Managing Change
Workshop Guide

Objectives

Participants will be able to
1. Identify their own perspective toward change;
2. Understand characteristics and stages of change;
3. Learn leadership strategies for dealing with change in groups or organizations.

Materials Needed

- Flipchart & Markers
- Copies of the following materials for each participant:
  “Leadership Change Strategies”
  “Reflection on Change and Application to My Life”

Workshop Outline

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Note: Instructions to conduct this workshop are given in italics print. The “script” for the workshop facilitator is given in regular type.

Icebreaker – 15 Minutes – “Rotating Circles”

Break the group into two groups of equal size. Ask one of the groups to form a circle, stand shoulder to shoulder, and face outwards. This group will be called the “Inner Circle.” Ask the remaining people to form another circle outside the Inner Circle. This group will be called the “Outer Circle.” In other words, people will be standing face-to-face with a partner.

Give the following directions to the group, and ask the following questions.

• People in the Inner Circle, speak to your partners; Outer Circle partners, listen. Question for the Inner Circle: Identify a change that you have recently experienced in your personal, social, or school life. Remember, people in the Inner Circle speak; people in the Outer Circle listen. You have 60 seconds to respond.

• People in the Inner Circle, move two people to your right. Now, Outer Circle people, it’s your turn to speak, and Inner Circle people, listen. Same question for the Outer Circle: Identify a change that you have recently experienced in your personal, social, or school life.

• Outer Circle, move one person to your right. Inner Circle people, respond, and Outer Circle people, listen. Respond to the following question: In general, how well do you think you respond to change? You have 60 seconds.

• Inner Circle, move three people to your right. Outer Circle, now you respond to the same question while Inner Circle people listen. In general, how well do you think you respond to change? You have 60 seconds.

• Outer Circle, move three people to your right. Inner Circle people speak, and Outer Circle people listen. Why do you think it is important to develop skills in managing change? You have 60 seconds.

• Inner Circle, move one person to the right. Outer Circle people speak, and Inner Circle people listen. What skills do you think are important in dealing with change? You have 60 seconds.

• Both circles, move until you find your original partner. What are the key skills leaders need to manage change? Both partners speak. You have two minutes.

Introduction – 10 Minutes

Let’s discuss some of the questions you were asked in this opening activity.

What are some of the types of changes you identified? List the responses on flipchart paper.

How well do you deal with change and why or why not? Bring out various feelings and behaviors from their responses.

Why is it important to develop skills to deal with change? List the responses on flipchart paper.

What are some of the key skills leaders need in order to manage change? List the responses on flipchart paper.

Change is occurring in most all spheres of our lives—family, school, work—and at a very fast pace. Technology has driven many of the changes we experience, but there are other types of changes, too. Can you give some examples of changes in our world?

Allow people time to respond. Some common responses might be globalization, nanotechnology, and the economy. As people give responses, draw out how these changes affect people.
These changes affect each of us as individuals, and changes affect the groups and organizations to which we belong. Leadership is essential if organizations are to be able to function in today’s rapidly changing world. Joseph Rost, author of *Leadership for the Twenty-First Century*, defined leadership this way: “Leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes and outcomes that reflect their shared purposes” (1991 p. 102). Initiating and managing change is fundamental to the work of leaders.

During this session, we are going to talk about leadership strategies to deal with change in our groups and organizations, but first we’re going to start by understanding our own perspectives on change, characteristics of change, and the stages of change.

**Topic Discussion – 20 Minutes**

When you hear the word “change,” what thoughts or feelings come to mind? List these on a flipchart. Some words will be negative; some will be positive. Link their responses to comments made in the Icebreaker Activity.

There are basically two ways to respond to major changes—proactively or reactively. When people are proactive, they plan for change, are open to new or multiple ways of doing things, and see opportunities. When people are reactive, they let change happen, and then they respond or adapt to it. They may see change as a loss or a threat of losing something important to them.

A person may have an overall orientation toward change, meaning that he or she most often responds in a certain way. But it is also true that, depending upon the importance of a specific change, a person could react differently than he or she usually does. For instance, a person may usually respond to change in a fairly positive and proactive way. But the same person could experience a huge sense of loss if he or she lost a job that was very important to him or her.

Whether we see change as an opportunity and respond proactively, or as a loss and respond reactively, depends upon a number of things:

- Whether it is a change we have made or is one imposed on us
- The importance of the change to us
- How many changes are occurring at the same time
- How fast the change is occurring
- How much involvement or control we feel have over the change
- How we view the change in terms of our general attitude to change
- How a person views change influences how he or she will communicate, make decisions, and solve problems around that change. It also affects how quickly a person will transition through the stages of change.

**Stages of Change**

Change is a dynamic process. In other words, as we experience a significant change, we experience different feelings and undertake different actions at various points in time in the process. William Bridges, an author who has written several books about change, identifies three stages of change: Ending, the Neutral Zone, and New Beginning.

The Ending Stage is actually the beginning of the transition. This stage marks the end of something, such as giving up bad habits like smoking, death of a close friend, divorcing parents, a break up with girlfriend or boyfriend, or a move to another city. Some of these changes may be a personal choice; others are not. In each of these examples, however, something is given up—an existing pattern of behavior ends.
This stage may cause a person to be in denial that the change is happening, and he or she may try to resist it.

The bridge between the Ending and New Beginning stages is the Neutral Zone. Typically, a struggle occurs within this stage. Common feelings are anger, disbelief, resentment, mourning, and depression. The Neutral Zone is a time to talk with others in order to process feelings. During this stage, these feelings give way to exploring other options, gathering information about possibilities, and setting new goals.

The New Beginning phase is a stage where new options are realized and new goals are met. New relationships are established, and new or different ways of using time, money, or other resources are developed. Gradually, different patterns of behavior develop.

**Dealing More Effectively with Change**

What can a person do to be more effective in dealing with change? *List responses on flipchart paper. Summarize with the following points.*

- Confide in your friends or other people you trust to respect your confidences. Talk about your feelings and what you’re experiencing. Trusting relationships during times of change are critical.
- Recognize the importance of the neutral zone and that it is a time for learning and growth. It will end in time, and you will be able to move forward.
- Remain positive. Develop the ability to view life as challenging, dynamic, and filled with opportunities. Appreciate the dangers and threats inherent in change, but do not become overwhelmed by them. If necessary, “compartmentalize” the stress caused by disruptions to prevent it from affecting other areas of your life. Be resilient.
- Stay focused on your goals. As soon as possible, determine where you are headed, and set goals so that barriers along the way do not become insurmountable.
- Remain flexible so that you are open to different options when faced with uncertainty.
- Set priorities, and be as organized as possible. This is a way to deal with high levels of ambiguity.
- Be proactive. Work with change rather than defend against it. Look for opportunities, develop a vision of a desired outcome, and plan on how to get there.

In summary, how we deal with change is, in large part, a function of our comfort with change and our ability to learn new things.

**Managing Change in Organizations**

Let’s talk now about how to deal with change in an organization. For example, maybe your organization is faced with financial issues due to a new policy imposed by the school’s administration, or your student organization’s office has to be moved because the school needs to use the space for another purpose. As leaders work with others to deal with changes in an organization, there are a number of assumptions that the leadership team should address.

- Assume that, in general, people do not like change because it is unpredictable and that they want to keep things as they are, to stay within what they know.
- Assume that people need time to think about the change and adjust to it. Patience and persistence are critical attributes of successful organizational change.
- Don’t assume that your version of the change is the one that should or could be implemented. Rather, assume that successful implementation consists of frequent communication and interaction with others involved in the change.
• Assume that there will be disagreement and conflict throughout the change process. Again, frequent communication and the chance to discuss opportunities and consequences of various options are critical. It is important to work through the issues and to deal with conflict as it arises.

• Assume that people who will be affected by the changes want to have input into the change process—to have their voices heard, to express their concerns, to have choices, to explore the options, to answer questions. Involving people in the change process and communicating frequently are essential.

• Assume there will be many unplanned, unexpected situations throughout the change process. Change is often a process of three steps forward and one back. There are many unknowns and a lot of ambiguity throughout the change process. Again, this is part of leadership in today’s reality.

**Activity – 10 Minutes – Leadership Change Strategies**

Let’s identify specific strategies that leaders can use to assist an organization through a change process.

*Hand out the “Leadership Change Strategies” activity sheet. Break the group into small discussion groups of five people. Identify someone to be a group facilitator and to record the group’s discussion and someone to report back to the total group. Give them about 10 minutes for discussion.*

**Discussion – 10 Minutes**

What were some of the leadership strategies that you discussed? *Ask each small group to report back.* Some strategies the groups might identify are:

• Create a sense of purpose. Explain why the change is necessary.
• Create a vision of the long-term outcomes. This provides a sense of direction.
• Identify the opportunities.
• Identify the process that will be used to make the change. Be “transparent.”
• Involve people in meaningful ways; draw upon people for their diverse skills, knowledge, ideas, and experiences.
• Help people to understand their role in the change process.
• Help people to understand possible impacts of the change—positive and negative.
• Manage conflict as it arises.
• Communicate frequently; communicate in multiple ways; communicate directly and honestly.

**Reflection, Application, & Summary – 10 Minutes**

*Hand out the “Reflection on Change and Application to My Life” activity sheet. Give participants about five minutes to reflect quietly on the questions asked. At the end, ask if anyone would like to share some thoughts.*

One of the key attributes of leadership is the ability to deal with change. Leaders initiate change and lead groups and organizations through necessary changes. First, however, it is important that leaders understand their personal responses to change. In today’s reality, it is important that leaders develop the capacity for change and that they be open to learning. As leaders work with others through complex, ambiguous, and challenging situations, it is important to have skills to build relationships, develop a vision and goals leading toward desired outcomes, guide an inclusive and open process of change, and communicate effectively within the organization.
References


Leadership Change Strategies

What can leaders do to help members of a group or organization make necessary changes? What are some important leadership strategies?

At your table, identify at least five specific things leaders can do. Write your individual strategies here, and transfer the strategies on which you all agree to the flipchart. Be prepared to report to the larger group.
Reflection on Change and Application to My Life

Instructions: In quiet reflection, go back to the major change that you identified earlier in the Icebreaker Activity.

What enabled you to deal well with this change?

Looking back, could you have dealt with the change in better ways? If so, how?

What are your strengths in dealing with change?

What is a skill you would like to improve/develop?

What is one concept that you learned today that you could apply to your personal life or to an organization?

Other thoughts or reflections:
About Leadership in Action

Leadership in Action is a multi-state leadership development program for college-age students. It was funded in part by an USDA/CSREES HEP Challenge Grant, 2005-2009 to the University of Illinois, Purdue University, and the University of Wisconsin – Madison. Undergraduate students from those universities participated in a 21-month program during which the workshop modules were developed, used during the two cohort programs, reviewed, and revised.

We intend that students who have been trained in conducting effective workshops use these materials for leadership workshops with various student organizations. The materials can be used separately for individual workshop sessions, in any combination for a short-term program, or in their entirety for a long-term program.

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