

Managing Change Effectively

Using Kotter's 'Theory of Change'



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We need to embrace change in order to develop and grow - successful organisations regularly take the time to reflect on their goals, make adjustments and set new targets. Over the last few years, schools across the country have undergone significant programmes of change and development as a result of government initiatives — all of which have had to be implemented and managed by each school's leadership team.

There's not much we can do to halt the progress of government policy, even if we wished to do so, but we can push for successful outcomes by planning for change and ensuring a smooth transition to a new working practices.

Good communication

Good communication is at the heart of a successful transition. A leader's skills are paramount in identifying the scope of the project, and in communicating its parameters with clarity. Studies on leading change reveal that around 30 per cent of organisational change initiatives and management proposals tend to fail (Turner et al, 2009) — a figure that is unsurprising, given people's reluctance to change without clear and compelling reasons (Kotter, 1996).

How to manage change

The Professor of Leadership at Harvard Business School, John Kotter, has developed a useful framework for successful transformational change. With these principles in mind, here are some approaches to driving forward effective change in your school:

- 1. Create a sense of urgency.** Decide on the reasons for change. Provide evidence to support your argument, then encourage and enable honest and frank discussions by all stakeholders. For example, detail how a particular model for monitoring and tracking student attendance has been used effectively in others schools.
- 2. Pull together the guiding team.** Assemble the right people to drive, implement and manage change. Ensure they bring different skills to the party and can work collaboratively — it might take effort to establish a strong working community.
- 3. Develop and create your vision.** Having a clear and easily understood vision is imperative. For instance, if your vision is to improve low-level student disruption in your school, how you begin to communicate this to your lead team is one of the most important stages.
- 4. Communicate your goals.** Effective communication throughout the change programme is central to successful change. Engage interest through regular meetings, weekly email updates, website/intranet communications, letters and 'open surgery' sessions that allow a two-way communication. Providing a platform for open communication will also assist in dealing with any obstacles as well as helping get on board those that are resistant to change (Balogun, 2006).
- 5. Empower others to act.** You should aim to create a climate in which people feel empowered to act and are equipped to manage the changes. Discussions — even combative ones — are essential to creating the wider sense of ownership and collaboration that will drive the change forward.
- 6. Enable short-term wins.** It is sometimes difficult to keep the momentum going, especially when there are no noticeable changes. This is why it is important to build into any change programme the opportunity to celebrate, reward and acknowledge the work and progress being made.

- 7. Incorporate reflection.** Enable time to reflect on the work that has taken place and review what work has been implemented and achieved. This is an important stage and one that may require adjustments to ensure goals are being met.
- 8. Create a new culture.** Sustaining change in your school must be embedded in the ethos and culture of your institution. It is important to show that lessons can be learnt through change by providing evidence of how your school has moved forward.

Although Kotter's model provides a useful framework for achieving successful change, it is important to appreciate that change is complex and there is no 'one size fits all' solution. It is important to lead by example, maintain resilience, ensure effective two-way communication with all stakeholders, prepare a robust action plan, measure and review progress, display empathy to those affected, and empower others to take ownership. As Jaffe et al (1997) suggest, "if you want change, become it".

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