

## **MANAGING CUMULATIVE CHANGE**

**by Angelo Pesce, CHRP, CMC**

### **Introduction**

Most literature on change discusses, analyzes, and dissects major change initiatives. For managers and human resources professionals, these models are too cumbersome to apply to minor change initiatives that occur rather frequently. Yet the cumulative effect of minor changes can become just as devastating as a badly instituted major change.

### **Symptoms of Cumulative Change Syndrome**

The following list of symptoms indicates that cumulative change has gotten out of hand. (Please note that this list is not exhaustive.)

- Work is duplicated
- Processes are redundant
- Understanding of the purpose of all or part of a system has been lost
- The connection between some of the processes and the business goals has been lost
- Some things are not being done well or efficiently
- Workload is increased (because we tend to *add* change to staff's workload)
- Technology is not being used appropriately
- Staff is or appears to be overwhelmed.

### **What is Missing?**

Minor change is typically added to existing processes and consequently to staff's workload. No attempt is made to determine the impact of the change on existing processes and, often, no thought is given to the best way to do the new task.

Thorough explanation of the change is often missing: namely, why and how the change will help achieve organizational or regulatory goals. It is also likely that no thought has been given to training staff to perform the new task — or at best, staff are given rudimentary training that has many gaps.

### **How to Introduce Small/Minor Change**

To introduce small or minor change successfully and avoid the pitfalls mentioned above, the following steps should be taken every time any task is changed:

1. Determine how the change will support your organizational goals and why this is necessary. This will ensure that the change is better than the status quo.
2. Examine the impact the change will have on existing processes, especially technological ones.

3. Look for and eliminate any duplication and redundancies that will inevitably occur as new change is introduced. This will ensure that increases in workload are fully justified and needed.
4. Communicate the rationale for the change and the new and efficient process to all staff who will be affected.
5. Provide training to ensure that staff are comfortable with the change and that they will carry out the new task as efficiently as possible.
6. When carrying out the steps described above, involve all staff who are going to be affected. No one knows better than they do what the full impact of the change will be and how it can be introduced efficiently.

### **Conclusion**

Any change, including small or minor change, can be devastating to staff morale and, as a result, lead to a decrease in productivity. If small change is not introduced properly, inefficiencies and redundancies accumulate over time. Implementing the six steps described above will go a long way toward avoiding the negative impact of cumulative change executed poorly.

*Angelo Pesce is the President and Principal Consultant of Pesce & Associates, a full-service human resources consulting group. Visit [www.pesceassociates.com](http://www.pesceassociates.com).*

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