



The Power to Improve

– crucial in competing for clients,
competencies and capital



At Teleopti, we have made it our business to ensure that our clients benefit from their investments. As consultants in the field of ‘change management’ we sometimes witness that improvements regarding customer satisfaction, a more balanced workload and a more effective use of resources are unfortunately not realised, despite the potential to be attained. This often reflects an organisation that cannot cope with the changes required to attain improvements. Streamlining naturally affects those working in customer services but a change regarding working methods, internal procedures and professional roles also implies a change for other parts of the organisation too.

Customer services is the frontline, i.e. the smallest disturbance there affects ‘production’. On the other hand, improvements at the frontline provide the greatest effects concerning customer satisfaction and profitability because it is the greatest competitive asset the company has.

In working for our clients, we combine our experience and knowledge about customer service operations with expertise about ‘change management’ in order to support the company’s management. We help managers actively participate in the process of change so that strategic guidelines bring about more effective operations.

The three steps of the improvement process:

The art of managing change is an important leadership skill in all modern organisations. A continual adaptation to new circumstances in the market and increasing demands for profitability place great demands on operational flexibility. Ultimately, these adaptations result in structural and cultural changes within an organisation.

From an organisational perspective the outer driving force promoting change is often the customers' higher demands for service and accessibility. This development is in marked contrast to the traditional white-collar environment of restricted office hours that is now being replaced by customer services along with significantly higher demands for flexibility. The increasingly common progression towards 24/7 is a consequence of more employees working outside 'normal' office hours and the need for internet and cable TV support in the evenings and weekends, etc. This leads to the need for change in work procedures, management structures and the roles of co-workers and their functions. It is our experience that in this transition process a new culture and new values develop and grow quite spontaneously. The energy generated can then, if utilised correctly, provide a driving force enabling the rapid attainment of the original objectives of the changes, i.e. an improvement.

We choose to speak in terms of improvements rather than changes, because no project that promotes change is initiated without the wish to improve.

The three steps of the improvement process are:

- Awareness
- Acceptance
- Action

Awareness

To comprehend using one's intellectual capacity – the brain!

“Why didn't anyone say something.” “We've tried that before.” “It will never work...”

Do these comments sound familiar? Such things are often said during the process of change and aim to hinder the change or escape responsibility in various ways.

These are examples of resistance, escape or passivity. They are completely natural reactions during a change and not worth being concerned about. In order to make progress, personnel must be given the opportunity to understand why the improvement process is necessary.

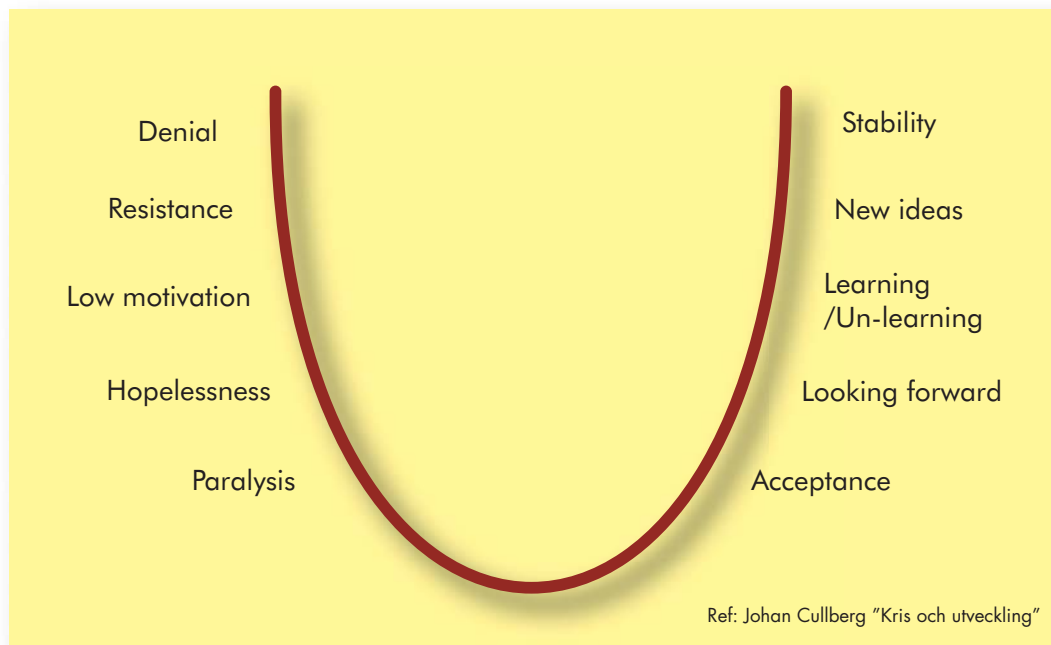
Simply providing information is not good enough. Personnel at all levels need to be given the opportunity to comprehend the information.

Therefore the management's responsibility is to:

- Formulate the objectives
- Define the needs for improvement
- State the consequences that such changes will bring about for the organisation, its clients and co-workers

The change curve

Resistance to change follows a clearly defined pattern. Even if it varies from person to person, it appears that everyone passes through a number of phases leading from denial to stability.



Resistance can arise when a co-worker only considers matters from his or her own situation and needs and not from the wider perspective at all. Resistance can also occur as a result of wounded pride or from the risk of losing status.

For information to lead to awareness requires:

- That it is not general in nature, but formatted for the individual's specific situation
- That it is repeated on several different occasions
- That it allows time for reflection together with one's co-workers

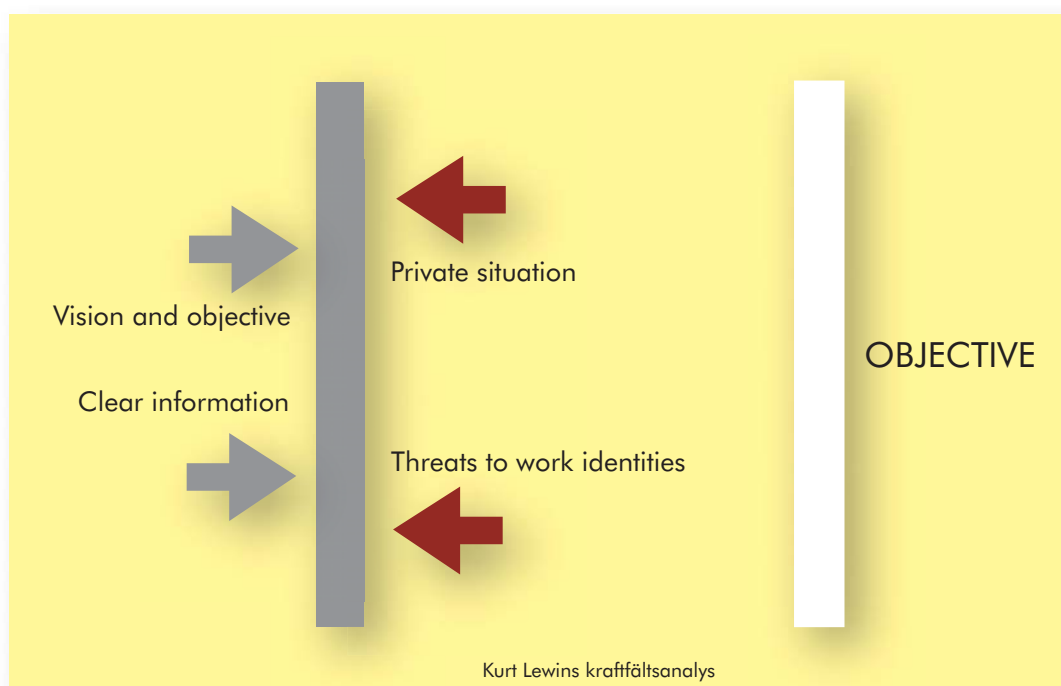
As a leader, it is crucial to facilitate the passage of co-workers through the various phases in a good way and ensure that everyone makes progress.

Acceptance

To consent to and feel real desire for improvement – wholeheartedly.

All change takes longer than you think, but once you have gained acceptance for the measures you wish to implement then the actual work towards improvement can commence with full force.

Sometimes the force applied to supporting change within an organisation is not sufficient to counter the energy applied in resisting change. Then it is not simply a case of applying more force, but also seeing the situation from the other side.



In order to understand our own as well as our co-workers' actions and reactions prior to and during change, it is important that we have insight and knowledge regarding how we as people work in situations of change. To the highest degree it concerns you as a manager and the double role you play in the process of change. You have to lead your team through change while at the same time being affected yourself.

The sense of being in control is a crucial factor in performing well. It can be hard to feel in control if you also feel insecure about new technology, unsure about how actions will be followed up or what is expected. The step forward that separates awareness from acceptance is frequently the individual's insecurity in the above matters.

Don't sweep issues under the carpet that relate to the improvement work, such as the risks faced by individuals, for example, poorer conditions, lost official/unofficial privileges or the loss of established working relationships.

Getting co-workers to accept a change means they have to:

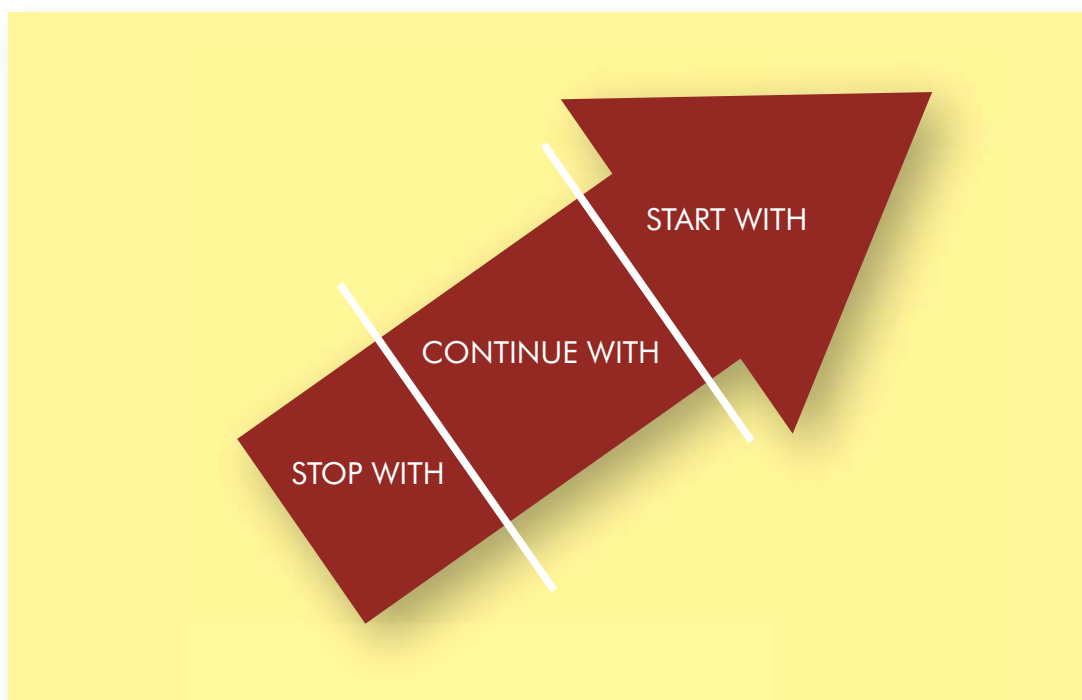
- See that the change leads to an improvement, not just for the entire unit but also for the individual
- Alternatively, concerning cut-backs and geographical moves, understand the grounds on which the decision has been based
- Not be censored in their questions and opinions
- Receive support in the process (have understanding and supportive leaders, receive the opportunity to influence their time at work in the form of requests)

Action

To start moving in the right direction

It takes coaching to start acting in another way than before. When we learn something new, we need feedback about the progress we make. It must be permissible to make mistakes and to fall back on old routines, as long as we learn from it and make progress.

It is important to understand the concept that everything you have learnt beforehand requires time to be un-learnt, as well as the time it takes to learn new procedures. This applies to everyone in the organisation.



People have a basic need for equilibrium and security and this can also be upset by the improvement process. To learn new habits and ways of thinking requires a great deal of energy. The fact that we establish habits and rituals so quickly depends on their ability to save us time and energy.

We need to leave our comfort zone and may lose control and be affected by doubt. The act of attaining improvement may also require the act of un-learning something!

It is vital to clarify what should be continued during an improvement process; to actually highlight what we are already doing right that leads towards improvement. This promotes confidence in the act of learning and un-learning.

Checklist: how to succeed with the improvement work

We have devised a checklist to succeed with the improvement work which is based on our experience in the field with clients in a range of businesses:

- Define the need for change based on established improvement objectives
- Establish a reference group (representing all areas of the organisation) to analyse the consequences
- Based on the consequence analysis, make a schedule for the various steps of the improvement process
- Clearly define who has responsibility for the various matters
- Define decision-making paths
- Review objectives and operational instructions
- Highlight the successes
- Action plan for setbacks
- Adopt a position regarding any possible new choices
- Dialogue with other parts of the organisation concerning the implementation
- Final evaluation and new improvement objectives

An improvement-friendly culture

We increase the chances of attaining the improvement objectives through a greater understanding of the improvement process, as well as your own and others reactions. It places great demands on the management to concretise the improvement potential and value from the perspective of clients, profitability and personnel. However this is not sufficient in creating an improvement-friendly culture. This requires the need for change to come as naturally to co-workers as for the management.

In working with companies and organisations, we initiate 'improvement groups' who continually work to make operations more effective. These groups have wide-ranging and in-depth knowledge of operations. In these organisations there is great awareness regarding the need for continual progress. The concept of an improvement group means that its members both listen and speak about ideas throughout the organisation.

The role of the improvement group is firstly to initiate improvements and secondly to secure the need for change in the organisation. It is a successful way of promoting a total perspective to co-workers, which is a pre-requisite for their constructive contribution to improvement and progress.

Teleopti's improvement services - IMPROVE

- Improvement analysis
- Improvement projects based on an action plan
- Mentor support in the improvement project
- Leadership development in customer services
- Tools that diminish stress in customer services
- Recruitment and personnel development

Additional white paper in the series:

- Lifestyle Scheduling – Workforce Management with a Human Touch

Client references:

- E.ON
- Stockholm Visitors Board

For further information: www.teleopti.com

About Teleopti

Teleopti provides world-leading solutions for strategic workforce management. Teleopti contributes to the creation of greater efficiency and productivity in contact centres by providing advanced and customer-unique solutions renowned for user friendliness.

Hundreds of enterprises in Europe already use Teleopti's solutions to attain optimal efficiency and provide the highest levels of service. The solution is available from Teleopti offices in Stockholm, Oslo, London, New Delhi and Bangalore as well as a comprehensive partner network

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About Maureen Lundgren Gomes

TITLE

Business consultant (BA in Business economy, sociology, statistics, human relations)

AREAS OF WORK

Maureen works with Teleopti's services and products in the Strategic workforce management field. The work constitutes of effective change management, organisational issues, management, and recruitment for contact centres.

EXPERIENCE

Project manager, sales manager and product manager at My Travel
Resource manager for My Travel, Sweden (45 travel shops, 45 local managers and in total 250 sales agents)
Together with My Travel Sweden's management team, produced material and processes to balance My Travel's staff costs against staffing need related to service levels, customers' expectations and employee satisfaction.

About Marita Bildt

TITLE

Organisational consultant (D.Phil pedagogics/psychology/sociology)

AREAS OF WORK

Management issues at Teleopti
Organisational and leadership consultant for Teleopti clients
Conducts team-building activities and gives seminars about personal development, objectives, guidance and motivation

EXPERIENCE

Teacher at the Pedagogic Institution at Uppsala University (1981-83)
Personnel and leadership developer for the defence forces and Gällöfsta education centre (1984-86)
Leadership development and change expert at Digital equipment (1986-91)
Founded Teleopti together with husband Nils in 1992.

