

Managing Change When Resources Are Tight

In the world of Irish SMEs and charities, change is rarely a formal programme with a dedicated budget and a suite of consultants. Instead, it usually arrives in the form of a new software system, a shift in government funding criteria, or a necessary restructure to keep the doors open. For a team of ten people already juggling full workloads, these changes can feel less like progress and more like an additional burden.

At Project Compass Advisory, we often see that the standard change management theories—designed for multinational corporations—can feel alienating for smaller organisations. When your resources are stretched, you don't need a heavy 50-page change strategy. You need a practical way to help your people move from point A to point B without the day-to-day work falling apart. The reality is that simple, human-led approaches often work better than complex frameworks. In a small team, change is personal, and managing it effectively is about clarity, empathy, and focus.

Why Change Struggles in the Real World

For a resource-constrained organisation, the barriers to change are practical rather than theoretical. The most significant challenge is often limited staff capacity. In a charity or a growing business, there is rarely "spare" time. When you ask a team member to learn a new process, you are essentially asking them to do it on top of a full day's work.

Resistance to change in small teams is rarely about being difficult; it is usually a rational response to the pressure to keep day-to-day work moving. As Kotter (2012) suggests, without a clear path forward, the natural human reaction is to cling to the familiar.

This leads to competing priorities. If the choice is between attending training or responding to an urgent client request, the client usually wins. Over time, this creates a lack of structure where changes are started but never quite finished. People worry that the change will make them less efficient or that they won't have the support they need to adapt.

Practical Ways to Manage Change with Limited Resources

Managing change when resources are tight requires a "lean" mindset. You have to strip away the jargon and focus on what actually moves the needle:

1. Start Small and Focus on Quick Wins

Instead of trying to overhaul everything at once, identify one small part of the change that can be implemented successfully. John Kotter (2012) emphasizes the importance of generating short-term wins to build momentum and quiet the critics. In practice, if you are moving to a new tool, start by using it for just one small internal project first.

2. Radical Clarity in Communication

In small organisations, news travels fast. If you don't provide the "why" behind a change, the "rumour mill" will fill the gap. Prosci (2023) research consistently shows that the most effective communicator of change is the person's immediate supervisor. Use team meetings to explain what is changing and what it means for each person's daily routine.

3. Involve People Early

The people doing the work are the experts. When you involve them in the design of the change, you aren't just getting better buy-in; you are getting a better solution. Before committing to a new process, hold a 30-minute workshop to ask: "What will break if we do this?" and adjust based on their feedback.

4. Lightweight Check-ins and Feedback Loops

Complex programmes use monthly steering committees; you likely don't have time for that. Instead, use lightweight check-ins. Two weeks after a change starts, ask the team for three things: what's working, what's confusing, and what is one small fix we could make today? This creates a culture of adaptation rather than frustration.

How Simple Practices Improve Delivery

When you manage change as an integrated part of project delivery, the benefits are immediate. You gain stronger buy-in because people support what they help create. You see smoother implementation because quick wins iron out the kinks on a small scale first. Most

importantly, you reduce disruption. As noted by the Project Management Institute (2023), projects that include active change management are significantly more likely to meet their original goals and stay on budget. In a resource-tight environment, this efficiency is a necessity.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

Even with the best intentions, it is easy to stumble. Frequent pitfalls include trying to change too much at once, which leads to "change fatigue," and under-communicating. You might feel you are repeating yourself, but for a busy staff member, that repetition is a vital anchor. Finally, never treat change as separate from delivery. Change management is simply the process of ensuring that the technical solution you are building is actually used by the people it was built for.

MINI CASE STUDY: THE DUBLIN COMMUNITY CHARITY

A small charity in Dublin needed to move to a digital CRM system. The team feared the technology would be a "black hole" for their time. Instead of a "Big Bang" launch, the manager chose the simplest part of the system—contact logging—for a one-week trial. They held 10-minute daily huddles to share tips. By keeping it bite-sized and human, they achieved a 100% adoption rate within three months and saved five hours of admin per person, per week.

Five Practical Change Management Habits

1. **The "Why" Test:** Ensure you can explain the reason for the change in two sentences to someone who is busy.
2. **The 30-Day Focus:** Choose one small aspect of the change to achieve in the next month.
3. **The Open Door:** Set aside 20 minutes every Friday specifically for people to air concerns.

4. **Visible Progress:** Use a simple tracker to show "Quick Wins" being physically checked off.
5. **Celebrate the Small Stuff:** Acknowledge team members who successfully adopt new ways of working.

References

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