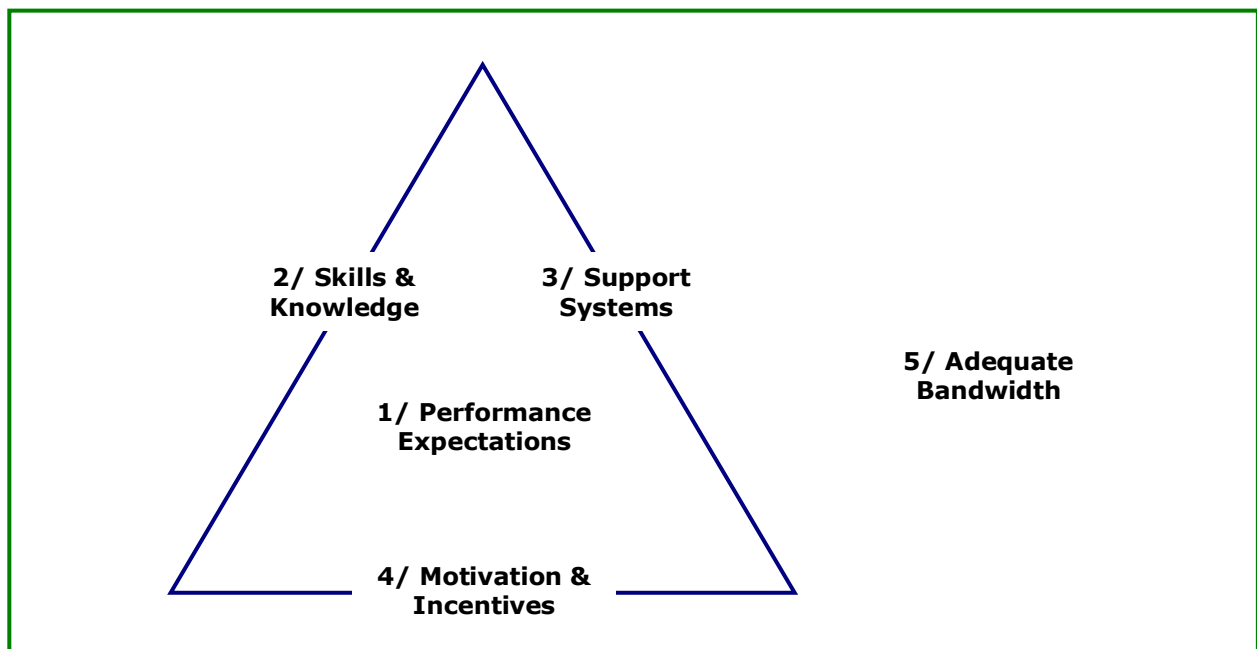


**A Primer for Supervisors and Managers:
Five Elements for Managing Change**
by Douglas J. Sietsema, Douglas Sietsema LLC

A business that undergoes large scale changes often sets up a dedicated project team, sponsored by the most senior executives of the company, working exclusively for weeks or months to roll out changes by executing a carefully integrated plan. This approach makes sense for large scale changes to processes, structure, markets, or technologies, but not for day-to-day changes to the way work groups interact or complete their tasks.

Line managers and executives have a daily responsibility for helping their teams respond effectively to challenges in the work environment. There are five straightforward elements *always* available to you help the people you supervise. The key to understanding and using these elements is to recognize that an individual's effective response to change requires making changes to behavior and performance. The five elements can be shown in this diagram:



1/ Set, communicate, and confirm mutual understanding of **performance expectations**. In other words, make sure you explain what is changing and how performance will be measured. Get feedback to confirm that the person understands. And then monitor performance and provide corrective coaching if required. Keep your eyes open for other aspects of performance that change; not just the ones you were expecting.

Example – Companies increasingly require employees to use special apparel or tools to protect them from injury when performing their job duties. Managers and supervisors need to provide specific guidance beyond telling employees to “work safely” or “wear protective gear.” The heavy gloves that employees need when handling caustic materials would create a safety and performance hazard if worn when operating delicate machine tools. The ear plugs or baffles that safeguard against hearing loss around noisy machinery could prevent an employee from hearing critical information while working among others who are maneuvering

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large loads within a shared work area. The range of possible combinations of safety gear requires clear direction regarding expectations to prevent the safety tools from creating dangers of their own.

Tip – When asking your employees to change their routines or follow specific rules, always ask them to describe their understanding of what you expect, and monitor their outcomes.

2/ Identify what **skills and knowledge** employees will need to change their behavior. Plan carefully how to provide skills and knowledge. For tasks that are core to the business or will be performed frequently (often 80% of the employees' time), focused training may be the best solution. This will help them be effective as soon as changes are made. Many training professionals estimate that 20% of the distinct tasks for a given role require this level of attention.

For the other 80% of the duties, consider providing procedural job aids ("cheat sheets"), other types of reference materials, or possibly arrange for support personnel (perhaps in a shared services center) who can specialize in tasks that would distract from employees' core activities.

Think carefully about when an employee is first going to apply new skills and knowledge. If you provide training or other orientation too soon, it may be forgotten by the time the employee needs to put it to use.

Example – A high-tech company implemented an ERP system and a shared services center to consolidate the finance and accounting operations of seven divisions that had been using stand-alone IT platforms and finance teams. Training for Day One daily transactions was scheduled for the week before system go-live. This prepared employees to process transactions effectively and with minimum disruption beginning the first day. Each person was given laminated cards with manual- and system-supported work steps for each of their tasks. Training for month-end close processes was conceptual, rather than procedural, and job aids were provided for reference. This month-end close training was deferred until just before the end of the first month of operation. And refresher work sessions were held just before quarter- and year-end closes to address the special tasks needed for those operations. This pattern of training and job aids minimized the time spent in training and maximized effective just-in-time access to the knowledge that employees needed to perform well.

Tip – Before asking an employee to take on a new or changed responsibility, discuss the required skills and knowledge and jointly determine whether training or some other technique is the best way to fill any gaps.

3/ Determine what new **support systems** (like tools, communication channels, or work space) would help employees perform their duties well. This is especially important when the changes require people to learn new tools (as in going from a manual process to an automated system); to change work locations (perhaps consolidating several plants into one); or to adopt a new organizational structure or reporting relationship (people often rely on informal networks that these changes can disrupt).

Example – In the ERP case above, employees who transferred into the new shared services center initially had difficulties in their roles because they no

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longer had access to their informal networks of colleagues who could answer questions about exceptions to normal transaction processing. The center's operations director held a series of brown-bag lunches where employees could bring questions and resolve them in a group setting. This helped create new ties and bonds and an informal network to replace the old ones. It also enabled management to identify problems that were likely to recur and update procedures to avoid them.

Tip – Discuss support and tool needs with your employees before they start new assignments. Help them identify what they need, then make sure they have adequate access.

4/ Think through how changing performance expectations will affect **motivation and incentives**. Note that different people are motivated by different incentives. Managers who want to provide effective incentives for their employees need to gather information concerning what types are most meaningful and highly regarded. Some people mostly want the chance to do meaningful work. Some are motivated by working with people they admire and respect. Others want to advance their careers. Many want to make sure they have plenty of free time with their families.

Example – The new Director of IT Operations for a large distribution company was asked by the executive team to restructure the IT organization to align better with operations groups. It was clear that many roles would change. Some people with senior titles would likely lose authority. Others would need to take on totally new roles if they wanted to continue with the organization. Many people were long-tenured employees that the company could not afford to lose because of their knowledge of existing systems. The IT Director formed a team consisting of existing managers and external consultants to explore options and candidates for new roles. He met individually with every person in the department (over 100 people) and with his consultants to identify and map the career and job aspirations of all employees. Some were motivated by the opportunity to stay at the cutting edge of technology applications. Some wanted to be able to manage teams. Others found the greatest satisfaction in being part of a team effort, working with people they knew and trusted. For most, compensation was NOT their primary motivator. These insights were combined with an analysis of skills and experience to place employees in new roles. Eventually, some of the at-risk people left the organization; but the majority of them worked into effective and satisfying roles, and the overall restructuring effort resulted in a more effective IT Operations group.

Tip – Get to know each employee's personal motivators for top job performance and satisfaction. The easiest way is to ask; but you also need to monitor to watch for changes.

5/ Finally, and equally as important as the first four elements, a supervisor or manager needs make sure that the people have **adequate bandwidth** to adapt to changes. The reason that this element appears "outside" the triangle that binds the first four elements is that it is driven by factors that often are far outside the control of the individual, the manager, or the work group.

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Let's face it: business-related change tends to disrupt productivity. By definition change requires people to replace activities and processes that they know with others that are unfamiliar. It is no surprise that it takes time for people to become adept in new tasks and processes, even when they are enthused about using them successfully. The pay-off for using a disciplined change management approach is that it allows people to regain productivity as quickly as possible. But until that productivity is regained, employees need to have enough latitude in their demands to accomplish work at lower productivity levels and with fewer distractions.

Example – *A software development company met its milestones for first year compliance with Sarbanes-Oxley 404 (SOx) reporting regulations and wanted to achieve benefits from internalizing SOx principles going forward. The SOx director realized that trying to apply SOx principles across the whole company all at once would overwhelm staff in all departments. Instead, she identified the “critical few” areas where SOx would yield the greatest benefits and risk containment, and focused attention on these few areas in the second year of activity. She wanted the people responsible for these areas to be as involved as possible in tailoring the SOx solution. She assigned a team of people borrowed from other departments plus external consultants to handle day-to-day operations in these areas while the area leaders concentrated on applying SOx principles to monitoring and reporting that would be rolled out later in the year. When implementation day arrived, the consultants rolled off the project, the borrowed staff returned to their own departments (where they would do a similar implementation in year three), and the experts resumed responsibility for their areas, using their new SOx-compliant processes.*

Tip – *Take a careful look at current work load before asking an employee to take on something new. Consider reducing demands in other areas for transition period, if necessary. Don't forget that some of their demands come from their personal lives.*

Managing change in processes and procedures or organizational roles and structure is not easy work; but neither is it magic or rocket science. Everyone who supervises the work of others needs to create and continuously improve the work environment of their direct reports. This will lead to greater productivity and profitability for the organization and greater employee job satisfaction. The five elements described here belong in every manager's tool kit.

About the author

Douglas Sietsema is an organizational effectiveness specialist with over twenty-five years of experience applying adult learning and organizational development principles to improve individual and organizational performance. His assignments have included large scale organizational business process transformations (such as ERP implementations), organizational restructuring (including merger and acquisition planning and post-Day-One support), organizational strategy and design, organizational culture change, and management of instructional development and delivery.

He earned a Ph.D. in educational psychology (adult learning) and an M.B.A. in organizational development, both from UCLA. He is General Manager of Douglas Sietsema LLC, a network of organizational effectiveness consulting professionals.