

11 Tips for Successful Change Initiatives

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Why is change so hard? Particularly if we know that most of the time a significant change improves things. Right? Well, not always, but if done the right way, change can bring about significant improvements!

Organizations reorganize internal structures and processes for a few reasons. A change might be: to better align the organization with changing conditions, new business demands, or perhaps because of a crisis that impacts the organization.

Change is initiated by stepping back and looking at the organization from a strategic perspective and then making a plan for realignment and adjustments to how business is done. The goal being, to get the organization closer to where it should be: In terms of increased revenues, improved productivity, enhanced quality, cost savings, and most important – an improved customer experience.

Some organizations succeed at this kind of effort, and some fail miserably. McKinsey Quarterly did a study that revealed that only 8% of executives polled, who had been through a redesign, said their change efforts added value, met business objectives, and were completed on time.

Most of the executives said successful redesigns took six months or less and were successful at changing the mindsets of employees to rally around the change rather than resist it.

Organizational leaders explore reorganizations and change efforts when they feel the need to:

- **Respond to the growth of the organization.** For instance, has the organization outgrown its current facility space?
- **Reduce costs.** For instance, have operating costs increased and is there an opportunity for cost savings. Benchmark best practices. For instance, have you learned about new and better ways to operate through a professional organization?
- **Change a static organization.** For instance, is your organization simply stale and needs to improve? There are different thoughts on the timing of implementing change initiatives.

Questions

- Should the organizational change be implemented gradually over time, or should it be quick?
- When discussing this with leaders, I ask, “do you like to pull a band-aid off quickly or slowly?”

There are definite advantages to both approaches. However, making changes quickly allows the organization to get to where it wants to be faster – and slower implementation prolongs what is often a painful process.

The secret to successful, rapid change is to focus on altering the mindset of those that the change affects. In the book *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*, **Daniel Pink**, talks about the importance of influencing the employee's motivation to change.

The premise is that to change an organization successfully, the change needs to well up from within the ranks of the employees. Figure out what motivates employees to change and then target efforts to the heart of what motivates them.

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1. Help Employees Understand the “why”

Change can be hard. Employees develop routines at work, and changing those routines requires extra effort. Help employees accept the change by explaining why the change needs to be made and what the results of the change will be. For instance, if you are changing software for tracking customers, help employees understand how improved technology will make their job easier – once they go through the learning curve.

2. Get Employees Involved

Employees do the day-to-day work. Get them involved in the planning and implementation of the change effort. Do this by ensuring employee representation on planning implementation teams.

3. Focus Change on Entire Organization

Organizations often make the mistake of focusing efforts on one department or area that needs change. To be successful, target the entire organization and work through each area of operation.

4. Create Strategies to Change Employee Mindsets

Let's be real, change is not easy for many employees. Take the time to create strategies that will help the employees see beyond the status quo and into a better, future state.

5. Create Very Specific Goals

There is not much more confusing than working toward something but not being clear on the goal. Take the time to create SMART performance goals for your change efforts. The detail will help employees understand exactly what you are trying to accomplish.

6. Provide Necessary Resources

Change comes with a cost. And often that cost is in terms of available resources and support for the change. Create systems and processes that will support the efforts

and make sure all necessary resources (people, time, and money) are available to ensure the outcomes you are striving for.

7. Leadership

Employees follow great leaders. Identify a leader who is excited about the change. Choose leadership that will champion and support the change efforts by helping employees see the big picture and coach them through the inevitable challenges that come with change. Only 22% of workers strongly agree that the leadership of their organization has a clear direction for the organization. From Gallop – It's the Manager

8. Implement Fast

Make a plan and then implement it quickly. Use great communication tactics to ensure all employees understand and are ready for the change. The faster you can implement, the more quickly you will be able to get back to acceptable norms.

9. Help with Distraction

Change can create stress for employees. And, stress is a distraction from getting the job done. Thoughtful implementation tactics can help employees overcome the distraction and demoralization that often comes with change efforts.

10. Communication Often

Change efforts require constant communication. Identify a communication advocate who can help develop a communication plan for employees. Then communicate, communicate, and communicate more!

11. Create Support Systems

Change efforts need lots of support. Make sure you have the systems and processes in place to support the change. For instance, if you are changing software, make sure there is technical support available for employees who encounter training or technical issues. Poorly planned change efforts can affect employee engagement and ultimately, worker productivity.

Employers can help employees cope with organizational change by:

- creating a change strategy;
- developing a very clear communication plan that helps employees understand why the change needs to take place;
- soliciting employee involvement in the change;
- thoughtful timing;
- and very defined procedures for implementing the change.

Take the time to plan every detail of a change initiative, develop a strong communication plan (to help engage employees in the process) and you will be able to turn your organization around quickly and successfully.