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What is Change Management?

Change management refers to the approach in transitioning individuals, teams, and organizations using methods intended to redirect the use of resources, business processes, budget allocations, or other modes of operation that reshapes a company or organization. No organization is static.

The major challenge of change is to understand, respond to, harness, further create, and manage it. While many leaders believe change is planned and implemented strategically, many changes occur ad-hoc and are often confusing, messy, and unpredictable. These words are descriptive of some of the risks associated with change. From a human perspective, even the best-laid plans can be exciting and full of opportunity or chaotic and painful.

Without full consideration of the change, unfocused efforts can extract heavy economic and human toll within a workplace.

Risk Management – What could possibly go wrong?

Below are some examples of risks (certainly not exhaustive) throughout the lifecycle of a change that can affect a favourable result:

- ◆ Are there resisters within your organization that you're aware of? Although powerful resisters can derail a change effort, they should be given an opportunity to understand and support the change. As well, they might offer some valuable critical perspective on the matter. It's prudent to consider who stands to lose what because of the change. Every transition begins with an ending – a letting go of the past – experienced by many as a loss even when the change is a good one.
- ◆ Notably, if those with position power are not co-opted, they remain powerful unknowns with the power to ultimately block progress.
- ◆ Organizational communication can be painfully slow due to the hierarchical chain of command or horizontal sharing between departments. As well, there could be a problem rooted in the superior / subordinate communication channel, and the power balance between the two. There are other examples such as nonverbal language, gender, and cultural differences that should be considered.

A strong planning process will help in understanding the need for change to build proactive rather than reactive plans and create plans that are supported by key organizational players.

Like many plans, implementing a change to address a problem or issue is a process. Although there is much information on the topic of change management, below is a brief overview of some of the more common concepts for an organization to consider when implementing a change:

- ◆ It starts at the top. An executive champion is critical to success. Change is sometimes difficult, and the nature of most people is to resist it. Breaking employees from their comfortable way is a challenge that should not be underestimated. However, when change is required, participants look to their leadership to provide the vision, motivation, empowerment, and support. Do your eyes roll at the mention of the concept of creating a vision? Unfortunately, the concept has been diluted by misuse. Despite its negative association, a strong vision must be created to manage change successfully. Dr. John Kotter, author of *Leading Change*

(1995), suggests a vision contain the following characteristics: tangible, desirable, feasible, flexible, focused, and simple.

- ◆ The next step is to move the goal from a vision to strategy and implementation. One imperative question at this point: Who are the stakeholders with respect to the change initiative?
- ◆ Communicate and filter a consistent message. Often, we may make the mistake of assuming others understand the vision and see the way forward as we do. To improve the level of understanding frequent communication through multiple channels with the stakeholders in a timely manner is key. At first, this may seem excessive but it's important to create a sense of urgency and you would want to be sure no one is missed.
- ◆ Identifying and celebrating quick wins can be a very effective way to build momentum and keep everyone moving in the same direction. It shows employees that the organization can create change and is not wasting resources and employee's time. Secondly, it may motivate other employees to want to share in that success with their own success.
- ◆ Training should be ongoing and regular. In addition, positive reinforcement and productive feedback is important to employees by letting them know they are succeeding in creating the changes set out.
- ◆ Lastly, monitor and review. It's not only important to measure the progression of change, but to look at the overall effectiveness. Is it producing the expected results? Monitoring provides an opportunity to tweak and shift direction as needed.

Change can be challenging but using the steps above can assist with the process. If your organization can show its employees the need for change, clearly express what that change is to be, and provide the resources and training to make the change happen, then your organization can see positive results from its efforts.

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