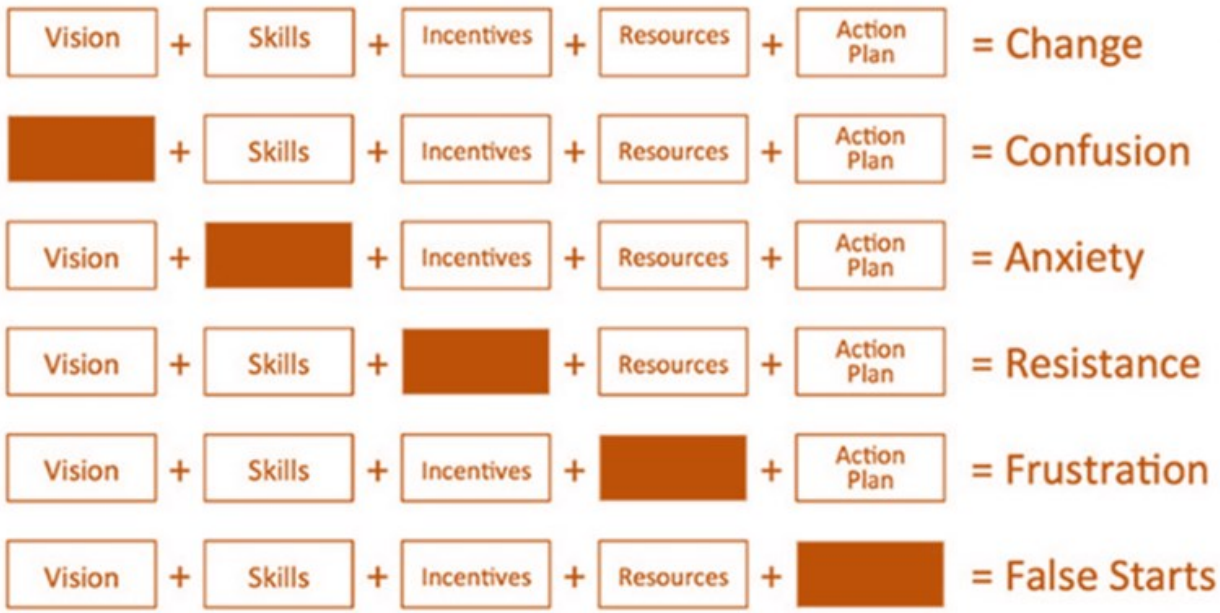
Managing Change and Leading Teams

Change is a constant! Greek philosopher Heraclitus claimed that “The only constant is change” more than 1500 years ago. In today’s world, these words are even more relevant. Change is difficult, but for leaders who want to succeed in the modern business environment, the ability to manage and lead through change is a critical skill.

Change is no longer something that occurs as a single occurrence or act. It is more of a way of seeing things and is especially important as a leadership attribute and strategy. Quite often leaders may sense what is wrong, but do not understand how to resolve or determine the root of the problem.

The Knoster Model for Managing Complex Change is a useful framework for thinking about change management. According to Knoster, there are five elements required for effective change: vision, skills, incentives, resources, and an action plan. If people leading change and teams fail to put any one of these elements in place, then the change efforts will fail and/or the team will not be working at their optimum level. This model can be a helpful way for planning as well as diagnosing what might be needed when plans go awry.



Source: Dr. Mary Lippit

More than 30 years after it was first developed, this simple formula rings true for guiding modern-day teams and leading effectively. If you want your teams to embrace your culture and persevere through the many challenges presented in workplaces, these 5 elements can serve as a helpful checklist.

This chart continues to be popular because it outlines a simple but effective way for an organisation, team, or project to assess potential problem areas and determine next steps.

Developing a formidable team culture and leading effectively will only occur if you have a clear vision, the necessary skills, motivated employees, vital resources, and a solid action plan. In other words, a robust strategy and plan.

Vision: Building a shared vision is a critical factor in managing change and leadership. The "why" of the equation, vision is integral to keeping leadership initiatives and teams on track and preventing confusion, especially during periods of rapid change and project implementation. Vision creates the big picture – needed by everyone if they are to have a sense of where change is leading them. If everyone involved is not aligned to the direction, confusion will inevitably occur. Ask yourself, "Is the intent clear and easy to understand?" Better yet, ask a few team members to explain the "why" back to you. It will quickly become clear whether further work is required.

Skills: The means to act in new ways, explore diverse ways of working, negotiating and collaborating. When teams are equipped with the right set of skills for change, anxiety remains low when new challenges arise. Even if a team lacks the right set of skills, having a plan in place to train individuals so they can develop those skills is an effective way to combat unease regarding team performance. Communication and interpersonal skills are the core of many leadership challenges. Focus here to determine if the team has been set up for success and, if not, where you can most effectively support their growth.

Incentives: Many assume that incentives are monetary, but that's not always the case. Think of this instead as core motivation. People ask, "What's in it for me - additional payments, self-esteem, sense of achievement?" For teams to truly succeed (and continue to succeed), all team members must be bought in to the concept, committed to the value it brings to the organisation, and personally motivated by a job well done. Naturally, rewards and recognition play a role in making employees feel proud of their accomplishments. Real momentum often starts with the internal motivation of a committed core group of employees who see the bigger picture and recognise the win-win outcomes.

Resources: Change cannot occur unless the proper resources (like time and tools) are given to team members to keep them on the track toward success. If a team is short-staffed or lacks the resources needed to succeed, efforts can slowly grind to a halt, resulting in frustration and doubts about the merits of the program or direction. This aspect demands dedicated resources and plenty of upfront conversations to gain stakeholder buy-in to secure the necessary support. Once you have that organisational influence, keep it by providing regular progress reports to demonstrate the ROI.

Action Plan: A shared plan of action will ensure that teams remain aligned with the original vision and resources are used effectively and efficiently. Execution of a well-designed action plan will produce the type of tangible results needed to answer the ever-present question of ROI. Any leader or project manager knows it is critical to have a clearly articulated plan with assigned roles and responsibilities tied to deadlines. For those leading a team or project, it's even more critical to be able to justify the change being requested and overcome the inherent resistance to change by connecting all action steps back to the broader vision.

Sources:
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