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Changing is tough if you don't get your employees on board

Business Courier of Cincinnati – by Kate Nelson

Recent research on organizations that are experiencing change confirms what many of us have known either explicitly or instinctively for years: The biggest challenges to making change happen within organizations are people issues ("Effecting Change in Business Organizations," the Conference Board, 2005.) This same study indicated that a whopping 82 percent of the respondents identified managing change as a priority for their organization.

Given the pace of business change today and in the future, building a change management competency is going to be a clear competitive advantage for organizations of the future. Organizations that are really good at helping their people move from thinking and acting in existing ways to thinking and acting in new ways that are required for the organization's success are the ones that are going to beat their competition every time.

In 2004, the research group Prosci developed and studied a "Change Management Maturity Model" that described different levels of skill that organizations have managing change.

The maturity model has five levels, ranging from no change management focus or skill at all, to complete integration and competence in managing the people side of change. At each level, managing the human side of change received progressively greater attention and activity.

For organizations in Level 1, people are not aware of ways to manage the human side of change and it is not addressed at all except as a last resort when resistance jeopardizes the success of organizational changes. At the next level, pockets of people who

are focusing on the human elements of change begin to emerge in isolated instances and some basics like communication are built into projects.

In Level 3 organizations, some groups begin using a structured change management process in localized teams or areas. When level 4 is reached, organizations have selected a common approach and standards for using change management. Finally, change management competency is part of the skill set of organizations in Level 5.

The same report included the results of a survey of 180 organizations commenting on how good they were at managing the human elements of change and how good they'd like to get. Eighty four percent of the respondents reported that they didn't even have a common approach and standards for managing the people elements of change, let alone any significant organizational capability to manage change. And an overwhelming 80 percent indicated that they would like to have at least a common approach and standards to manage the people side of change or, even better, change management as a core competency for the organization.

What does it take to build an internal change management competency? Some organizations are building change management functions or centers of expertise (such as Motorola). Having a team of people who are dedicated to focusing only on the human elements of change ensures that it is not forgotten.

Many other organizations are developing or adopting common tools and techniques that can be used across an organization to manage change.

For example, Johnson & Johnson has its "Change Integration Process" and General Electric has its "Change Acceleration Process." The use of a common language and approach to manage the people aspects of change speeds up the process of

changing people's behavior. And having a common set of tools that everyone can refer to helps get teams focused on the actual work of changing people's behavior.

While developing a proprietary methodology and toolkit might make sense for the biggest companies, there are lots of methodologies and tools out there that companies can adopt without inventing it themselves. Large consulting firms often "bring their own" to their large clients, but there are also many other methodologies and toolkits that smaller organizations can adopt without the pricey consultants.

If you don't want to create your own model for managing the people aspects of change and you don't have the budget for the big firm consultants, then find a model that fits your organization's level of sophistication and experience.

Once you have a model, start letting people in the organization know what it is, why it is important, and how to use it. The act alone of teaching staff about a change management process and tools sends a powerful signal to employees that the people part of change is important. And having the skills and tools and common language available to them will help them start doing the work.

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