

Graham, Clive & Bowles, Marcus (1994), *Five theories of change*, Chapter 5 Extract, *Workbook on Change Management*, DIRETFE & Centre for Working Futures NSW: Sydney.

7.1 Five theories of change

To communicate change successfully, managers will also find value in the many change theories iterated in management texts. There is no one strategy that can guarantee success. Like all human endeavour, the correct change strategy is what works for the individuals involved in change. While there are many different approaches to change, we can guide our study by examining five basic theories of change:

- **Rational Theory**
- **Behavioural Theory**
- **Achievement Theory**
- **Positional Theory**
- **Experiential Theory**

In the following sections we shall examine the implications of these theories to the management communication of change.

7.2 The Rational Approach

The underlying assumption of rational theory is that our beliefs determine how we behave. Therefore, in communicating change to an employee, rational theorists advocate that the manager should focus on the belief system of the employee because beliefs affect how the employee behaves. This theory is consistent with the thesis of symbolic convergence in which the beliefs and values of employees gradually align with corporate beliefs and values. The theory has meaning only when the manager can find a way for employees to adopt new (changed) beliefs.

7.2.1.1 Focus on personal meaning

Some theorists argue that people adopt behaviour when they discover personal meaning in that behaviour (Combs, et al 1971:145). Personal meaning includes the images we hold in our minds about persons, objects and events. Personal meanings are expressed in the way we talk about things. For example:

Individuals respond to language in the form of instructions, commands, and rules that govern behaviour. However, there are more subtle means, such as self-verbalizations, through which language influences behaviour (Craighead, Kazdin & Mahoney, 1976:145).

The notion that reality is formed according to how we internalise our language about people, objects and events is explained as follows:

Unlike lower animals, people tell themselves various sane and crazy things. Their beliefs, attitudes, opinions, and philosophies largely take the form of internalized sentences of self-

talk. Consequently, one of the most powerful and elegant modalities they can use to change themselves... consists of their clearly seeing, understanding, disputing, altering, and acting against their internal verbalizations (Ellis & Harper, 1975: x).

If the manager appeals to the inner self-verbalisations of employees, then, supposedly the manager can effect changed behaviours in employees.

7.2.1.2 Changing behaviour through rational-emotive training

To communicate effectively in this pursuit, Ellis and Harper (1975) propose that management implement rational-emotive training (RET). Under RET, individuals follow a six-step change process:

1. Identify appropriate behaviour and the impediments to its attainment
2. Accept responsibility for past behaviours and their implications for the future
3. Identify long-term prices paid for continuing a behaviour
4. Recognise every individual makes inner choices
5. Face fears about new behaviours
6. Test these fears against reality

One serious drawback of this approach is that it is difficult to implement. Training every individual is lengthy and costly and, in a climate of on-going change, almost impossible. We include it here because it does provide a good foundation for understanding the interpersonal dimensions of change. Its emphasis on the need to address the belief system of employees is particularly important.

7.3 The Behavioural Approach

Behavioural theory recognises that people internalise thought but advocate that only the observable outcomes of those thoughts, that is, behaviour, can be the focus of management attention. The premise of behavioural theory is that changes in behaviour produce changes in thoughts and attitudes.

Behavioural theory is founded on the psychological principle of reinforcement. Reinforcement assumes that rewarded behaviour will be continued and that actions preceding reinforcement will be associated with the reward so that a chain of behaviours can be built associated with a final reward:

'Effective self-management primarily involves the re-arrangement of behavioural consequences so that desired behaviour is immediately reinforced (Williams & Long, 1975:22).

7.3.1.1 Change via a contingency approach

Change can be effected by offering 'carrots' for good behaviour. For this approach to work, rewards must always be contingent upon the performance of a desired behaviour. One contingency approach to changing behaviour involves the following five steps:

- Step 1 Identify a goal that is important to the individual, measurable in behavioural terms, is readily attainable, and can be positively stated.
- Step 2 Record the frequency and context of a behaviour that must be made obsolete by counting the number of times it occurs, the duration of its occurrence and the undesirable outcomes.

Reading Extract for BSXFMI410A

- Step 3 Change the situation in which the behaviour occurs by providing new situations.
- Step 4 Arrange reinforcement or punishment of consequences by requiring new behaviour to be exhibited before reinforcement.
- Step 5 Focus on and verbalise the contingencies such as the physical and monetary factors to be attained by changing behaviour.

The contingency approach is the process for change most often used by management: employees are paid to perform or dismissed. However, in reality most workplaces employ staff who work only some of the time because their internalised belief system perceives no value in the work they undertake. Therefore, the contingency approach works only up to a point. Like most change theories, the behavioural approach depends upon extensive training which is usually accomplished successfully by the individual during the training period but not applied consistently on the job.

7.3.1.2 Change via modelling

Some behavioural theorists argue that nearly all learning results from direct experiences acquired vicariously through the observation of another person's behaviour: that is, through modelling. They suggest that a person can learn intricate response patterns merely by observing the response patterns of appropriate models. (Bandura, 1969:118). For example:

Behaviour modelling is implemented best through the preparation of a series of video tapes that participants can view, identify with the situations, rehearse the modified behaviour under the coaching of a trainer, and transfer the skills back to their job (Rosenbaum, 1979:40).

A behavioural modelling process involves 7 steps:

- Step 1 Define the problems in terms of lack of improvement since the previous discussions.
- Step 2 Ask for, and actively listen to, the employee's reasons for the continued behaviour.
- Step 3 If disciplinary action is called for, indicate what action you must take and why.
- Step 4 Agree on specific actions to be taken for solving the problems.
- Step 5 Assure the employee of your interest in helping him/her to succeed and express continued confidence in the employee.
- Step 6 Set a follow-up date.
- Step 7 Positively reinforce any behaviour change in the desired direction (Rosenbaum, 1979:40-44).

The behavioural notion of communicating change can be attained through the counselling interview and performance measures. When these are connected to contingencies such as remuneration and promotion/demotion, there is a powerful incentive to employees to change. However, again it must be noted that the belief system of the employee may need to be addressed to promote meaningful change.

7.4 The Achievement Approach

Achievement theory argues that the changed behaviour of an individual occurs because that individual wants to succeed. This theory is premised on motivation theory which channels an individual's drive and energy towards recognition, rewards and self-esteem (that is, success).

7.4.1.1 Some basic assumptions about people

Underlying achievement theory are some basic assumptions about people. These include:

- 1 People like work that involves moderate challenges. If it is too easy they get bored, if it is too hard they fail.
- 2 People like to have concrete feedback on whether they have succeeded or not. If they cannot tell when they are achieving they tend to dislike the task.
- 3 People like to be personally responsible for working on a task. Working in committee involves a lack of responsibility.
- 4 People are restless, tend to be innovative and travel a lot; they search for more challenging tasks (McClelland, et al, 1953:55-65).

7.4.1.2 Key principles about motivation and change

To understand why many people do not apparently exhibit motivated behaviour, it is necessary to subscribe to a number of principles associated with achievement theory. For example (Pace & Faules, 1989:289-290):

1 **Change is a result of achieving psychological success.**

This is reinforced by achievement theorists who argue that 'by representing foreseeable outcome symbolically, future consequences can be converted into current motivators and regulators of behaviour' (Bandura & Cervone, 1983:1017). This involves techniques of visualisation of success such as are found in popular management texts derived from the works of Claude M Bristol and other visualisation proponents.

It also implies that the psychological success of one individual might be different from another individual. People often occupy work roles to which they are psychologically unsuited and have no real interest. The implication for the manager is to select people who 'fit' the work role.

2 **Inadequate performance or achievement is a result of low aspiration**

As one achievement theorist notes, 'Clearly our expectancies do determine our behaviour, and they do so by not only telling us what we think is going to happen but by telling us how much we are going to like or dislike what is going to happen' (Deese, 1967:128). The role for management, then, is to communicate change by appealing to the 'like' rather than the 'dislike' of what is going to happen. This requires persuasion that appeals to the needs of employees. By appealing to the security, recognition, independent capability, affiliation and purpose of employees, the manager may raise the aspirations of individuals to change.

3 Change occurs when our attention is persistently focused on a goal

Techniques, such as stating positive affirmations, assist in focusing on goals. A browse through the motivation shelf of any bookshop reveals numerous titles about the power of belief, the power of suggestion, positive thinking, and so forth. Many managers read these for themselves but never think of applying some of the contents to their management of others. Most managers fail to communicate the goal or purpose of change in meaningful terms to employees. Communicating goals and focusing on them underpins achievement theory.

4 Achievement is enhanced through group support

Affiliation is a prime incentive. People feel reassured when they perform consistently with others. The idea here involves team effort rather than individual effort. Because people tend to 'follow the band', there is a psychological basis for achieving group change more readily than changing every individual separately. Change may be more effectively communicated in small groups (teams) than individually or in large groups.

5 With the realisation that one is achieving, efforts intensify and more energy is devoted to accomplishing the goal

Researchers observe that people tend to work harder when they are dissatisfied with their performance, provided they think attaining the goal is important (Bandura & Cervone, 1983:1017). However, this may be the result of team pressure as much as individual motivation. On the other hand, sight of a goal obtained spurs effort and provides a feeling of success.

Achievement theory has a lot to offer leaders. It combines assumptions about the belief system of employees with some behavioural strategies and provides managers with a basis for leading purposeful change.

7.5 The Positional Approach

According to positional theory, a person's behaviour is determined by the role he/she occupies. Each role provides a repertoire of behavioural characteristics with a set of expectations, standards, norms, and concepts about how to behave in a social position. Positional theory also argues that the behaviour of individuals is shaped by the expectations and demands of others as well as their own perception of the characteristics one should exhibit in a role. People learn and develop new behaviours by changing their attitude relevant to their own roles and the roles that surround them.

Positional theory has a lot in common with attitudinal theories. Changing attitudes involves changing learned beliefs. Attitudes include prejudices, convictions and entrenched surmises that exist contrary to rational explanation. Managers hold convictions about employees which are often difficult to change despite evidence to the contrary (as many job selection panels demonstrate).

7.5.1.1 Change via role negotiation

Positional theorists advocate that changing role perception requires negotiation. They define role negotiation as:

[c]hanging by means of negotiation with other interested parties the role which an individual or group performs in an organization' (Harrison, 1972:85).

The premise of role negotiation is that people will change their role in a given task only by communicating co-operatively with others involved in accomplishing the same task. For this to happen,

the manager must communicate a desired goal and the tasks required to achieve it; the employees and the manager negotiate their roles in accomplishing the tasks. Negotiations culminate in a contract of obligations.

7.5.1.2 Usefulness of negotiations

Negotiations shift the focus from what one does (and always has done) to what one will do to make something happen. Roles are allocated via a process of 'give and take'.

The communicative process for negotiations is essentially the same as that outlined in Module 6. Research indicates that role negotiation exposes which organisational members have real power and influence. It can also expose those who bluff and those who operate behind the scenes (Hill, 1983: 8).

Positional theory provides a practical process for changing roles and behaviours. Rather than focus on personalities, it focuses on tasks and corporate goals. As such, it provides a very useful communicative process for initiating change.

7.6 The Experiential Approach

Experiential theory argues that people are more likely to believe their own experiences than those of others. Learning, therefore, must result from direct experience. This implies that change must involve 'doing' rather than 'listening'.

7.6.1.1 Experiential learning

Experiential theory acknowledges that people learn formally and informally and that their experiences are a combination of both. To effectively change people's behaviour, it recommends an intensive training effort where practical experiences and measurable training outcomes are clearly defined so that employees can practice what they are required to perform in the workplace. Competency based training is experiential in that it defines standards of performance, and trainees must perform at desired levels of performance before being deemed competent.

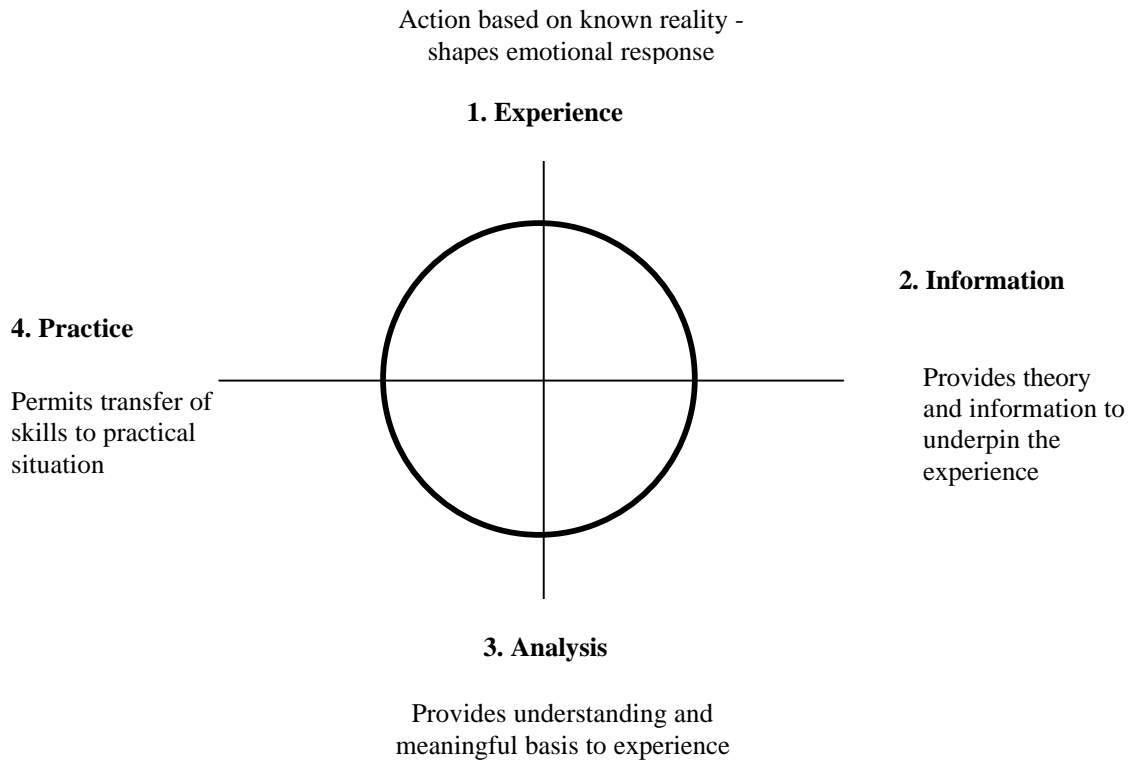
Experiential learning involves a two-way flow of information between management (trainer) and employer (trainee) to effect change. Not only is an employee required to demonstrate changed performance to a required standard but the employee must also demonstrate understanding of the applications of his/her performance. Advocates of experiential learning argue that it is:

- More active than other approaches
- Problem centred and incorporates theory for a solid base
- Involves two-way communication to a greater extent than do other forms of learning
- Shares control over and responsibility for the learning process with participants
- Incorporates, thoughts, actions and feelings in a more holistic approach to behaviour change (Hall, et al 1975:27-29).

7.6.1.2 A model of experiential leadership

Figure 9.1 illustrates the experiential learning process. As the figure shows, four elements must be present in an experiential training effort: experience, information, analysis, and practice.

Figure 1 - A model of experiential learning



(Based on Pace & Faules 1989:294 experiential learning model)

While critical in all approaches, the experiential approach emphasises the importance of the executive leadership team's skills, knowledge and values. Having a team that is not able to operate across all aspects of the cognitive and behavioural spectrum may not only limit the shape or the change process and the risks taken, but also hamper the change process as it moves through stages that require a different balance between analytical, practical, informational and experiential considerations.

7.7 An Integrated Approach

The five theories we have examined each have their own merits and drawbacks. Together, however, they provide quite a powerful arsenal of ideas and techniques of which managers can make good use. In this section we incorporate some elements of the five theories into a three-stage model.

'Effective change requires comprehensive planning — incorporating a positive environment for change, clear communication throughout the change process, and realistic evaluations along the way (Connoley & Rock, 1991:484).

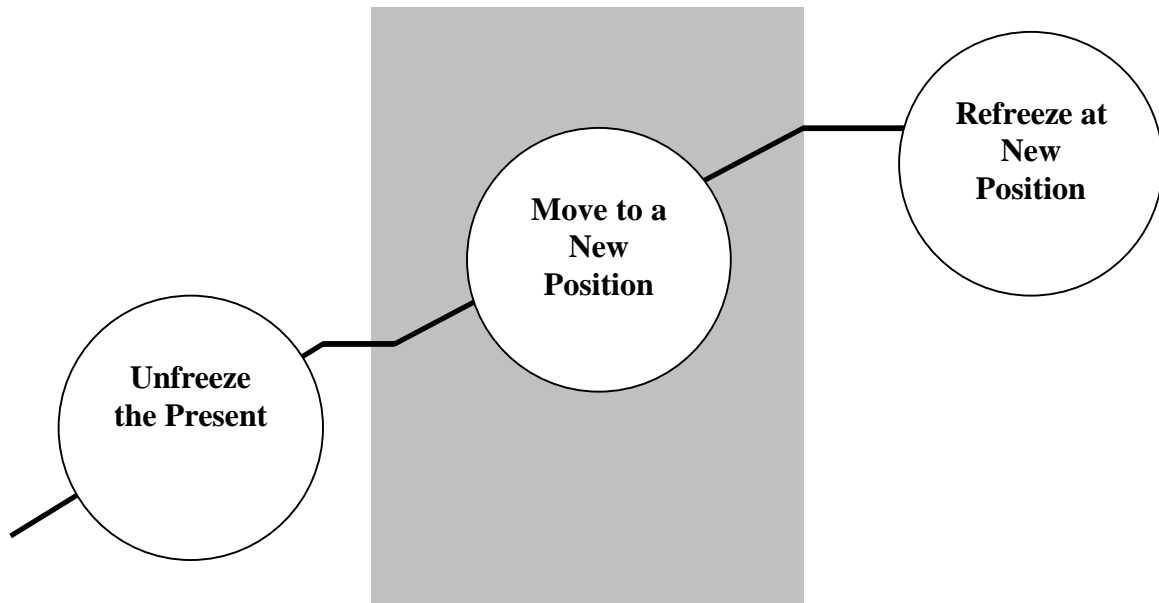
7.7.1.1 A three-stage model

Figure 3 illustrates the steps in an integrated model first developed by Kurt Lewin (1951) and used as a means to illustrate how change is a break in the organisations status quo, and requires different

management and communication actions at each of the three stages (Pace & Faules, 1989:294). The model suggests change progresses through:

- Step 1 Unfreeze the present status quo
- Step 2 Move to the new position
- Step 3 Refreeze the organization at the new position

Figure 2 - A three-stage integrated model for communicating change



What you as a manager incorporate in each of these three stages depends on what you believe will work from the change theories we have just studied. Examine the following selection of possibilities and choose or add the elements you prefer:

Table 1- Approaches to change and the Pace & Faules change model

Approach	Unfreeze the present status quo	Move to the new position	Refreeze the organisation at the new position
Rational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appeal to beliefs and internal self-verbalisations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement rational-emotive training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide personal meaning for the changes
Behavioural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-arrange behavioural consequences • Identify undesirable outcomes of current behaviour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on contingencies for new behaviour • Implement behavioural modelling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counsel and reinforce
Achievement	Raise aspirations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appeal to the need for more challenging task 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structure opportunities for psychological success • Make new challenges moderate — provide attainable steps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide concrete feedback • Structure affiliation via team effort • Provide opportunity for personal responsibility
Positional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish new goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negotiate roles for change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree to a contract of obligations
Experiential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement experiential learning situations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information to underpin experience • Explain the meaning of (reasons for) experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice to ensure transference.

© Graham & Bowles 1993

The problem with the three stage change model is it is severely tested and its theoretical validity challenged where:

Change is constant factor of the operating environment so disequilibrium is the norm.

Continuous change through agility and responsiveness is part of the competitive capabilities the organisation embraces.

Change is so rapid and all encompassing 'freezing' at any point into a status quo is not possible.

Obviously, the three factors above represent situations more common to organisations at the beginning of the twenty first century than had previous been acknowledged in the 1950 to 1980s.

It is often more appropriate to consider how leaders communicate change. This communication has to occur with sensitivity to three factors we have already covered:

Reading Extract for BSXFMI410A

- (a) The stage of organisational development
- (b) The level of change (innovation, reengineering, etc.)
- (c) The preferred approach to change (we covered five such approaches).

References

- Bandura, A. (1969) *Principles of Behaviour Modification*, Holt Rhinehart & Winston: New York
- Bandura, A. & Cervone, P. (1983) Self-Evaluative and Self-Efficacy Mechanisms Governing the Motivational Effects of Goal Systems', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* no. 45, p. 1017.
- Combs, A.W., Avila, D.L. & Purkey, W.W. (1971) *Helping Relationships: Basic Concepts for the Helping Professions*, Houghton Mifflin: Boston.
- Craighead, W.E., Kazdin, A.E. & Mahoney, M.J. (1976) *Behaviour Modification Principles, Issues, and Application*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston.
- Deese, J. 1967, *General Psychology*, Allyn & Bacon: Boston, p. 128.
- Ellis, A. & Harper, R.A. (1975) *A New Guide to Rational Living*, Willshire: Pennsylvania.
- Hall, D.T., Bowen, D.D., Lewicki, R.J. & Hall, S.S. (1975) *Experiences in Management and Organizational Behaviour*, St Clair Press, Chicago, pp.27-29.
- Harrison, R. (1972) 'Role Negotiation: A Tough-Minded Approach to Team Development', in *Group Training Techniques*, eds M.L. & P.J. Berger, John Wiley & Sons, New York, p. 85.
- Hill, R.L. (1983) *Role Negotiation: Participant Workbook*, Human Synergistics: Michigan, p. 8.
- Lewin, K. (1951) *Field Theory in Social Science* Harper & Row: New York.
- McClelland, D.C., Atkinson, J.W., Clark, R.A & Lowell, E.L. (1953) *The Achievement Motive*, Appleton-Century-Crofts: New York, pp. 55-65.
- Pace, R.W. & Faules, D.F. (1989) *Organizational Communication*, Prentice-Hall: New Jersey.
- Rosenbaum, B.L. (1979) 'Common Misconceptions about Behaviour Modeling and Supervisory Skill Training', *Training and Development Journal*, August, p.40-42
- Williams, R.L. & Long, J.D. (1975) *Towards a Self-managed Lifestyle*, Houghton Mifflin: Boston.