THINKING BEYOND CHANGE AND INNOVATION – ENGAGING PEOPLE TO DRIVE PERFORMANCE DURING CHANGE

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Change, change and change again. For many organizations, constant change is the new reality. To remain competitive, organizations need to consistently innovate. According to studies conducted by Tech Pro Research (2015), 92% of companies recognize the importance of innovation to the success of the organization. However, with every innovative concept, there is work that must be done to make it happen. Individuals may be asked to behave differently, upgrade a skill or learn a new process. As a result, many people resist the introduction of an innovative offering since more individual change will be required.

Good change management enables people to get back to their day-to-day operations faster and feel more satisfied with the change experience. This requires business partners to plan and think strategically when executing new change initiatives.

What is getting in the way?

Fear of the Unknown is a major reason for resisting change. The less individuals know about the change, the more their fear will grow. In the absence of frequent, two-way communication, gossip will start and the rumours tend to be far worse than the truth.

Leading an innovative change initiative means not springing it on employees. The organization needs to be ready for the change and leaders need to support the innovation. Expectations also need to be communicated so that people know what they are responsible for.

Non-reinforcing rewards systems can also derail the change. People will likely resist the change if they do not see the benefits or if there is a mismatch with the reward and desired behaviour. For example, if you want people to demonstrate teamwork, but give financial incentives for individual contributions, staff are likely going to take self-serving actions. The rewards must encourage behaviour that is congruent with the change, otherwise people will revert to old behaviours.

Overcoming Barriers to Change and Innovation

Expect that some people will resist when new ideas are introduced. Consider the following tips to help overcome challenges and increase commitment to the change:

1. **Explain the need:** Resistance can be reduced by beginning with an explanation of the need for the innovation. Every new idea requires change. People need to understand why this change is happening. Provide as much information about what is going to change, what will remain the same and what will be improved upon. On-going communication is critical to the success of the change. Leaders can build trust and a sense of security among staff by providing more details about the innovation.

2. **Encourage participation:** Leaders also need to assess the team's readiness to accept the new innovation and anticipate employee reactions to the change. Some individuals will be excited about the opportunities the change will bring. While there may be good business reasons for change, other employees may feel threatened by the process, reluctant to adopt the change and

resist the innovation altogether. Leaders need to acknowledge losses and be prepared to offer support, training, and coaching to help those who will be "on the fence" as to whether or not they will get on board with the new idea. Most importantly, leaders need to invest in the time to build commitment. Involve people in the process early. To increase engagement and buy-in, solicit input from staff to assist in the creation of a shared vision of the future.

3. **Sustain the change:** Executing a new idea will require alignment of systems, structures, policies, procedures, and strategies to ensure sustainment. HR business partners are critical to make this happen. Collaborate with cross-functional departments to identify gaps, possible impacts of the change on the business and areas for further improvement. Ensuring that the change is aligned with the organization's culture and values is key to making the change stick beyond implementation.

Addressing employee concerns can aid in reducing resistance. By thinking strategically, leaders can build more momentum for the change, and lead innovation with increased success.

Reference:
Tech Pro Research (2015). *IT innovation report 2015: Top companies, key tech drivers, and biggest roadblocks*. San Francisco, CA: Tech Pro Research.

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