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### Change Management Best Practices

According to *Recklies Management Project*, “Change management means to plan, initiate, realize, control, and finally stabilize change processes on both, corporate and personal level. Change may cover such diverse problems as for example strategic direction or personal development programs for staff” (Recklies). Public relation’s role in change management is instrumental in controlling the narrative around both internal and external communications. Change management can be a tricky subject, especially in a climate as unprecedented as ours. With the help of skillful public relations practitioners, change can be smooth and easy for all involved. This topic is paramount for those in the public relations industry to know thoroughly. Change is constant in the business world, especially in the digital age. As the liaison between internal and external stakeholders, it is the public relations practitioner’s job to ensure that communication is engaging yet not overwhelming. While it is a CEO’s priority to implement change effectively, it is the public relations practitioner’s priority to *explain* change effectively.

Gartner reported that in 2020, the amount of change the average employee could absorb before fatiguing was cut in half compared to 2019. For public relations practitioners, this means being prepared for information overload and fatigue in times of change. Now that nearly every company has transitioned to a widely virtual format, in times of extreme change, management must be aware of the volume of communication they put out on the subject. While everyone may have access to their laptops at all times, they will likely experience fatigue if focused on their job

and the changes their company is going through at multiple points throughout the day. Creating messaging surrounding change engaging is of the utmost importance. If employees trust that they will actually enjoy reading announcements, they will be more likely to actually consume the important information that change management teams put out. External communication is just as important as internal communication. In the digital age, nothing is secret, and the line between external and internal becomes blurred. A good way to keep employees and the outside world informed is to utilize LinkedIn as an information resource. Making important milestones announcements on this platform allows for both internal and external stakeholders to be aware of what change a company is going through without bombarding them with information or disturbing traditional social media channels. Pacing announcements is also extremely necessary in keeping employees engaged. Logic 20/20, a change management company, recommends if a sector of a company has a major milestone during a change management period that they wait until the month following to participate in their part of the company's change rollout plan (Gibson). Men, Linjuan, Yue, and Liu state in their study that an effective change management team has three aspects. To begin, they must envision this plan, creating it to be compelling and with a clear correlation to its importance. Next, leadership must be encouraged to energize their community about this change. By showcasing their passion for the difference this will make in a company, employees and stakeholders will be more susceptible to change. Lastly, they must enable employees to feel comfortable by offering sincere care and emotional support. These three tactics garner trust among employees and create a space where they can be open to change.

Change especially be a challenge for titans of industry. Even before rising to worldwide fame, Starbucks had three core tenets of their company: invest in their partners (Starbucks' name for its employees), competent and personal customer care, and a close connection to its local

communities. In the mid-2000's Starbucks was growing exponentially, spurred on by Wall Street, and was struggling to compete against companies such as McDonald's and Dunkin' Donuts. Howard Schultz, then Starbucks' former CEO, noticed that while revenue was growing, this departure from the company's core values was causing a plateau in growth. He came back on with the knowledge that change can only occur by investing heavily in new products and communication channels. Schultz and his team began by implementing a transformation agenda with "7 Big Moves" that included steps ahead of their time such as "Expand our global presence—while making each store the heart of a local neighborhood" and "Be a leader in ethical sourcing and environmental impact." Not only did Starbucks make these claims, they stuck to them. These individuals aided victims of Hurricane Katrina and made lasting connections with local communities. These practices launched Starbucks to the height of success it sees today (Hanna).

Netflix was part of a species on the brink of extinction - DVD rental stores. However, as other companies, such as Blockbuster, fell off the map, Netflix grew to become one of the largest streaming services in the world. Netflix's specialty is change and innovation. They are constantly looking for way to change their company to stay on top of industry trends. Whether that be transitioning to a DVD subscription service in 1999, to moving to streaming in 2007, to developing their own content through studio partnerships 2012, to its transition into the video game industry starting in 2022. Netflix is able to make these drastic changes so often due to its decentralized employee structure, allowing employees to make the necessary decisions for their jobs quickly and efficiently. Externally, Netflix communicates to its users often and effectively without overwhelming them (Kobiruzzaman).

Lastly, Real Chemistry, formerly known as W2O, is at the top of the public relations industry. Specializing in healthcare, this company has grown exponentially since its founding in 2001. After a sizable private equity injection in 2019, Real Chemistry was able to acquire a variety of businesses ranging from a talent agency to medical education companies. This sparked former CEO Jim Weiss to realize the company needed change. It was no longer a public relations agency, but rather a healthcare conglomerate. Enter “Real Chemistry.” Weiss and his team implemented a campaign largely centered around LinkedIn posts and internal communications to introduce a new era for the company - an emphasis on the intersection between data, tech and people. Employee’s were made a priority. Weiss held town halls biweekly to explain the transition and take questions from thousands of employees. This change was implemented seamlessly, starting with a simple name change and now moving into what Weiss calls CICTD: collaboration, integration and connecting the dots (PRWeek Staff).

Change is always difficult. Humans feel uncomfortable by the threat of their lifestyle becoming different from what they know. This holds true for companies as well. It is the job of public relations practitioners to create a space for employees and external stakeholders where they can trust the executive board and feel comfortable with the change they are experiencing, no matter how drastic.

## Works Cited

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