# How2 empower managers to lead and effect change


| | |
|---|---|
| **Author:** | Kim Coe |
| **Position:** | MD |
| **Organisation Name:** | The How2 Knowledge Group |
| **Area of Expertise:** | Business Growth, Change Management, Sales Development, Management Development, Market and Customer Development, People Development |


## Introduction

All change is reliant on the goodwill and commitment of those in the organisation who are actually going to have to implement the new.

Unfortunately, the success rate of most major initiatives is very low as most Directors and Managers underestimate the support necessary to help the implementers ensure that positive change happens.

This Byte looks at practical ways that a ‘change driver’ can encourage, support and lead new innovations into reality, through a group of managers who are ultimately going to have to make it work.

The first and probably most difficult and important idea to consider is that people are not, as a point of principle, generally keen to see new initiatives fail, whatever appearance there is to the contrary.

A relationship with a management team is pretty much the same as any other, in that most people are reacting at some level to what they think the other parties think of them. When an autocratic manager tries to launch a new concept, people will probably nod their heads and then wonder what they have said yes to and what it means to their survival.

When a democratic manager appeals to peoples’ desire to be part of a team, they often bring a relatively superficial approach to the support and then wonder why everyone wants the thing to happen but nobody seems able to do it.

The key, as always, is in the over-used word ‘empowerment’ and the following overview is about how to empower managers to drive change, especially within a fixed, traditional structure and working ethos.

## Main

**You, the ‘change leader’ and the ‘process’**

**Even if you have already launched an initiative, the following describes what must happen as early on in the process as possible, if you are to be fully satisfied with the results.**

To use a vernacular; *'where you are coming from'* is vital and could be said to be the difference between ultimate success and failure of the endeavour. Try to take a step back and list on paper all of your views and prejudices about why the project is likely to fail and make it as subjective as possible (don’t worry, nobody else has to see it).

When you have made your list, look at how much supporting evidence you have to pack up your judgements and you will probably see that it is extensive enough to be called a sensible assessment of reality, but that is not the point.

As you know, nothing is reality until it happens. Until then, you have ‘probable reality’ which, more than likely, means that your own survival methods have absorbed this and will be effecting your perception, behaviour and most importantly, your communication.

Instead of approaching the task from a ‘damage limitation’ perspective, try to imagine that:

**(a)** You have a clean sheet of paper with the managers coming on board
**(b)** Anything is ultimately possible
**(c)** It is conceivable that everyone wants to make a contribution to the task in hand despite their views and fears.

If you can take up this position, then what you say and how you say it will be based on recognising the highest in others and your communication will err on the side of encouraging success rather than struggle. You may think that this is the case already but, given that 90% of communication is ‘non content’, there are an inevitable number of subtleties that convey the real message you are putting across, behind the words you are using.

To that end, consider exactly what message you want to convey about:

**(a)** The endeavour
**(b)** The people who are responsible for its implementation.

Write both of these statements down and then remember them at all times in your dealings with the team. Try to notice how you might be saying either; ‘you are the people who can make this happen’ or; ‘you are the people who could block this happening’.

**Getting buy-in**

**There are a number of steps involved that are neither a mystery nor difficult to do.** The problem is always one of time and attention for the fundamental aspects relating to team creativity. As always, we have a classical ‘chicken and egg’ situation where we think that the initiative will sort the problems of time and resources - the trick is to get those principles sorted first.

For a long time, it has been accepted that the so-called Japanese way of working does get results in that 80% of the project time spent in preparation will result in the fastest and most successful rollout of the project. This, however, relates as much to the human elements as it does to the logistical details. Some ‘change drivers’ spend a scary amount of time discussing the objectives of the strategy and what it means to the organisation, customers and to the organisation as a whole.

This ‘preparation’ is really all about prioritising and, despite the appearance of ‘not getting anything done’, it forms the absolute foundation that your project will be built on. A quick guide is to spend at least three times longer than you would, checking that everyone has understood, is in alignment and knows their part in it.

**<u>Step One</u>**

Get outside of your own perception about the way in which the initiative will be received and ultimately implemented or not (as above).

Even when the old comments surface, remember that it is just ‘part of the journey’ and if you just listen and acknowledge you’ve heard, don’t get stuck on it and no-one else will either.

**<u>Step Two</u>**

Understand that people only fail to embrace or implement change for three reasons:

- **They don’t understand it**
- **They don’t understand what it requires from them**
- **They don’t understand the consequences of success or failure.**

Whatever logical or scientific arguments you receive, it will always be about the above three points, which all amount to a simple fact; people need to identify with the proposed changes or new projects, or they will try to distort it to fit in with their current outlook and organisational position.

**<u>Step Three</u>**

When you launch the idea, follow these guidelines:

- Describe what issues and circumstances have created the real **need** for the project (can be described as problems and / or opportunities)
- Create a **dialogue** about the circumstances and wait until everyone has agreed WHAT has to be addressed (not HOW it will be addressed yet)
- Create a set of **project objectives** WITH THE TEAM such as ‘To improve the support services to our customers’ and ‘to increase customer participation’.
- Describe a possible set of **measurable outcomes**, resulting from the project objectives such as ‘retained customers’, ‘higher revenues’ or ’increased customer satisfaction as measured by xyz’, again WITH THE TEAM
- Try to **encourage communication** outside of each individual’s role and stimulate discussion ‘on behalf of the whole’
- When the team has clarified the exact purpose and measurable benefits of the project, then **outline your particular scheme that you want buy-in for**
- Ask for feedback but do it in two parts; Firstly, ask for all the **negative reactions and reasons** why it can’t be done (just

list them on a board as the group expresses them – don't try to deal with any of them). Secondly, ask for all the **positive reactions and reasons** why it can de done (again, just list them).
- Afterwards, refer the team back to the original objectives and outcomes being pursued and ask them if they **(a) think it's worth going for** and **(b) whether they are prepared to lead the company** through the problems and motivate the people towards the benefits.

Then:

If you get a 'stone wall' at this point, it is because some people still do not understand and it means you must go back to the basics again. You can address individual concerns but only in the context of having the person understand the purpose and their part in its success. Do not try to 'handle their case'.

**If you have already launched the initiative**, you can make the next meeting run along the above lines on the basis you felt some more groundwork was needed to be done as a team, before looking at how it can be implemented.

**Sustaining the change through the 'change drivers'.**

**Step One**

Once the initiative has had full buy-in, you can start to organise the implementation (don't confuse disagreement or 'moaning' with a lack of alignment – never censor the 'it can't be done' because inherent in that are the seeds of 'it can be done' if people are empowered to communicate their concerns).

**Step Two**

Many change managers forget the most important aspect; the implementation plan.

Once a strategy and initiative have been agreed, there is quite often a 'go and get on with it' approach, which can undo all of the clarification work that's been done because now people are clear about 'what' needs doing but not 'how' to do it.

As the overall change driver, you will need to structure an implementation plan with the team, before they go about their own areas of implementation.

This can be done by listing the key objectives with key activities and then sub-sets of activities where needed, which all need a time scale and a person's name (or group of names) next to each.

Break the activities into clear 'do-able' milestones that give the team a number of wins as soon as they begin implementing and throughout the process.

**Step Three**

- Have regular meetings to review and validate the progress, troubleshoot stuck points and build on efforts made.
- Always remember that a 'no result' is due to a lack of understanding and encourage team support and solutions so that nobody feels stupid or useless even if they have not achieved the interim targets.
- Have a weekly meeting or a monthly meeting with weekly communications that feed back to the team ongoing issues and progress to date. Ask for examples of how something was achieved and ensure this is communicated amongst the team at all times.

**Step Four**

*This relates to additional pressures brought about by a regimented business structure and working approach that the change managers have to implement within.*

All organisations, to some degree, have a relatively inflexible (or at least historical) way of working that can make change difficult to implement due to a number of seemingly 'contradictory' goals competing on time and resources.

However, if the change initiative still has to be approved by a board or executive team, this is more difficult and is therefore something to add in early on in the 'Buy-in' section and the 'teams' creation of the business case and its activities plan (above).

If your job is to get the buy-in from above, you will need to produce a business case that has been generated by the implementation team and should be genuinely submitted on their behalf, even if you have done most of the production.

**Empowering the managers**

Your job is to empower, motivate and guide everyone in the team and to position them as change drivers for this project, regardless of whether they are ‘born leaders’ or likely to move into a leadership role in the organisation, going forward.

The endeavour is based on a team of managers ‘defining, leading and implementing change’ and all parts are key to the whole success, whatever their individual activities. If you can treat the team like this from the outset, you will have a ‘meritocracy’ at the heart of the project, which allows issues of status, territory and control to be put aside for the sake of the collective meaning.

The most important aspect of ‘empowerment’ is based on assigned decision making. An autocratic manager will not allow any autonomous decision making and the democratic manager will allow too much and that will be generally based on consensus. The empowerment manager says ‘you cannot make decisions about these goals, policies and activities but you can make them about xyz’.

**Step One**

When the activities plan and implementation schedule is complete, create major tasks and ‘task leaders’ out of combining strands of activities. Try to get people to volunteer for tasks (both in terms of ‘driver’ and in terms of input into each other’s strands).

**Step Two**

Next to each major task, list ‘determined’ as those elements which are set in stone and ‘to be determined by **name and the team**’ where there is license to make the call. Create plenty of discussion around issues they feel are ‘unfair’ and locate the aspects they can independently ‘make a call’ as a clear guidance on how they can be effective despite the ‘restraints’.

In all cases, you are focusing the individual and team energy away from blame and ‘it’s not fair’ to independent responsibility and the sense that it can be done by using the will and talents of everyone in the team.

**Step Three**

Even with regular meetings and internal communications updates, meet or at least speak on the telephone with each driver individually, once a week.

These sessions are not ‘progress updates’ they are your opportunity to facilitate breakthrough at an individual level and to ensure that the team is operating at its highest when it does meet, rather than descending to the lowest common denominator of problems and possible resentments.

Your communication is vital for these sessions and you must structure the conversation in your own mind first, making sure you know what the desired outcomes for the dialogue are; for the person, the team and for yourself.

You can attack non-alignment and lack of productivity but do it ‘one-to-one’ and always make sure you are ‘coming from the right place’ as described at the start of this Byte.

**Supporting the team to implement the project**

This issue relates to managers having to do their ‘normal jobs’ and may even be geographically remote, for the communication and implementation of the task.

The suggested communications plan for the team and each individual (described above) can be used for managers who are not accessible at all times and who have a number of tasks they are juggling with, day to day.

The most important aspect of remote support is; Communication.

The more you communicate, get the team to communicate and feed back communication, the more engaged everyone in the team will feel. Alignment, involvement and responsibility are not dependent on time and proximity for the empowerment manager.

The only reason a project unravels in these circumstances is if it is not given the right foundation at the outset, the personal involvement throughout and the feedback showing follow-through and milestones of achievement.

When the time comes for the task leaders to communicate and enrol their people into the project, they will know what to do if they have had the right time and approach made available to them as a team and as individuals. In addition, you may want to do some communications training to help managers articulate the objectives and motivate their people to be part of the new concept.

## Conclusion

All of the points covered here are based on simple organisational practices and straight forward inter-personal skills, so why don't people use these common sense ideas more effectively?

Generally, it's because of pressure on one's own time and patience, as well as a misunderstanding of the difference between coercion and enrolment. Human beings cannot be told what to do - they can only be invited to choose to do what they have no choice over, in a sense.

The dictionary defines 'enrolment' as "To incorporate as a member into a society" and 'enrol' is described as "To join something; such as to enrol in a class".

These definitions spell out the fact that people put themselves into or onto something and there is no amount of force, persuasion or manipulation that is greater than the power of individual choice and, as a change leader, you are there to facilitate that choice whilst organising the collective will.

When you have received an understanding of the information in this e-learning activity, please click on **'Submit Training'** to add it to your evidence base.