are three outcome curves identified in the change diagram:

**Curve A: The successful transformation.** Employee morale and productivity levels (team and individual) improve from the pre-change level. Although not always a core reason for the change itself, whenever change is executed with great integrity by leaders, it is possible to actually improve the engagement level of employees on the other side of change. This requires dedication to follow-up (and follow-through) from the workshop sessions where change was communicated and implemented.

**Curve B: Regain previous productivity.** When change is exceptionally challenging or severe this is a reasonable goal, but so often a less than stellar result occurs when top management discounts the impact of change, or when there was little post-workshop follow-through.

**Curve C: Negative result.** Unfortunately, over half of all change efforts are done at a long-term cost to morale and productivity. In the worst cases, this cost nullifies the overall financial benefit of making the change in the first place.

At Steinbrecher & Associates, Inc. we have assisted many clients through the organizational change process by providing high quality workshop sessions to help with change implement , but most importantly, ***we work with top leaders to ensure that all four phases*** (planning, alignment, implementation, and revitalization) are successful, and that productivity, employee engagement, and other benchmarks of employee results are elevated! If you remember one thing from this process, it is the lesson that what happens before and after a change is every bit as important as how the change itself is conducted.

**Figure 1. The Phases of Organizational Transformation**

