Managing organizational change

“Change” has become one of the few constants in the modern organisation. Yet despite the reality of change, many individuals and organisations struggle against it, others try to ignore it, and others get swamped by it.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter wrote a couple of years ago about “change-adept” organisations, observing that such groups shared three key attributes:

- the imagination to innovate
- the professionalism to perform
- the openness to collaborate

Even without considering the demands of change, such values and practices are of clear value to any organisation wanting to be effective. It’s not, of course, a given that by nodding our support for the qualities we will ingrain them into our workplaces. In fact, such a commitment might represent a major—and initially unsettling—change all by itself!

Implementing change and effective change management requires that the leader has the skill and confidence to introduce, sell and sustain the change process—not simply announce it and stand back. Moss Kanter’s observations across 20 years identified seven “classic skills” for leaders wanting to move ideas forward:

1. Tuning into the environment
2. Challenging the prevailing organisational wisdom
3. Communicating a compelling aspiration
4. Building coalitions
5. Transferring ownership to a working team
6. Learning to persevere
7. Making everyone a hero


Change is one of the demands of leadership. Leaders are expected to anticipate it, communicate it, support it, and celebrate it—all the while anticipating the further changes that every change tends to generate.

Understanding how people view and respond to change is a vital key to effective leadership, enabling us to more confidently and astutely manage this important part of our responsibility.

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