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## The High Performance Toolkit Your Guide to Managing a High Performance Organisation



### Workplace change: Managing change in the workplace

High performance workplaces are by nature dynamic. Organisations that want to survive and to prosper are innovative, and effective change management is a requisite skill across all workplaces. New technology, new systems, company mergers and the impact of global trade mean that workplace change is a feature of all of our work lives. Winning employees' commitment to innovation and change in the workplace is the key challenge for contemporary management.

#### How to use this fact sheet

This fact sheet aims to help your organisation effectively manage workplace change. It includes ideas on how you might achieve this, as well as examples from other organisations.

While there are some broad principles or guidelines that can be used to assist with change management in the workplace, it is important to remember that each organisation is different, so the tools and techniques that work may differ. You will need to tailor any ideas to your own unique situation.

However one thing is certain. In order to successfully manage workplace change, it must be led from the top and be based on agreement and consensus between all involved – managers, employees and any representative body such as a trade union.

Successful change management requires a step by step approach and this fact sheet sets out a three-stage process to assist you. And although this fact sheet focuses on change management, it must be seen in the context of the other strategies canvassed in related fact sheets.



## First stage – starting out

High performance organisations are successful because they adapt and move with the changing times. They know that the most important thing in preparing for change and in implementing new arrangements is ensuring they involve their key resource – their employees. Effectively involving employees through consultation and participation at the outset in any change management process is vital to ongoing workplace productivity and efficiency.

### Ideas worth trying

Effective communication is the key to managing change but there is no one perfect way to communicate change. Tailor strategies to the specific needs and culture of the organisation.

Clarify exactly what you want to achieve from the change. You will then be able to communicate this clearly and honestly to others. Ensure you know exactly what is changing and why, who is losing what, what's changing and what's not.

Share information about the change with employees and their representatives as soon as possible. The enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA) may provide a template for the process required for consultation and the EBA's consultative committee could oversee the communication strategy. However you may decide to establish a separate employee/employer committee to oversee the change project from the initial decision-making stage.

Provide information on:

- the need for, nature and the scope of the change
- employees affected by the change proposal
- proposals for training and retraining if required, as well any proposals for redeployment
- implications for OH&S and quality of work/life, measures to minimise adverse effects
- proposed rate and timing of implementation
- effects on staffing, organisation and work patterns, and
- expected benefits and adverse effects of the change.

Prepare for some resistance. People used to working in traditional organisational structures could feel that changes threaten their status and usefulness. Learning to work constructively with resistance is an important skill in managing change.

#### » Essential

Although involving people may be seen by some as too time-consuming, workplaces that adopt an authoritarian style and a command mentality – in the long run – will spend much more time trying to motivate unwilling people.

#### » Good practice

'No surprises' – an open and honest communication style is one of the lessons learned from Hazelwood Power



## Second stage – moving forward

Workplace changes are introduced for many reasons. Some of these reasons will be obvious to everyone in the workplace and some less so. Cost saving, quality improvement, increased management control, increased employee empowerment, introduction of new technology, service expansion and improvements to health and safety are some of the goals that may be sought through workplace change. The impact of any change depends a great deal on how it is implemented.

### Ideas worth trying

Keep in mind that the quality and consistency of information is crucial – ensure you continue to communicate significant and substantial information throughout the change process.

Use a variety of communication strategies – don't only use email or the company intranet site. Talk with employees and their representatives.

Employees will want to know exactly how the change will impact on them:

- will there be more or less jobs and will new duties be added to existing jobs?
- will the pace of work change?
- what will be the effect on wages and pay scales and how will promotion be affected?
- will current skills and abilities still be needed?

- what will be the effect on the quality of products or services provided?
- will seniority for any employees be affected?
- what kind of training will be provided and who will have access to the training?
- will the variety of tasks performed by particular workers be affected?
- what will the health and safety impacts be?
- will there be subcontracting of work?

Provide multiple opportunities for employees and their representatives to share concerns, ask questions and offer ideas. Make follow-up with answers and updates a top priority. Involving people in the change process, reduces the risk of people leaving or sabotaging the change from within.

#### » Essential

Employees will tend to have one primary concern: What does it all mean to me?

Ensure you address all their questions and concerns.

#### » Good practice

Recognising a need for change, the Victorian Building Commission actively sought feedback over a six-month period from key stakeholders through a series of targeted forums and consultations. In addition, employees participated in an organisation-wide survey that provided critical feedback and identified areas for improvement.



## Third stage – new horizons

Change processes usually include four phases – planning, consultation, implementation and monitoring/evaluation. Each phase takes time, and while it is important to reach the outcome, not putting the maximum effort into any of these phases may result in problems impacting on the outcome for a very long time.

### Ideas worth trying

Develop a realistic timetable for change. Include time for preparation and the actual changes, as well as support for staff during and following the change, and a monitoring and evaluation process. Continuing to monitor the process beyond the date of implementation will ensure that the desired outcome does occur.

Workplace change is not a single instance. It will be a recurring feature of most workplaces. Avoid the common mistakes of managing workplace change:

- don't rely just on formal presentations and written materials
- don't assume that everyone in the workplace has the same knowledge
- don't assume the change management has a definite end date. It begins when the project begins and continues well into implementation
- be sure to tell employees in the initial change announcement whether there will be job losses or not. In an environment where employees are not even certain whether or not they have a job, it is unrealistic to expect them to be able to focus and prime themselves for working in a new way
- communication needs to be two way. Don't just provide information to the employees, also provide opportunities for them to express their concerns and opinions about the change. Holding one large meeting to announce the project is not enough, and
- talk about the problems as well as the solutions. If everyone recognises the problems, they are likely to be solved much faster. This also helps everyone to 'own' the solutions.

### » Good practice

'Keeping union officials and workplace delegates regularly up to date on business and industry developments means that when management must introduce change, employees realise they are fair and needed for the long term sustainability of the business.'

David Auld, Group Human Resources Manager, Air International Group Ltd.