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*What word seems to be the most important themes in our life today and is likely the most important words in your organization? CHANGE! Likely change is driving your thinking as you plan for the new year. But it can be successful or it can fall flat. I recently read this article that discusses many reasons for the failure of change initiatives and asks some excellent questions to ponder for your own organization.*

*I felt this information would provide you some excellent food for thought!*

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*Are you trying to bring about lasting change in your business? Are you grappling with outsourcing, lean manufacturing or autonomous work teams? Or perhaps you are bringing in visioning and values, knowledge management, customer charters or any one of a number of other change initiatives that modern organizations can choose from. If you answered yes, you are not alone.*

### **Organizational Change Management – The New Imperative**

*by Business Performance Pty, Ltd.*

The rate of organizational change has not slowed in recent years, and may even be increasing. The rapid and continual innovation in technology is driving changes to organizational systems and processes. Witness the startling growth of the internet, which is enabling much faster and easier access to knowledge. Add to this the increased expectations of employees as they move more freely between organizations. And, of course, globalization has seen the tearing down of previous international market barriers. It is no wonder that relentless change has become a fact of organizational life.

#### **Expected Organization Benefits**

In spite of the importance and permanence of organizational change, most change initiatives fail to deliver the expected organizational benefits. This failure occurs for a number of reasons. You might recognize one or more of these in your organization.

- absence of a change champion or one who is too junior in the organization
- poor executive sponsorship or senior management support
- poor project management skills
- hope rested on a one-dimensional solution
- political infighting and turf wars
- poorly defined organizational objectives
- change team diverted to other projects

Failed organizational change initiatives leave in their wake cynical and burned out employees, making the next change objective even more difficult to accomplish. It should come as no surprise that the fear of managing change and its impacts is a leading cause of anxiety in managers.

Understanding your organization and matching the initiative to your organization's real needs (instead of adopting the latest fad) is the first step in making your change program successful. Beyond that, recognize that bringing about organizational change is fundamentally about changing people's behavior in certain desired ways. As is apparent from the above list of reasons for failure, lack of technical expertise is not the main impediment to successful change. Leadership and management skills, such as visioning, prioritizing, planning, providing feedback and rewarding success, are key factors in any successful change initiative.

### **Key Areas for Managing Change**

Whatever your change program, one key area requiring your attention is the identification and management of change stakeholders. A stakeholder is any person with an interest in the change process or the outcome of the proposed change. Stakeholders bring with them an amalgam of competing interests and often act to further their own power, influence and survival. The added difficulty for change managers rests in the fact that such political maneuvering is often in the guise of impartial and rational argument. Who are your major stakeholders? How will you get them on board and retain their support throughout the life of your change program?

Another essential activity often neglected by failed changed initiatives is the setting of clearly defined and measurable objectives. Goal setting done well engages stakeholders and commits them to the program. Other benefits include focusing effort to where it is important and providing a yardstick for measuring program success. Are your goals fuzzy and hard to put a finger on, or are they SMART goals? Do they link to the strategic objectives of the organization and do they have widespread and genuine support across the organization?

People, and only people, can make your organizational change happen. Programs fail where roles and tasks are not agreed and clarified. In organizations with a low performance culture, many employees and managers will expend considerable effort in hiding from responsibility. What are the key roles and responsibilities for bringing about the change in your area? For any change initiative, we have identified four key change roles: Change Driver, Change Implementer, Change Enabler and Change Recipient. Who are the people that occupy each role in your change program? Have the right people been selected for the right roles?

### **Achieve Results Through Your People**

Whatever your change initiative, most likely the above-mentioned roles will not be working in isolation. More and more, results can only be achieved through people working in collaboration – in teams. Are your teams of the optimal size – not too small and not too big? Have you got the right team leader? Do they have the necessary technical and interpersonal skills? One reason why teams are much more productive than individuals working in isolation is that members may leverage off each other's strengths and compensate for each other's weaknesses. Do your teams have the right balance of natural working styles? At times, teams get stuck. What is your strategy in moving stuck teams forward?

Training is an indispensable tool for skilling teams and bedding in change. Many organizations, however, fail to benefit from the resources spent on training. Soon after the training is completed, employees continue to cling on to the old way of doing things. How successfully are you using training in your organizational change program? Do you have a well-articulated training plan? Does the training focus on

behavior change or simply on content? Have you planned for back in the workplace support? Do your managers actively support the training?

### **Dealing with Resistance**

No matter how good your training, some employees, customers and suppliers will resist the change. Unless you have a well-thought out strategy for dealing with resistance, resisters will wear your program down till it grinds to a halt. Are your resisters out in the open or do they work from the underground? The stated reasons for resisting may simply be a smokescreen. Have you uncovered the real reasons for resistance to your program? How have you helped people work through the psychological process of change? What is your strategy for overcoming resistance to change?

Bringing about change in organizations today is fraught with uncertainty. However, when done well, it can be extremely rewarding. We wish you well on your journey.