Good Work Design:
Managing change at work

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Around the world, the pace of change in workplaces is getting faster

It's now more important than ever that managers and supervisors help their teams adapt.

Great managers support their people through change at work, making the process a smoother and easier journey for everyone.

Why it matters

Workplace change is normal and brings benefits. It can influence growth and innovation, but still leave people feeling anxious and distressed.

Change can impact the psychosocial work environment increasing risks and causing harm to worker health. For example, poor change management can increase workloads, role conflict and uncertainty, while reducing role clarity and feelings of job control. See Comcare's guidance on reducing the psychosocial risks of workplace change.

What is workplace change?

Workplace change occurs when a business alters key components of its strategy or operations. This can include changes to culture, technologies, structure or size, or to major initiatives, activities and goals. Sometimes workers can struggle to adapt to change at work – even when the change appears minor or positive.

How it's done

Great managers never assume that there is no impact and they proactively lead their teams through change. They communicate and collaborate with their teams, review roles, and provide and seek support.

① Communicate

Communication is the single most important strategy in managing change, so make it a priority.

- Have early and regular conversations with your team during periods of change.

- Keep your team informed of what is going on. When nothing is happening, let them know that too.

- Provide opportunities for your team to voice concerns and views.

- Listen to your team's concerns and make sure you respond to them. Be fair and equitable and explain reasons for decisions.

- Check back in later to see whether people feel that their concerns have been addressed, and if there's anything more you can do.

Know your team · Manage change · Communicate effectively · Provide support · Provide flexibility · Build trust · Enhance performance · Manage absence · Support return to work · Address work demands

What great managers do

Communicate early and regularly

Signs of poor organisational change management include:

- inadequate consultation
- little consideration of new hazards or risks to health and safety or performance impacts
- insufficient support
- not communicating key information to workers.

2 Involve your people

- Find ways for your employees to participate in the change process, to ease feelings of lack of control and support.
- Have conversations with your team about what the change means for them.
- Provide opportunities to influence how the team responds and adapts. Where possible, involve them in the redesign of tasks, roles and responsibilities.

3 Clarify roles and responsibilities

During or following change, team members may feel uncertain about what their role involves or what their current priorities are. Sometimes change creates conflict between different aspects of a person's role or between the roles of different team members.

- Draw on context and purpose in framing conversations to promote clarity and stability.
- Check that your team members know what they need to do, how they can do it and when it needs to be done by.
- Make sure your team has the resources they need to effectively deliver their tasks.
- Help people understand how the delivery of their work impacts the work of others and how they can work together to achieve good results for all.

Research shows that 'transparent communication and including employees in the change process result in positive attitudes towards change and support.'

Team members may feel uncertain

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4 Provide support

Individuals have different levels of tolerance to change and your team members may all react differently.

- Understand the common emotional responses people can experience and tailor your support appropriately. Refer to the **Kubler-Ross change curve at Figure 1.**
- Be alert to signs that people need more practical or emotional support.
- Encourage them to share their feelings about the changes and acknowledge their emotions.
- Make sure people know what support services are available and how to access them. Workplace services or programs may include an Employee Assistance Program, Early Intervention Service or NewAccess. Outside the workplace see **Beyond Blue - Get mental health support.**
- Give individuals the time and support they need to learn to use new technology.
- Remember that change can take time to process, so be patient.

5 Seek support

How you manage yourself during times of uncertainty is important because your people will look to you for direction and support.

- Reflect on your own feelings and behaviour and seek support to lead others through change when needed. For example, this could be through coaching or mentoring.
- Maintain self-awareness and provide more clarity and direction to your team if you are finding the change process difficult.
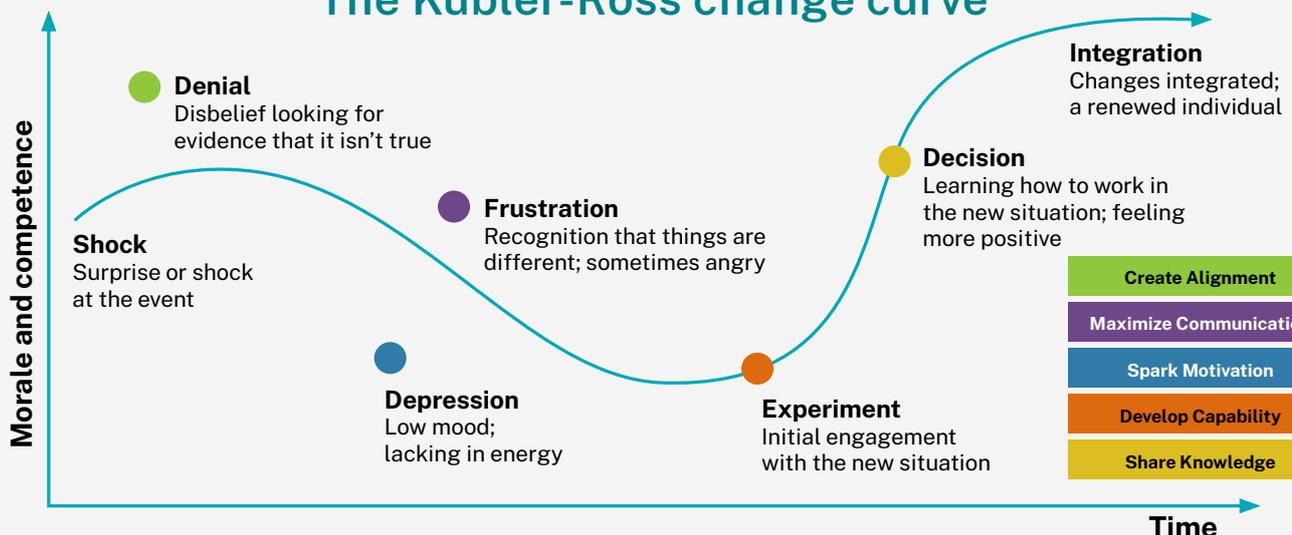
The Kübler-Ross change curve

Morale and competence (vertical axis)

Time (horizontal axis)

Denial
Disbelief looking for evidence that it isn't true

Shock
Surprise or shock at the event

Frustration
Recognition that things are different; sometimes angry

Depression
Low mood; lacking in energy

Experiment
Initial engagement with the new situation

Decision
Learning how to work in the new situation; feeling more positive

Integration
Changes integrated; a renewed individual

- Create Alignment
- Maximize Communication
- Spark Motivation
- Develop Capability
- Share Knowledge

Figure 1