Managing Change in Organizations

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Abstract

A fundamental management responsibility is to lead change effectively. Compared to structure or technology, people require the most skills and knowledge from managers to support them through the change process. Managers must prepare employees to be ready and willing to change. Managers must know how to lead and control effectively to obtain the most value for the organization. This paper explains the four response types which define the characteristics and behaviours people exhibit while dealing with change. It illustrates two views of the change process and how they affect the organization. Employee resistance, associated stress, and recommendations for managers to help employees overcome these challenges are discussed.

Managing Change in Organizations

The need for Managers to effectively lead change in organizations has never been more pressing. Yahoo!, a giant tech company, realized this in 2006. They were losing the top spot in the web services industry to smaller companies like Google and MSN. Although they had the resources to do everything bigger and better than the smaller companies, they weren't innovative enough. The company needed to undergo serious changes in the way it operated if it was going to survive (Robbins et al., 2011).

As stated by Robbins et al. (2011) organizational change is "any alteration of people, structure, or technology in an organization" (p. 360). Knowing how to lead change effectively is something more managers are being faced with than ever before. People tend to resist change, as the fear of uncertainty replaces what they have come to know. Having people ready and accepting for change typically is the most challenging aspect of the change management process. This paper will explain how changes made to the organization affect people with various response types and provides recommendations a manager can take to minimize resistance and stress, ensuring a smooth transition.

Response Types

There are four distinct responses people will exhibit when an organization is dealing with change: the entrenched, overwhelmed, poser, and learner (Bunker, K. A., 2008). The author of the article illustrates people in the entrenched response often lash out at change and blame the organization for changing things, when they were working just fine. They feel anxiety and fear

and will try to ride it out. People in the overwhelmed response will fall victim to a

cynical mindset of depression and powerlessness (Bunker, K. A., 2008). They

have a hard time accepting change. This wasted energy of doubt affects their

ability to learn how to adapt to the new environment. People in the poser

response have a high level of self-confidence and energy (Bunker, K. A., 2008).

They feel they are in control and ready to make the transition. Unfortunately, this

false self-awareness and lack of learning capacity can be a threat to the

organization. People in the learner response are accepting and positive about the

change. This can be of great assistance to the manager.

Each response requires different strategies for a manager to support

people with the change process. To support people in the overwhelmed and

entrenched responses when dealing with change, managers must show what the

changes are and how they will affect them. They should highlight the fact that

change is necessary for an organization to grow and stay competitive. Managers

should also recognize they will need assistance through the change process and

provide them with support to deal with their emotions. Managers should be aware

that although people in the poser response may have the motivation, they may

not have the skills. They lobby for critical roles and will fool their leaders into

thinking they are suitable for the position. Managers should resist the urge to

expand their role and provide checklists and reviews to ensure they are

performing appropriately. People in the learner response see the opportunities

change brings and will often be at the center of the action. Managers should give

this group roles where they can interact with the other responses to help

encourage and support them (Bunker, K. A., 2008).

Change process metaphors

According to Robbins et al. (2011), two views explain the change process:

the calm waters and the white-water rapids metaphors. The calm waters

metaphor suggests the change process happens in three steps. Robbins et al.

(2011) state you start by "unfreezing the status quo" (p. 357). This prepares the

organization for the changes to come. Once you have unfrozen the current state,

you can implement changes. Finally, you refreeze the situation, which makes the

changes you made permanent. The white-water rapids theory explains change

as being dynamic and continuous. The status quo needs to reflect innovation and

creativity to be effective (Robbins et al., 2011).

Employee resistance

Helping employees deal with resistance to change is an area where

managers need quality interpersonal skills. Some common reasons for employee

resistance are fear of the unknown, getting used to old habits, and not having the

confidence to learn new processes or skills (Robbins et al., 2011). Managers

should be empathetic and communicate clearly. Techniques a manager can use

to reduce employee resistance is asking for employee input, listening to their

concerns, and explaining the benefits that the change will bring relative to these

concerns. Showing management supports them and will help them along the

change process improves morale and the bond between the organization and

employee. Once the changes have gone into effect, managers should be open to

employee feedback and revisions to ensure employees are comfortable with the outcome.

Employee Stress

Stress has adverse effects on the employee and the organization. Robbins et al. (2011) define stress as "the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure placed on them from extraordinary demands, constraints, or opportunities" (p.371). Stress can be a result of factors in an employee's job and their personal life. Common signs of stress in employees are depression, anger, and absenteeism (Robbins et al., 2011). Managers must watch for these signs in their subordinates and take corrective action when necessary. Managers should be aware; issues of ethics do arise. If stress is a result of a personal matter, does the manager have the right to *intrude* (Robbins et al., 2011)?

Approaches a manager can take to reduce employee stress from the organization's perspective is to ensure an employee's abilities and skills, match their job requirements. Job redesign can be a way for the employee to feel more comfortable in their position. Alternatively, they can transfer to a position where their skills will be effectively utilized (Robbins et al., 2011). Whether stress is job-related or due to personal reasons, employee counselling is an excellent way for employees to get advice from health-care professionals. They can speak confidentially and gain knowledge for ways to deal with stress. Lastly, an organization sponsored wellness program provides not only mental health but also physical health assistance.

With advances in technology and competition from smaller innovative companies, organizations are changing more every day. Knowing how to manage change is becoming more of a concern to managers than ever before. They need to understand people's various response types. Before implementing changes, managers should prepare the organization and employees for the change. Managers should communicate honestly and empathetically and give clear guidance on what is expected. Providing employees with not only intellectual support but also physical and mental health support reduces resistance and stress. By outlining clear goals, communicating honestly, and leading by example, managers can make the change process successful.

References

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