

Lewin's Change Management Model

Understanding the Three Stages of Change

The concept of change management is familiar in most organisations today but how they manage change (and how successful they are at it) varies enormously depending on the nature of the business, the change and the people involved. Organisations that handle change well appear to thrive, whilst those that do not may struggle to survive. A key part of this depends on how far people within the organisation understand and deal with the change process.

One of the cornerstone models for understanding organisational change was developed by Kurt Lewin in the 1950s, and is still used today. His model is a simple and easy-to-understand framework for managing change known as **Unfreeze – Change – Refreeze**. Lewin, a physicist as well as social scientist, explained organisational change using the analogy of changing the shape of a block of ice, i.e. unfreezing a large cube of ice to change it and reform it into a cone of ice.

By recognising these three distinct stages of change, you can plan to implement the change required. You start by creating the motivation to change (**unfreeze**) as it is necessary to change existing attitudes towards working practices and prepare the ground. Communication about the proposed change is vital at this stage if people are to understand and support it.

You move through the **change** process by promoting effective communications and empowering people to embrace new ways of working and learn new values, attitudes and behaviours. Problems are identified and action plans developed to enable implementation. Maximum flexibility is needed in the planning and implementation of the change.

The process ends when the organisation returns to a sense of stability (**refreeze**) and the benefits of the change are realised, which is necessary for creating the confidence from which to embark on the next inevitable change. Praise, rewards and other reinforcement by managers are required on an individual level and more effective performance at an organisational level. Not until the change has become incorporated into the culture can it be said to be frozen.

Lewin's Framework for Change

