

How to Coach Employees Through Change

To help clients manage change, consultants need a systematic method. This guide outlines the stages of change employees must go through to resolve ambivalence and alter their behavior. By utilizing this model, management can provide the necessary support to help individuals find their own motivation for change. The six stages include Precontemplation, Contemplation, Determination, Action, Maintenance, and Recycling. Effective coaching can make the change process more comfortable and efficient by providing employees with the resources they need at the right time.

Introduction

Changes in our work environment are happening faster than ever. Employees are facing a variety of training programs such as diversity training, TQM training, team building, and computer and skill training for new jobs. Buzzwords like quality, empowerment, work teams, reengineering, and the learning organization are leaving employees feeling overwhelmed and stressed. They feel that these ideas are just excuses to justify more work for less pay. However, change is necessary for companies to survive in a global economy. We need a systematic approach to help employees cope with the realities of the workplace today.

The Change Cycle

A model of motivation for change, used and researched in psychotherapy, can be adapted for use in organizations. The Change Cycle, a six-stage model developed by psychologists, has been used successfully with thousands of changers in multiple countries. When provided with support and readiness identification, changers can maintain change over time. The model can be used in organizations to help employees cope with workplace changes. This guide will describe the six stages of change and typical statements associated with each stage. Interventions for coaches to help clients progress to the next stage will also be discussed. Identifying the stage of the client is crucial in using the Change Cycle model. Understanding each stage and the person's needs is essential.

Identifying the Phases

- **Stage One - Unawareness of the Need for Change:** In the Precontemplation stage, individuals deny or ignore the need for change despite rumors or information floating about. They may make statements such as "They can't make me learn that program" or "We will never adopt TQM like other companies". This stage is characterized by denial or unawareness of the need for change.
- **Stage Two - Consideration of Change:** The Contemplation stage is entered when individuals begin to consider the information or rumors about the need for change. They may say things like "Perhaps I'll have to take a class" or "Our company will have to change its process". In this stage, commitment to change increases, and ambivalence about change decreases until a decision is made.

- **Stage Three - Decision and Planning:** The third stage is Determination, where individuals decide to change and begin to make plans and envision the future. This involves time management strategies, scheduling, and training to prepare for the change.
- **Stage Four - Implementation:** Action is the next stage in which the individual is actually performing, practicing, or executing the change. This stage involves using the new program, forming new teams, or implementing a new marketing plan.
- **Stage Five - Integration of Change:** Maintenance is needed after the Action stage, where individuals may need to gain new skills and manage old habits that may creep back. This step is crucial to make the change feel comfortable and natural.
- **Stage Six - Evaluation and Continuous Improvement:** Finally, in the Recycling stage, individuals may relapse or fall back into old habits due to inadequate support, training, or implementation. It is important to go through the six stages in succession and take time and commitment to achieve real change.

Coaching Motivation for Change

In order to effectively support individuals through the Change Cycle, coaches require training to identify each stage and provide the appropriate interventions. Active listening, problem solving, and effective communication skills can enhance the process. This article presents a brief overview of the interventions required at each stage, which can be provided by trained coaches, change groups, or coworkers.

- **Precontemplation**
The first stage of the Change Cycle is precontemplation, during which the individual may not even be aware of the need for change or may be in denial. Direct insistence on change is likely to invite resistance, so information must be presented in a matter-of-fact way to help the person see the need for change. It is important to increase trust and approach the need for change in a way that allows the individual to exercise control over the process and recognize that they have a choice.
- **Contemplation**
As recognition begins to emerge of the need for change, individuals move into the contemplation stage, during which they require someone to listen to their ambivalence and reinforce their motivation. It is important to listen sincerely to their concerns and work with them to identify the pros and cons of the new and old ways.
- **Determination**
In the determination stage, people begin to think about the future and envision what it may look like. It is important to listen and support them without telling them what to do. Letting them construct their plans and make their own choices can be more helpful and empowering. Visualization, problem-solving, and addressing potential roadblocks can help individuals identify and resolve challenges that may arise during the change.

- **Action**

The action phase refers to the stage in a project or plan when implementation takes place. This is the time when all the planning and preparation come into play, and the actual work is carried out. If the previous stages, such as the planning and preparation, were done thoroughly and thoughtfully, there is usually no need for extensive support during the action phase. The team or individuals involved should be equipped with the necessary resources and information to carry out their tasks effectively. However, occasional check-ins and problem-solving discussions may be needed to ensure things are progressing as expected and to address any issues that arise, ensuring a successful outcome.

- **Maintenance**

Maintenance is crucial even if things have been going smoothly for a while. Changing behavior takes time, and nurturing a new behavior is necessary for success. Soft skills training can help individuals cope with current and future changes. Communication, problem solving, and interpersonal skills can empower people and provide new ways to manage their lives. Soft skills are crucial for coping with the inevitable changes that will arise.

- **Recycling**

Finally, it is important to recognize that recycling, or a relapse, may occur. This is not cause for despair but an opportunity to examine commitment, resolve ambivalence, and work through the Cycle of Change once again.

Implementing sustainable habits is not a linear process and may involve relapses back into old habits. However, relapses can be seen as an opportunity to examine our level of commitment and identify factors leading to the relapse in order to make adjustments. Recognizing the Cycle of Change, which includes stages such as pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance, and relapse, can help us approach sustainability goals with patience and resilience. By viewing relapses as a natural part of the process, we can cultivate a self-accepting mindset that ultimately supports long-term success.

Applying the Change Cycle to Organizations

The Change Cycle can also be applied to organizations as a whole, with different departments and individuals in different stages of the Cycle. It is important to recognize and address the stage of change that individuals are in and provide the necessary support to help them discover their own motivation for change. This approach emphasizes the level of the individual rather than the implementation of the organization, which is more effective and less likely to result in resistance.

Summary

Organizations experience constant changes, some intentional and some accidental. These changes include reengineering, process modifications, and cultural and technological changes. A six-step Cycle of Change, originally used by therapists to help individuals with addictive behaviors, can be applied to organizations to ease stress, prevent costly mistakes, and motivate employees. It is more effective and less expensive to provide employees with what they need rather than forcing new systems, structures, and technologies on them, leaving them exhausted and stressed.