How to Prepare Employees for Change in The Workplace

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In most industries with the growing global competition, management has been forced to divert its attention to change, something they had happily avoided in the past. According to Harvard Business Professor Rosabeth Moss Kanter, successful companies must develop "a culture that just keeps moving all the time." When dealing with transformation or change most organisations focus on devising the best strategic and tactical plans. But for change management to succeed management ought to understand the human side of change management-the alignment of the company's culture, values, people, and behaviors to encourage the desired results. Value of change is captured when there is a collective reaction-when employees take part in the change. When asked most CEOs involved in transformation indicate that the thing that worries them the most is how their workforce will react, how they can get the team to work together and how they will lead the people. Leadership teams that fail to plan for the human side of change often find themselves wondering why their best-laid plans have gone skewed.

Global research and advisory company Gartner report that the average organization has undergone five enterprise changes in the past three years and 73% of organizations expect more change initiatives in the next few years.

What is change management and why is it important?

According to SHRM Change management 'is the systematic approach and application of knowledge, tools, and resources to deal with change. It involves defining and adopting corporate strategies, structures, procedures and technologies to handle changes in external conditions and the business environment. The primary goal of change management is to successfully implement new processes, products and business strategies while minimizing negative outcomes.'

Change can be difficult and it is often taken with a lot of resistance. Change management takes care of the people side of change. It does little good to create a new organization, design new work processes or implement new technologies if you fail to involve your employees. The financial success of these changes will be more dependent on how individuals in the organization embrace the change than how well you draw organization charts or process diagrams.

According to Prosci, there are three major reasons why change management matters:

1. Organisational change happens one person at a time-Success of any organisational change is dependent on how well it is received by the people (employees). It is the collective impact of successful individual change that results in an organizational change being successful. If employees fail to change in how they conduct their day to day work, an organisational transformation will fail to yield results.

2. Poorly managing change is costly- Ignoring the people side of change can lead to a number of

consequences for example:

> A decline in productivity
> Managers failing or unwilling to support the change
> Failure of stakeholders to appear for meetings
> Suppliers begin to see the disruption and impact caused by the change
> Customers are negatively affected by the change
> Employee morale decreases and there is a visible division between managers and non-managerial staff
> There is an increase in stress, confusion, and fatigue among employees in the workplace
> Valuable employees leave the organisation

In some cases, the project itself is completely abandoned after large investments of capital and time. All the above consequences have been seen to have tangible and financial consequences on organisations that fail to consider the people's side in any transformation project.

3. Effective change management increases the likelihood of success- Prosci's longitudinal benchmarking studies show a strong correlation: Data from the 2013 benchmarking study showed that 96% of participants with excellent change management met or exceeded objectives, while only 16% of those with poor change management met or exceeded objectives. Research has shown that organisations with excellent change management programs that incorporate the people's side are likely to successfully implement their transformation project.

How to effectively implement change in the workplace?

According to Judy Lindenberger, President of The Lindenberger Group, an award-winning human resources consulting firm, 'managing employees through a period of change takes art, intuition, skill, strong listening, and effective communication. When done correctly, change management can help a leader gain respect and loyalty. Done poorly, it can have adverse effects on the organization and its people.'

One model that can assist an organization in dealing with the people issue side of change is the ADKAR Model. This model was created by the Prosci founder Jeff Hiatt, the acronym stands for the five tangible and concrete outcomes that people need to achieve for lasting change: awareness, desire, knowledge, ability and reinforcement:

Below are the five elements of ADKAR.

1. Awareness of the need for change.
2. Desire to make the change happen.
3. Knowledge about how to change.
4. Ability to implement new skills and behaviors.
5. Reinforcement to retain the change once it has been

The advantage of the ADKAR model is that it creates a focus on the elements that are likely to make a change process fail. If management approaches organizational change using this model, you can immediately identify where the process is likely to break down and which elements are might be overlooked. This results-oriented approach helps focus energy on the area that will produce the highest probability for success. The ADKAR model can help in planning effectively for a new change. In some cases, corrective action can be taken and the change successfully implemented.

How organisations treat employees during a change initiative determines how successful the change and the organisation will be. During a transformation exercise, employees usually go through the following six states of readiness: *indifference, rejection, doubt, neutrality, experimentation, and commitment.* Before an organisation embarks on any transformational exercise it is important to assess workforce readiness with assessment instruments and leader self-evaluations to identify the areas in which the most work is needed.

Importance of communication

According to a Robert Half Management Resources survey, poor communication commonly hinders organizational change-management efforts, with 65 percent of managers surveyed indicating that clear and frequent communication is the most important aspect when leading through change. Sometimes decisions regarding major organisational changes are made at the top then cascaded down to lower levels, in such cases by the time such information reaches employees why and how the company is changing maybe unclear to most. To avoid communication breakdown, HR ought to be involved in helping employees prepare for change and to get them to participate. Effective communication helps in making the employees aware of the change that is coming and their role in the process. According to SHRM, employers should communicate change-related information to employees in multiple forms (e.g., e-mails, meetings, training sessions, and press releases) and from multiple sources (e.g., executive management, HR and other departments).

Experts indicate that effective communication strategies can double employees' acceptance of the change. For change to be successful executive management and HR need to be great communicators. The organisations leadership should explain the change and why it is needed, management ought to be truthful about the benefits and challenges, listen and respond to employees' reactions and implications.

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