

Take a harmonious approach to the integration of workplace change

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Business is the most powerful institution in the world, and when coupled with change led by an active, visible and consistent visionary with a clear and definable vision, the sky is the limit – or is it? Unfortunately, more often than not, that leader's success is in the hands of others. The senior leaders who partner officially, or otherwise, as a change coalition, the middle managers who liaise both up and down during the change and the employees who execute the change will have their own effect. With those additional players comes the increased possibility of reluctance and resistance. When resistance strikes, what choices does the transformation manager have?

1. Demonstrate the benefits of the change and the risks of not changing

Barriers to change are often a direct response to a lack of understanding. Resistors simply have had no answer to the question "why". If there's no reason to change, and more importantly no consequences of not changing, it's rare for the change to take hold. Knowing "why" alone is not enough to garner a desire to work differently, yet without "why" being answered, there will be no chance of change. Some corporate cultures gain when the reasons are provided. Telling the reasons may not always yield the desired results, yet either way they must be openly shared and discussed.

If a new technology is introduced, some of the "whys" could be:

To simplify workflow

To automate and provide more data when needed

To respond to customers' requirements

Without knowing these reasons, employees may suspect that the technology's purpose is solely to automate, ultimately reducing human contact during the service cycle, thereby cutting jobs. This thinking highlights a one-way benefit, leading to rumours and organisational cancer.

Once the benefits are known, the risks of not changing will also be evident, providing more reason for everyone to get on board. If the benefit of the technology is to remain competitive, wouldn't a lack of competitiveness from not upgrading result in loss of jobs? With this reasoning, the employees understand that they indeed have an ability to influence the outcome of the change.

2. Solicit direct, yet timely, involvement of the visionaries themselves

The visionary is a visionary because he or she can see the state of the

future in a way others cannot. Whether we refer to Nelson Mandela, Steve Jobs or our own greatest boss or mentor, each one felt a situation could be improved, increasing efficiency, effectiveness, accessibility and also was willing and able to do something about it.

The very description of the state of the future is believable when communicated from the one who can see and feel it. One word of caution – this person should not be overutilised, as continuing to describe and personify the change “on stage”. Plan the intervention for both limited exposure and maximum effect.

We often hear technology chiefs describing a future we have not yet reached (wristband screens to access online information and a nearby shop’s catalogue linked to our kitchen devices, for example). Many IT experts are now imagining what that will look like as we hear those conversations at the coffee counters. Descriptions of the future can pique interest and open people’s minds when a vision is clear and offers hope and opportunity.

3. Get the most resistant senior managers more involved

Senior managers are partners to the chief executive or president, who commonly holds the role of ambassador of the desired new business state. That chief executive cannot be present for every minute of the day and needs to be represented during their time away from the office. Resistance by any senior manager will seriously jeopardise the chance of change.

What a great opportunity to have resistors in that spotlight while they are morphing into supportive spokespeople and champions of change. A great example would include the more “senior” employees being asked to complete compliance training in an e-learning format. Throughout this process, if there’s resistance the root cause can also be explored. New technology will be unfamiliar to them and it may become clear that they need help. Anticipating this need by providing individualised attention (coaching, counselling or even training the keyboard basics) will reap results and instil confidence, thus converting potential resistors into a walking billboard. Transforming people and methodologies at the same time yields double positive outcomes.

Organisational change is in everyone’s hands, with each undoubtedly having the ability to enable or derail its success. Intervene at a time suitable for each role and level, anticipate and work with resistance before and during the change and balance the telling vs asking equation. Success will come when growth and realignment are simply no longer options but rather necessities.

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