NOTHING STAYS

THE SAME:

Leadership Techniques to Empower People During Change Initiatives

BY JONATHAN GILBERT

Every organization is affected by change, especially during times of economic volatility. Managers who must lead change initiatives, however, are all too aware of the alarming failure rates that can occur. The critical missing piece is largely the failure to take into account how change affects an organization's people.

According to a study by PriceWaterhouseCoopers, nearly 75 percent of all organizational change programs fail because they don't create the necessary groundswell of support among employees. When organizational leadership employs a three-phase "Organizational Change Management Life Cycle" methodology to address the stages of change, change management initiatives stand a much greater chance for success.

It's important to consider the three organizational elements that both drive and are affected by change:

- **Processes:** Business processes, including maps, policies and procedures, and business rules, which are redesigned or realigned to provide improved services
- **Technology:** Allows greater organizational efficiency in implementing change
- **People:** Those responsible for developing and implementing new processes, and specifying and using new technology

These elements are closely linked to the three stages of the Change Management Life Cycle: identify the change, engage the people, and implement the change. From the outset of any change management initiative, people must recognize and buy into the need for change. Leaders must recognize that an organization cannot successfully adopt change unless its people understand and support the reasons for creating the change. >>

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The Change Management Life Cycle

Phase I: Identify the Change

While it may seem obvious, clearly articulating the proposed change in common, consistent language is the fundamental first step for any change initiative. Leaders need to identify and communicate the need for change so that it is understood and supported by people at all organizational levels. Project leaders should also be aware that there are intellectual, psychological and neurological responses that people have regarding change that can be addressed with the following techniques:

Get People's Attention. Change distracts and disturbs human beings, so directing their attention in a positive way will help them focus on the proposed change. Introducing the initiative in a setting away from people's daily routines, off-site if possible, will create a shared sense of urgency and ownership in the change.

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Align Their Disturbances. A disturbance is a neurological term for the conflict or gap between a person's current mental map of thinking and the mental map required to operate in a changed state. To align disturbances means to create agreement among the individuals in an organization so they have a common gap between their current way of thinking and the mental state needed to adopt the change. This will enable them to agree on the direction and organizational response needed for change. An important technique leaders should use to align disturbances is to create a compelling vision of the future state and continually communicate it. The vision should take into consideration the change need at every organizational level, so that the day-to-day work experience of the staff is described along with high-level change goals.

Additional people-related issues that leaders should address when identifying change opportunities include the following:

- Potential frustration in performing new tasks
- Clearly defined job responsibilities
- Job descriptions and metrics appropriate to the new process
- Understanding of the end-to-end process
- Organizational culture dynamics that may prevent people from adapting to the changed state

Phase 2: Engage the People

The next step in the Change Management Life Cycle is to engage people in the planning of the organization's response to the change. This concept is the antithesis of a top-down rollout strategy in which a change initiative is delivered to the people expected to implement and adopt the change. Giving them the opportunity for intellectual, emotional and psychological reaction to the proposed change enables them to become accustomed to the idea of change and begin thinking in ways that can identify potential trouble spots and contribute to process improvement. It is critical to their personal stake in the proposed change.

A technique project leaders can use to facilitate people's adoption of a change is to conduct organization-wide workshops on appropriate change response. These sessions enable people to participate in the dialogue about how a deliverable should be used in the organization, and contribute to the emergence of an aligned approach for managing and adapting to the change. Aligning reactions and encouraging involvement in the change response typically moves people's behavior to addressing the problem and creating a direction to facilitate change.

The implementation strategy for change response can then be developed at a high level. The people executing the strategy, as well as those who will be affected by it, should be included in the strategy development. The strategy needs to be acknowledged by all involved as a flexible plan so that changes can be made once implementation is begun.

Phase 3: Implement the Change

During the final Implementation phase, change stratgies developed in the Identify and Engage phases are translated into actions for achieving the proposed future organizational state. If the first two stages were effectively addressed, people will be well-prepared to participate in the development and implementation of new processes and technology, and the implementation should essentially be a monitoring activity for leaders. Most organizations, however, spend the majority of their time in the Implementation phase and don't adequately address the role of their people in the change. In such instances, successful change adoption rarely occurs.

Prototyping is a critical technique to get the change under way incrementally, without waiting for a highly detailed master plan that could stall the change initiative, while allowing flexibility to respond to changing conditions. Prototyping takes into account people's thinking and activities as new processes and technology are deployed. Since their thoughts and actions are used in developing the change response, prototyping further increases people's ownership in the change initiative.

Techniques leaders should use during Implementation include reiterating the change mission through ongoing communications. E-mails, project milestone commemorations, conversations, and other channels should be used to remind people why they are expending their hard work on implementing a change.

Organizational leaders should address people-related issues that arise by asking themselves the following questions:

- Does the individual have the ability or desire to work in the new environment?
- Are additional skill sets needed to transition to the new job?
- Are changes to job descriptions needed?
- Are job grades or pay affected by this change?

continued on page 24

NOTHING STAYS THE SAME

continued from page 18

- Does the change affect short-term productivity, and is additional support needed to ensure business success?

Lastly, leaders should focus on people's performance and satisfaction by questioning the following areas:

- Are change-oriented tasks being accomplished as planned?
- Are energy and enthusiasm present?
- Does alignment still exist among the people?

People First

The urgency of circumstances that precipitate change results frequently in the introduction of new processes and technology that are doomed to failure without the input and buy-in of an organization's people. Leadership that recognizes the importance of making change a personal commitment for all its people, not just executives and stakeholders, will be more successful at implementing change. Using the Change Management Life Cycle methodology's three phases—Identify, Engage and Implement—provides organizations with a framework for creating a receptive environment for positive, lasting change. ✹