

Organisational Restructure

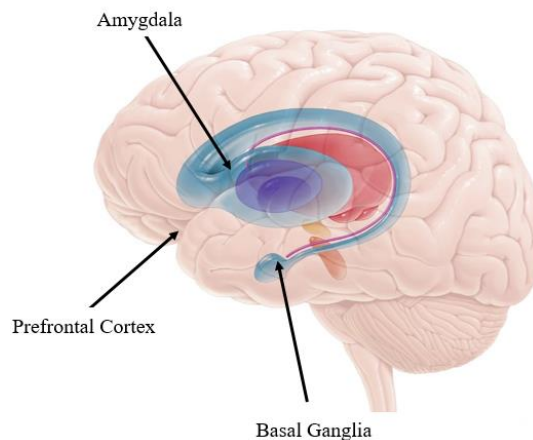
The news just landed in your inbox, or maybe in your ear, whispered through the gossip chain from one colleague to another—the company is restructuring. You likely have a million questions racing through your mind as you wait to hear if the changes will impact you.

While everyone deals with stress, anxiety and change differently, the following information may assist you in understanding your reactions to an organisational restructure and help you take some positive steps to manage them.

We spend around 30 percent of our lives working, so it's no surprise that most of our work activities become habitual. These work habits are controlled by a part of the brain called the basal ganglia and take significantly less mental energy to perform because they have become "hard-wired". "The way we've always done it" is mentally comfortable. It not only feels right—it feels good. The process of an organisational restructure (i.e., change) jerks us out of a comfort zone by stimulating the prefrontal cortex, which is linked to the amygdala. When the prefrontal cortex is overwhelmed with complex and unfamiliar concepts, the amygdala connection gets kicked into high gear, which can cause physical and psychological disorientation.

Some of the most common reactions to an organisational restructure include:

- Anger
- Disappointment
- Feeling that change is unnecessary
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Fatigue
- Feeling unmotivated
- Disturbed sleep
- Irritability
- Cognitive disruptions (i.e., trouble focusing, difficulties making decisions)
- Loss of appetite
- Feeling betrayed



To manage these reactions and effectively calm the mind/body:

- Eat well, exercise and drink plenty of water. Busy, stress-filled days often result in eating on the run or not at all, and skipping exercise in favour of ticking things off your to-do list. Remember that you will almost certainly feel worse in the long run and optimal cognitive performance requires energy, which comes from more than just coffee.
- Be aware of your self-talk. If you find yourself having negative thoughts regarding yourself or the future, focus on your strengths, skills, capabilities and achievements.
- Remember that change is normal. By focusing on the negatives/losses you may miss out on the positives/benefits.
- Focus on what you can control.
- Make time for activities you have always found enjoyable.
- Talk to loved ones.
- Utilise deep breathing exercises, progressive muscle relaxation and/or creative visualisation.
- Find a suitable counsellor if your reactions are prolonged or intense.

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Learning through Change

This requires offering appropriate support to staff. However, the first step requires that you identify whether the changes are developmental, transitional or transformational.

Developmental changes are the easiest to implement. This is when you only need to improve current business procedures, such as improving billing and reporting methods, updating payroll procedures or refocussing marketing strategies and advertising processes. Even when the long term plans also include transitional change, if you start with the developmental changes and can demonstrate that change will streamline the process you will win hearts and minds and so alleviate unnecessary fears of change.

Transitional changes are more difficult and occur when you need to replace existing processes with new processes. This can include corporate restructures, mergers or acquisitions; creating new products or services or implementing new technology. However, once again when staff are properly informed and supported most will rise to meet the new challenges. It helps to explain the reasons for the need to change and to give individuals the opportunity to have input when possible.

Transformational changes usually involve both transitional and developmental changes and occur when businesses accept that the whole business needs to be revamped. When this happens it is imperative that staff are involved in all phases of change discussions and planning throughout the process.

Once you have decided why what and how you need to change, it is best to involve everyone and ensure they all understand the why as well as the when and how. Despite the fact that Neurologists and Neuropsychologists have a plethora of data to explain why we tend to resist change, history shows that humans can and do make changes when it is likely to improve the way they live and work. This seems to happen most readily when the majority can see the advantages, particularly for themselves.

IMPORTANT DO'S AND DONT'S

- There will be a range of different reactions to change and this is normal. Therefore, share the why in your communications.
- Consultation needs to be genuine and this means giving time for people to respond as well as ensuring they know they have been heard.
- If consultation is not possible explain why.
- Tell the truth.
- Expect people to seek more information, if you have it share it and if you haven't say so.
- Expect gossip to increase as people try to make sense of change and manage their fears.
- Expect people to share past poor change experiences, so show you are listening and get your own support for the change journey.
- Encourage others to join you in supporting change; support these 'change champions'.
- Be aware that for some people change may take away from their energy as the brain diverts energy and attention.
- Encourage people to use the EAP or other support options and consider this for yourself too.

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