

# Gain With Less Pain

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We all know that the pace of change in business and technology is faster than the pace at which organisational behaviour and culture can cope. What steps can today's industry leaders take to reduce the level of pain?

We find four areas of change management are frequently underestimated and overlooked:

## 1) Enrolment and Engagement

Very often it is only the people at the top levels of the organisation who truly understand **why** change is necessary; and there is no robust process to communicate that change across the organisation in the different functional, geographical or cultural contexts. Merely 'declaring' a change without establishing an enrolment process will not work – because people in matrix management structures, multi-functional teams and flatter organisations are more likely to respond if they feel they have 'bought' into an idea versus being 'sold' one.

This approach to change may take time at first; but with a robust enrolment process, and change leadership, the benefits of reduced resistance to change – be it merger, acquisition or any other change process – are significant. Organisations can then focus on how and what to do without being held back by the 'why'.

## 2) Welcoming Diversity

New skills and competencies are required – throughout the organisation – to introduce change successfully. 'Technical' competency and experience are important, but not enough. New recruits should be selected on the basis of their behavioural profiles as well, especially in areas such as managing uncertainty, living in ambiguity, living in the 'gap'. Existing employees with strength in these areas should be developed and considered for promotion to more important roles in the company. Creative rather than conformance thinking needs to be welcomed. And the temptation to align new thinking to the existing culture needs to be resisted. Reward systems and performance appraisals also need to be aligned to these values.

## 3) Aligning Operational Processes to

### Longer-term Direction

Although some events are totally unpredictable, it is remarkable how often a reaction to change becomes chaotic and expensive because of weak planning processes and a disconnect between strategic direction and operational (short-term) activities. With effective integrated business management processes in place, the top levels of organisations can make decisions fast based on longer-term assumptions; they can minimise the costs and disruption of change and above all keep short-term goals aligned with longer-term targets.

## 4) Leadership Style

The style of leadership required for successful change tends to be more motivational, participative and engaging (i.e. spending more time with your people on the 'why'). So even more speed is needed when it comes to the 'what' and 'how'. Effective change leaders actually use speed (short-term targets) to force change. An 'adapt or go' approach may be necessary to allow an early identification of those that will or won't make it and also start a process of aligning new behaviours and new competencies to different expectations.

Change is a normal state of existence, in business as elsewhere. The constant external pressures in today's environment – technological, geopolitical, from globalisation or competition – are not going to go away. The organisations most likely to survive in the long-term are those that are most capable of change – that have taken steps to instil new leadership priorities and behaviours, welcome and reward diverse competencies, align operations much more closely with strategy, and encourage a leadership style that fosters participation, focus and accountability.