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People and Process: Successful Change Management Initiatives

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Abstract

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus once said πάντα ῥεῖ (Panta rhei, for everything flows, in contemporary English), and people have expanded upon this philosophy to mean the only constant in life is change. In this article, we will discuss organizational change through change management implementation (CMI) to improve organizational performance as well as a leadership response to social distancing and the global COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. We will discuss research exploring leadership communication, the importance of communication in minimizing or addressing change, and CMI roadblocks including employee resistance.

Keywords: *change management; company change initiative; communication; consultant; COVID-19 pandemic; coronavirus; employee productivity; organizational success; outsourcing; performance; sensemaking; social change; resistance to change; stakeholders; workplace culture; work life*

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Introduction

The only constant in life is change (Heraclitus, circa 535–475 BC). The magnitude of the COVID-19 global pandemic appears to be a crisis in which business leaders need to quickly implement change initiatives to respond to the social needs of public safety, safety of the employees in the workplace, and marketing their products in order to survive the crisis (Hartmann & Lussier, 2020; Kuckertz et al., 2020; Sobieralski, 2020; Spurk & Straub, 2020). Indeed, "the quality of an organization's response to a crisis is typically associated with resilience" (Kuckertz et al., p. 7). We will address successful change management initiatives (CMI) and provide valuable research explaining what CMI is, the reasons for engaging CMI, plus the organizational and employee impact resulting from CMIs, concluding with understanding employee resistance as a possible barrier to CMI success.

Change Management Explained

Change management is often described as a process to initiate an adjustment, renovation, modification, or as a revolution in the way business as usual is conducted for an organization. Moreover, during the global COVID-19 pandemic, change management is vital for some organizations to grow and other organizations to survive (Hartmann & Lussier, 2020; Kuckertz et al., 2020; Sobieralski, 2020). Change management is more than just the how or the why; it is also about the who. Organizational leaders should change and adapt to the current uncertainty of the economic environment and the people within the organization also need to change and adapt (Pavlakis et al., 2011). How a change management initiative (CMI) is implemented is at least (if not more) as important as why it is. Everyone should be on the same page as to the how and the why; therefore, it is important for senior leadership and management to tell everyone—communicate.

Language and word choice are important when managing a change initiative (Thurlow & Mills, 2009). In particular, many employee perspectives will result from a company change initiative. Sensemaking is an act in which individuals communicate and make sense together. It is a behavior that is about transforming the meaning of an event (Weick, 2011). Some adoptions encourage innovation, and some discourage deviation from the way things have always been done and how communication has been conducted (Thurlow & Mills, 2009; Weick, 2011).

Sensemaking can also provide alternative understandings of organizational norms, values, and worldviews (Abolafia, 2010) as each participant works towards a common understanding in a world where common understandings are no longer prevalent (Bisel & Arterburn, 2012). This is an illustration of what is known as sensemaking, transforming the meaning of an event by altering one's perception. Thurlow and Mills (2009) noted how organizational employees make sense of a change initiative's language discourse, which can have an impact on future change initiatives. Moreover, organizational leaders must address these perspectives when crafting a new organizational culture from the old one (Landau & Drori, 2008).

When transformation change happens, the framing and communication practices change (Goleman et al., 2010). Responsiveness, openness, and flexibility behaviors are identified as important components of effective communication during change (Naor et al., 2010). A CMI is always highly dependent upon communicating to others the need for change as well as the process. Failing to account for ramifications throughout the entire system can undermine a CMI (Moon, 2009).

Change initiatives require action plans that are commonly regarded as essential tools for optimal organizational efficiency, yet are too infrequently implemented by leaders and managers. It is more common for managers to be focused on their own areas of expertise in departments, for which they are directly responsible, rather than implementing strategy and action company wide. Yet, the more complex the initiative and its strategy, the more imperative and necessary for an action plan for successful implementation, to avoid unnecessary expenditures, poor coordination between departments, dysfunctional allocation of resources, bottlenecks and delays in process, and duplication of effort (Davis et al., 2010). Moreover, action plans involve understanding results, establishing priorities, communicating priorities and results, clarifying new priorities, and generating recommendations, monitoring progress, and measuring results (Davis et al., 2010; Salem, 2008). Of course, all the best action plans in the world are useless unless a leader can communicate to subordinates (Salem, 2008) what is needed, when it is needed, why it needs to be done, how it should be done, and who should be doing it.

Organizational change can be episodic or continual. At the end of the day, leadership needs to have workers on board for the initiative to be successful (Chreim, 2006). The formal organizational chart is not always a correct illustration about where the power really lies within the company and what the informal communications channels really look like (Eshraghi & Salehi, 2010). The change initiative does not have to be large; it can be a small one, as well (even small changes can have large impacts, right?). The same goes for the position one occupies within the organization. Sometimes it is the leadership of the person sitting at the desk next to one who makes all the difference when it comes to implementing a CMI.

Organizational change is critical during the COVID-19 pandemic. The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimated that 436 million companies will experience considerable business disruption leading to change and further noted that "around 68 percent of the world's total workforce, including 81 percent of employers and 66 percent of own-account workers, are currently living in countries with recommended or required workplace closures" (ILO, 2020, p. 2).

Disruptive Innovation as the Reason for Change Management

In addition to global social health issues, there is a need for a company to understand and adapt to consumer behavior when accounting for new technologies. Change is inevitable; therefore, the company that remains on the cutting edge of technology is one that can quickly adapt to a changing consumer base (Nicholas, 2009). What many firms fail to understand is that they have more influence over consumer choices than over technological advances.

In a case study of footwear purchases in India and China, Saha et al. (2010) wrote that many factors affect the buying of shoes. Noting that price, quality, ambience of the store, and celebrity endorsements do influence what shoes customers buy, Saha et al. concluded that such factors are ultimately influenced and impacted by the consumers' belief systems, regardless of the new product. Consumer behavior and product choices are influenced by personal attitudes, values, personality, emotions, moods, cultural upbringing, and the like. These factors drive buyer behavior and affect a company's bottom line through profit. Therefore, a company can adapt to emerging technologies and innovate by influencing consumer choice, rather than adopting new capital expenditures.

Investment in new technology can be dependent on the potential buying population. Consider this: new medical technologies have expanded exponentially, now that Baby Boomers are growing older (Nicholas, 2009). We are now seeing new drug therapies in treating diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol, all of which have high initial start-up costs but also have great return on investment (ROI) potential (Fonseca et al., 2012). Conversely, Baby Boomers buy fewer cell phones, iPads, and the like than younger age groups (Nicholas, 2009). Yet, a great deal of technological advancement is in these fields because Millennial, Gen X, and Gen Y consumers buy a lot of these types of products.

The consumer base has made a dramatic shift in composition not only because consumers live longer, but because the generations now living have contrasting needs, wants, and demands based upon the different world events that have impacted their formative years (Badke-Schaub et al., 2010; Goldsmith, 2010). Nicholas (2009), in an article about the generational differences of workers and consumers, writes of the four generations currently living and their perceptions and responses to current advertising methods and trends. Traditionalists, born before 1946, are slow to embrace change, as compared to Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y, whose needs and responses range from meaningful work to freedom and autonomy needs and how these emotions must be considered by marketing departments (LeBoeuf & Simmons, 2010). Nicholas also addressed these four generations and their impact on marketing and consumer concerns, noting that large numbers of Baby Boomers skew market results, yet different values, such as traveling and electronic goods, can also skew market demands.

Adaption requires developing new core competencies (Botha & Claassens, 2010). It requires change to the organization on a large scale, for "without a clear vision of desired outcomes and a good strategy to attain them, it is unlikely that an organization will be able to adapt successfully to a turbulent environment full of external threats" (Yukl & Lepsinger, 2004, p. 90). In order for an organization to effectively implement a cognitive conflict scenario, the company must have a culture that encourages innovation and change, encourages flexibility, supports a continuous process, emphasizes the importance of learning, displays openness to new ideas and risk taking, envisions change, monitors the external environment, rewards and recognizes individuals, and encourages collective learning (Baer, 2012). Leadership behaviors to enhance a learning community include strategic planning, envisioning change, building support for change, implementing change, and encouraging innovative thinking (Baer, 2012). To sum up, the process is complicated and dense, but necessary to encourage brainstorming of ideas during a healthy debate and facilitate a learning environment.

One may perceive disruption as a departure from the norm; however, many see disruption as the norm (Karn & Cowling, 2006). Indeed, contemporary technology is changing rapidly, subsequently morphing into new structures, products, and work-flow processes. Yet, the human dilemma remains the same: for meaningful work as well as reward and recognition in the workplace (Hanson & O'Donohue, 2010).

Unless a company can adapt to new technology, they are soon out of business. In a case study of five manufacturing firms, Akdogan and Cingoz (2009) found that organizations respond to technological advances by attempting to reduce the company to an appropriate size through restructuring. They hope to become more flexible by cutting costs to remain competitive in the marketplace. Moreover, a company will put into place other strategies before shutting the doors, including layoffs, downsizing, early retirement plans, and selling the company to a rival competitor (Akdogan & Cingoz, 2009). In the end, the result is the same: the company must face the inevitable fact that it has failed to adapt to disruptive innovation and is no longer in business (Adner & Snow, 2010).

At the time of a crisis, or afterward, we tend to focus on the negative aspects of a situation and miss the learning opportunity and the chance to adapt future behavior for further success, a chance to "transform our experiences into grist for our mill" (Bennis, 2009, p. 109). Too often management is addicted to the quick fix and an obsession with the bottom line. However, there no longer is a bottom line, for life "is no longer linear and sequential…. it is spontaneous, contrary, unexpected and ambiguous. Things do not happen according to plan, and they are not reducible to tidy models" (Bennis, 2009, p. 18). Instead, decision makers must be flexible, creative, and innovative to be able to embrace an emerging opportunity when faced with one (Prewitt et al., 2011).

Good entrepreneurs are not always the savviest of innovators and can make poor decisions for their companies (Levangie, 2004). In Levangie's eight simple practices of effective executives, the writer presents entrepreneurial decisions and dilemmas that have the most influence on decision making, good or bad, including competition, scarcity of resources, finances, calamities, and employee retention (Chalhoub, 2010; Levangie, 2004). To counter and account for anticipated problems, therefore, the most effective executives follow, develop, and implement action plans to account for changes and challenges in the marketplace (Chalhoub, 2010; Levangie, 2004).

The challenge then becomes how entrepreneurs can account for and attempt to mitigate poor decisions. Is it process or structure? Structural forms within the company that facilitate innovation include how the work is structured and the physical proximity of important team members that dramatically increase opportunities to discuss ideas and exchange information (Lee et al., 2011; Yukl & Lepsinger, 2004). Mitigating poor decisions is the implementation of cross-functional teams made up of members from relevant parts of the organization as well as outside stakeholders (Lee et al.; Zhang et al., 2011). Moreover, this mitigating process is enhanced by diversity of membership and allows rapid and creative response to a changing environment (Goffin & Koners, 2010; Goleman et al., 2010). Finally, the organization encourages innovative thinking by encouraging others to innovate, see multiple perspectives, set realistic goals for creativity, and recognize and reward those who do (Goleman et al., 2010).

Change Management Plans and Initiatives

A CMI can take the form of a reduction in force (RIF), a complicated process that requires delicate handling, whether in the public or private sector or in the military (Castro, 2013). Researchers have noted the critical influence leadership has on subordinates' perception of the effective implementation of a sizable reduction in force (Appelbaum et al., 1999; Luan et al., 2013). Some companies are unable to adapt to the new global market and are forced to change the organization through inevitable downsizing (Bragger et al., 2013). Leadership, therefore, is critical in managing a potentially demoralized workforce, because a poor manager can make a bad situation worse (McDevitt et al., 2013). Indeed, it seems that leaders must adopt new strategies, roles, duties, and responsibilities when managing the organization experiencing a reduction in force. The leader will need to have a strategic plan that considers outplacement service, severance packages, transferring employees to other departments, and coping with survivor's syndrome (Sherman & Garland, 2007). Proper management and leadership will result in improved profit and productivity (Buehlmann, et al., 2007). Poor planning results in worker absenteeism, excessive turnover, and increased legal costs from litigation as employees fear for their jobs and roles in the revamped company (Iverson & Zatzick, 2011).

Some of the current strategies implemented by firms that are opposed to downsizing are: hiring freezes, mandatory vacations and sabbaticals, reduced workweeks, salary reductions, and exit incentives (Gandolfi & Littler, 2012). The organization's intent is to maintain the current workforce, yet reduce overhead while driving productivity (Gandolfi & Hansson, 2011). Furthermore, some firms and organizations, such as government agencies, have successfully implemented these strategies, yet most companies today have not taken advantage of these responses, probably because they are more complicated to set in motion. Surviving employees watch how the organization treats laid off workers and respond in kind, for downsizing is strong enough to tear apart a whole value system of an organization, further destroying the social fabric that is the true glue that holds a company together and enables it to compete in the marketplace (Sherman & Garland, 2007). As noted, the correct and most effective implementation of a downsizing initiative must be handled with care.

Internal and External Experts and Their Impact

Often an organization initially decides to use an outside consultant and then recognizes the importance of the internal champion. Outside consultants often find that their efforts are stymied not only by regulatory agencies, but the lack of knowledge about how the organization really works (Meadors, 2010). The formal organizational chart is not always a correct illustration about where the power really lies within the company and what the informal communications channels look like (Eshraghi & Salehi, 2010). Outside consultants are then forced to implement workarounds when the formal organizational chart does not match the informal workplace power structure. Moreover, workarounds come into existence when formal policies and procedures are difficult to implement and senior leadership do not adapt to contemporary circumstances. As time goes on, the workarounds become formalized to the point that the organizational chart bears no resemblance to how the company works (Eshraghi & Salehi). Outside consultants can have difficulty making recommendations regarding change initiatives, making an internal change agent the best choice to make the changes needed.

A good point can be made about the idea of bringing in an external expert to affect a change initiative. In many ways, this is similar to outsourcing a process to an external agent (Bolman & Deal, 2013). If done correctly, it may be just the answer to address concerns that internal change agents have too much at stake to make the initiative work (Sherman & Garland, 2007). If done poorly, it can result in further damaging relationships between leadership and their followers, who may already be suspicious about the true nature of the change initiative (Cheng et al., 2012). Change agents then became the focus of any resistance (Sherman & Garland, 2007). Moreover, a firm's formal organizational chart does not necessarily portray the true power relationships between people and departments (Higgs, 2009). Therefore, unless one really understands the organization from the inside-out, so to speak, a change initiative could have very bad consequences for the company.

Change initiatives are usually best implemented internally by those who know how each component may impact others (Miller et al., 2010). These internal experts understand the underlying dynamics of a change—the employees who are closest to the change (Miller et al., 2010). Far too often, organizations frequently bring in outside consultants to address change initiative challenges, rather than trust that others at the firm can effectively do so. Trust is an important component of any communication (Maria, 2009). Efficient communication is important for organizational success in general (Maria, 2009), but especially when implementing a change initiative. Many legitimate systems within organizations are resistant to change and strategic initiatives (Salem, 2008), which makes effective communication all that much more important.

Most times, outsourcing or offshoring is viewed as a negative. However, Akdogan and Cingoz (2009) had a fresh perspective on the topic of outsourcing. Companies and firms turn to strategic downsizing for several financial reasons. Akdogan and Cingoz, in their case study of five manufacturing firms in Kayseri, Turkey, noted that organizations downsize to:

> achieve an appropriate size, to restructure, to adjust to increasing technological advancements, to specialize in their core business, to become more flexible, to cut costs, to remain competitive, to speed up the decision-making process, or to execute new ideas quickly. (para. 4)

Furthermore, Akdogan and Cingoz wrote that the employee's positive perceptions of the downsizing strategy and its perceived fairness and necessity have a strong impact on remaining employee's organizational commitment. Outsourcing in and of itself is not necessarily a bad thing; rather, why it is implemented and how it is done are the real concerns.

Outsourcing is one tool in a toolbox of strategies that companies use to remain profitable in a hypercompetitive marketplace (Bács & Nagy, 2014; Burk, 2008; Dekkers, 2011; Verner & Abdullah, 2012). Outsourcing also includes bookkeeping tasks and facilities maintenance, in order to reduce overhead costs. Outsourcing is frequently turned to as a response to increasing expenses and has appeared to work in some industries, such as software development, customer service support, airline reservations, and on-line purchasing. Aliengena (2008), in a review of outsourcing in the trucking industry, noted that the key to successful outsourcing appears to be the retention of "core competencies in-house and sourcing out the things not central to the business" (para. 7), such as billing, accounting, and tax preparation. Outsourcing works because "the work they do is more about the function, rather than the industry in which that function is performed" (para. 7) and hits staffers hardest, because they are in overhead functions that can be most easily automated, eliminated, or acquired outside.

The Impact on Employees

Uncertainty in the workplace can demoralize employees to the point of impacting productivity. Eilam and Shamir (2005), in a case study of a large government agency office relocation in Israel, stated that "change includes a component of uncertainty, which reduces the individual's ability to predict the consequences of change and of individual behaviors, thus reducing the sense of control" (para. 66). The old offices were located in a small, timeworn complex of buildings where co-workers existed side-by-side in cramped situations. When the unionized employees refused to move to a newer, luxurious, more modern office facility in Jerusalem with public fountains and manicured lawns, they stated that they "wish[ed] to maintain freedom of choice and action" (para. 66), stating loss of privacy, a cold and impersonal office environment, and restrictive security measures as reasons for resistance. The government agency senior management attempted to address the complaints by monitoring air quality and changing security measures, but complaints remained high. Using a two-page questionnaire, the agency asked employees (n = 178) to attend a workshop so that the researchers might determine the reasons behind the resistance to change. Each page contained a 17 bi-polar, 7-point semantic differential scale, ranging between safe and hazardous, and employees were asked to rank the old office as well as the new. Employees were also asked their feelings about the move and their answers were listed on flip charts by the researchers. Findings centered on perceived threats to self-determination and control of circumstances, as well as the perceived loss of the office as village rather than workplace.

From a practical sense, management should address these perceived threats when implementing a change. Emotional reactions to change are not necessarily logical nor justified, yet are longer lasting than more practical concerns and speak to self-concept in the workplace (Sherman & Garland, 2007). Change managers should consider the existence of continuity and symbolic gestures such as moving artifacts from the old location to the new one (Chreim, 2006). Presentation of the change should focus on opportunities rather than terminations.

One of the drivers of organizational change must take into account cultural relevancy. Change management can be fraught with opportunities through how an organization interacts with the culture of the company and the global marketplace (Naor et al., 2010). A change initiative should address practical applications and reality in the workplace (Maria, 2009), as well as the global marketplace. A lack of planning leads to an assumption of invulnerability; indeed, the sharing of these assumptions will lead to company failure (Bodolica & Spraggon, 2011). There is an absence of monetary value put to human capital. In fact, there has been a great deal of research conducted that attempts to find a direct link between human capital and firm productivity (McMahon, 2010; Mihail et al., 2013; Zegeye & Rosenblum, 2000). It can be said that the link is tenuous at best because of intervening factors between the two.

Leaders provide resources to employees, understanding that it is not enough to delegate tasks, but leaders must also delegate authority to see that the job gets done (De Vries et al., 2010). This important point is too often lost in the business of everyday work life. Individuals desire to belong to something bigger than themselves; to go beyond just having a job and showing up for work each day (Valk et al., 2011). Leaders must build a collective excitement and group ideal and make the shift from hard skills to soft skills (Fallesen et al., 2011). Employees can easily become disengaged in the workplace. Moreover, disengaged employees are destructive to a company's morale, which in turn has an impact on the profitability of the firm. Therefore, it is important for company leadership to communicate with everyone in the organization (Nordin et al., 2011) about what the true goals of the firm are—to remain competitive in the global marketplace.

Human capital and human resources (HR) are the engines that drive organizational capacity (Martin-Alcazar et al., 2012). It is particularly important when the work is complex, difficult to learn, requires a high level of skill, and when extensive training may be needed (Green & Roberts, 2012). Human resource leaders assist others to rise to their potential by expanding their skills, boosting their performance, or even by changing the way one thinks through clarification and attainment of goals successfully aligned with the goals and vision of the company (Harper, 2012). More than merely a mentor, the HR coach can assist the company to develop its people and thereby increase the efficiency of the organization (Harper, 2012). Effective tools an HR coach can use include feedback, identifying behaviors for change, developing an action plan with employees, telling the truth to employees and leadership, and being supportive and following up with those who can best identify whether an effective change has occurred (Harper, 2012).

Resistance to Change

True and lasting change comes from the bottom up (Kezar, 2013). A forced top-down approach will result in change that is surface level and momentary. A CMI that is rationally conceived usually fails because change agents do not account for the unanticipated consequences to the entire system (Hughes, 2011). A CMI alters power relationships, agreements, and pacts and disrupts tradition and rituals (Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2008). Below the social surface of the everyday mundane tasks of the company, the organization's social tapestry begins to unravel, and people resist the change and then sabotage it (Mantere et al., 2012). The unresolved conflict will have consequences in the future, as hostilities and confusion are buried, only to resurface later in acts of sabotage, theft, interpersonal aggression, employee turnover, and job dissatisfaction (Kramer, 2010). Leaders have a responsibility to communicate to others the intent and spirit of the proposed change.

Change management can be fraught with opportunities or with disruption (Naor et al., 2010). Chreim (2006) studied two Canadian banks that had survived several rounds of job cuts in the late 1990s. In a series of interviews in 2000, with 22 non-union, non-supervisory employees, Chreim found that employees saw themselves willing to embrace change when the focus was on the survival of the organization. Conflict arises when organizations are in flux and the people within them respond in dysfunctional manners to those changes (Salem, 2008). Chreim noted that there are four responses to change: acceptance, resigned compliance, avoidance or opposition, and ambivalence. The focus is on the process, rather than the change, as the focus becomes survival (Chreim).

Conflict resolution involves sensemaking, in which individuals communicate and make sense together, framed by a common culture (Salem, 2008). When transformation change happens, the framing and the communication practices change; hence the culture adapts (Goleman et al., 2010). Some adoptions encourage innovation, and some discourage deviation from the way things have always been done and communication has been conducted (Salem, 2008). Responsiveness, openness, and flexibility behaviors are identified as important components of effective communication (Naor et al., 2010).

Boeing discovered that a change initiative can go wrong in all the worst possible ways when organizational leadership decide to outsource the manufacture of some airplane parts for the 787 Dreamliner in 2008 (Gates, 2009). Problems with the change initiative included the poor construction of the tail section in China, which resulted in the company sending union workers to the plant to instruct the supplier in proper construction, as well as defective manufacture of nut-plates, resulting in their necessary replacement in planes already partially completed on the production line (Gates, 2009; Yu, 2008). Other consequences included general production and delivery delays, a machinist strike over increased outsourcing by the company, and employee sabotage of a $24 million dollar Chinook helicopter, none of which added to company profits (Gates, 2009; Yu, 2008). It is apparent that Boeing did not account for all the ramifications to the relevant parts of the company.

It is important for company leadership to communicate to everyone (Nordin et al., 2011) what the true goals of the change initiative are—to remain competitive in the global marketplace. Many times during this process, the difference between leadership and management is that leadership involves change initiatives and management is a maintenance force; leadership involves people and management involves paper, implementation, and systems (Bush, 2007). Change management can be fraught with opportunities or with disruption (Naor et al., 2010). Organizations must change and adapt to the current economic environment and the people within them must also change and adapt as well (Pavlakis et al., 2011). Conflict arises when organizations are in flux and the people within them respond in dysfunctional manners to those changes (Salem, 2008).

Resistance to change is sometimes difficult for individuals and organizations to embrace (Moon, 2009). Leaders and their organizations go beyond limitations and at times implement the unorthodox to address change management in today's world of rapid innovation by redefining success (Larsson & Vinberg, 2010). The challenge for the leader is to provide a positive role model, empower others, prove relevancy, and create the buy-in that fosters constructive change, resolves conflict effectively, and reduces destructive resistance in the workplace (Ozmete & Hira, 2011).

Leadership Communication for a Successful CMI

How a change initiative is executed is at least as important as why (Moon, 2009). A company is not just about paying people for their work; it also is about assisting others in developing pride in their work as well as encouraging collaboration and innovation into new ways of doing business as usual (Baran, 2010). Also, an interactive and productive learning organization community acknowledges and nurtures communication in the workplace, thereby diffusing the new knowledge throughout. We would posit that a successful CMI is dependent upon leadership and transformational leaders.

Too often, a change initiative is more about the process than the people. It may be more appropriate to focus change on the process in many cases; however, without the people on board for a change initiative, all the plans in the world will mean little. Leaders inspire others to assist the changes needed. Indeed, transformational leaders must be proficient in relationship management where self-awareness, self-management, and empathy meet (Kotlyar et al., 2011). It is moving others in a new direction, finding common ground, building networks, and giving others a common purpose and vision (Stevens, 2011). It is the subtle shaping of the workplace culture (Stevens, 2011). Transformational leaders move others toward shared dreams when change is required, provide clarity, and build team commitment (Stevens, 2011). The style drives commitment through participation for consensus and input (Cote et al., 2011). The true transformational leader with strong skills in CMIs stands a better chance of assisting an organization through any alterations, modifications, and adjustments required (Stevens, 2011).

An over-looked component to a successful change initiative is the importance of the little things, like how employees perceive a change management and its impact on their jobs. One person's small change is another's life-altering one. Change is not always in the larger sense; in fact, most organizational change is in the little things (Moon, 2009). In their study of 400 people in 130 organizations, Kotter and Cohen (2002) found that during a CMI, the challenge is to change the behavior of people and influence their feelings in order to bring about a change. In addition, resistance to change is dependent upon the importance of tradition within the culture, for "people change what they do less because they are given analysis that shifts their thinking than because they are shown a truth that influences their feelings" (Kotter & Cohen, 2002, p. 1). Clear, decisive victories early in the process go a long way towards boosting morale and clarifying long-term goals. Small wins and victories in the workplace influence the feelings of others and empower them to become a part of the process rather than a victim of it.

We would reiterate that it is not the initiative, per se, that is the problem; rather it is how the initiative is implemented by senior leadership at an organization. As a result of poor implementation, employees distrust that senior leadership has their best interests at heart. Fritzsche and Oz (2007) found that leadership ethics, values, and attitudes will influence a subordinate's job satisfaction which, inevitably, impacts the company's bottom line. From senior leadership's or management's perspective, disengaged and discouraged employees are destructive to a company's morale which, in turn, impacts the firm's profitability.

Our values and attitudes influence job satisfaction. We like to believe that the organization we work for operates on high principles and ethics and that a CMI is not about punishing employees. When employees perceive differently, they experience job dissatisfaction, which results in turnover, morale problems, conflict with others, and other subsequent behaviors that directly impact the organization's effectiveness (Chreim, 2006). It is important for company leadership to communicate to everyone (Nordin et al., 2011) what the true goals of the change initiative are—to remain competitive in the global marketplace.

An example of a change initiative is what could be considered the use of what is known as the hard skills—where tasks and responsibilities are hard-and-fast policies and procedures established from the beginning. Conversely, soft skills are those that address working with people. Both hard skills and soft skills have their challenges. Hard skills when working with people can be problematic where a softer touch may be needed, for example when there are differing cultures (Yuan, 2010); accordingly, soft skills can create a lot of problems in procedure and implementation (Dimitroff et al., 2005). The hard skills are usually easier to implement as in project management or accounting firms, while the softer skills usually take more finesse, such as managing and leading a college-age workforce (Yuan). Hind et al. (2009) posited the existence of a third dimension in leadership skills, which they term reflexive abilities requiring leaders to adapt to circumstances as needed.

A major component of an organization's ability to make a successful change concerns resistance to change. A change presented as an opportunity is more likely to be accepted (Chreim, 2006). Therefore, it behooves organizational leadership to communicate to all why the change is needed and how it will benefit the firm (Chreim, 2006). Responsiveness, openness, and flexibility behaviors are important components to effective communication (Salem, 2008). Trust is also important; subordinates want to trust that their superiors have the best interests of the firm in mind and that the information they are receiving about the coming change is accurate and not self-serving (Maria, 2009). Finally, it is important that company leadership recognize that employees have many great ideas about how a change should come about. Employees as internal experts are important to smooth a transition by addressing some of the little-known impacts to which they are privy.

Unless senior leadership explains the needed change, too many in the organization may perceive the changes as a betrayal of core beliefs and values (Chreim, 2006). How information is disseminated during a change is at least as important as the eventual resolution. One important task that leadership has during a CMI is communication to all stakeholders (Garcia, 2006). For effective CMI, organizational leaders need to communicate as applicable with internal stakeholders such as leaders and managers, employees, unions, and activists as well as external stakeholders such as stockholders, vendors, consumers, government, and community groups; "identifying stakeholders and their needs limits potential obstacles and provides business opportunities" (Fusch & Gillespie, 2012, p. 57). Leadership is a test of stewardship. Change leadership requires dispensing with denial quickly and moving forward expeditiously by setting direction (Garcia, 2006). It is the ability to demonstrate situational awareness, grasp the significance of the crisis, and mobilize a quick response.

Change initiatives can be successfully embraced, for "a change framed as an opportunity is likely to be embraced and one framed as a threat is likely to be avoided or opposed" (Chreim, 2006, para. 73). Moreover, how the firm manages a change initiative will determine whether the change initiative is long-term or short-term (Dresp-Langley, 2009). Innovative technology is all well and good in the abstract; however, a change initiative gone badly can undo any and all positive results (Chreim, 2006). Leaders as mediators have a significant impact on response to change in their organizations through their communication and conflict styles.

Some may never adapt; most will modify and adjust to the change initiative (Speakman & Ryals, 2010). For managers, leaders, and change agents it is best to adapt as fast as the organization can cope (Adner & Snow, 2010; Salem, 2008). The business leader needs to quickly address change during the COVID-19 global pandemic in order to protect the customers, employees, and communities in which the organization operates as well as changing to a new business as usual in order to grow and survive (Hartmann & Lussier, 2020; Kuckertz et al., 2020; Sobieralski, 2020). In the technology hub of Bellevue Washington near Amazon and the Microsoft campuses, the Seattle-based global outdoor recreational clothing and outfitting company Recreational Equipment, Inc. (REI) quickly responded to the COVID-19 pandemic after experiencing their employees working virtually. REI leaders changed their long-term plan for a new centralized headquarter campus to having their employees working virtually with small decentralized offices when needed. In making this change, REI sold their new unoccupied 400,000 square foot campus on eight acres to Facebook (Grant, 2020; Recreational Equipment, Inc., 2020). This was a quick CMI major decision to address a new working model that emphasized social distancing for the safety of employees to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Another reason for CMI is innovation. Innovation is not merely an improvement of the company's products; rather it also includes senior leadership and management's efforts to encourage and facilitate innovation to improve other performance determinants (Sue-Chan et al., 2011). This is important as a means to an end when the environment is unstable during technology changes, political and economic changes, threats from competition, change of customer needs, as well as poor assessment of market and customer needs (Buehlmann et al., 2007). Innovation is essential for rapid and needed response (Frese et al., 2007). It may not be necessary when things are stable, product is in high demand, subsidies are high, or a market is guaranteed (Alfonso et al., 2012). Complexity is not just about the product or process; it is also about the people! Bolman and Deal (2013) said it best: The success of a company is dependent upon its people. They made that statement back in 2003 but it is just as relevant today. Even the most automated and technologically advanced workplace still requires people to run it.

Conclusion

This article began with the idea that the only constant in life is change (Heraclitus, circa 535–475 BC). We suggested the importance of change management implementation in response to the COVID-19 global pandemic in which business leaders need to quickly implement change initiatives to respond to (a) the social needs of public safety, (b) safety of the employees in the workplace, (c) and marketing their products in order to survive the crisis (Hartmann & Lussier, 2020; Kuckertz et al., 2020; Sobieralski, 2020). We further addressed successful change management initiatives and provided valuable research explaining what CMI is, the reasons for engaging CMI, plus the organizational and employee impact resulting from CMIs, concluding with understanding employee resistance as a possible barrier to CMI success. Using CMI, leaders need to (a) address disruptive innovation by embracing new technologies, (b) mitigate resistance to change, (c) encourage sensemaking between stakeholders, and (d) address employee impact resulting from the change initiative. The importance of leadership buy-in and communication is a key factor towards CMI success.

In a world where change is the only constant, being able to respond in a timely way to emerging threats and opportunities is crucial to any organization's ability to thrive (Bennis, 2009). The ability to adapt includes coping with external threats with the ability to exploit opportunities created by new technology, changing markets, as well as the shifting needs and expectations of customers (Christensen, 2010). Moreover, organizational leaders need to quickly address change during the COVID-19 global pandemic in order to protect the customers, employees, and communities in which the organization operates as well as change to a new business as usual in order to grow and survive (Hartmann & Lussier, 2020; Kuckertz et al., 2020; Sobieralski, 2020).

Life gets in the way of our best intentions, to be sure. What remains is how we approach those challenges in a pragmatic and realistic manner. Some of us are ready to take on the task and others struggle with the most basic first step, which is the courage to do so. It can also be said that change is always with us and the only thing constant in life is change (Nastase et al., 2012). As mentioned, everyone wants to be a part of something bigger than themselves; sometimes people have a hard time finding their own role in that process.

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