

How to effectively manage change

Once driving forces have been recognized and employee trust has been established, managers can successfully implement change

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The change process enables us to more effectively manage change. What makes change successful? It is necessary for management to: 1) plan the changes carefully; 2) clearly communicate with employees; 3) analyze the entire process; 4) overcome resistance; and 5) provide real leadership. The entire process rests on the foundation of trust that is built by the way managers perform daily.

DRIVING FORCES OF CHANGE

"Our own times have, no doubt, experienced the greatest transformation in industrial methods than man has experienced in any age." That quote describes the HPI of the 1990s, yet it was written in 1915. Long before that, Heraclitus said, "There is nothing permanent except change." Change is a constant and if change accelerates as society approaches a new century, managers in the HPI must effectively manage the change process. Change is a way of life in the fast paced, hi-tech world of the HPI; yet change still causes tension for managers and employees alike. In fact, if not managed effectively, change is disruptive to an organization.

Why is change such a factor today? There are two main driving forces for change: cost and competition. While internal, external and technological factors affect businesses, the

real driving forces of change can be traced to the "root causes" of cost and competition.

Once the driving forces are recognized, the manager is in a position to begin the change process. To avoid chaos, change must be planned and implemented in an organized manner. Treating change as a process enables managers to proceed in an orderly and systematic way.

Also, managers should recognize the first rule of change, "Somebody ain't gonna like it." The second rule is, "Somebody else ain't gonna like it." When managers and employees understand these two rules, the change process becomes easier. Why? Because we will: 1) avoid change for the sake of change; 2) seek to understand why employees resist change; and 3) use a change process that seeks to achieve employee "buy-in." Remember, managers manage change and employees implement change. You cannot make anyone implement changes. You lead them through the process.

DEFINING THE CHANGE PROCESS

Fig. 1 depicts a flow diagram of how to effectively manage change. Although this methodology doesn't guarantee success, it increases the probability of successfully managing and sustaining change.

Change is often considered a negative when in fact it can be positive,

negative or neutral. Yet, change is usually resisted. Remember the first two rules mentioned earlier. People generally resist change because of: 1) fear of the unknown; 2) fear that it will break up a work group; 3) economic concerns; 4) being comfortable with the present way; and 5) personal inconveniences.

When defining changes within an organization, it is important to know what should and what should not change. A recent article, "Change is good—but first, know what should never change,"¹ discussed the importance of knowing core values and principles of the business before embarking on a major change process. It is important to identify areas of business that should never change. For example, a commitment to certain moral or ethical principles, a commitment to quality or a culture built on customer service. Even a small change in one of these core areas can cause major concerns throughout the organization.

Often changes in the HPI are the result of technological advances over the past few years, organizational changes caused by mergers and acquisitions or changing customer requirements. These are all driven by cost and competitive pressures. Major changes are usually accomplished because of

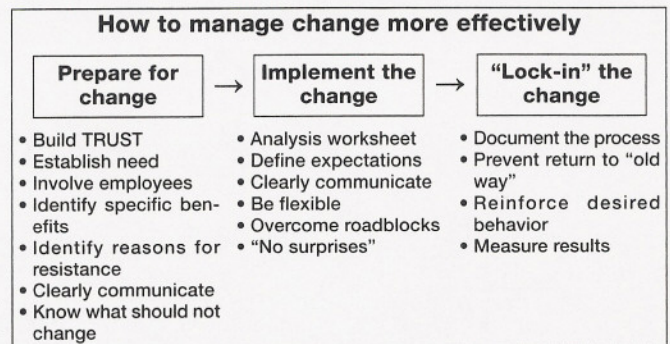


Fig. 1. Flow chart for managing change.

process requires listening to employees and patiently coaching them through the rough spots. Managers must guide and lead people through the process. Change cannot be implemented effectively by trying to push people through the process.

LOCK-IN THE CHANGE

Sustaining change requires that organizations "lock-in" the change, evaluate the results over time and practice continuous improvement. The major steps required for "locking-in" change are: 1) documenting the work processes; 2) not accepting a return to the "old way;" 3) recognizing and reinforcing employees who are trying to make the changes work; 4) dealing with those who are resisting changes; and 5) measuring results.

An example from one of our clients illustrates the importance of this phase of the change process. In one plant of a multiple location company, many electrical and process control changes were made in the processing units to reduce operating costs—note the driving force of change. Maintenance personnel were trained in troubleshooting and repairing the new systems. Operations personnel were trained in the new operating methods and the unit operating procedures were revised. A breakdown in the process occurred when engineers failed to update the maintenance drawings and procedures. When new maintenance people came into the organization, it was difficult for them to troubleshoot problems. This is one example of the importance of documenting changed processes in every

area that is affected.

After the process documentation is completed, it is time to clearly define and communicate expectations to employees. Next, managers must assume the leadership role in the process. This means not accepting a return to the old ways and using one-on-one leadership and communication skills to deal with the human side of the change process. Employees need to be recognized for what they are doing and those who are not performing should be given an oppor-

tunity to correct their problems.

Finally, results should be monitored and measured over time. These measures may involve variables like waste reduction, productivity improvement, costs, employee morale, customer feedback or competitive issues. Communicate results to employees and solicit their ideas for improving on the results to increase the level of "lock-in" for the changes.

LITERATURE CITED

¹ "Change is good—but first, know what should never change," *Fortune*, May 1995, p. 141.



The author

Davis M. Woodruff is the founder and president of *Management Methods*, Decatur, Alabama. He is a graduate of Auburn University, a registered professional engineer and a certified management consultant. Mr. Woodruff was with 3M for 10 years before entering the consulting profession in 1982. His background is in manufacturing with an emphasis on the people, productivity and quality aspects of his business. He has designed and delivered workshops and seminars for organizations throughout the U.S. Also, he has published many articles, authored training manuals and has over 20 years of "hands-on" technical, management and consulting experience. Mr. Woodruff is a member of Institute of Management Consultants, American Consultants League, Fellowship of Companies for Christ, National Speakers Assn. and AIChE.