

10 ways to help team members adjust to change

By  [Anja van Beek](#)

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The one constant thing we can be certain of is change. The world we were used to was flipped upside down. Here's what you need to know about the human side of change to support your team.



Image: Supplied

We all can relate to the term 'RUPT' (rapid, unpredictable, paradoxical, tangled) coined by the Centre for Creative Leadership.

Almost everything that has been 'normal' for us, changed. The uncertainty has reached new heights – as we are not sure what the future will look like - we only know it will be quite different from what we were used to.

How can leaders support their teams? Follow these 10 practices and you are halfway there.

1. Know people deeply

One of the HR trends many predicted before the Covid-19 pandemic was the increased focus on human-centricity in the workplace.

We need to know and understand what drives and motivates our team members. This will not only enable us to support them during change but also will be able to solve challenges faster, as you understand what drives each team member. Once you make a dedicated effort in getting to know and understand each team member, you may just be surprised at how this influences their behaviour for the best.

2. Be intentional about a sense of meaning and belonging

Humans crave connection and belonging. Any team member must experience and have a sense that they contribute to the team. If we don't feel that we make a meaningful contribution, we see the situation as a threat, which increases our stress or cortisol levels.

Any team leader should be aware of the social safety in the group and ensure that everyone has a sense of meaning and belonging, especially during unknown times.

3. Remind and rave about rest and recovery

We all want to be part of high-performing teams. When people go the extra mile in tough times, we need to remind them and insist on a proper recovery period. In an HBR article, *The corporate athlete*, they emphasize the importance of physical well-being and list this as the foundation of the high-performance pyramid.

It is best to take a recovery period every 90 minutes. This recovery should include eating something, hydrating, moving physically, change channels mentally as well as emotionally.



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4. Reframe the thinking

We are wired to obsess over the negative and our brains are focused on keeping us safe, hence the over-awareness of negative experiences. How can you as a leader help? Reframe your team's thinking patterns.

Reframing is a strategy used to deal with a negative event like the pandemic and the aim is to shift your perspective to be empowered to act. This is a practical tool for promoting alternatives and options to be innovative, and is often used during problem-solving.

5. Acknowledge growth mindsets

Great leaders create a moment to catch people doing things right and give recognition.

Public recognition works best. Get into the habit of recognising the team members that display a growth mindset. It can be a simple mention at the end of a meeting where someone highlighted failure as an opportunity to grow or where they have persisted instead of giving up, especially when faced with setbacks during a project.

Encourage teams to give kudos to one another and highlight what they appreciate about the other's views and input. This strategy to recognise the right behaviour sends a strong message that the right behaviour is valued.

6. Benefits of boundary spanning

Often people don't see the full picture and the interconnectedness of their tasks, work or function. When we experience change, we should reach out to people outside our immediate close circle. People in different departments, people with different skillsets and experience, and people even in different industries might spark an idea in a direction you might not have considered yourself.

Expand your network and get the benefit of ideas and inspiration outside your own boundary in times of change.

7. Cultivate a gratitude-attitude

Neuroscience has highlighted the benefits of gratitude. This habit of being grateful is extremely important for any individual and teams and the easiest way is to reprogramme your subconscious mind.

Encourage teams to start a meeting by highlighting the three things they are grateful for. This can become a (short) and powerful team ritual to build into your meeting cadence.



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8. Do not underestimate the invisible leader

A Harvard study found that companies with a high level of purpose outperform the market by 5-7% per year. The term “invisible leadership” refers to the common purpose that inspires leaders and employees to act. This common purpose motivates team members to use their strengths and talents willingly.

9. Radiate and role model adaptive thinking

Leaders set the tone and should model and radiate the behaviour they want to see. In the pandemic, where we faced many situations that we have never dealt with before, an adaptive thinking approach was absolutely critical.

According to psychologist and expert researcher Anders Ericsson, 'adaptive thinking' involves the ability to “recognise unexpected situations, quickly consider various possible responses, and decide on the best one.”

10. Give clear goals and simple rules

Knowledge workers crave autonomy and mastery. Make the most of this need by giving your team a well-defined goal; be very clear on the outcome.

What do you want to achieve and what are the non-negotiables? Then, be flexible and allow the team to work out how they are going to achieve the goal. If needed, provide the boundaries or rules applicable. Simply said, “Explain the 'what' and 'why', and leave the 'how' for the team”.

For any team going through change, the Kubler-Ross Change Curve model is a good starting point. This will provide you with insight and understanding of how to best support team members going through change. Change is inevitable and by following the different stages, leaders and managers are supporting the team to cope with changes in the business. The five stages of any change for humans are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

Last words

Failing to manage change effectively can have significant consequences for companies and their employees. By prioritising a human-centered approach, corporate leaders can ensure that changes are implemented in a way that supports the well-being and productivity of their workforce.

Anja van Beek is an independent leadership consultant, talent strategist and coach.

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