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## CONSIDERATIONS FOR SUCCESSFULLY LEADING CHANGE

Provided by National University, [Center for Creative Leadership MBA](#)

### LEADING CHANGE

Change is inevitable. It's happening all around us, all the time. Without it, we'd be unable to journey from one place to the next. Still, the idea of change can be frightening. When the future is unpredictable, we worry that we could lose the things we value now.

In the workplace, leaders play an unprecedented role in crafting a future for their organizations that is better than the present. Maybe that involves implementing a new HR policy or digital solution; perhaps it's restructuring or downsizing to cut costs. Regardless of the change initiative, leaders play two important roles: managing change as it happens, and leading their people through the change.

### WHAT IT MEANS TO MANAGE CHANGE

According to research, 75% of change initiatives fail because leaders overlook either the human dynamic of the transition or the structural side of change.

For change to be successful, it has to be organized. Leaders must approach the initiative with clear objectives, steps, and responsibilities. Like project management, change management involves keeping track of a budget, monitoring the process, and training people on their responsibilities in the future state. During change, this type of clarity is critical to keep people from floundering.

Leading the process is just half of change leadership, however. The second half of the equation involves leading people through change. Often, leaders neglect their people's feelings, presuming team members should do what it takes because they want to keep their jobs. This attitude sends a message to employees that their input isn't valued, and in the long term, they'll associate change with negativity. Eventually, change fatigue hits the organization's bottom line.

Effective leaders understand that if change is approached in the right way, people will see it as an opportunity. When you learn to lead the process and your people, you can cultivate mind-sets that propel adaptability and growth.

### HOW TO LEAD PEOPLE THROUGH CHANGE

When it comes to change, involvement leads to commitment. As early and as often as possible, give your team members a sense of control by inviting them to planning discussions. Collectively, consider whether the change is necessary — or if there are alternative approaches. Listen to team members' experiences. Recognize that there was value in old processes, even if those processes won't continue going forward. Answer the question, "What should we hold on to?" to help acknowledge employees' fears and concerns.



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Throughout these conversations, consider the change from your employees' perspective. What's in it for them? If the change will be hard, what can you offer that helps them handle the difficulties they're facing? Further, listening to and addressing their concerns makes people feel supported and heard. If 75% of change initiatives fail, that kind of up-front investment pays off.

Finally, understand that adapting to change takes time. People go through three stages of processing during transition. First, they accept the ending. Second, they live in the neutral zone, and third, they reach their new beginning. Even when change is positive, people transition through these three stages. But when change is negative, it takes time. Change leaders should respect this period of adjustment.

## **LEADING MULTIPLE CHANGE INITIATIVES**

Rarely does an organization lead one single change initiative at a time. Most have 50-75 simultaneous initiatives that employees must prioritize and manage. These projects are led by different departments and have varied impacts.

Change leaders are successful when they're able to widen their scope and view their particular initiative within a broader context. That's because from a project management perspective, people can feel overwhelmed, burned out, and demoralized. Only when you understand the competing priorities can you help direct your team members' focus.

In addition to helping their team members prioritize, change leaders can help preserve valuable human resources. Imagine that your team has a bank account filled with energy, attention, and interest — all resources that can be put toward current change initiatives. Even when change is good, it requires account withdrawals that can be taxing. Whether you're a seasoned leader or a new manager, know your employees. What has been asked of them lately? What demands have they faced? Have recent changes been positive, negative, or neutral?

When employees feel they have available reserves and resources, change can lead to greater engagement, excitement, and commitment. But when these reserves are drained or depleted, employees feel stress, frustration, cynicism, and are more likely to leave their jobs.

If you don't have leadership responsibilities during a change initiative, you still have an important role to play. Whether you're a middle manager or a front-line contributor, recognize your voice. If you value the future of your organization and want to be a part of a constructive approach to building a better organization, speak up. Share your input and your ideas for how to build a better future.

Finally, take time to reflect. After you've worked through a change initiative, pause with your team and discern what you've learned. What worked? What could be better in the future? Hindsight is 20-20; how can you leverage this clarity for the next initiative?



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## TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Change leaders carry a heavy load, and it can take a toll on their physical and emotional health. Prioritize your own wellness — and combat your own change fatigue — by focusing on resilient practices that can help you bounce back from adversity. These practices include developing a broad range of personal and professional relationships, extending gratitude to your colleagues, exercising regularly, and getting 7-8 hours of sleep each night.

As you move through change, embrace new perspectives, resisting the urge to hold onto old behaviors and skills just because they're familiar. Great leaders are great learners, and when you model this openness to change, your team members will follow suit.

*National University has partnered with the Center for Creative Leadership to create a Master of Business Administration that focuses on leadership. This partnership is driven by the 50-year history each institution holds, in both online adult education and leadership upskilling.*

*This article showcases content from the Leading Change course that is part of the CCL MBA program. To learn more about the CCL MBA, visit <https://nu.edu/cclmba/>.*