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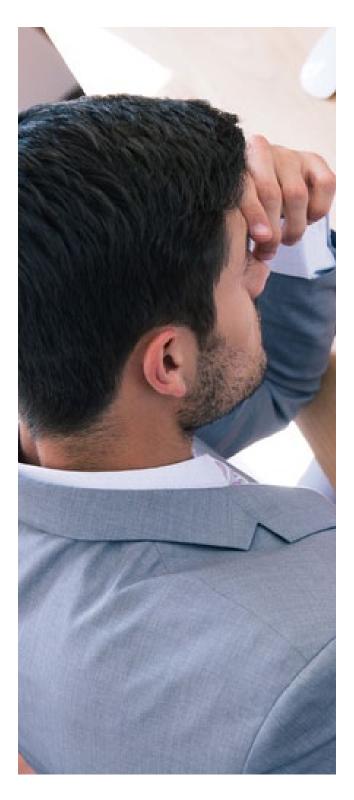
How to Motivate Employees During Times of Change

When organizations are in flux, employees may experience an array of emotions ranging from anger to fear of losing their jobs. Employers may struggle to establish a sense of security while the organization progresses through the necessary stages of change. Organization-wide, it may seem impossible to motivate employees to embrace the process of change.
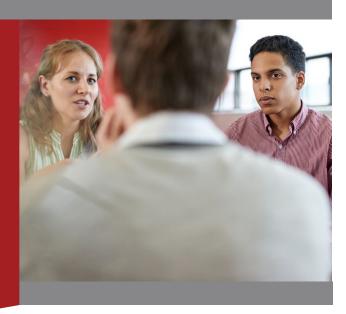
However, much of the opposition to organizational change initiatives can be mitigated through a deeper understanding of what motivates employees on an individual level. Most employers recognize that the success of change often lies on the shoulders of employees as much, if not more, than upper management. Therefore, understanding what can be done to motivate individual employees to embrace change represents a critical imperative for leadership. Unfortunately, a recent survey of global senior executives by PwC Strategy&, along with the Katzenbach Center, reveals only 54 percent of major change initiatives report a positive success rate.[1]

Why was the failure rate so high? There are many potential pitfalls that can arise when implementing major changes, including:

- Not gaining enough input from employees before or immediately after the change is announced, leading to perceptions of injustice.

- Ineffective communication and optics about the change, resulting in a lack of clarity or understanding which leads to fear and anxiety.

- Lack of discussion over how the change will impact employees' day-to-day work in a positive way, which in turn undermines an individual's sense of personal ownership of the change.

- An undesirable realignment in job role because of redundancies or inefficiencies brought on by the change.

The remainder of this paper addresses each of the above items in order to provide insight on how to achieve success during major organizational change initiatives.

Engage Employees by Gathering Input

Not all corporate changes can be immediately discussed outside of the C-suite. However, as soon as appropriate, employees at all levels should be asked to participate in change-related decisions and encouraged to provide input. In particular, employees who highly value innovation and have a strong desire to influence the planning and execution of changes. Likewise, they will feel valued, considered, and motivated by employers who place a priority on soliciting their input during the change management process.

As Senior Writer for Inc. Ilan Mochari states, "Executives tend to believe that planning will be faster and more efficient if fewer people participate. Here's the rub: they're right. But the goal shouldn't be fast or efficient planning. It should be creating a plan that actually works, over a long time."

Leaders who connect with the individuals who will ultimately be affected by and responsible for implementing the change, will be more successful in leading change initiatives. Even small amounts of listening and feedback gathering can go a long way for individuals that value being involved in change. In addition, individuals who are in the trenches within the organization are more in tune with potential hiccups, delays, or issues that will present themselves down the road if not proactively addressed.

Communication Goes Beyond the Masses

Communication is a chronically neglected element of executing a successful major change initiative. Although all aspects of the change, including the reasoning for it, the business strategy behind it, and the vision of the future organization once the change is implemented, may be obvious in the C-suite, it's often those missing pieces that make rallying employees around the importance of the change difficult to achieve.

A lack of communication that covers multiple forms and mediums, including email announcements, group communication, and one-on-one communication, puts the success of the change being implemented at much greater risk.

Taking it one step further, top leaders who take the time to understand what motivates individual employees are better able to tap into these motivators and tailor their communication accordingly. Highlighting aspects of the change that specifically resonate with individuals will motivate them and go a long way in engaging employees in the change process. For example, while companies might select one mode of communication such as a mass email or large corporate presentation, smaller, more intimate conversations are going to be more motivating to individuals that highly value voice and participation.

Conversely, identifying groups that may be more resistant to change and stepping up the level of communication provides these groups

an acute sense that they were considered, thereby promoting a feeling of being treated fairly. Even if they don't support the change because of a perceived detrimental career outcome, the mere act of considering their views helps sway such individuals and combats their general tendency to resist change.

Individuals who are highly motivated by stability are likely to be resistant to change altogether as well. These individuals value a well-structured, unchanging work environment and tend to oppose any changes that threaten their sense of stability at work. Such individuals tend to become anxious and blindly resist change when it occurs, even if the change could potentially benefit them in a tangible way. Managers may falsely view them as obstinate or uncooperative

without having attempted to understand why they're acting in a resistant manner. For these individuals, focusing on how the change will offer greater stability in the future may go a long way in winning them over during large-scale change initiatives.

When it comes to both large and small in-person communications, selecting leaders who are widely viewed as authentic and who are highly trusted by organizational members is critical. This is especially important when teams are dispersed or physically difficult to connect with on strategic business issues. The individual communicating the change one-on-one will be greeted with more openness and listened to more attentively.

Realign the Workforce Based On What Motivates Individuals

A change in job responsibilities, the dilemma of redundancies, and assigning new roles emerge as issues that need to be resolved during times of change.

In the paper, Strategic Organizational Change: The Role of Leadership, Learning, Motivation and Productivity, authors Appelbaum, St. Pierre and Glavis suggest that the largest barrier to "change" is not changes to technologies and work processes but changes involving people.[2]

Organizations are often rigid in their attempts to realign workforces, looking only at aptitude of individuals and what makes the most sense to the organization from a profitability perspective. Transcending this myopic view and examining what motivates each member of a work unit is essential for realigning individuals in a way that will optimize

productivity and help make the change successful for the entire organization.

Both individual motivators and how the new work context motivates a person are equally important to consider. For example, if an individual is motivated by autonomy, aligning them with a team that works collaboratively in a rigid office setting will not provide the most motivating work context to that individual.

While all of these factors might seem daunting, especially when considering all the moving parts of a large-scale organization, it's important to remember that major changes create sweeping impact. Taking the time to consider the motivating factors of each person affected goes a long way in optimizing the potential for organizational change to be largely successful.

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Sources: 1. Aguirre, DeAnne, vonPost, Rutger, and Alpern, Micah "Culture's role in enabling organizational change," Strategy&, 2013. 2. Steven H. Appelbaum, Normand St.Pierre, William Glavas, "Strategic organizational change: the role of leadership, learning, motivation and productivity", Management Decision, Vol. 36 Iss: 5, pp.289 - 301