"Essentials Of Change Management: Five Critical Steps For Greater Project Success"

By Jeremy S. Lurey, Ph.D.

Today's organizations experience tremendous amounts of change. Whether these changes are prompted by the implementation of emerging technologies, the redesign of major business processes, or even the realization of a new corporate vision, they can, under the right circumstances, be exciting and exhilarating experiences that lead to innovation and renewal in many areas. Better utilization of technology, more efficient process flow, and enhanced individual and team productivity are all potential benefits of change.

Far too often though, organizations fail to achieve the anticipated benefits of their large-scale change efforts – arguably because they do not attend to the "people side" of change. In fact, it's not uncommon for only 20% of major change efforts to ever achieve their intended business results. That means that up to 80% of these change projects fail to achieve their intended business results!

Amazingly, these statistics haven't really changed over the past 20ish years as change management has developed as a discipline. Why is that? After countless books on managing change and decades of organizational change efforts behind us, you would think that we'd have it figured out by now. Is it really possible that we don't? I suppose. More likely though is that our business leaders still don't get it even if "we" do! No matter how you approach it, it's a "pay now or pay later" scenario. Either you invest the time and energy required to proactively manage the change process upfront, or you likely will end up revisiting your choice about not doing so and ultimately be forced to do it all over again – albeit with more rigor and discipline – after the changes fail to deliver their intended outcomes.

Not managing the people side of these organizational change initiatives just isn't effective. Individuals who do not participate in the transition process are less likely to own, or even accept, the upcoming changes. Successful change strategies actively engage the hearts and minds of those affected by the upcoming changes early in the process to mitigate potential risk and improve the likelihood for success. The following are five proven steps required for any organizational change effort to succeed:

1. **Define Success** – Clearly define your metrics for success, along with a process for measuring them, right at the beginning of your change effort. There are a number of ways to "go on vacation" this summer, but you wouldn't want to wait until the end of your trip to determine what having fun looks like while you are away. Why treat your major change efforts any differently?

Follow MNODN at:

2. **Prepare Leadership** – Identify specific roles your leaders must play and then educate them on those required behaviors. At a minimum, your leaders must communicate the business case for change and provide the necessary resources for the changes to occur. Beyond that, serving as "change champions" requires leaders to hold themselves and others accountable for achieving the stated objectives throughout the change process.

3. **Increase Readiness** – Measure the organization's culture and current readiness for change and then proactively manage the sources of potential resistance across the organization. Remember, resistance is not a bad thing. In fact, you can use it to determine what else you might need to do to more successfully implement your changes. Change readiness assessments along with individual interviews and focus group meetings are the most effective way to expedite this discovery process and identify what solutions are required.

4. **Manage the Message** – Effective communication is critical to the success of your project efforts. Design and implement two-way communication strategies that specifically target those employees and key stakeholders most impacted by the changes and inform them about what is happening, why, and what they can do to help before the changes are implemented. It's also essential to keep the lines of communication open well after "go live" because the transition will continue beyond the implementation itself.

5. **Make It Stick** – There is a huge difference between "go live" and "adoption". Most change management approaches focus on "go live" with complete disregard for what happens after that brief moment in time. Apply reinforcement strategies to discourage undesirable behaviors from occurring and make desired behaviors more routine. This requires remaining focused on the future state and including everyone in the lessons learned process to hear their thoughts about what worked well and what may still be missing and/or needs to be done to achieve your desired results.

While this is by no means an exhaustive list of everything you need to do to implement long-lasting changes across an organization, it is a great start for what many business leaders tend to ignore. If nothing else, this disciplined approach can help you achieve extraordinary outcomes by producing faster, smoother transitions to sustainable increases in productivity and ultimately bringing you greater return on your project investments.

Jeremy S. Lurey, Ph.D.

Dr. Jeremy Lurey is the CEO of Plus Delta Consulting, LLC and works with business leaders to improve performance and implement positive changes in their organizations. With 17 years experience as a management consultant, he has particular expertise in change management, process improvement, leadership development, strategic planning, and virtual team effectiveness. Dr. Lurey is a seasoned consultant and trusted business advisor for clients ranging from small start-ups to multi-national corporations.