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The publication for Ericsson employees all over the world

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# Living with change

No one is indifferent to change. Some people welcome the unknown, but most people react with fear. You can grit your teeth and wait for everything to return to normal, or learn to live with change – because continuous change is a fact of modern life.

Change permeates private life and working life. Stockmarket prices and interest rates rise and fall, politicians step down and their successors step in, new technology brings new opportunities and the workplace is a never-ending source of change – new routines to improve efficiency, new colleagues arriving and others disappearing, new supervisors and reorganizations. Major changes in the workplace create unease among both salaried staff and management.

“In all types of operations, restructuring causes some degree of anxiety,” says Paul Moxnes, psychologist and professor of organizational psychology at the Norwegian School of Management in Oslo and the University College of Karlstad in Sweden. He believes that most people need a certain degree of structure at the workplace, a framework in which to place themselves and other people. People

want to be able to see the whole picture and understand their part in it. Loosening up that structure results in both creativity and anxiety among the employees.

### New power base

People can be afraid to lose the position they have acquired or perhaps worry that their work situation will deteriorate. In the worst case, they might fear losing their job in the new organization. Others see a chance to obtain better circumstances from the change and react with higher motivation and energy. “The entire organization vibrates with a sense that a new power base is being created. Hopefully, from out of this chaos a structure bearing renewed energy and creativity will arise.”

Reorganizations are an important management tool and a natural part of a company's development. In the future, they will take

place with increasing frequency.

“We are not living in a stable world, and change happens so quickly.

It is therefore important to be secure in yourself,” says Paul Moxnes. “It is impossible to tolerate anxiety if you do not feel security.” Some people are naturally secure, through having a strong belief or a philosophy. For others, their family or friends are their life-buoy. It is also possible to learn to be more tolerant of anxiety by taking courses. “There are courses where participants deliberately expose themselves to anxiety-producing situations and practice their ability to tolerate and recognize the feeling.”

### Information is important

“Information also allays anxiety. All surveys I have conducted at workplaces show that a lack of information in the face of imminent change affects staff adversely. The



Paul Moxnes

reaction that occurs is very primitive – it is as if your mother and father are turning their backs on you. I see it happening in everyday situations I experience – for example, if I don't get an answer to an e-mail message, I become impatient, and eventually aggressive!”

### People fantasize

When there is a lack of information, people begin to conceive their own ideas of how things will be after the change. Such fantasies can be dangerous since they cause staff to act in accordance with personal fantasies about reality.

“This is why staff-members' fantasies are more important for the company's performance than facts. A leader who is aware of and knows how to influence staff-members' fantasies can create an organizational paradise. This is from new research findings that I feel are very exciting,” Paul Moxnes says, adding that people who have a rich inner life tend to be able to tolerate many setbacks.

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