How to Make Change Happen

Dr Aidan Harney | Valerie Yeo | Jules Siegal-Hawley

OrgDev
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7 Takeaways

How to Make Change Happen

1. Change is about meaning, not just messaging
2. Pay attention to what people may be losing
3. Build infrastructure that can hold the change
4. Sponsorship needs to be active
5. Communication is a loop, not a broadcast
6. Give people voice, even when they cannot have choice
7. Change happens through relationships and conversations

What this means in practice

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1 Change is about meaning, not just messaging

People do not simply receive change; they make sense of it through role, identity and experience. Ask how different groups are making sense of the change, not only how to communicate it.

2 Pay attention to what people may be losing

Resistance often makes sense when change affects identity, status, routines, relationships, power or everyday practical realities. Look beyond the formal plan to what the change means for people.

3 Build infrastructure that can hold the change

Use clear roles, governance, milestones, stakeholder maps and decision processes so uncertainty about the process does not overwhelm the change itself.

4 Sponsorship needs to be active

Sponsors need to make decisions, advocate for the change, communicate visibly, remove barriers and stay engaged throughout the process.

5 Communication is a loop, not a broadcast

A town hall or email is not enough. Communicate, listen for the response, learn from it and let that feedback shape the next step.

6 Give people voice, even when they cannot have choice

Not every part of a change can be co-created. Be clear about what is fixed and what people can genuinely influence.

7 Change happens through relationships and conversations

Trust, power, authenticity and the quality of conversations all shape whether change can move. Change happens one conversation at a time.

Reflective question

Where in your current change work are you concentrating on the plan or the message, when you may need to pay more attention to how people are making sense of what is happening?

One action to try

Choose one group affected by a current change and ask: What are they gaining? What might they feel they are losing? What do they genuinely have the power to influence? Use the answers to adjust how you engage them.