

The science of change

How predictability can guide your next change initiative **Interviewed by Paul R. Harvey**

Today's spotlight on business speed and agility is magnifying the shortcomings and frequency of poorly executed change initiatives. The truth is that nearly 70 percent of all change implementations never bear fruit. There are many documented reasons why change initiatives fail.

"Often, the people leading the change think that announcing change is the same as implementing it, so they don't pay attention," says Patricia Zigarmi, Ed.D., organizational change expert and Founding Associate of The Ken Blanchard Companies. "They don't surface people's concerns regarding change."

Smart Business spoke with Zigarmi about how change elements are predictable and why leaders of successful change initiatives involve a broad-based team to address employee concerns on the front end.

Why do change efforts fail?

A big reason why change efforts fail is leaders often don't surface people's concerns. The immediate reaction when people are asked to change is, "What am I going to give up?" They're talking to each other about those concerns but not to the change sponsors. Leaders need to eavesdrop on the conversations about concerns people are having. Another big reason change fails is because the people who are asked to change are not involved in the planning for it. These employees feel closest to the customer, the work processes and the problems at hand, and they want to influence the changes that are being architected at the top.

Some initiatives fail when there is no communicated sense of urgency or when the business case for the change isn't made clear. People need to see a gap between the what-is and the what's-possible. People are smart — if you help them understand the change from the standpoint of the person deciding the change, they'll come to the same conclusions about compelling reasons to change. Other factors for failure include misaligned systems within the company and change leaders who are not credible or trustworthy.

Are there predictable reactions to change?

Absolutely. People have predictable and sequential concerns with change. In the



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1980s, I worked on a study to find out why a set of educational initiatives tested extremely well, but when they were rolled out, they didn't achieve results on a mass basis. What we found out was that nobody had surfaced the concerns of the teachers with regard to the changes. We created a model and ended up proving in subsequent change efforts that reactions to change are indeed predictable and sequential.

How can change leaders apply this model?

The model delineated six buckets of concerns with change, and if leaders would only pay attention to the first three, the rest of the change would take care of itself. The first bucket is around information concerns. People don't want to be sold on the change. They want to know what it is, what you are seeing and why things have to change. The second bucket involves personal concerns. They're the most ignored because they sound like whining, but what they really are, are clues about resistance to the proposed change. People don't want to know why the change is good for the company; they want to know why it's good for them, and they want to know if they will be able to master the new

skills the change requires. The third bucket is around the nitty-gritty implementation concerns like system alignment, best practices and the daily mechanics of making the change happen.

The remaining buckets of concern are impact concerns — does the change make a difference; collaboration concerns — who else needs to be on board; and refinement concerns — what's even better than what you're doing right now?

How can leaders best communicate change?

I think the minute people sense a crack in senior leadership support for the change, they think they don't have to get on board, or they believe they can wait around and see what happens. It's really important for dialogue to happen around the change, at the top. What is the compelling case? What is the vision? What is the picture of the future if this change were to be successfully implemented?

The real need here is for leaders to speak with one voice, to communicate the same message, no matter who is communicating. Leaders must explain the priority of a change against all the other initiatives going on in the company. Leaders also should express trust and confidence in the decisions of their colleagues because if that doesn't happen, the change is doomed from the front end.

What are the key steps to a successful change initiative?

Top-down change efforts appear to get off to a faster start, but many times, the reality is all of the details aren't thought out and ultimately the change doesn't get implemented. Leaders need to listen to people's concerns and find ways to address them. They need to create a compelling business case and expand involvement and influence to gain the buy-in of those impacted by the change at all phases of the change process. A high-involvement, collaborative change effort dramatically increases the probability of a successful change initiative. <<

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