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Change offers a growth opportunity

By Carole Spiers, Special to Gulf News
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Any prospect of major organisational change - a merger, takeover, relocation or perhaps restructuring - can tend to provoke fear and resentment out of proportion to the actual disruption that eventually occurs. All too frequently, it can be our attitude and mindset towards change rather than the change itself that can cause the most anxiety.

Therefore, with today's constantly accelerating pace of change in the Gulf region, management has a growing need to recognise organisational change as a specific subject, worthy of comment and training.

Superficially you might assume that reactions to forthcoming change would vary according to seniority. The people at the top (who might well have voted for the changes) would tend to view it most favourably. The rest of the workforce might be more likely to suspect an ulterior motive, having perhaps learned to mistrust any promises from above. And in between would be the middle management, who would see a mix of benefits and drawbacks in the new arrangements.

Yet under any test, it seems that the responses have less to do with status, and more to do with personality types. And your 'reading' of these different types will determine your success in holding a team together.

At one end, there are those who instinctively resist change. One clue is their tendency to dismiss anything new and unfamiliar as unnecessary or impracticable. In essence, this can only be attributed to laziness, a reluctance to disturb the comfortable rut they've got settled into.

At the other end are those who actively embrace change, eagerly exploring new systems and cultures. Some of these may simply be those trained in the latest technology, who know that corporate change will tend to move them up the pecking order. But they will also include people who are just innovators and risk-takers by nature.

It is these people who you hope will be your allies in influencing the large majority who are undecided, or what you might call the 'floating voters'. One good technique is to ask them straight out "Where do you think we're going wrong?" This may be the first time they've actually been consulted about the changes, instead of just notified of them,

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and it may yield new insights.

The chief qualities needed for this morale-raising agenda include empathy with the vulnerable, a good listening style, a knowledge of how to interpret dialogue and spot verbal clues, and a gift for persuading your listener of the benefits of forthcoming change for the corporate good.

And remember that this large group, with its doubts and confusions, is the one most likely to be suffering stress-related problems, and you should be geared for applying workplace stress diagnosis and management, through change management training and employee support.

Key points: How to manage an alteration

- The right attitude and mindset are needed to effectively manage organisational change.
- Change management has become an essential managerial skill.
- Reactions to change tend to reflect personality types rather than seniority.
- The morale-raising qualities are a crucial management asset.

- The writer is an BBC broadcaster and motivational speaker, with 20 years' experience as CEO of Carole Spiers Group, an international stress consultancy based in London.

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