

NAVIGATING THROUGH CHANGE: THRIVING IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

Change is inevitable, but thriving through it is a choice, writes Justine Farrington, who offers five key strategies for leading change successfully.

Change is a constant we all know too well, however in 2024, it felt like the pace of change and restructures accelerated beyond anything we'd experienced before – and this trend looks set to continue.

The ripple effects of the pandemic, technological breakthroughs, and shifting government policies, rising living costs and a looming recession are reshaping how we live and work. It's no wonder that many organisations in New Zealand are feeling the pressure to adapt faster and more effectively to stay relevant.

As leaders, it's not just about managing change – it's about helping your team navigate through it in a way that avoids burnout and maintains morale.

Think of it like steering a ship through a storm: if you don't steer the course carefully, it can all too easily turn into confusion, resistance, and disengagement. But with the right approach, change doesn't have to be a disaster – it can also be a chance to rethink, innovate, and unlock new opportunities.

THE HAZARDS OF MISMANAGING CHANGE

The biggest challenge? Poor communication. When the reasons behind changes aren't explained clearly, uncertainty and mistrust take root.

With so much instability around us, employees are naturally worried about job security, and that fear only undermines their confidence, creativity, and productivity. On top of that, if

the goals are unclear or unrealistic, employees can start to feel lost, unsure about their role in the process. And when change doesn't align with the company culture, it erodes trust and disengages your team.

The solution lies in leadership that champions change effectively and builds an environment where people are empowered to adapt, grow, create and seize new opportunities. By embracing these strategies transformation will not only stick but also becomes sustainable and meaningful.

FIVE KEY STRATEGIES FOR LEADING CHANGE SUCCESSFULLY

- 1. Transparent, consistent communication:** Effective communication is vital for successful change. Leaders must articulate the 'why' behind the change to motivate and cut through scepticism. Transparency, frequent updates, and creating a psychologically safe space for voicing concerns builds trust and encourages collaboration. This also demonstrates vulnerability as the leadership doesn't have all the answers yet shows that they are emotionally connected to the need for change.
- 2. Involve:** Change should never be imposed from the top down (but almost always is!). Involving people throughout the process builds ownership and commitment. Engage teams by seeking feedback, inviting opinions, and encouraging regular input through surveys and team discussions.

When people feel heard and empowered, they are more likely to embrace change. Answer these two questions for yourself and you'll understand the importance of involving others:

- "When change is done to you, how do you feel?" and
 - "When change is done by you, how do you feel?"
- 3. Build capability:** Training and development is about more than just new skills – it's about equipping people with the mindset and tools to navigate change. Ongoing support in decision-making, creativity, and problem-solving helps people adapt. Investing in their growth, well-being, and autonomy boosts confidence and proactivity.
 - 4. Align with a constructive culture:** For change to succeed, it must align with the organisation's culture and aspirations. Constructive Cultures—focused on growth, collaboration, and proactive problem-solving – are key to sustainable change. Leaders should role-model the behaviours, growth mindset, and attitudes they want to see in their teams, setting the tone for a supportive environment where people can thrive.
 - 5. Set Clear, Achievable Goals with Realistic Timelines:** Clarity and candour are essential during change. Break goals into manageable phases, set realistic timelines, and celebrate small wins. Recognising progress helps maintain momentum and shows employees their efforts are making a difference.

LEADING THROUGH CHANGE WITH STRONG LEADERSHIP AND CULTURE

Successfully navigating change requires more than strategy – it requires leadership and a culture that supports transformation. Transparent communication, employee involvement, capability building, and alignment with a constructive culture guides teams through change. Leaders who model desired behaviours and foster trust and collaboration ensure that change is embraced and sustained.

Change is inevitable, but thriving through it is a choice. By committing to these strategies, organisations can turn uncertainty into opportunity. Investing in constructive leadership and culture will ensure change is a catalyst for growth, innovation, and long-term value for both your people and the business. ■



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