Successful Change Management

John P. Kotter’s ‘eight steps to successful change’ model

John Kotter’s book, ‘The Heart of Change’ (2002), presents a model for understanding and managing change. Each stage acknowledges a key principle relating to people's response and approach to change, in which people see, feel and then change. The model is based on research which shows that there are eight critical steps an organisation or team needs to go through to ensure that change happens and sticks as follows:-

1. **Establish a sense of urgency**
   - make objectives real and relevant
   - help others see the need for change and the importance of acting immediately
   - identify crises, potential crises or major opportunities.

2. **Pull together the guiding team** (a ‘powerful, guiding coalition’)
   - assemble a group with enough power and the right skills to lead the change effort
   - encourage the group to work together as a team.

3. **Create a vision**
   - develop the vision with the team to help direct the change effort
   - develop strategies for achieving that vision.

4. **Communicate the vision**
   - use every mechanism and involve as many people as possible to communicate the new vision and strategies for understanding and buy-in
   - communicate the essentials, simply, to appeal and respond to people’s needs
   - teach new behaviours by the example of the guiding team.

5. **Empower others to act**
   - remove obstacles/barriers to change
   - change systems or structures that seriously undermine the vision
   - encourage risk taking and non-traditional ideas, activities and actions
   - recognise and reward progress and achievements

6. **Plan and create short term wins**
   - set aims that are easy to achieve for visible performance improvements
   - create those improvements in bite sized chunks
   - Finish current stages before starting new ones

7. **Don’t let up**
   - Foster and encourage determination and persistence
   - consolidate improvements and produce still more change
   - use increased credibility to change systems, structures and policies that don’t fit the vision
   - highlight achieved and future milestones.
8. **Make change stick** (Institutionalise new approaches)

- weave change into the culture
- articulate the connections between the new behaviours and corporate success
- develop the means to ensure leadership development and succession
- reinforce the value of successful change via recruitment, promotion and new change leaders who can implement the vision

These steps are summarised in the diagram below:

![Diagram](image)

### Eight common reasons for failure of change management

In contrast, Kotter also highlighted eight common reasons why change often fails:

- Allowing too much complexity
- Failing to build a substantial coalition
- Failing to understand the need for a clear vision
- Failure to clearly communicate that vision
- Permitting roadblocks against that vision
- Not planning for short term results and not realising them
- Declaring victory too soon
- Failure to anchor changes in corporate culture

**References**


NHS Improvement Foundation