

Change Leadership vs. Change Management: Why You Need Both

Change is necessary for continuous improvement. Knowing the distinction between change leadership and management can be the difference between success or failure.



Change. It's inevitable and necessary for a business to grow or adapt. Some people accept change and others resist. When looking to guide employees through change, it's important to understand the difference between change leadership and change management.

Change Leadership

Change leadership is the practice of guiding and influencing people through organizational change. It focuses not just on managing the logistics of change but also inspiring, aligning and equipping people to embrace and drive change forward. Some of the key aspects of change leadership are:

- **Being vision-oriented.** Define a compelling future and communicate why the change is necessary.
- **Being people-focused.** Recognize that change can be emotionally and professionally challenging. Focus on empathy, communication and support.
- **Being proactive and adaptive.** Anticipate resistance and obstacles. Stay flexible and responsive to employee feedback.
- **Influencing.** Influence isn't authority. Influence uses trust, credibility and engagement to motivate others, rather than relying on positional power alone.
- **Driving culture.** Encourage new ways of thinking and behaving, not just new processes or structures.

Change Management

Change management is the systematic approach to dealing with the transition of an organization's goals, processes, technologies or people. It involves strategies and tools to help individuals and teams move from a current state to a desired future state effectively. Some of the key aspects of change management are:

- **Planning.** Define the change, set objectives and identify key stakeholders.
- **Communication.** Inform and educate those affected by the change.

- **Training and support.** Provide the resources and knowledge people need to succeed in the new environment.
- **Monitoring and feedback.** Measure progress, gather input and make adjustments.

Why the Distinction Matters

Understanding the distinction helps leaders address both the technical and the human sides of change. Change management ensures the logistics are in place (plans, training, timelines). But without change leadership, people may resist, disengage or revert to old habits. Leadership drives the "why" — the emotional and cultural commitment needed for lasting change. Different skill sets are required, so the owner may provide change leadership and the plant manager may provide change management.

Change is both rational and emotional. One without the other can lead to failure. Strong management without leadership equals technically sound plans, but poor adoption. Strong leadership without management equals energized people, but chaos or confusion. **P**

CHANGE LEADERSHIP	VS	CHANGE MANAGEMENT
Visionary and strategic		Tactical and operational
Focused on people and culture		Focused on systems and processes
Inspires and motivates		Plans, coordinates, and tracks
Leads through uncertainty		Manages known transitions

Carli Kistler-Miller, MBA has over 25 years of experience with operations, event/meeting planning, marketing, writing and communications. Email: cmiller@pmpa.org — Website: pmpa.org.