CHANGE MANAGEMENT

A Guide for Recreation and Sporting Organisations

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INTRODUCTION

The world in which we live is changing at a rapid rate due to forces such as technology, economics, politics, societal demands, market demands, and environmental issues to name but a few. Many of us feel threatened by change and are reluctant to engage in it, however gaining skills in change management has become an important tool to have in the sports administrator's kit. This guide is intended to provide the sports administrator with a brief insight into the issue of change management, and provide some information to assist in the process of managing change.

SYMPTOMS OR SIGNALS THAT CHANGE IS NECESSARY

How do we know when change may be needed? The following are just some of the more common signals:
- Board meetings are ineffective and inefficient.
- Tension between paid and unpaid staff.
- Lack of focus on the future.
- Inability to respond to member/customer needs.
- Ongoing financial loss.
- Diminishing pool of skilled and committed volunteers.
- Ongoing loss of members.
- High turnover of executive staff.

If several of these are apparent to your organisation, it may be necessary to consider changing the way you are managing things.

DRIVERS OF CHANGE

In the introduction, we touched on some of the things that are driving change in the sport and recreation industry. Examples of some other drivers are listed below:
- Increasing demand for accountability, higher performance and quality programs and services from a whole range of stakeholders. Changing social patterns such as the emerging "24/7" society, is leading to greater strains on volunteers, on the way in which we participate in sport and recreation, and on the time and places in which we participate. Other changing social patterns include higher numbers of single parent families, unprecedented levels of household debt, the growth in part time and casual work, and the increasing number of women in the workforce. This has led to a reluctance to pay the traditional price of membership. 'We just want to play!' is commonly heard. People want to be customers, not members.
- Increasing competition from the emerging "entertainment" industry. Traditional sporting and recreational activities are competing more than ever to attract and retain members. Increasingly we are becoming a nation of 'watchers' not 'doers', and escalating levels of home based technology, world scale sporting events, and world class sporting facilities have turned our attention toward seeking quality entertainment that is conveniently packaged in terms of price, location and 'family friendliness'. In other words, society is becoming convenience-oriented, seeking more flexibility to do things when it is convenient to them.
- Higher levels of litigation than ever before, coupled with rising insurance premiums have led to a rising emphasis on risk management strategies and planning.
- Mounting emphasis on sharing facilities with other sports and flood lighting for greater than ever usage. This is also leading to increased rationalisation of the number of clubs and facilities and greater emphasis on club amalgamations.

"CHANGE MANAGEMENT IS ABOUT MAKING FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES IN HOW BUSINESS IS CONDUCTED IN ORDER TO HELP COPE WITH A NEW, MORE CHALLENGING MARKET ENVIRONMENT." (Erni Rauter)

BLOCKERS/BARRIERS TO CHANGE

While this seems obvious and we all know that in order to survive we must "move with the times", change is not something which is embraced easily and many people are threatened by the very hint of change. Some of the more common blockers of change include:
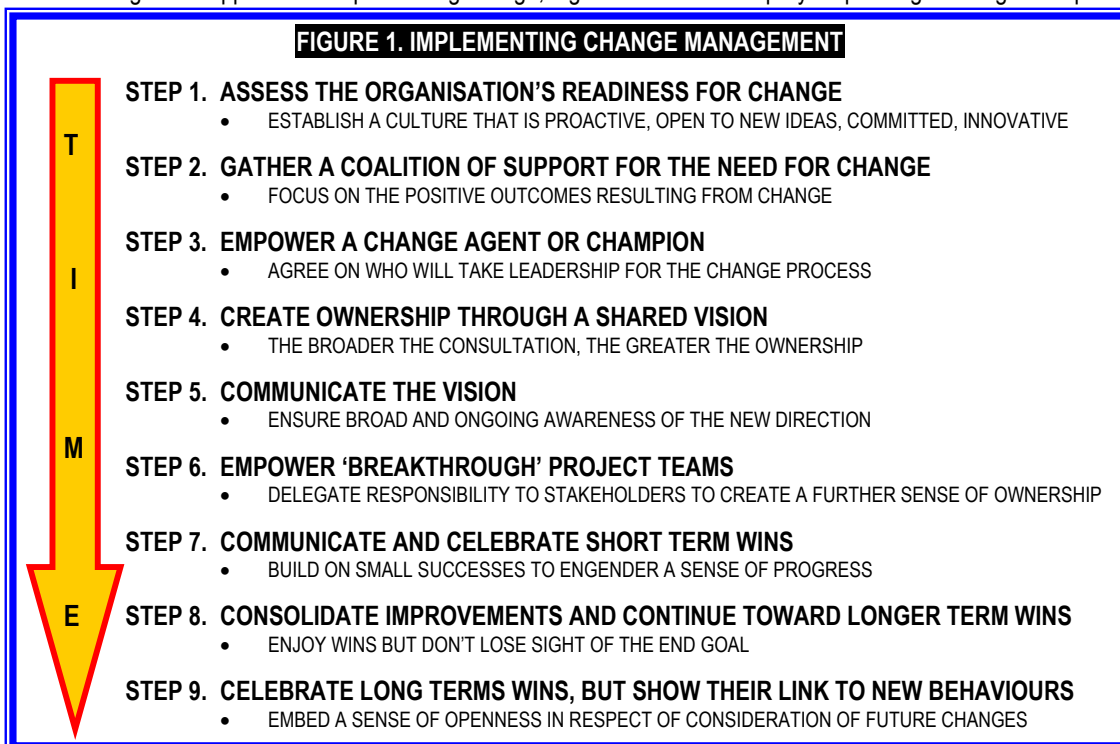
- Organisational culture - the notion that "we have always done it this way."
- Volunteer management - the challenge of volunteer administrators balancing the provision of social or community services, but within a modern day, professional management environment.
- Personalities - every organisation has those people who seem to disagree with everything, but are seen as invaluable in terms of their level of time and commitment to the "cause."
- Politics - factions, cliques and power plays are not uncommon and can cause significant disruption to the change process.
- Balancing limited resources against increasing stakeholder demands – this can lead to things that are considered even remotely difficult to implement (such as issues related to change), ending up in the "too hard basket."

MANAGING CHANGE

With all these issues, is it any wonder change is resisted and/or is often difficult to implement? So how do we manage change? There are a few key principles that, in terms of order of implementation, will tend to vary from issue to issue and from organisation to organisation, but are designed ultimately to gain a sense of commitment to change. These principles include:

- Acceptance – that change is necessary and will take time, compromise and effort.
- Communication – is kept open and ongoing.
- Ownership – seek and value all stakeholders' feedback and input.
- Trust – needs to be established.
- Shared values – about the future/vision of the organisation.
- Respect – for one another and for the treatment of one another.

In terms of a general approach to implementing change, Figure 1 outlines a step-by-step change management process.

FIGURE 1. IMPLEMENTING CHANGE MANAGEMENT

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STEP 1. ASSESS THE ORGANISATION'S READINESS FOR CHANGE
- ESTABLISH A CULTURE THAT IS PROACTIVE, OPEN TO NEW IDEAS, COMMITTED, INNOVATIVE

STEP 2. GATHER A COALITION OF SUPPORT FOR THE NEED FOR CHANGE
- FOCUS ON THE POSITIVE OUTCOMES RESULTING FROM CHANGE

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STEP 3. EMPOWER A CHANGE AGENT OR CHAMPION
- AGREE ON WHO WILL TAKE LEADERSHIP FOR THE CHANGE PROCESS

STEP 4. CREATE OWNERSHIP THROUGH A SHARED VISION
- THE BROADER THE CONSULTATION, THE GREATER THE OWNERSHIP

STEP 5. COMMUNICATE THE VISION
- ENSURE BROAD AND ONGOING AWARENESS OF THE NEW DIRECTION

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STEP 6. EMPOWER 'BREAKTHROUGH' PROJECT TEAMS
- DELEGATE RESPONSIBILITY TO STAKEHOLDERS TO CREATE A FURTHER SENSE OF OWNERSHIP

STEP 7. COMMUNICATE AND CELEBRATE SHORT TERM WINS
- BUILD ON SMALL SUCCESSES TO ENGENDER A SENSE OF PROGRESS

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STEP 8. CONSOLIDATE IMPROVEMENTS AND CONTINUE TOWARD LONGER TERM WINS
- ENJOY WINS BUT DON'T LOSE SIGHT OF THE END GOAL

STEP 9. CELEBRATE LONG TERMS WINS, BUT SHOW THEIR LINK TO NEW BEHAVIOURS
- EMBED A SENSE OF OPENNESS IN RESPECT OF CONSIDERATION OF FUTURE CHANGES

While change can take a considerable amount of time (so be prepared to move slowly), perhaps the key to managing change is maintaining broad and ongoing communication. It is pivotal in gaining an understanding of the issue/s, in gaining support to address these, in agreeing to a common vision, and in selling and sharing the successes.

> **IT'S NOT THE STRONGEST SPECIES THAT SURVIVE, NOR THE MOST INTELLIGENT, BUT THE MOST RESPONSIVE TO CHANGE." (Charles Darwin)**

References:
Paper presented by Mr Martin Stewart-Weeks, Achieving Organisational Change, National Conference for Leaders in Sport, Melbourne, June 1999. Rauter, E. Corporate Governance for Sport and Recreation, Australian Sports Commission, Canberra.