



## **The Importance of Developing Mental Toughness to Successfully Implement Change Management**

Change management has long been a vital part of successfully fostering and strengthening a more cohesive and productive work environment however until very recently the importance of developing Mental Toughness as a quality in the management team has been largely overlooked. However as the Third Sector struggle to sustain growth and maintain traditional means of funding the need to continually change and perform will be tested more and more by management's ability to handle new challenges and pressure.

The current economic climate and the resulting budget cuts to stem the tide of an increasing deficit have had a profound effect on the way management teams view the future of their organisations. Nowhere is this truer than in the Third Sector where the ability to function at full capacity rely on funding partly from government, be it national or local. Independent trusts have also not been immune to the shortage of funds further creating problems for charitable organisations that relied upon their grants and contracts.

Change is the name of the game when it comes to the new coalition government with the creation of David Cameron's 'Big Society' aimed at re-empowering local communities and the individual. While this move towards community-created and community-managed public services will be embraced by many Third Sector organisations it is imperative that management teams have the mental toughness to deal with the challenges, stressors and pressures that change can bring.

External factors such as the restructuring of fund management in health and social services, rising taxes, changes to benefits and employment issues will all influence the extent of internal change required in organisations. Internal issues such as increased redundancies and new approaches to income generation may well require restructure which in turn puts a strain on the work environment. These changes often provoke feelings of uncertainty, fear and high levels of stress. Leaders often struggle to take important decisions and take the initiative in this environment.

## **Change Management**

In these circumstances Change management interventions often focus on tackling the feelings of stress and resistance to change by ensuring that staff feel involved during the entire process and that there is adequate communication. This can certainly help to reduce the fear element of **this** change process but what about the next one? Change is now definitely a constant in today's world of work!

The ability to absorb high levels of change and indeed flourish in an environment that has become increasingly complex is key to success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and has to be the long term goal for any change management programme

## **Mental Toughness**

So what does cause one person to thrive and another to succumb when faced with challenging circumstances?

Fortunately we now have the ability to both measure and develop precisely those qualities of resilience and mental toughness which ensure not only an acceptance but also a positive desire for change when appropriate.

Mental Toughness has up until recently been ignored in the business world (it has long been used by professional athletes and their coaching teams), however it is now gaining momentum and prestige with organisations in the public and private sectors testing their employees to ascertain their mental toughness and subsequently using these results to target specific development. Mental toughness is a concept that can help meet challenge as it is directly related to performance, behaviour, wellbeing and aspirations.

So what is Mental Toughness? Mental toughness is defined as "the capacity for an individual to deal effectively with stressors, pressures and challenges and perform to the best of their ability irrespective of the circumstances in which they find themselves." This personal resilience is assessed through a questionnaire which provides an occupational measure of an individuals' mental toughness. The Psychometric Test was developed and validated by Dr Peter Clough of the Psychology Department of Hull University and AQR Ltd. Challenge, commitment, control (emotion and life) and confidence (abilities and interpersonal) are all measured with breakdowns for all four components.

From this questionnaire a report is then generated which provides feedback as well as suggestions for action on their development. Coaching from a mental toughness specialist is highly recommended after completing the questionnaire so that lasting positive change in behavioural patterns can be developed. The completion of a second report at a later date is also extremely useful as it allows people to see the distance they have travelled due to their newfound awareness of their behavioural pattern and development of it. It also offers evidence based development and return on investment.

Some of the benefits recorded in areas such as Housing, Care, Education, Community Associations have been to do with the development of a can-do attitude in the face of challenge:

- The willingness and ability to take on increased responsibility and accountability
- Increased confidence to take difficult decisions and deliver unwelcome messages
- A willingness to seek out new partners and develop successful relationships with external stakeholders
- The ability to carry on and deliver challenging targets while remaining focused despite obstacles
- The feeling of being in control in challenging situations and not feeling overwhelmed

In stressful situations there is undeniable evidence that shows a link between the degree of mental toughness in an individual and both the quality of work achieved, and the wellbeing of the individual. A number of trusts are already benefiting from targeting their recruitment towards mentally tough directors and senior managers, while others are building mental toughness into their management development programme.

Programs like this can only become more commonplace during uncertain times where the resilience of the team is vital to maintaining productivity during change.

There is no denying that measuring and developing the Mental Toughness of the team is rapidly becoming an essential component in ensuring the success and sustainability of future change management programmes.

### **Written by an Expert Consultant from ACEVO Consulting**

To speak to an advisor about the matters raised in this article please call 020 7280 4933 referencing the article.