

Managing Change with Confidence

Change is increasingly a fact of our professional and personal lives as budget cuts, redundancy, retirement, and divorce all present huge challenges to the way we feel and behave. The ability to cope confidently with these changes in our daily lives, with great personal resilience, is what defines successful, happy people and yet so many people, understandably, find change unsettling and difficult. Many changes trigger a feeling of being out of control in your own life and throw the ability to make clear, confident choices into disarray.

‘People do not resist change – people change all the time. What people resist is having change imposed upon them’ Margaret Wheatley (1992).

The NHS is often characterised as an organisation in a state of perpetual change, with the Health and Social Care Bill 2011, cited as heralding ‘unprecedented change’, to be delivered with, to some observers, ‘unseemly haste’. David Cameron has said, repeatedly, that the NHS must change and in the face of the recent Health Service Ombudsman’s report *Care and Compassion? Report of the Health Service Ombudsman on ten investigations into NHS Care of Older People (February 2011)* attempts to refute this assertion may be deemed to be built upon shaky ground.

Against this backdrop, the human consequence of being in a state of apparent perpetual motion can be deeply unsettling and affect not only their performance at work, with a consequent knock on impact upon service delivery, but also physical and mental health. Organisational change can be experienced by some as a major stressor, with a consequent deleterious impact upon morale, health, performance at work, and sickness absenteeism.

How big a problem is this? The Health and Safety Executive in 2007 have identified work-related stress as a major cause of occupational ill health, poor productivity and human error, and that it can result in sickness absence, high staff turnover and poor performance. The resultant cost can be exacerbated if the issues are not dealt with by early intervention and if preventative strategies are not deployed.

Around 1 in 7 people say that they find their work either very or extremely stressful, with depression and anxiety being the most common stress-related complaints seen by GPs. These affect 20% of the working population of the UK. When stress leads on to sickness absence, the average length of sick leave is 30.1 days which is much higher than the average length of sick leave for work-related illness in general (21.2 days). Indeed a total of 11.4 million working days were lost due to stress, depression and anxiety in 2008/09.

Research also demonstrates the strong links between stress and physical effects such as heart disease, back pain, headaches, gastrointestinal disturbances and many minor illnesses, alongside significant psychological effects such as anxiety and depression, loss of concentration and consequent poor decision making. Once again this, in turn, will impact upon the frequency and longevity of sickness absence and a resultant increased cost incurred by the organisation.

Stress can also lead to other behaviours that can have an adverse effect on psychological and physical health and well being and thereby upon performance at work. These include social withdrawal and isolation, aggressive behaviour, alcohol and/or drug abuse, and eating disorders.

There is substantial evidence to show that by taking action to manage the causes of stress in your organisation, you can prevent or reduce the impact of these problems on your workforce and bring about business benefits as a result.

At a time when service and business continuity are of paramount importance (and when are they not?) then it behoves managers and leaders to equip themselves and their staff with the personal resilience necessary to weather, not just this latest 'storm' of change, but to develop the resilience necessary to sustain them into the future.

What is it that differentiates those who cope well with change and those who do not? Much has been written on this subject ranging from the 'guru' inspired formulae for a 'happy and successful life', through to more scholarly texts that may be hard to relate to everyday life. Distilling our way through the received wisdom, the following emerge as significant:

- ✓ Self confidence and self-esteem play a pivotal role in determining our ability to embrace change rather than quake in the face of it
- ✓ A heightened sense of internal locus of control (i.e. you are the one in charge!) is fostered through the development of enhanced influencing and negotiation skills which enable you to feel that you are the one in control of the direction of your life
- ✓ Goal setting and problem solving are both enhanced by the clarity of thought that is derived from feeling more in control
- ✓ Change can then be viewed as an opportunity to be faced, managed and ultimately embraced

In addition, as leaders and managers we need to be attuned to the characteristic personality or behavioural style of those who work for us and with whom we come into contact. In this way we will increase our chances of getting the best out of our staff, and indeed ourselves, throughout any process of organisational change, however large or small. A useful framework to guide both our understanding and our actions is one familiar to many leaders and managers within healthcare; that of Myers-Briggs (1998).

Insights into this approach can help us to understand our own response to change, that of our colleagues, and those whom we manage. That understanding can, in turn, allow us to tailor our communications and intervention in a way that optimises the chances of a positive and constructive response to change, enhancing or at least maintaining performance through a critical transition period.

This picture of personality presented by 'psychological type' was developed by Carl Jung in the early 1900's. The 'type preferences' described by Jung play a pivotal role in people's communication skills, ways of interacting with colleagues, their primary motivations at work, and their preferred work environments and 'modus operandi'. This description of personality gives us

a logical, practical and systematic way to understand the normal differences that people bring to work. Drawing upon Jung's work, Isobel Myers talks of our personality as comprising a set of preferences, that is those preferred or typical ways of behaving which characterise us as individuals.

In their leading edge work, *Understanding Type in Organisational Change* Nancy Barger and Linda Kirby (2004) explain, in detail, how the different type preferences manifest themselves within organisational change. This in turn helps us to understand how, as leaders and managers we can adapt our communication, information and management processes in order to optimise the response of individuals to change. Through this approach we can enhance individual resilience and team performance at a time when ensuring business continuity is of paramount importance.

For example, the dimension Extraversion/Introversion describes where people prefer to focus their energy and attention, how they gain mental energy, and how best they process and analyse information and make decisions.

Extraversion

People who prefer extraversion tend to require face to face communication with time to talk about what is going on. They will want:

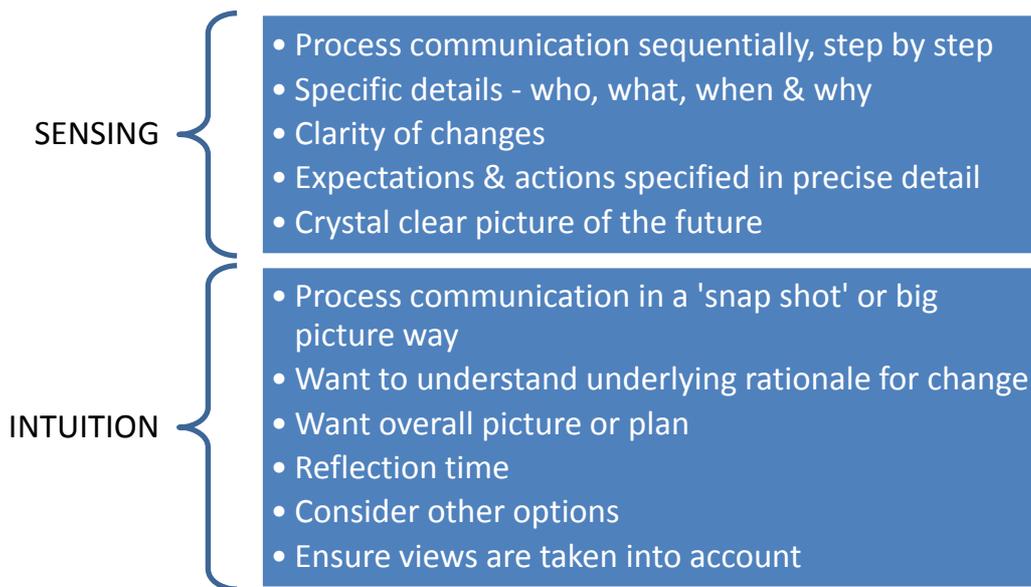
- to be paid attention to
- to have a voice
- to be heard
- to have an involvement and a real part to play in what is going on
- to see action being taken
- to see things moving on

Introversion

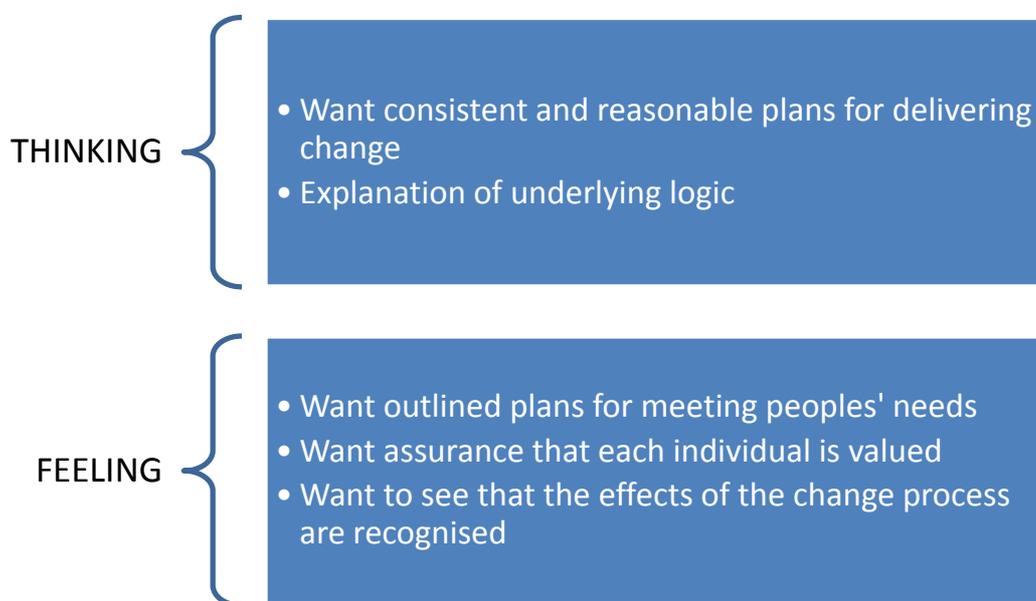
People who prefer introversion need written communication in advance of a discussion, with time alone beforehand for reflection, to digest the material and gain an understanding of what is going on. They will want:

- to be asked what they think
- to have evidence that their thoughts and concerns are being considered
- to have further time to think and reflect before taking (considered) action

The dimension 'Sensing - Intuition' is also a very helpful one in enhancing our understanding of individual responses to change, and the optimum way to engage our staff and sustain their motivation. Sensing and Intuition define two different ways in which people take in information, the kinds of information they require, and the way in which they convey information to others.



‘Thinking’ and ‘Feeling’ define two opposite ways of making decisions, with people who prefer ‘Feeling’ making their best decisions by stepping into the situation and taking an empathic view. In contrast those with ‘Thinking’ as their preferred style, will perform better if allowed to step back, and make decisions from an objective, external, perspective. It follows that, during a change process, these differences in approach lead to very different criteria for supporting or rejecting change.



People have very differing orientations to completing tasks and achieving goals. Their preferences for ‘Judging’ or ‘Perceiving’ have a huge influence upon the way in which they structure their environment and their time.



Knowledge of these differences can be pivotal in determining how well an individual will fare in the face of impending change. In addition, our experience has demonstrated to us, consistently, that directing our efforts at enhancing the confidence of people embarking upon a programme of change, will enhance their chances of viewing the change with optimism.

The evidence is clear that approaching change in a more confident, assertive manner, with robust self esteem will serve to ensure that individuals perceive opportunity rather than danger as an outcome of the change process. If we do this whilst tailoring our communication and intervention in a way that adapts to the preferred style of the people going through the change this in turn optimises the chances of ensuring performance, and thereby business continuity, are maintained.

Maggie Cork and Elaine Smith specialise in working with Managers and Directors to develop individual, team and organisational confidence in times of change.

'It is not the mountain we conquer but ourselves' Edmund Hillary



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