

# ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS WHEN FRAMING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

BY BILL HOGG

A critical element of initiating a successful change initiative is communicating that change is a normal and positive function of doing business -- it is a key factor in a company's ability to remain relevant and differentiate from competitors and grow year over year.

People are intuitively resistant to change -- even helpful change -- so it is a leader's ability to frame organizational change in a positive way that will lead to its successful adaptation internally. Yet, one of the major issues that organizations face regularly is how they approach implementing new processes and managing change -- and not communicating consistently and effectively.

## Change is a Process

Change is a process -- and a leader's ability to manage this process effectively makes change possible.

There are three main phases when implementing change in an organization:

1. **The Current State:** This is the normal routine that people are used to. It is within this state that leaders begin to frame the change that is to come in a way that their team will understand and accept.
2. **The Transition State:** This is the point where people within the organization begin to break away from the everyday processes they are used to and begin to implement new processes and a new way of doing things. This is where things get messy and hard, because there is a natural inclination to revert back to the known versus the new and different.
3. **The Future State:** This is the state when the desired change is the new normal and people have consistently altered their behavior to reflect the change. Getting to this state is largely based on how change is introduced and interpreted by people within the company.

## How you frame change makes a significant difference

The manner in which impending change is framed has a significant impact on how your team will react.

Most people view change of any kind as a threat. When change is announced, people automatically feel defensive and immediately become concerned about their role within the company, or whether they may lose their job. And, this is particularly understandable considering how many companies have been forced to right size in the past few years.

Ideally, you want your team to be in a frame of mind where they are asking "How can change help us get stronger, more competitive?" and not "How will change impact my position?"

## Framing change so it is accepted in your organization

How do you get to the point where change is accepted and internal [employee behaviour](#) shifts to achieve new goals and objectives?

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- 1. Sell the opportunity:** It is important to paint a picture of the future state so people can see the benefits of change, not just the stresses. Leaders need to answer the question everyone is silently asking, “What’s in it for me?”. The clearer the picture you paint of the results of the change, the greater likelihood that your team will be receptive.
- 2. Acknowledge the threat, but focus on the positive:** Acknowledging that change is hard is important. Failing to do so will only suggest to your team that you don’t “get it” and will put them on edge and have them concerned about their well-being. When people feel threatened, it tends to decrease the amount of involvement and participation, which could lead to increased internal resistance.
- 3. Accept that resistance is a necessary part of change:** Change and resistance go hand in hand. Even if you frame change in a positive light, you will have some people that will be resistant to it. This resistance shouldn’t always be viewed as or treated like a negative response -- but a natural human reaction to being asked to move out of our comfort zone. Some of your earliest critics will become your greatest supporters once they understand the future vision and how it benefits the organization - and them.
- 4. Plan for Resistance:** You need a plan for how you will handle this resistance when it does arise. Think about how you will address resistance and how you will deal with each instance of it. It is important leaders anticipate this resistance, re-enforce why change is occurring, have regular conversations with their team about how change impacts them, and communicate what they need to do to ensure the transition is successful.
- 5. Create an open dialogue:** People will be more accepting of change if it is a conversation rather than a directive. Open the lines of communication and gather input from people on all levels within the organization. Consider holding regular open forums to allow people to ask questions and get more clarification about specific aspects of the new direction the company is taking. No company has ever been accused of communicating too much.
- 6. Involve people:** The more people who are involved, the higher level of acceptance you will see. When people feel they have some influence on the outcomes, they are more easily engaged to get behind a change that benefits the organization. If they are watching from a distance, they are often ill-informed and create worst case scenarios in their mind that they share with others as “fact”. When people are involved they also have a greater grasp of the big picture versus evaluating things in a vacuum.

Change is only as successful as your ability to frame it in a way that will be accepted. Focus on framing change as a new opportunity and not as a potential threat to your employee’s current status with your organization.

### **Transformational Leadership Expert | Professional Speaker | Performance Excelsator™**

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