



Issues How to manage change and drive your business forward
Change Access all information and resources while on the move
Solution Mobile Broadband and outsourcing

power to you



Change is essential for every successful business. Yet, too often, organisational change is viewed merely as disruptive. Encourage people to want the change that is needed.

Everything is different today

From a cascade of new regulations to new concerns for the environment, people are facing a future rife with change. Sweeping changes in the world of communications also means people are able to access an ever increasing amount of information on the move, and are expecting to be connected to that information whenever they want and wherever they are.

All of these changes mean that businesses need to find new ways of working if they want to stay on top. They need to be ready for change and be able to adapt their business as circumstances dictate. In the future, it won't necessarily be the strongest who survive but the most flexible. The challenge facing businesses of all sizes is how to plan for change and how to organise themselves to take advantage of it.

It was the Greek philosopher, Herclitus, who first said, "Nothing endures but change." Put another way, if you think companies have had to deal with a lot of change up until now, you haven't seen anything yet.

Change and the workforce

Demographic and generational changes are already affecting how businesses operate. The new 'social media' recruits to the workforce invest less emotional time in their job, valuing interesting work over high income or job security. They also have new ideas about how they want to work, expecting flexibility from their employers, and fast connections with the outside world.

A study by the UK House of Commons Public Accounts Committee¹ found that information is 'lacking' on how long young people stay in the same job. However the feeling from employers is that they expect a certain level of 'churn' with young employees, as many have a desire to travel and achieve personal goals before they settle down into a career. As most people now move jobs five to seven times in their lifetime, the very idea of a 'career' is changing.

All these changes are fundamentally affecting the traditional relationships between employer and employee. So businesses are now adopting new working practices, from mobile working to homebased employment, to help their workforce be more effective and efficient. For example, online collaboration tools which enable people to communicate and share information faster using shared workspaces, instead of sending emails back and forth, are now being rolled out across small and large companies alike.

Companies are also changing their use of technology, moving from a 'fixed location' to a 'work anywhere' mindset. This enables them to take advantage of mobile technology to ensure that their business is done wherever their people are, rather than where they are based.

¹ House of Commons, Committee of Public Accounts Sustainable employment: supporting people to stay in work and advance Thirteenth Report of Session 2007-08, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk>

Adapting technologies can improve services to your customers. Happy customers are loyal customers.

Getting the technology right

While technology is an aspect of change, it's also an enabler; helping to encourage new, more efficient, ways of working and make life in general easier.

A growing number of organisations are adopting technologies to improve their service to customers. For example, as part of its mission to become a "museum without walls", the California Museum² launched an online "teachers' lounge" where educators can exchange ideas on innovative lesson plans and new programmes.

The technologies that are critical for successful change are those that affect how people communicate. The secret is to find a technology that your employees are comfortable with. One that is natural to your way of working. For one company, a wiki (a collaborative online reference document) might prove to be a great way to keep employees in the loop about what's going on. For another, face-to-face meetings may be the most effective way.

Put simply, before implementing any new technology, businesses need to think about the output not the input. Asking themselves, 'Will my customers and employees benefit from this technology change or are we doing it because it's new or cool?' For example, rolling out mobile email to a wider group of people may be actually more useful to the company than starting a blog.

² California museum: p.16, Accenture report, "Web 2.0 and the Next Generation of Public Service" (available on www.accenture.com)

You can't rush change, but you can make your business more open to it. Then as time goes by, you're at the forefront of technology and not playing catch-up.

Finding your vision

Involve everyone

It's no business secret that staff resist change if they feel it's imposed on them. So, put a communication plan in place that tells all your people what's going on. Ask for all their feedback and how it can be improved to service all their needs. Not only will it encourage everyone to use the new technology for all its benefits, but you may just learn and discover something that you never thought the technology could do.

"Given the constant need to navigate rapid change, it is imperative that organisations introduce systems to help their entire workforce to participate in and adapt to change," says Deborah Schroeder-Saulnier, Senior Vice President of global solutions at Right Management, an arm of the global recruitment firm Manpower³.

There's no rush

Don't rush change. Create a clear set of goals and don't try to achieve too much in one go. Some goals will take longer to achieve than others, but with the right team driving the initiative, good communication and useful feedback and buy-in from everyone, you'll make sure you get there on solid foundations.

As part of that team you'll need a good, strong leader – someone that can convey the vision and communicate it to everyone clearly and concisely. So everyone knows, 'that's where we're going, let's make it a journey to remember'.

Build on flexibility

As part of their vision for change, many businesses are looking to outsource non-critical parts of their business. Traditionally the weapon of large organisations, companies of all sizes are seeing outsourcing as a way to create the agility they need to respond to business changes as they occur.

There are IT solutions available for small businesses. These can be fully managed by a service provider so that you get the latest telecoms solutions for your business in one package and all IT infrastructure, updates, and more, are managed by the provider on your behalf. This means that you won't need to invest in expensive hardware and technology; you can add users easily and you just pay for what you need, helping you to quickly respond to change.

As well as the business benefits, outsourcing means you stay at the forefront of technology. After all, that's what you're paying other people for isn't it?

³ Press release from Right Management, an arm of the employment services firm Manpower (<http://www.right.com>)

The key to dealing with change is embracing it. See it as an opportunity to refresh your thinking and set new challenges and goals.

Does it work in the real world?

Having flexible technology can give you a significant head start when trying to implement change, but putting in place cutting-edge technology that doesn't address 'the human factor' can limit its effectiveness. Even the best technology is no good if your people can't or won't use it.

Even external factors can have an impact for businesses that are not nimble enough. For example, a study of the current global financial crisis found that many corporations suffered because their management expected their relationships with banks to remain unchanged. In fact, the crisis drove many banks to behave more opportunistically – cancelling credit or increasing collateral requirements – which led to a number of bankruptcies.

For those organisations that do adapt to change it's a different story. For example, Wal-Mart is now a leader in corporate sustainability due in large measure to tough attacks from critics on the company's environmental impact.

For any business, the first key to dealing with change is to welcome it. See it as an opportunity to refresh thinking, set new challenges and goals, and give talented people in your business new opportunities.

Embracing opportunities

External factors will always be something you can't control. Changes in the way that people want to work, climate change, uncertain economic times, etc all have an impact and also drive businesses to make changes they may not have done otherwise. Likewise, regulatory changes can make business more difficult. For example, the UK government's Carbon Reduction Commitment is expected to affect some 20,000 organisations when it takes effect in April of 2010. A recent survey, however, found that only four in ten businesses are even aware of the coming regulatory requirements – and 60 per cent of those businesses aren't doing anything to prepare⁴.

All these problems never outweigh the benefits of increased business agility and effectiveness that can result from the ability to quickly respond to business challenges as and when they occur.

To find out how your business can gain from better communications, visit: www.vodafone.com and go to our business section or contact your account manager today.

⁴ UK firms disclosing more on carbon emissions, could do better, Greenbang.com 8 October 2009 <http://www.greenbang.com>

