

# Quality Improvement

## Kotter's Eight Steps of Change



<sup>5</sup> Kotter, John P. and Cohen, Dan S. The Heart of Change. Boston: Harvard Business School Press

### Step 1: Create Urgency

For change to happen, it helps if the whole organisation really wants it. **Develop a sense of urgency around the need for change.** This may help you spark the initial motivation to get things moving. This isn't simply a matter of showing people poor performance or talking about changes elsewhere in the NHS. You will need an open and honest and convincing dialogue about what's happening in your organisation and in healthcare. If many people start talking about the change you propose, the urgency can build and feed on itself.

### Step 2: Form a Powerful Coalition



**Convince** people that change is necessary. This often takes strong leadership and visible support from key people within your organisation. **Managing change isn't enough – you have to lead it.** You can find effective change leaders throughout your organization – they don't necessarily follow the traditional company hierarchy. To lead change, you need to bring together a coalition, or team, of influential people whose power comes from a variety of sources, including job title, status, expertise, and political importance. Once formed, **your "change coalition" needs to work as a team**, continuing to build urgency and momentum around the need for change.

### Step 3: Create a Vision for Change

When you first start thinking about change, there will probably be many great ideas and solutions floating around. **Link these concepts to an overall vision** that people can grasp easily and remember. A clear vision can help everyone understand why you're asking them to do something. When people see for themselves what you're trying to achieve, then the directives they're given tend to make more sense.



- Determine the values that are central to the change.
- Develop a short summary (one or two sentences) that captures what you "see" as the future
- Ensure that your change coalition can describe the vision in five minutes or less.

### Step 4: Communicate the Vision

What you do with your vision after you create it will determine your success. Your message will probably have strong competition from other day-to-day communications within the organisation, so you need to **communicate it frequently and powerfully**, and embed it within everything that you do.



Don't just call special meetings to communicate your vision. Instead, talk about it every chance you get. Use the vision daily to make decisions and solve problems. When you keep it fresh on everyone's minds, they'll remember it and respond to it.

It's also important to "walk the talk." What you do is far more important – and believable – than what you say. Demonstrate the kind of behaviour that you want from others.

### Step 5: Remove Obstacles

If you follow these steps and reach this point in the change process, you've been talking about your vision and building buy-in from all levels of the organization. Hopefully, your staff wants to get busy and achieve the benefits that you've been promoting. But is anyone resisting the change? And are there processes or structures that are getting in its way?

**Put in place the structure for change, and continually check for barriers to it.** Removing obstacles can empower the people you need to execute your vision, and it can help the change move forward.

What you can do:

- Recognize and reward people for making change happen.
- Identify people who are resisting the change, and help them see what's needed.
- Take action to quickly remove barriers (human or otherwise).

### Step 6: Create Short-Term Wins

Nothing motivates more than success. **Give your team a taste of victory early in the change process.** Within a short time frame (this could be a month or a year, depending on the type of change), you'll want to have some "quick wins" that your staff can see. Without this, critics and negative thinkers might hurt your progress.

**Create short-term targets** – not just one long-term goal. You want each smaller target to be achievable, with little room for failure. Your team may have to work very hard to come up with these targets, but each "win" that you produce can further motivate the entire staff.



### Step 7: Build on the Change

Kotter argues that many **change projects fail because victory is declared too early.** Real change runs deep. Quick wins are only the beginning of what needs to be done to achieve long-term change. Each success provides an opportunity to **build on what went right** and identify what you can improve.

What you can do:

- After every win, analyse what went right, and what needs improving.
- Set goals to continue building on the momentum you've achieved.
- Keep ideas fresh by bringing in new team members and leaders for your change coalition.



### Step 8: Anchor the Changes in Corporate Culture

Finally, to make any change stick, it should become part of the core of your organization. Your corporate culture often determines what gets done, so the values behind your vision must show in day-to-day work. **Make continuous efforts to ensure that the change is seen in every aspect of your organisation.** This will help give that change a solid place in your organization's culture. It's also important that your team leaders continue to support the change. If you lose the support of these people, you might end up back where you started.

What you can do:



- Talk about progress every chance you get. Tell success stories about the change process and repeat other stories that you hear.
- Publicly recognize key members of your original change coalition, and make sure the rest of the staff – new and old – remembers their contributions.