Embracing Change: How to Make the Hard Transition Easier

Research and Application Report

Carl Andrew Labaro

LEAD 442: Supporting Organizational Change

University of Louisville

February 18, 2025

Introduction

In today's fast-paced world, organizational change is inevitable. Whether it is a new system, restructuring, or a shift in business strategy, change is something every organization must face. However, despite its necessity, change can be difficult for many employees. People are often resistant because change challenges their comfort zones and brings uncertainty. This is where change management becomes crucial, it refers to the process of guiding individuals and organizations through transitions, helping them adjust effectively and embrace new ways of working.

In her article, *"Change Is Hard. Here's How to Make It Less Painful,"* Erika Andersen (2020) explores the psychology behind why change is often met with resistance and offers practical strategies for leaders to ease the process. Andersen emphasizes that change triggers an emotional response, rooted in our human history when stability and predictability were essential for survival. To help employees navigate this discomfort, she suggests several "change levers" techniques that leaders can use to support their teams in shifting their mindset. By addressing fears, increasing understanding, offering control, and providing consistent support, leaders can make change feel less overwhelming and more achievable. Andersen's approach aims to help organizations succeed in their change initiatives while fostering a culture more open to future changes.

Review of the Article

In my opinion, the issue of change management is of paramount importance, not only in the world of business but also across other sectors of society. This is a matter that is both timely and highly relevant in today's rapidly evolving world. Erika Andersen's article is particularly insightful and thought-provoking. She skillfully addresses the complexity of organizational change, and her ability to break down this complex topic into understandable concepts is remarkable. Andersen's deep understanding of the psychological aspects of change is evident, and she provides a framework that helps readers better grasp the underlying challenges that people face when adjusting to change. Her article opens the door to critical discussions and lays the foundation for gathering valuable insights that organizations can use to navigate and manage change effectively.

When I first read her article, I could not help but think about the bigger questions that arise when facing organizational change: Where should we go if we have no clear guide? Who should we follow to lead us through the unknown? These are fundamental questions, and I believe Andersen's article provides the answers by offering practical insights into how leaders can support their teams in overcoming the challenges associated with change.

One of the key takeaways from Andersen's work is that change is difficult for people not just because of external challenges but because of their inherent attitudes and perceptions toward it. It is clear that humans are wired to resist change. For much of human history, stability and predictability were necessary for survival, and any deviation from the norm was often seen as a threat. Andersen highlights how these deep-seated instincts are still at play today, making organizational change appear as something difficult, costly, and "weird." The article makes it clear

that resistance to change is not a matter of "resistance" in a negative sense, but rather a deeply ingrained psychological response that needs to be understood and addressed.

Andersen's article demonstrates that the real difficulty in change often lies in our mindset and emotional responses. Change does not have to be as difficult as it often seems, it can become more manageable when individuals are willing to embrace it. In fact, as she points out, when people shift their perspective to view change as something that could be "easy, rewarding, and normal," they are more likely to engage with the change process and adopt new behaviors. It is not just about providing people with new processes or systems but also about helping them navigate their emotional and psychological responses to these changes.

In my view, the article emphasizes an essential truth, change is not just a matter of implementing new systems or strategies. The success of change depends significantly on the attitude and willingness of the individuals involved. Even if an organization has all the necessary tools to manage change, it will not be successful unless the people are genuinely open to it. The critical factor in ensuring successful change is addressing the human element, people need to feel supported and understood throughout the transition. Andersen offers a roadmap for leaders to facilitate this shift in mindset by providing support, information, control, and reassurance. These approaches help to transform the initial resistance into a willingness to adopt new practices.

Andersen's article highlights the importance of creating a culture of change-readiness, where change is not seen as a threat but as an opportunity. This cultural shift requires not just leadership but also a collective effort from all members of the organization. A leader's role is not only to manage change but also to foster an environment in which individuals feel empowered to embrace change and view it as an opportunity for growth, rather than a challenge to their comfort

zones. I believe that Andersen's article provides invaluable insights into why change is so hard and how it can be made less painful. Her approach emphasizes the importance of understanding the psychological and emotional aspects of change and offers practical strategies for leaders to help their teams navigate these challenges. By focusing on mindset and providing adequate support, leaders can ease the process of change and create a culture that is more adaptable to future transformations. In the end, the key to overcoming the difficulty of change is not just the systems we implement but also the willingness and readiness of the people who are expected to adopt them.

Implications

The key implication of Erika Andersen's article is that successful organizational change requires more than just implementing new systems, it requires a shift in mindset. Andersen emphasizes that people initially perceive change as difficult, costly, and unusual. Leaders must help their teams move from this mindset to one where change is seen as easy, rewarding, and normal. This shift in perception is essential for fostering acceptance and engagement, as employees are more likely to adopt new behaviors when they feel the change aligns with their personal and professional values.

The article highlights that leadership plays a crucial role in facilitating this mindset shift. Leaders must offer clear communication, provide a sense of control, and offer ongoing support throughout the change process. When employees feel informed and supported, they are more likely to embrace change, reducing resistance and enhancing the likelihood of a successful transition. This insight suggests that leaders must not only manage the logistics of change but also focus on the emotional and psychological responses of their teams.

Another important implication is that organizations should build a culture of change-readiness. In today's fast-paced world, organizations that cannot adapt quickly will struggle to thrive. By fostering an environment where change is seen as an opportunity for growth rather than a threat, companies can better prepare for future transformations. This requires a long-term investment in developing employees' change capabilities, ensuring that they are not only prepared for current shifts but are also adaptable to future challenges.

The article implies that individuals within organizations must take responsibility for their own adaptability. While leadership is essential, employees must also be open to embracing change. When individuals shift their perspective and see change as an opportunity to learn and grow, they contribute to the overall success of the organization's transformation efforts. Thus, both leaders and employees play an integral role in making organizational change less painful and more effective in the long run.

Application

The application of Andersen's ideas is crucial for leaders who aim to guide their teams through organizational change effectively. Leaders can increase understanding by providing a clear and detailed summary of the change. Instead of offering vague, overly optimistic messages about the change, leaders should address the three key questions employees naturally have: What is changing? Why is it happening? How will the change ultimately benefit the organization and its employees? A thoughtful explanation can reduce initial skepticism and help people start to shift their mindset from seeing the change as "difficult, costly, and weird" to recognizing it as something that could be "easy, rewarding, and normal."

Andersen's also emphasis on clarifying and reinforcing priorities can be applied to help employees stay focused on what matters most during the change. When leaders emphasize the elements that will remain the same, alongside the changes, it reassures employees and helps them differentiate between what requires adaptation and what does not. For example, a leader may explain that while there is a reorganization in the sales structure, employees' core roles and responsibilities will remain consistent, offering stability amidst uncertainty. This focused communication minimizes resistance and makes the transition smoother.

Another essential application of Andersen's advice is giving employees control during the change process. When employees feel they have some influence over the timing or approach to change, they become more invested in the process. By offering employees options in how the change is implemented, leaders can reduce anxiety and foster a sense of ownership. For instance, if a company is adopting a new technology platform, allowing employees to choose the training format or timing can help them feel more empowered and less passive in the face of the change.

The application of consistent support is perhaps the most critical aspect. Andersen emphasizes the importance of not only addressing employees' concerns but actively listening to their worries and providing tangible solutions. This approach builds trust and eases the emotional strain of change. Providing additional resources like training, mentorship, or peer support can help employees transition smoothly. When leaders acknowledge employees' emotional responses to change and offer real-time support, they create a more resilient and adaptable workforce, ready to face future changes more effectively.

References

Andersen, E. (2025, February 18). *The change arc: How leaders can shift mindsets and guide teams through organizational change*. Harvard Business Review. https://hbr.org/2022/04/change-is-hard-heres-how-to-make-it-less-painful