Posaction® Plus

A SOLAREH SOLUTION

Healthy Teams Collection

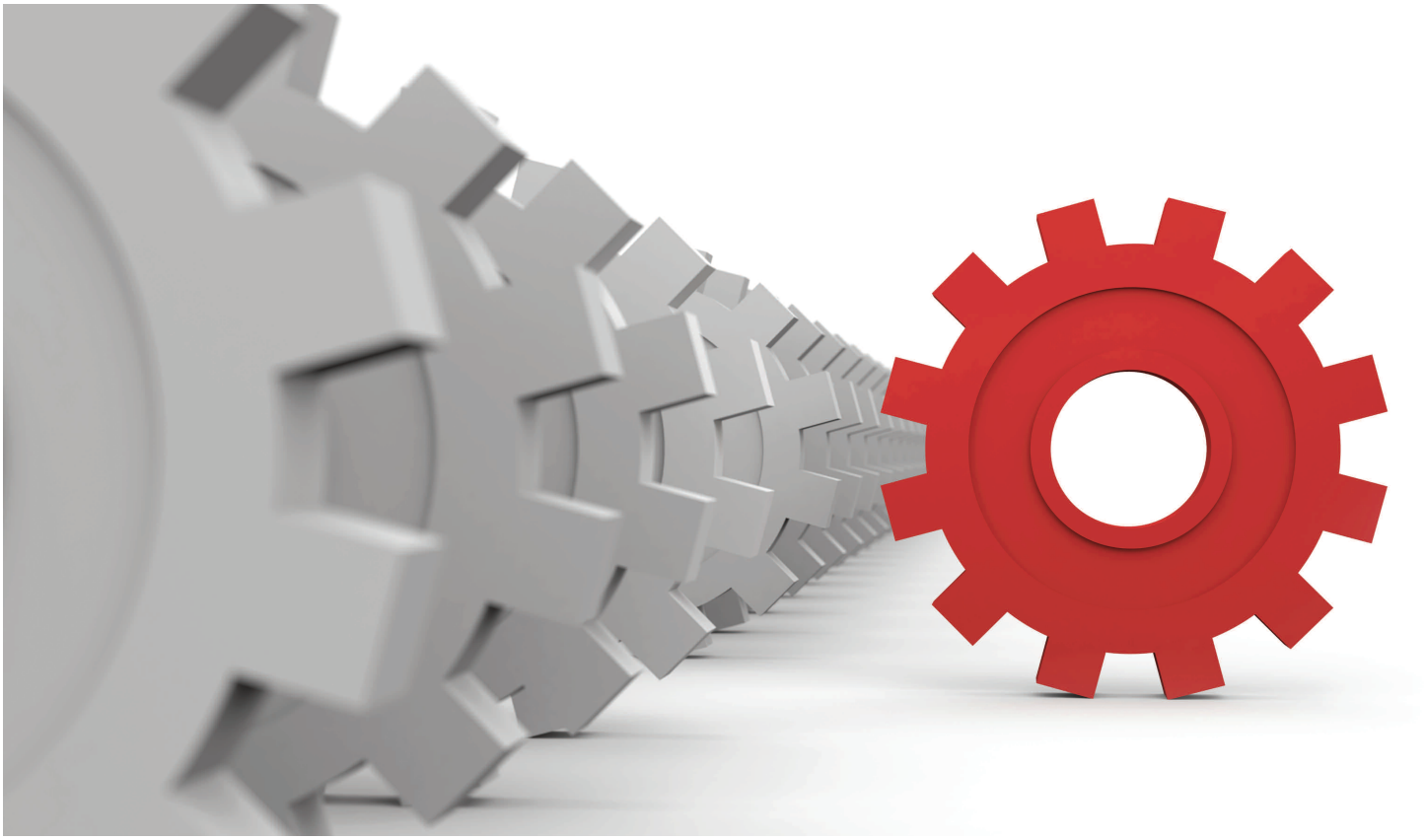
Managing Reactions to Change

Posaction® Plus
A SOLAREH SOLUTION

Managing Reactions to Change

In today's companies, the only thing that's constant is change. Whether it's restructuring, mergers, budget cuts, job changes or layoffs, change is an unavoidable part of corporate life these days. While some people associate change with growth and new opportunities, others associate it with discomfort and upheaval.

As a result, it's not unusual for people to have very different, even contradictory reactions to the disruptions brought on by change, including enthusiasm, confusion, concern, anger, or lack of motivation. These reactions have a direct impact on the behaviour and performance of the individuals concerned. Anticipating and managing these reactions, is the key to developing a change-oriented team.



Understanding reactions to change

Fears associated with change

Change is virtually inevitable, both at work and outside of work. Even life itself is a series of changes. Contrary to popular belief, it's not the change itself that makes people react, but their lack of understanding about the consequences of the change. An individual's reaction to change, whether justified or not, is generally associated with two factors.

One of these factors is the need to control their environment. Everyone feels the need, to varying degrees, to have control over their environment. This need is conditioned by certain character traits, such as tolerance to risk. It's these individual traits that determine how positively a person will react to change.

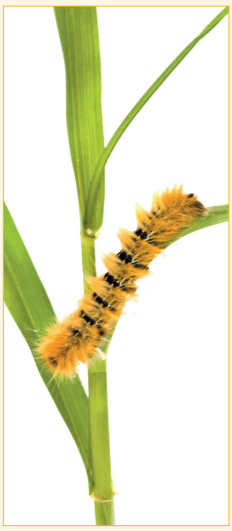
Fear of losing acquired benefits is the other factor that causes certain reactions. People generally tend to focus on what they're losing instead of what they have to gain. Even if the pre-change situation wasn't ideal, it will almost always seem better than the proposed situation.

All reactions to change, regardless of their nature or intensity, are normal. The differences in perception from one person to another, are the result of different personalities, backgrounds and experiences. It's impossible to control an individual's reactions to change, but what you can do is anticipate the process.

The process for dealing with change

The process for dealing with change always consists of three stages, which can vary in length depending on each person's perceptions. The first phase is "uncertainty", when the old situation has come to an end. This is followed by the "transition" phase, when the person starts warming up to the new situation. Lastly, the "acceptance" phase is where the person turns the page and embraces the new situation.

1. UNCERTAINTY



Giving up a comfortable situation is never easy, even for the most cooperative people. Understanding the need for change doesn't mean accepting it. This first stage is a period of denial and questioning. Employees have trouble seeing the potential benefits. It's an emotional time because it's synonymous with loss: loss of functions, colleagues, familiar working methods, etc. This phase ends when the feeling of loss starts to fade and employees begin to accept the merits of the change.

2. TRANSITION

Once employees start to invest in the new situation and let go of the past, they've entered the transition phase. At the beginning of this phase, emotions win out over rational thinking, and there's still a fair amount of resistance. Employees question the benefits of the change, compare it to the previous situation, and are doubtful about its success. The length of this phase and the disruptions associated with it vary according to the scope and complexity of the change. For people to move on to the next phase, the objectives of the change need to become clear and their emotions need to give way to rational thinking.

3. ACCEPTANCE

This phase begins when employees accept and embrace the change and see the benefits they can get out of it. This is the end of the process. Employees face up to reality, understand the need to get involved in the process and are able to see the positive aspects. The time needed to reach this point depends on each person's degree of resistance, since everyone experiences things differently. That's why it's important to adapt the process and the methods of communication to each situation.

Driving forces and restraining forces

For the transition to be successful, it's essential to take into account resistance to change. The energy expended on resistance and the disruptive behaviour that results, limits the effectiveness of a change. **Before a major change is announced, the first thing to do is create a profile of the forces at work**. This will help you identify potential areas of resistance. The driving forces are those forces that propel the change forward and promote the change. The restraining forces, on the other hand, impede the transition and promote resistance. Creating a profile of the forces at work, will help you prepare for how employees are likely to react.

Clearly determine the goal of the change

Sample profile of forces at work

Factors that promote the change (driving forces)	Factors that promote resistance (restraining forces)
More competitors	Mistrust of new technology
Need for better quality	Short implementation period
Uncompetitive productivity	New management style
Need for a more diversified offer	New working methods
Stricter client requirements	New work environment
New products on the market, etc.	Need for learning and training, etc.

Posaction® Plus
A SOLAREH SOLUTION

Managing Reactions to Change

Preparing for reactions to change

Assessing behaviour

Change is always a matter of perspective, or perception. Different perceptions lead to different behaviours. By anticipating the constraints and how the change will impact your team, you can assess the potential fears and determine what you can do to make the change a positive experience. When you announce the change, you'll probably notice different types of reactions. **To ensure a smooth transition, you'll need to adapt your approach to how each person reacts**. Regardless of the reaction, be prepared to explain and re-explain the advantages of the change to each person based on their specific needs.

Assessing your team

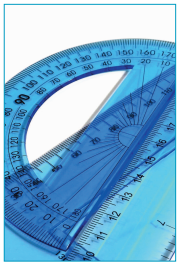
On any team, people generally demonstrate different degrees of resistance to change. It's important to determine which members of your team are most tolerant to change. These are the ones who will champion the change. Your evaluation may be informal, or may be more precise and organized, for instance by using a preparation questionnaire like the one below. Employees who are more open to change will be your allies, and can help you promote the change and motivate your team.

Team Member Assessment

For each employee, determine which of the following statements describe their usual behaviour. The more "yes" answers you have, the more open that person is to change.

Name of employee: _____

	Yes	No		Yes	No
Enjoys a challenge and responds positively when changes are made to their job.	☐	☐	Demonstrates initiative and solves problems without waiting for direction.	☐	☐
Accepts risk, and bounces back quickly from disappointments.	☐	☐	Accepts responsibility for the consequences of their decisions.	☐	☐
Views change as an opportunity rather than a threat.	☐	☐	Doesn't blame others for their mistakes.	☐	☐
Works towards achievable goals and focuses on results.	☐	☐	Is patient and understanding in relationships with their co-workers.	☐	☐
Adapts quickly to unforeseen situations.	☐	☐	Has good persuasive and communication skills.	☐	☐
Has a high tolerance for ambiguity.	☐	☐	Recognizes the strengths of all team members.	☐	☐
Accepts the disruptions and disorganization that accompany rapidly changing situations, as normal.	☐	☐	Is well regarded by members of their team and other teams.	☐	☐



Typical reactions to change

There are four typical reactions to change: withdrawal, disorientation, loss of affiliation and disenchantment. In all cases, it's best to get the person to recognize the impact of their behaviour on themselves, their co-workers and the work environment in general. Below are the specific attitudes to adopt based on each type of behaviour.

WITHDRAWAL

Typical behaviours

- Becomes "invisible"
- Only does the minimum work required
- Can't wait for breaks and the end of the day
- Shrugs shoulder frequently to indicate disinterest
- Doesn't ask questions or try to obtain information
- Avoids discussions with co-workers

Attitude to adopt

Withdrawn individuals tend to isolate themselves, so you'll probably have to make the first move by requesting a meeting. Be prepared to listen patiently to sarcastic comments. Don't expect sudden enthusiasm. Just getting the person to express themselves should be considered an achievement in itself.

DISORIENTATION

Typical behaviours

- Asks questions continually
- Makes errors frequently
- Asks others to ask questions on their behalf
- Is increasingly meticulous and particular
- Has a lot of difficulty setting priorities
- Doesn't complete their work without getting answers to all of their questions

Attitude to adopt

Disoriented individuals need direction. Give them as much information as possible, even if it means repeating it often. Be prepared to provide very detailed explanations. Provide an overview of the change, establish guide-posts, create a frame of reference and identify specific objectives.

DISENCHANTMENT

Typical behaviours

- Often raises voice, speaks loudly
- Leaves in a hurry
- Refuses to discuss things
- Feels sorry for themselves
- Tries to convince others of their opinions
- Is hypocritical, engages in sabotage

Attitude to adopt

Disenchantment often manifests itself through anger. Start by allowing the person to express their frustration, which is generally very emotional. Once the reasons for their anger have been identified, restate the facts if necessary, and try to put things in perspective.

LOSS OF AFFILIATION

Typical behaviours

- Frequently talks about how things were before
- Demonstrates irritability
- Clings to the old methods
- Does their work like before, without regard for the change
- Resists the new procedures or the new supervisor

Attitude to adopt

Individuals experiencing a loss of affiliation feel that their surroundings are deeply connected to who they are and how they work. Explore their reactions and help them dissociate the facts from their emotions. Do this by asking questions rather than making statements. Loss of affiliation is often accompanied by disenchantment, so expect the employee to express feelings of anger.

Posaction® Plus
A SOLAREH SOLUTION

Managing Reactions to Change

Developing an action plan

Intervention strategy

Define your strategy using the preparation documents for creating a profile of the forces at work, identifying potential employee reactions and assessing your team members' openness to change. **Start by defining the objective of the change**. Be clear and precise. If the objective is confusing or vague, it will be impossible to remain focused on your goal.

Then, using the planning guide below, identify all components of the change that will generate questions from your employees. **You will then be able to prepare an action plan that can be used throughout the process**. Avoid identifying too many objectives and priorities at once. Instead, use a step-by-step process.

Once the change has been announced, make all team members accountable by giving each of them a role. Avoid keeping any pertinent information from your employees unless it's absolutely critical. Encourage employees to openly express any objections they might have. Also, explain the means of communication that will be used throughout the implementation process.

Individual action plans

After the change is presented, you'll have to deal with the various reactions it generates within your team. After that, you'll probably have to deal with people's discomfort and negative reactions on an individual basis. **Remember that every employee will have different concerns and a different degree of resistance**. That's why it's best to meet one-on-one with employees who are in need of support. Use the following questions to prepare for these discussions.

- What is the impact of the change on the employee's work?
- What are the desired results in terms of the employee's work?
- What are the employee's reactions and objections?
- What are some possible ways to ease the employee's concerns?

Establishing clear answers to these questions will help you manage the most intense emotions and assess the real impact of the change on the person's work.

Listen for suggestions that would facilitate the change

Planning Guide

The goal of the change is:

_____

_____

The importance of the change for the organization is:

_____

_____

The role of my team in the change process is:

_____

_____

The short-term impact on my team is:

_____

_____

The long-term positive impact on my team is:

_____

_____

The change is scheduled to begin with the following actions:

_____

_____

The change is scheduled for beginning and completion on the following dates:

_____

_____

The ABCs of reactions to change

ACKNOWLEDGING THE VARIETY AND INTENSITY OF THE REACTIONS

Any kind of change causes a reaction, be it positive or negative. The intensity varies depending on the person. The time it takes to adapt can therefore be very different from one person to the next.

DEALING WITH INDIVIDUAL PERCEPTIONS

The more negatively employees see the consequences of the change, the greater their impression of losing control. The more positively they see the consequences of the change, the stronger their motivation to get involved.

MAINTAINING ONGOING COMMUNICATION

Once the change is announced, ongoing communication needs to be maintained between the manager and the team, from the beginning of the process until implementation is complete. The success of the change depends on it.

Key motivational factors

Regardless of the reactions you're faced with when implementing a change, the following will help you motivate your team.

Clarify the situation. Have regular discussions with your employees about the necessity and positive impacts of the change. This can be a good time to alleviate any concerns regarding the unknown.

Encourage open communication. Allow people to express their perceptions, fears and opinions regarding the change. This will help you identify their concerns so you can act accordingly.

Focus on the positive impacts. People generally focus on the negative impacts of change. Direct their attention instead to the positive impacts that will produce certain benefits for them.

Encourage a renewed sense of control. Talk to employees about what could be done to help them feel comfortable without compromising the objectives of the change. Try to understand what's bothering them, and what could make them feel better.

Put things in perspective. Once the initial emotions have passed, help your team put things in perspective by having them evaluate the real impact the change will have on their day-to-day lives.

Individuals can experience change in a positive way, or they can feel cornered. The key is to start things off on the right foot. In order for your team to embrace the change, the details need to be planned very carefully so you can combat their fear of losing acquired benefits and fulfill their need for predictability.

The most important aspect of change management is your ability to listen to what employees have to say. You need to let them express themselves openly. If you can identify the cause of the discomfort and eliminate the unknown, you can hope for a quick, smooth transition. Adapting your requirements to individual reactions is key to ensuring the commitment of your team.

Professional resources for managers

The Posaction® Plus management assistance program is included in your group insurance contract. The program includes training modules, coaching, a post-traumatic counselling service and psychosocial assistance for troubled employees.

Confidential telephone coaching

- Monday to Friday, from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (ET)

1.877.744.2789

Post-traumatic counselling

- Round-the-clock service for serious incidents

1.800.668.0193

For more details about the program
www.posactionplus.com

Posaction® Plus
Your management assistance program

Psychosocial assistance for troubled employees

By referring employees to professional resources, you'll be helping them take concrete steps to resolve their problems and regain their regular performance at work.

Round-the-clock confidential service

1.800.668.0193

- Work-related problems
- Personal problems
- Family problems
- Dependency problems

No charge for using the services

Posaction® Plus

A SOLAREH SOLUTION

Managing Reactions to Change

Other titles available

- Solving an Absenteeism Problem
- Solving a Presenteeism Problem
- Managing Interpersonal Conflict
- Managing Difficult Behaviour
- Solving a Performance Problem
- Delegating for Efficiency
- Recruiting the Best Candidates for Your Team
- Making the Most of Your Performance Appraisals
- Motivating and Developing Your Team

HUMANIA ASSURANCE INC.

The Healthy Teams collection is part of the Posaction® Plus management assistance program included in your group insurance contract. The program offers tangible solutions designed to improve management practices and prevent absence from work. Additional copies of this module, or copies of other titles in the collection, can be ordered free of charge at **www.posactionplus.com**

SOLAREH
Expert in human capital

PLS-503-HUM

© Solareh 2011. All rights reserved. Posaction Plus® is a registered trademark of Solareh.