



Change Management

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The ubiquitous nature of change seems to imply that change comes easily, but this is certainly not the case in most instances. The world of business and information technology requires frequent, and at times significant, change initiatives. Successful change appears even more elusive, and thus, the following information strives to address the major factors that aid in change management. The paper describes the technical and human elements of change and includes components of change management that relate to the field of information system management. The results provide guidelines and processes for successfully implementing change initiatives.

The level of global competition, corporate scandals, and continually changing governmental regulations and standards requires that firms of all sizes implement change initiatives in order to survive, remain competitive, and be in compliance with laws and standards. The changes range from minute to enterprise-wide and bring many challenges and benefits. Firms that embrace change and utilize it to their advantage receive a comparative advantage that increases their ability to compete and remain efficient in the marketplace. Due to the critical nature of change, the following information describes the role of change management in organizations, discusses the key factors of change, the potential impact, leadership characteristics, common barriers to change, and offers guidelines to aid in the successful implementation of change initiatives.

Gans (2011) states that 80% of firms polled reported experiencing “some” confusion with the concept of change management and another 57% indicated that they “often” experienced confusion during the process of change. These statistics clearly indicate the necessity to implement a clear, consistent, and comprehensive change management strategy (p. 48). Information technology projects are not devoid of change issues, as well. In fact, as Flynn, Pan, Keil, and Mahring (2009) state, IT projects at times “grossly exceed their planned budget and schedules, often by a factor of 2-3 fold or greater”; again these instances emphasize the need to focus on key initiatives and the process of change management (p. 131). The stakes are simply

too high; firms must take change management seriously and dedicate the time and resources necessary to effectively implement the initiatives. The very survival of a firm often depends on their ability to adapt and effectively change with the quickly adapting global business marketplace.

As stated prior, change in business remains a constant and continual process. Firms need to manage changes and, at times, seek to limit the degree of change while at the same time aggressively forging forward with changes, prioritizing becomes a key point.

Change creates a sense of uncertainty, stress, and anxiety for employees, which is often interpreted as resistance by change agents who are already aware of the change and the end results or ramifications. The change agents have spent countless hours developing, revising, and strategizing about how the change will improve business operations or advance the firm, but when the information is presented to frontline employees, they are often surprised and upset by the suggested or required changes. Balestracci (2003) states that firms and individuals in our technological age are “expected to absorb in 10 years what used to be assimilated in two or three generations,” which creates untold stress and has been identified as “corporate craziness” (p. 39). This same author goes on to cite the 85/15 rule: 85% of the problems in an organization derive from faulty process while only 15% or fewer are related to employees, and thus, management should take the stance to “blame the process, not the person” (Balestracci, 2003, p. 40). For some firms this may be a major cultural shift, but doing so decreases defensiveness, makes the actual problem the problem, and enables employees to unite against the problem in creating a solution. Depersonalizing the problem decreases the emotional reactivity to the situation, which allows for, and even encourages, change. Once the emotional reactivity has dissipated, the firm and employees are able to move into the change mode. The ability to respond appropriately requires five essential skills:

1. Self-awareness
2. Emotional maturity
3. Self-motivation
4. The ability to show empathy
5. The ability to develop and maintain positive relationships (Balestracci, 2003 p. 42)

Displaying these skills and abilities makes the change process much easier and flow more smoothly, but there are leadership and corporate cultural characteristics and factors that are also essential for a success change process.

Bejestani (2011) states that, “management is partly science and partly art” (p. 302). The human-side or soft-skills account for a major element of change, even with regard to the technical aspects of change. IT systems or applications do not develop, install, and maintain themselves. People are at the center of change, and the successful implementation of change requires leadership and management acumen. Great leaders and managers are able to overcome

resistance, unite employees, create a shared vision, and motivate employees or a team to implement change and accomplish tasks. Bejestani (2011) lists the following leadership characteristics:

- Consistency—to build confidence in the people who work for you
- Observation—to observe team members and their behaviors in a positive light
- Problem solving—to make right decisions and solve problems, especially in critical situations
- Training friendly—to believe in the necessity of training and provide resources for training
- Humor—to build happiness without non-logical stress
- Communication—to have face-to-face interactions
- Responsibility—to be responsible for completing objectives (p. 303)

In addition, Bluestone (2011) notes the difficulties associated with change and states that leaders should work to create a culture where mistakes are allowed and discussed in a positive light, using the mistakes and failures as learning opportunity. Employees should not be afraid to report mistakes and failures. The corporate culture should encourage a sense of forgiveness and restoration; employees should not obsess on making the right and perfect decision at the expense of actually implementing a decision and experiencing an error or setback. Bluestone (2011) ends by stating that “cultural change is evolution, not revolution”; this speaks to the continual process of organizational change and change management (p. 21).

Gee and Gee (2011) continue with the same line of thinking by stating the firms should work to “create a culture of change and innovation...which is one the best ways to build organizations that can respond to change in a positive and proactive manner” (p. 31). The actions and behaviors of managers account for up to 50% of how employees view a firm. Managers who encourage the following behaviors and attitudes are working to instill a culture of creativity, innovation, and change, which again provides a competitive advantage for their firm:

- Encourage new and creative idea sharing
- Promote diversity of thinking
- Support conflicting or opposing points of view
- Allow time for innovation and provide resources
- Allow people the freedom to make decisions with parameters
- Nurture risk taking as opposed to being risky (Gee & Gee, 2011, p. 31)

Similarly, firms that primarily operate from a top-down mentality are punitive, allow silos to exist, fail to communicate decisions, are overly controlling and fail to see the value of their employees, severely limit or hinder their ability to react quickly to market trends and implement creative and innovative change initiatives. Although the soft-side of change requires extensive management and interaction, the technical aspects remain and are vital to the process.

Hayes (2010) notes that IT projects are vital for all firms but the role of many IT professionals has changed. IT managers and even frontline staff are not simply able to maintain and interact with IT systems; they are being required more and more to collaborate and negotiate with other functional areas of the business. Hayes (2010) goes on to state that, “the change from provisioning physical IT assets and virtual IT assets is changing the relationship between IT and business units inside and organization” (p. 54). IT professionals are being pushed to not only upgrade existing skills and competencies but to learn, acquire, and utilize a whole new set of skills beyond specific IT skills (Hayes, 2010).

Firms must move beyond utilizing standard management and IT-related change management software and applications, such as SWOT analysis or Balanced Scorecards (Barraso, 2011). Firms that embrace and utilize project management techniques in addition to the standard techniques in developing and designing change management systems and protocols will become much more efficient and innovative in implementing changes that will serve to advance their firms. The time of being able to set back and rely upon prior successful change initiatives and practices has past. Firms must take advantage of their employees’ enthusiasm, creativity, and innovative spirit when diving into major change initiatives. The results will be astonishing; successful, innovative, and creative change projects will become the norm as opposed to the dreaded.

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