Implementing Change in the Reluctant Organization

Here's an approach to managing the human side of your company's transformation.

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Is your company going through major change? Chances are that it is in one way or another. Whether it is "right-sizing," merging, implementing a total quality management or a new compensation plan, or several of these at once, your organization is changing and requiring employees to modify aspects of their behavior.

During a recent seminar in Rosemont, IL, "Implementing Change in the Reluctant Organization," Jeanenne LaMarsh, president of LaMarsh & Associates, described a structured approach to change that can enable management to change employee behavior while minimizing stress on the organization. This article presents several tactics and concepts for managing the change process.

Success Factors

LaMarsh described success factors essential to change implementation. They include:
1. Evaluate and learn from the success and failure of past implementations.
2. Assess the level and type of commitment of key stakeholders (employees, customers, suppliers, stockholders, etc.).

Reinforcement Management Tactics

Tangible: salary increases, awards, bonuses, commissions, merit increases, prizes (trips, etc.), stock/profit sharing, perks.

Tasks: assignment of new duties/roles, relief from unpleasant duties, relief from repetition, varied duties, preferred equipment.

Development: Access to training, professional conferences, professional association representation, increased visibility, project control, professional recognition.

Responsibilities: increased decision making participation, increased input, influence over goals/tasks, access to information, supervise more people, high-level input, larger interdepartmental role.

Control: exemption from control policies, personal control over time, relief from threat of dismissal, special privileges, reduction in supervision.

Personal: increase benefits, cafeteria-style benefits, longer breaks, increased vacation, time off with/without pay.

Figure 1.

Key Roles

Role	Function
Sponsor	Authorizes change
Change agent	Implements change
Target	Changes
Champion	Believes in and attempts to obtain support for change

Figure 2. Source: LaMarsh & Associates Inc.

3. Assess the skills and motivation of transition managers. Where are the gaps?
4. Determine the values, behaviors, and unwritten rules (that is, the cultural factors) which support or oppose change.

Unfreezing and Refreezing

Change management is essentially transition management, LaMarsh said. Managing change requires an "unfreezing" of the present state, a structured and systematic management of the transition state, and "refreezing" in the desired state, she said. Communication and reinforcement tactics should be implemented, using the unfreeze-transition-refreeze model to change your organization.

Some tactics for unfreezing include:

1. Explain the objectives and rationale behind the desire to change. Clearly define the desired state and explain it using the language and *frame of reference* of those involved-in the change.
2. Focus on the external drivers for change, not internal deficiencies. Emphasize the cost of not changing. Show a need for change.
3. Describe why you personally believe in the change. Demonstrate sponsorship and walk your talk.
4. Be specific about what is and what is not changing for all groups involved.
5. Show what the rewards for successful change will be and show the punishment for stagnation.

It is important not to invalidate the old way of doing things, however. Everyone may be doing a good job and yet change still must take place. When unfreezing, consider having a funeral for the current state before moving on to the transition management step. One company literally staged a funeral for an obsolete process which utilized routing work sheets. A small, open coffin was brought around so everyone could throw away their routing worksheets and formally dispose of the old system.

Once the organization has become unfrozen, it enters the transition state where the change actually occurs. There are tactics for successful transition management, including:

1. Repeat change messages often and communicate those things which won't change as well. Appeal to the various employee frames of reference.
2. Focus attention ahead toward achieving change, not on returning to the past.
3. Provide as much information as possible and encourage overt resistance.
4. Provide change management training and other resources.
5. Involve those targeted for change in the change process.
6. Make symbolic actions to demonstrate commitment.
7. Celebrate small victories.
8. Provide needed training and encourage risk taking.

One manufacturing company failed to do this during an transition to a total quality environment. The company required that its foremen be absolutely responsive to the customer, yet one of its total quality initiatives was to never ship its product out of spec. So when a customer screamed for product, the foreman would make the same decision he'd made in the past — he would ship it out of spec and hope that the customer didn't notice. No change in behavior toward improved quality had occurred.

Tactics for refreezing once the desired state has been achieved, according to LaMarsh, include:

1. Communicate progress.
2. Acknowledge the costs that those involved with the change have paid.
3. Be honest about problems which still remain or new problems which were not anticipated.
4. Celebrate victories and reward those who made the change possible. One manufacturing firm had experienced a year-long change to a total quality environment (but the company had yet to see quality gains from it), which had taken its toll on everyone involved, especially the line people. At an annual management meeting, the line managers were praised, then criticized by corporate for a lack of immediate gains in quality and productivity — not the best way to celebrate a real victory.
5. Reinforcement management tactics (see Figure 1 above).

LaMarsh introduced four key roles involved in a structured approach to managing change (see Figure 2 above). Most individuals, no matter what role they are in, are targets of the change initiative at some point

in the process, she said.

People are not always logical and there will most likely be resistance to change from organizational or individual sources, LaMarsh continued. The organization should identify sources of resistance at the unfreezing step. A good change agent knows these sources and understands their frames of reference (reasons for the resistance). Consider indicators of resistance such as:

1. Do we need to do this?
2. I don't think we can pull this off.
3. They're just trying to get rid of people.
4. What's in it for me?
5. I don't think I've done a good job.
6. Nobody asked me.

Resistance is a process which must be managed through tactics such as education and communication directed at a specific change target's frame of reference, involving change targets in change management (such as a cross-functional design team), providing support, rewarding and acknowledging progress, legitimizing the resistance and providing multiple opportunities for overt resis-

tance, creating an atmosphere of trust, and reinforcing that different methods can have the same outcome.

Change agents must create involvement in the change process to be effective, LaMarsh said. They should not ignore change targets who react positively to change because these individuals still need to know about organizational expectations as well as the benefits and consequences of change.

The organization's culture must be evaluated and altered to fit into the desired state of the change process. Many manufacturing companies find that when they implement worker involvement initiatives, they continue to struggle with their old "command and control" culture and may subsequently fail in the implementation.

In conclusion, LaMarsh outlined a series of action steps and associated tools for successfully managing change:

1. Thoroughly define the change; get consensus on the desired date.
2. Assess the readiness of the organization for change; don't proceed if it is not ready.

3. Assess the history of implementation; determine whether to scale back or modify the change initiative.
4. Determine if a cultural change is required; educate or replace sponsors if necessary.
5. Assess the commitment level of sponsors; educate or replace them if necessary.
6. Determine target resistance; determine skill level of sponsors and agents to handle resistance.
7. Determine the probability of successful change and develop an implementation plan accordingly.

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