



Change Management - What is the Appropriate Leadership Response to Change?

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Historically, in times of recession and economic slow down, the organisational response has been "slash and burn" on costs, and to focus on and streamline business processes to squeeze out ever greater efficiencies.

In the recession of the early 90's, the focus was all about achieving those efficiencies by creating and putting in place processes that would deliver those efficiencies regardless of the human cost.

You may recall the period after the last recession when "Business Process Re-engineering" was very popular? And the focus was always on the process and not the people - and getting "buy-in" was once described by a change agent friend of mine as "like trying to get a bunch of turkeys voting in favour of Christmas"!

Lack of leadership and management failure

All too often, change management is largely reactive to issues that show up on the board's radar rather than driven by any strategic intent or innovation. Typically the three main drivers for change are:

- Increased efficiency
- Cost reduction
- Corporate restructure

Essentially this is all about stripping out cost rather than innovation to create added customer value.

The research evidence shows that in these conditions, change initiatives are frequently badly thought out, managing change in the workplace is poorly executed and many change initiatives do not succeed in achieving their stated objectives. The responsibility for this lies predominantly with the directors and senior management.

Change management is often seen by directors and senior management as a sort of "magical box of tricks" that will somehow get them through the aspect of change they don't like handling, the people issues, so that they can get to the aspect they do like handling - which is the money.

This also reflects the all too frequent lack of clarity of what the change initiative is intended to deliver, and a "business case" for change based on knee-jerk reactions.

In these conditions, change management is imposed from the top-down, and little if any consideration is given to the need and business benefit of winning hearts and minds.

So the majority on the receiving end of these edicts spend most of their time doing just enough to "be seen to be wanting" to comply, but in reality, resisting



the change and despising and resenting those "on high" who impose this stuff on them.

The reality is that all too often, directors and senior managers sacrifice the needs and feelings of their employees in the interests of keeping their shareholders happy.

The appropriate response

So in short, the appropriate response to change is one that actually works!

What works is an approach that addresses the root cause of human resistance to change:

- That looks beyond the organisational "synergies", cost reductions and service improvements, and identifies those people who will be impacted by the change.
- That thoroughly assesses what those impacts will be.
- That recognises and addresses the emotional issues arising and the personal transitions that accompany the organisational change.
- That provides leadership, supported by management processes, and practical, tactical support that deal directly with these impacts.
- That does so in ways that work as well for the people within the organisation as they do for the organisation.