

Successful Change Management

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A rose by any other name..... I just read a study on successful

change management and it totally reinforced my belief in our Compliance to Commitment™ model, again. The study, commissioned by Global Knowledge indicated that people issues remain the key problem in deploying or upgrading enterprise level software systems. Another study cited in the same article indicated that 70% of “re-engineering projects fail, and a third study which examined efforts ranging from “strategy deployment” to “culture change” showed a similar failure rate – 66%. One in three efforts yielded success!

So what caused all these failures? Well, the studies conclude that the two biggest impediments to successful change initiatives come down to two primary drivers-employee resistance and lack of proper training. Just for the record, employee resistance is by far the bigger issue. They have actually been able to identify the three key reasons employees “resist” the change:

- Fear of job loss
- Fear of increased responsibility
- Frustration with the process

So how do we address these issues?

We have several suggestions-

- **Recognize and address the “people side” of change management-** this may sound intuitive, but given slightly better than a one third success rate I would suggest not. We talk about re-engineering, restructuring, resource reallocation, etc. There are treatises written on processes, policies, procedures, and technologies to improve “efficiencies”, but at the end of the day people do the work.
- **Develop and hone effective interpersonal and communication skills for front line managers-** some of the key skills that help people deal with change include team building, coaching, constructive feedback, effective delegation, and clear expectations.
- **Recognize that change is systemic and inevitable-** change has become an organizational reality. In our dynamic environment nothing is static. If you have not built an ongoing system for monitoring your environment and incorporating changes into your strategies and systems you are in trouble.
- **Anticipate resistance and plan for it-** step back and look at change from your employee’s perspective. Reacting to resistance is inefficient and frustrating. It is management’s job to guide employees through the process. Make sure your leadership team has the skills and the tools to implement the change proactively.

Some Practical Tips

There are some very practical things you can do to make change occur more efficiently and reduce resistance.

- Tell people the truth and give them as much information as possible as often as possible
- Give them reasonable time to “process” the news- don’t expect immediate buy in.
- Give them time to vent and recognize that some level of anger is normal.
- Empathize! You don’t have to agree, but you can try to understand and recognize their concerns.
- Recognize that trust will be off balance temporarily. Be patient , it will return

- Get them involved! You worry about the what; let them participate in the how. Let them participate in determining the tasks and timelines.
- Build on their ideas. Their ideas may surprise you; after all they do the work.
- Be proactive. Discuss the new realities constantly and be sure your management team are effective communicators.

Some of this sounds familiar I hope from previous articles on our Compliance to Commitment model™ with its five elements of Respect, Responsibility, Information, Rewards, and Loyalty and our more recent information about successful **engagement** strategy. We talked about the financial and organizational successes of companies who embrace the models. So you have to ask yourself a question, similar to engagement strategy two thirds of “change” initiatives fail- Which category do you want to be in?

Mark F. Herbert is a principal in the management consulting firm New Paradigms LLC. He has successfully helped organizations manage their change management strategies on a regional and international basis. He can be reached at Mark@newparadigmsllc.com.