

SKILL BOOSTER 11: FEELINGS DURING CHANGE



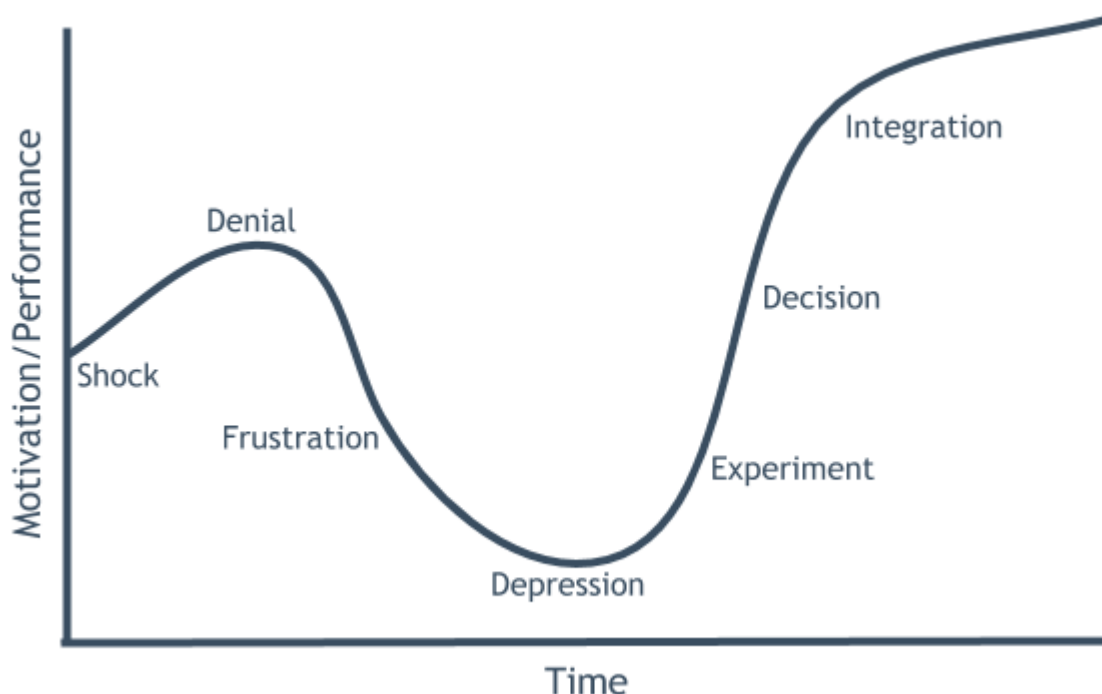
REIGNITE DEVELOPMENT
Reflect, Refocus, Results

Introduction

“It is not the strongest of the species who survive or even the most intelligent, but the ones who are most responsive to change”, so Charles Darwin wrote many years ago. But his words are as true for individuals in organisations now as they were then.

Change is inevitable in today’s workplaces, and the key to surviving it is to acknowledge and deal with the feelings it raises. Of course, these emotions depend to some extent on whether the new circumstances are thrust upon you, or you have willingly embraced them.

The change curve is one way of illustrating the personal emotions we each may experience during change. Some of us might move through the stages quite quickly (depending on whether we view the change as positive or not, enforced, or voluntary) For others, we might need more time or support to reach acceptance.



Source: Elisabeth Kubler-Ross.

Where change is perceived negatively, most people’s initial reaction is one of anger or upset – “it’s outrageous that the company is doing this to me”.

This anger may be covered up, with people pretending that it isn’t happening. Or there may be a sense of isolation as individuals imagine that they are the only ones affected by it.

Gradually people begin to embrace a new situation and even guardedly accept it. They start to relax, experimenting in the new ways, at first reluctantly and then actively.

Lastly, most people accept the transition, are happy with it and even come to feel some “ownership” of it.

Typically, those people who have experienced the whole range of emotions and survived can even be heard scoffing at those who have not yet adapted to the new way of doing things. Of course, there is no simple way to deal with the transition, but there are some key steps that people can take to help them get through it.

Consider these key steps in helping lead change!

1. Build on the past.

Every organisation has its own history and stories. Even when change appears to come out of nowhere, it is vital to build on what has happened before.

Mentioning ways by which the organisation has successfully adapted in the past allows people to make connections with developments that have already taken place. It reminds them that it can be done.

2. Fully inform people.

Too many managers assume that knowledge is a power that they alone should have, but most people will feel helpless in the face of altered circumstances that they do not understand.

If you give out insufficient information, people will jump to their own conclusions and may well imagine situations that are far worse than the reality. But if you give out as much information as possible you will greatly reduce feelings of isolation and anger. It is much better to acknowledge the tough issues openly. Information does tend to leak out anyway.

3. Engage people in finding solutions.

Two minds are better than one. The more opportunities you can create for dialogue with team members, the better. If you ask people’s opinions, they will feel involved. Engaging people in dialogue rather than simply telling them what is going to happen ensures that information is shared. It also encourages creative responses.

4. Provide a clear vision.

We all like certainties. Much of the hostility towards change may simply be the result of a lack of clarity. The role of managers during a period of rapid adjustment is to offer a clear way or set of possible routes through the issues facing the organisation.

When difficult decisions must be taken, leaders need to be seen to be taking them. Sometimes this involves painting a picture of what will happen if the organisation does not change, clearly stating the advantages and disadvantages of different courses of action.

Another key task is bringing people with you. You may be faced with saboteurs and

conscientious objectors whenever you alter the status quo, the more you can engage those people who are on the margins, the better. You need to find some early crusaders who will work with you to win over the hearts and minds of others.

5. Act quickly.

We all need to know where we belong, so, once you have decided what you are going to do, get on with it as quickly as possible.

And, of course, it is important not to let people think that once they have got through one adjustment they can relax and go back to a static existence.

It is much better to provide a trusting, knowledge-rich environment in which change is seen as merely one of the many business variables that team members can live with in comfort.