

A photograph of the University of Manchester building, a large, ornate stone structure with a central archway. The archway is the focal point, leading to a courtyard with trees and people. The building has multiple levels of windows, some with blue stained glass. The sky is visible above the building.

MANCHESTER
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The University of Manchester

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How to successfully communicate change – it's a two-way street

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Change is nothing new

Change is:

- Natural
- Inevitable
- Ever-present
- Guaranteed
- A process



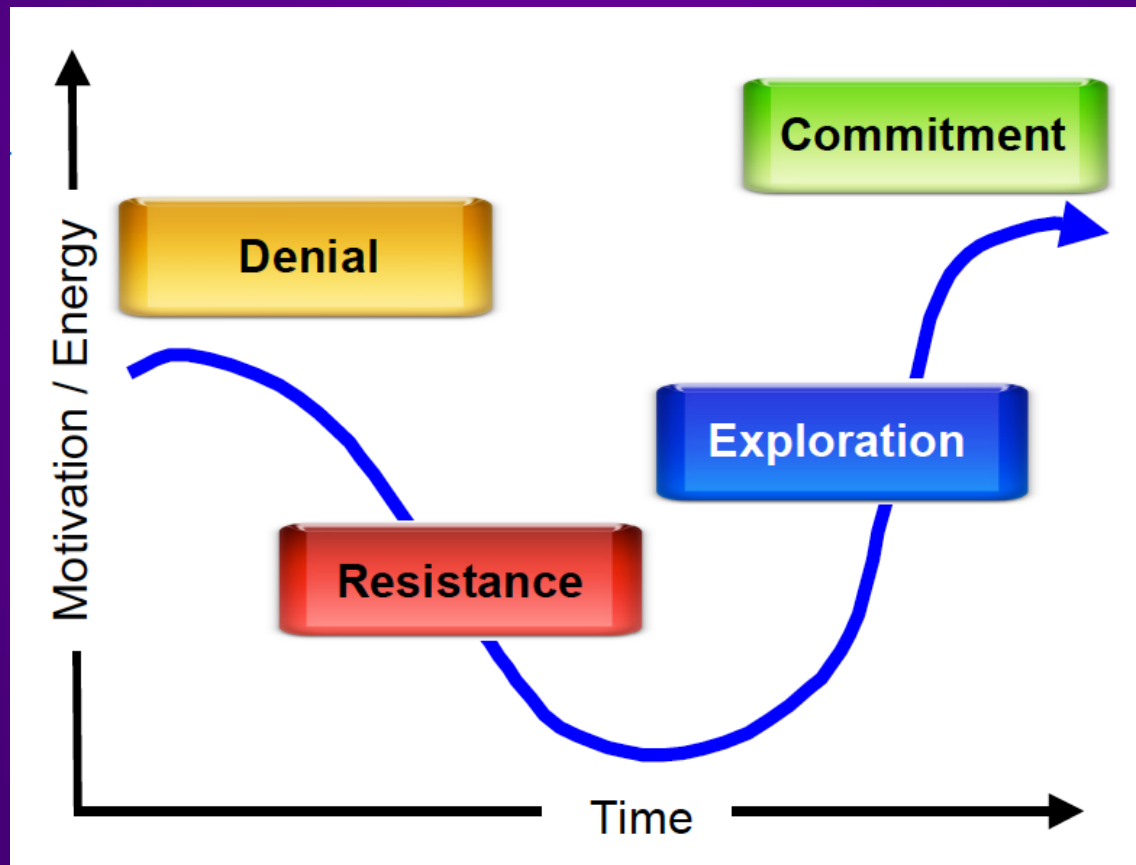
But it is gathering pace...

How people respond to change

People's resistance to change is proportional to what they feel they're losing...

- Security
- Familiarity
- Relationships
- Job
- Responsibility
- People tend **not** to resist change that they understand and / or which they know brings benefits
- They resist things that are imposed, things they don't understand and things they cannot influence

How people respond to change



The role of communication during change

- Explain **why** change is happening:
 - Ensure people understand the rationale for change
 - Talk about the benefits / consequences
 - Emphasise what's not changing
- Show people **where** they're going:
 - Map out the process of change
 - Identify and recognise key milestones; celebrate success
- Show people **how** they will get there:
 - Break it down into clear, simple steps
 - Give practical examples

Secrets of success for communicators

- Make sure there's a proper change plan in place
- Build a close working relationship with the project manager
- Establish a clear vision and objectives
- Divide the project into phases
- Confirm key milestones for each phase and tailor your communications strategy accordingly
- Identify your target audiences
- Select your channels
- Select your spokesperson/people
- Determine resources and timetable

Know your audience

Directly
affected

Stakeholders

Close
interest

Wider
community

Choose your channels

- **Face to face:** best for difficult messages; changing employee behaviour or attitude
- **Website:** quick retrieval of information and check facts
- **Q&As:** tailored information by subject/group
- **Email:** for short broadcast announcements and updates; *not* for major announcements about restructuring
- **E-bulletin:** regular updates; reminder of key milestones
- **Staff newsletter:** recognise success; reminder of what has not changed

Face to face is usually best

It allows you to:

- Articulate the end vision
- Listen to feedback
- Involve employees in the change
- Use the appropriate tone
- Gauge reactions
- Check understanding
- Correct misconceptions
- Provide reassurance

Communication do's and don'ts

What works?

- Keeping communication simple and heartfelt
- Doing your audience research before you communicate, especially how they're feeling
- Addressing, not hiding from, confusion, anger, distrust, etc.

What doesn't work?

- Under communicating - a common mistake
- Speaking as though you're only transferring information
- Fostering cynicism by not acting on your promises

Make sure it's a two-way process

Senior people might lead the organisation but people at lower levels determine whether a change programme delivers. They need to be involved.

- Set up change forums with employee representatives
- Appoint change champions
- Set up a dedicated programme email inbox to allow employees to submit questions, concerns and ideas
- Make sure you give employees lots of opportunities to air their views face to face

Monitor progress

- Did the briefings happen, how many people attended?
- What are people saying?
- What does the rumour mill say?
- Who are people listening to?
- Is there a change in behaviour?
- Do people need more support?



Why change initiatives fail

- **Unclear objectives** – the objective or outcome of a change programme needs to be clear and a proper change plan in place
- **Poor communication** – It could be difficulty delivering the tough messages or an inconsistency in the message delivered by the leadership team. Or the problem might not be with what's said but listening effectively to differing views and ideas.

Why change initiatives fail

- **Lack of performance measures** – change is usually about improvement but unless there's a clear set of measures that can let people know whether they're on or off track, that are monitored and people are held accountable, sustainable change is unlikely.
- **Underestimating emotions** – Few relish change so awareness of people's emotions can make a huge difference.
- **Lack of resources**

Other potential pitfalls

- Relying on written rather than face-to-face communication
- Confusing information dissemination with communication
- Complicating the message
- Hiding or massaging the truth
- Imposing change rather than involving people
- Underestimating people's reactions to change, or the time needed for people to absorb change
- Delaying communication until every detail is confirmed
- Communicating to affected audiences at different times

Tips for overcoming resistance

- Keep reinforcing the need for change – this change is going to happen
- Keep checking for understanding by questioning
- Allow people to voice their anger
- Keep your ear to the ground
- Consider talent retention
- Set clear expectations about performance standards
- Be empathetic, supportive, but strong
- Explain what the change ‘means for me’

Tips for successful change communications

- Ensure the structure, tone and content of communications acknowledges people's emotional and intellectual needs
- Listen – provide a range of feedback channels
- Use FAQs and keep them current
- Get people involved – make them feel they have a say

Group discussion



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