Change Management – Why is it important?

David McKillop
PGD (HR), Advanced Diploma (FLBU), CHRL Candidate

Edited by: Marcel Faggioni

Change management is an essential process when organizations are looking to introduce changes to their workforce. While there are many definitions for change management out there, this article will be focused on changes from an organizational perspective. Change management is a people-focused process that involves providing our employees with the proper knowledge, tools and resources to achieve a desired business outcome.

In order to successfully implement a change, we must first recognize why it is important. By our very nature, humans are creatures of habit; we look for ways to normalize our daily routines and reduce the number of unexpected outcomes in our everyday lives. Jacob Shriar explains, "As soon as something new happens, our brains automatically start trying to compare it with previous things we already know and are familiar with." As soon as a change begins to take place, the brain triggers a fear response known as the "fear of the unknown". When we experience this level of uncertainty to the changes ahead, our minds will revert to a worst-case scenario, making the change process increasingly difficult. A study conducted by Towers Watson indicates that organizations are more successful in change management when they provide clarity to the employees about the rationale for change and utilize effective change management processes, such as clear communication, in its bid to increase

the likelihood of success. If these processes are not carefully managed, it is unlikely that change will be successful in the long-term. Therefore, we must do everything we can to ensure that results are not short-lived within the organization. Furthermore, it is important to note that for a change to be achieved, organizations must ensure that everyone is on board to increase the chances of success. Where a well implemented change can have a positive impact on the organization, such as increased productivity and engagement, the converse can also be true. In situations where change management is miscarried, the ultimate result can lead to financial disaster and/or missed opportunities.

Now, let's look to address some of the reasons why organizational changes fail. In most cases, it can be broken down to these three (3) points: (i) lack of communication; (ii) lack of leadership skills; and (iii) lack of resources. To elaborate, when organizations begin to introduce change to the workforce, there is often a lack of communication as to why the change is needed in the first place. When people don't understand the necessity for change, it will inevitably lead to resistance as outlined above. Often changes are brought on from a financial standpoint, and these decisions are rarely made by involving feedback from employees. But for any change to occur, regardless of impact, people need to understand why a change is necessary and how it will affect their work-life. The next point, which is perhaps the most important part of this process, is ensuring employees are given the time to process and reflect on the new information. This concept is based on the theory of spaced-repetitive learning. By allowing employees to digest the information being given to them, the likelihood of retaining and accepting that information will increase substantially, and thus employees will

have a chance to form new beliefs or values that will create long-lasting change. It is also important to keep the information about the change accessible for employees to return to and review.

The next thing we would like to examine is how a lack of leadership skills can affect change management. If the management in charge of implementing organizational change lacks the required knowledge to be successful, this can at is a recipe for failure. When implementing change, responsibility for the success often lies with senior leaders, managers and supervisors throughout the organization, but as we discussed earlier, employees themselves should be involved in this process. For that reason, when selecting a change leader/champion, it important that they possess key characteristics of a transformational leader. These characteristics should include the ability to inspire others, entertain new ideas, adapt to challenges and remove their ego from the process. If a leader is not willing to listen to feedback from those affected by the change when making difficult decisions, it can turn into a timely/costly mistake. Thus, it is critically important that when considering stakeholders in the change process, employees directly affected by the change should be included, as their input and feedback could be very valuable in charting the course of change.

Finally, this brings us to the challenge of the lack of organizational resources to support the change. When creating a fertile environment for the change process, management must provide the necessary support and resources to those who are expected to implement it. Therefore, it is crucial to choose a competent leader and have management buy-in when undertaking the change management journey. Without their support, the project will be doomed to fail from the start - research shows that as many as 60-75% change management initiatives are doomed to failure. Organizations must create a system in which employees can provide feedback and voice

their concerns/anxieties/fears. The organization must also provide management the proper tools for implementation, such as a one-stop portal that contains valuable resources for those involved in the change process. Perhaps the most important resource is time itself - with organizational change being a time consuming process, organizations will sometimes find themselves in a predicament where, after investing many resources into the change initiative, the plan needs to be continuously revised, thus resulting in unexpected delays. The best way to prepare for this is by taking into consideration the potential pitfalls outlined above and ensuring the necessary time is given from the beginning to the end of the change cycle. This will better allow an organization to implement the changes, monitor the results, gather feedback and make revisions in a timely manner, which ultimately save both time and money in the long run.

It is important to keep in mind that the changes outlined above are not exhaustive and to gain further insight into the science of change management, we would invite you to attend our seminar anticipated in the fall of 2020. The proposed seminar will discuss in greater detail the strategies for implementing changes, potential pitfalls and how to overcome them, and finally how to monitor success and ensure sustainability.

Do you have any comments or stories on change management that you would like to share? We would love to hear it! Please send your feedback to mckillop@integrityconsultation.com

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