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HOW DO YOU INTRODUCE AN ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE?

By Bob Jud

Business publications have been full of advice on this topic for years. The Harvard Business School, in an effort to find out if any of this accepted wisdom has any value, did a study of the subject on its own. It issued a report on what it found about a year ago. Those findings probably match your own bootstrap observations of what works in human enterprises. The report is worth examining, however, and what follows is the gist of it:

There is no such thing as a "best" change process, and we should probably stop searching for one. All change situations consist of complex multi-variate circumstances, and there simply is no one-size-fits-all solution. All leaders and their enterprises are therefore likely to be best off when they tackle change from any angle that matches their own style and the organization's culture and context. That said, however, the report goes on to say that there are some practices that seem to work more often than not, and that reviewing them may help shape the approach you and your colleagues come up with to meet your own unique situation. Here's what they are:

1. Try to start with a compelling vision of what you regard as a desired future state. This means that your picture of the future should have a certain "face validity" to most people, and (more importantly) that the outcomes you feel your change will produce are likely to be seen as worth the effort and the sacrifices folks will have to make in order to bring them into being.
2. That step needs to be preceded by an information campaign which demonstrates why the status quo can't or shouldn't go on, if that is not obvious from simple inspection.
3. Then try your best to build a coalition. That means analyzing the politics of your situation to determine whose support you need and how you can get it.

4. Give your change initiative some emotional thrust. At the very least, that means harvesting employees ideas on how to proceed and then gaining their commitment.
5. Be sure to take care of the logistics: (a.) how can you get the resources you need; (b.) how do you capture and retain executive attention?
6. Try to build momentum by starting with these things: (a.) start with people who know the enterprise and its past and who therefore have a tendency to influence others; (b.) search for best practices, incorporate them, and then build on them; (c.) generate some small but noticeable early wins.
7. Since no approach will work absolutely, try to tackle the change from as many angles as possible. Dump those that don't work and put energy and resources into those that do.
8. Remember that not every change is for the better. While it is true that every improvement comes as the result of a change, not every change produces an improvement. That's why it is important to employ the "Action---Feedback---Adaptation" model of contemporary business.
9. Keep everyone in your group focused on the unsettling truth that change will never be over. Most of us would prefer that life situations be tied up like the end of a good movie. In the real world, of course, the story is never over. We have to be able to address constantly shifting and formidable problems every day, forever, and without a break. The issue is complicated by the fact that so often, in enterprises, we are faced with the prospect of fixing flat tires while the vehicle is still in motion.
10. Instead of trying to relieve stress by giving your people the promise of calm after a reorganization, then watching morale and trust take a nosedive when you have to announce the next necessary change. That doesn't mean that you can't pause after a successful change, to celebrate your accomplishments, and to show real appreciation for the hard work put into your collective effort.
11. The prospect of introducing a change is a good time to review courses you've taken or articles/books you've read that focus on how to listen to others, how to speak persuasively, how to make a team coalesce.

WHAT KINDS OF PEOPLE HANDLE CHANGE WELL?

By Bob Jud

Most of us, when we're on the receiving end of a Change initiative, have a range of feelings which go from surprise to annoyance to resentment to anger and (typically) to some ultimate form of acceptance. The ability of a human being to adapt successfully to new circumstances is called "Resilience." Since change is inevitable, it follows that people who can harness this ability quickly are the ones who can deal with change most successfully.

Research shows that people who are highly resilient in the face of change tend to score high in the traits and characteristics listed below. As a person who periodically needs to adapt to change, here are the things you may wish to focus on:

CREATIVITY: People with this characteristic quickly look for opportunity in change. Good ideas for how one can make the most of this change quickly follow.

EAGERNESS TO LEARN: People with this characteristic show an interest in learning more about the changes taking place, and how they can engage with that movement and profit when they contribute to it. Almost all such people tend to acquire or upgrade skill sets.

POSITIVE MINDSET: People with this trait tend to give every change a chance to work. They decide quickly what parts of the change are within their control. They look for every way they can to build their self-confidence in new circumstances.

SELF-EMPOWERMENT: People with this trait tend to be decisive in new situations, and count on their ability to make good personal or group decisions without looking to others first for their opinion about what's allowed and what isn't.

ADAPTABILITY: People with this trait tend to be open to multiple ways to do things. When difficulties arise, instead of saying, "This will never work!", they are much more likely to say, "Let's see if we can work this out."

COURAGE: There are three ways this trait becomes evident, and always in situations that most of us find difficult: (a.) people regularly ask others for feedback; (b.) people routinely take modest risks; (c.) people who are unafraid to raise a topic that needs to be aired.

FOCUS ON RESULTS: These people think in terms of desired outcomes, and the actions one can take to move steadily in their direction.

If you are a team leader, you may wish to review and then try to teach and role model these behaviors to your work group.

If you are a team member, you may wish to periodically review this list as the first thing you do whenever a new change initiative is announced.

25 Things You May Be Doing To Cause Resistance To Change

Here are just a few of the ways you can cause people to resist the change.

Many of these come from a very useful resource - changingminds.org:

1. Resist the resistance, fighting back.
2. Try to do everything yourself.
3. Allow your bosses to be non-committal about the change.
4. Use threats and aggressive language.
5. Avoid talking to individual people.
6. Avoid listening to people.
7. Do not visit the various teams affected.
8. Spend more time with your allies (and avoiding the troublemakers).
9. Talk about the resisters with others (your allies)
10. Ignore those who resist. Keep your fingers crossed they will give up.
11. Publicly and aggressively punish those who object
12. Be dismissive of people who "don't get it."
13. Tell people about your plans and then ignore the plans.
14. Give lots of rational reasons why people should do as you say.
15. Dive into the details before they have bought the big picture.
16. Do not test that people have understood what you have said.
17. Lose faith yourself in the change.
18. Be vague about what the change will be.
19. Avoid being the messenger of bad news.
20. Produce non-specific plans.
21. Expect people to instantly understand what took you three weeks to figure out.
22. Shout down anyone who disagrees.
23. Do not change reward systems to align with the change.
24. Make 'an exception' for talented people who resist.
25. Think you have communicated enough (even though people still have questions - even questions you think you already answered)

Mark the ones that may be your mode of operation. Practice behaviors that bring about cooperation, not resistance.