

# HRD

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“THERE'S SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL  
ABOUT THE COLLABORATION AT  
APPLE AND IT MAKES THE SENSE  
OF PURPOSE CLEARER”

HANNAH REID  
PEOPLE DIRECTOR EMEA  
APPLE

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ARTICLE BY ED SPARKES, DIRECTOR - LACE PARTNERS

# THE FIZZY & THE STILL

"ORGANISATIONS ARE LIKE SHIPS, THEY BOTH WORK IN EVER-  
CHANGING CONDITIONS, THEY BOTH REQUIRE PEOPLE TO RUN THEM  
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SMOOTH AND EFFICIENT OPERATIONS"

*Three very different case-studies shine light on volatility within change management. In 1985, Coca-Cola attempted a marketing risk to change its recipe, introducing "New Coke". Seventy-nine days later, the company reintroduced "Classic Coke". Fast-forward to March 2022, P&O Ferries executed the removal of 800 employees over a video call without consulting trade unions. Finally, in October 2022, Liz Truss resigned as UK Prime Minister after being in the position for forty-nine days and triggering major economic turbulence with her mini-budget.*

The examples in the introduction couldn't be more different, but they each have one very important thread that business leaders often overlook, a lack of wider and upfront stakeholder engagement. In the case of Coca-Cola, it was the customers; in the case of P&O Ferries, it was trade unions and employees and in the case of Liz Truss' Government, it was the market and the regulators. Organisations are like ships, they both work in ever-changing conditions, they both require people to run them properly and they both rely on communication to ensure smooth and efficient operations. Without these elements, a ship cannot float. In addition, for a ship to succeed in its voyage, it cannot stay forever in calm,

shallow waters. It will need to venture out, brave the elements and learn the sea and when a storm looms on the horizon, there is one question that each business leader needs to answer, "are we ready?"

One of the leading factors in whether an organisation is successful or not is its flexibility. The COVID-19 pandemic showed us this in real-time; businesses that could not adapt to the changing demands and limitations of the world struggled. The companies that succeeded in spite of the pandemic, pivoted. Business models were changed, customer interactivity was adjusted and some physical offerings became digital. COVID-19 was a shock to the world, but it did highlight a glaring weakness in

our society - that most of us didn't think it would happen. While the rapid spread and mutation of COVID-19 was a fluke of nature, it wasn't, as is often described, "unprecedented", the warning signs were there. This has provided leaders with an opportunity for self-reflection, what if you brainstormed what could go wrong in the world, your industry or business? Idea generation isn't just for "creatives", with every new technological evolution, a parallel conversation should be happening on the opportunities and threats, not just its pros and cons.

In the training of soldiers, armies across the world run drills mimicking a wide range of potentially different scenarios, with the understanding that if

a particular event does happen, they are prepared. In discussing potential issues and solutions, organisations gain a mental malleability that can be applied to a multitude of situations. Implemented in an operational team setting, this meeting of minds can generate a strong mindset that can overcome even the stickiest of situations. With a greater understanding of the wider environment, business leaders can identify chances to be the disruptors rather than the disrupted. One of the most significant factors that sets organisations apart is their degree of transparency. Take for example, the proposed and short-lived European Super League. The League (ESL) was proposed to include 20 teams, 12 of which would be founding members and permanent competitors regardless of their success in other leagues. Unfortunately, what was clearly a purely commercial endeavour forgot to consider the greatest influence on football, fans. The resulting backlash resulted in nine of the participating clubs - of which six were English clubs - announcing their intention to withdraw. Subsequently, the ESL announced suspension of operations. Proactive communication may have been able to salvage the PR disaster that was the ESL fiasco, which seems obvious in hindsight. Yet, when issues are uncovered or anticipated, many leaders keep staff in the dark until they actively affect the business. In the meantime, workloads may have increased or management demands have changed with little to no context. The lack of context for change within an organisation can contribute to higher stress levels and lower work satisfaction levels, thus leading to increased turnover. As a result, the ability to hold open, honest and proactive conversations with stakeholders is crucial for leaders to overcome operational difficulties.

Leaders often have the unenviable job of leading or introducing difficult tasks or operations, which may not immediately align with personal values. As is often the case, it is up to leaders to spearhead this change and bring staff on board. Whilst we are all human, leaders often need to “own” a change and keep any reservations

to themselves, which is not easy. Effective and successful leaders must look beyond the uncomfortable to focus on the bigger picture. Exceptional leadership leads by example, with a commitment to both staff and the introduced vision. Key questions can be: “In the context of these changes, how can I best support you and what can we do as a team to move forward effectively in this new direction?” Instead of staff becoming the victims of the change, they can evolve into agents of change, becoming spokespeople and advocates for this new chapter. In providing a strong, active and engaging position, organisations can have a better communication platform to traverse any obstacles as a team, together.

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Apathy is a killer and one of the worst poisons within organisational change is the risk of indifference. It isn't enough to just introduce new thoughts, ideas or directions, they have to be lived to be believed. Staff who go through the motions without coming on board with proposed changes become an organisation's greatest weakness. People who don't care about the vision will be less inclined to be problem solvers or think outside the box and, as a result, do the bare minimum. In the absence of a strong leader, this attitude can spread rapidly across a team and beyond, creating a domino effect of detachment. Constructive and practical leadership

identifies the potential risks of indifference and heads it off at the pass. With proactive communication and a strong stance, an effective leader can identify the causes of the indifference and offer an alternative view, steering the ship back on course.

Social media and the widespread opinions that traverse the digital world mean that it may feel like an organisation has to be all things at once. However, consensus politics can dilute the message of change and disrupt any actions that may need to occur to truly reach that next chapter of growth. While there is a delicate balance to be maintained, there is still space and opportunity for businesses to be unapologetic in their change and yet still be empathetic regarding their history. You won't please all of the people all the time, but the only ones you should be concerned with are the ones that matter the most, your stakeholders, customers and employees. External parties with little context or care for your organisation should be given little space at this particular table. It is possible to enact change, be firm with that change and be respectful within that context. What helps is the steadfastness that comes with complete and total transparency with yourself, your staff and your customers. At the end of the day, you can approach change in one of two ways - either buy a bouquet of flowers, beautiful yet temporary - or you can plant seeds and create a perfect environment for them to grow and succeed. Whilst change management is hard, it doesn't have to hurt. It might have negative connotations, but it can also be a joyous and exciting time, providing a new lease of life and opportunity for all involved. As leaders, it is our responsibility to ensure our crew members are familiar and comfortable in choppy waters, so we are better prepared when the weather takes a turn. In this way, they will overcome inevitable challenges that come their way.