

The Day of Reconciliation: Remembering the fundamentals of SA's most important change

By [Tom Marsicano](#)

13 Dec 2021

As we prepare to celebrate the Day of Reconciliation, we must remember why it is so important to the people of South Africa. It's an event of great relevance to various communities across our country because it symbolises how our people could bring about great change peacefully - despite the genuine possibility of civil upheaval.



Tom Marsicano, CEO of 'and Change'

Reconciliation, negotiation, and conflict resolution/prevention are central tenets of managing change. The way the newly elected government handled the transition to democracy in 1994 has proven to be one of the single best case studies for the people working in our field.

As apartheid was coming to an end, there was a real threat of conflict, and had this transformation been mishandled, chaos would have erupted. But through careful planning, ongoing communication campaigns, and strong leadership, potential crises were averted.

While change management is often associated with the private sector, many have also worked with governments. The State is still an organisation – or rather, a group of organisations that must deal with stakeholders both inside and outside of their direct sphere of influence – and many of the tactics we use to facilitate change still apply at such a macro level. New complexities are introduced in managing change at a government level, but the core principles remain the same.

Right now, the world is once again going through significant change. The global health crisis has affected everyone across the planet somehow, and once again, governments have been called upon to try and guide people through this massive change to healthcare and lifestyle.



Leadership now: Lessons from 2021 and preparing for the future

Brian Eagar, MANGO-OMC 7 Dec 2021



Strong leadership is essential

Apartheid would not have ended without unified, tactical leadership from the opposition – leaders who could convince those in power that political change was necessary. This need for advocates of a change is one of the most important requirements of any change, whether it's a merger and acquisition within an organisation or the start of a new digital process. For these new systems to successfully be implemented, leaders have to believe in the change and help the people around them understand why it is beneficial. Change resistance is very real, but with the right leaders who can articulate and negotiate the true effects of the change, they can mitigate backlash in the long term.

Defining success and the importance of communication

Every person involved in a change has a different understanding of what makes it successful. In the decades leading up to the end of apartheid, the numerous political stakeholders had different needs, objectives, and ideas on the way forward. It was only through years, even decades, of ongoing communication throughout the struggle years that helped build the strategies that would ultimately shift power from the National Party.

Recently, we have seen an example of what happens when a change is put in place without proper communication and consultation: the E-tolls in Gauteng.

After years of civil disobedience from drivers across Gauteng, transport minister Fikile Mbalula recently announced that the government plans to scrap the system. Had there been more communication about the motivation for the tolls on drivers before their implementation, with more public consultation and – you guessed it – communication between the various stakeholders, the tolls may have been more successful.

Compromise to avoid conflict

For the many people who don't understand its power, compromise is often described as neither party getting what they want. But when multiple sides attempt to create real change (from rival political parties to employers and employees), it is only through compromise that a genuinely successful plan can be realised. In 1988, Nelson Mandela, still in prison, invited the government to negotiate an end to apartheid. Following his release and the unbanning of the ANC, PAC and SACP, the negotiations continued – taking into account the varying needs of each party.

Negotiation is central to any change and helps create expectations among all parties of what a "successful change" is. This ultimately leads to more of the people involved become invested in the change, because they know what to expect when it is implemented and have a say in how it affects them exactly. It's rarely easy, but it's a process that's necessary to avoid the conflicts that can stop a change in its tracks.

Clear rulesets and a vision for the future

South Africans are lucky to have a constitution that has defined how the people of this country ought to be treated. When it was drafted in 1996, it laid out a plan for South Africa's future prosperity, allowing the country's people a glimpse of what our society could be. It answered how society could succeed under the right circumstances. Similarly, once a change has

been implemented at an organisational level, it's essential that the 'how' of the change is apparent to those affected by it, and concrete goals are set. When you have an explicit ruleset and vision for the future, it becomes significantly easier to measure the success of a change, which means we can adjust our strategies if we are not meeting the metrics we have set – without a set of shifting goalposts.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tom Marsicano is a change management expert and CEO of and Change.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>