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MANAGING THE MANAGEMENT OF CHANGE



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V. Ramkumar finds out what goes into bringing change across an enterprise.

The greatest effort in change management is in comprehending the change itself. Simple as it may sound, I have always found it the most interesting, yet intriguing part of implementing a process or organizational transformation across both SME and large enterprises.

Let us understand this better. We deal with change across organisation in three levels, based on the context and impact that it tends to create. In simple terms, this is reflected by the depth of change it brings in the organisation, the time-span that this change tends to be absorbed across the enterprise, and the effort it takes to bring in this change. So what are these?

Individual unit level

This is typically evident in a new focus that organisations bring in, seen in unit level focus for a specific objective, typically for a quick short term one. A good example in a change sales effort – bringing in a new direction and focus on the target segment, key account relationships, transforming the sales organisation to bring in higher customer focus and driving higher sales performance. These have a high focus at a unit level, has a faster implementation timeframe, and relatively quick in getting it implemented.

Business unit level

Be it an entire business unit – such as an operations function or a finance function, SMEs do bring in and implement change at a specific business unit level. These are usually done over a period of time, and driven by a relatively longer-term objective. Typically these initiatives are driven towards addressing a key pain point such as addressing increased customer complaints in a certain area, reducing cost structure of a certain production process, among others.

Further, it does take a higher effort to have these fully implemented.

Enterprise level

These include less frequent initiatives that have a very high degree impact across the organisation. While unit level changes may be done more frequently, enterprise level changes are not expected to happen too soon, and too frequently – or they would have an adverse effect too. A very common example of enterprise level change is where an ERP solution is rolled out across the organisation and resultant change it brings in the way the processes are rolled out. Not only is this change more long-term in its sustainability, but also has an affect across the organisation and takes a significant effort to execute.

While human tendency is usually to resist change, in most circumstances, the acceptability of the change is much higher at an individual unit level. As the surface of change grows, so does the complexity of implementation. The point to remember is that the enterprise level changes are not just trial and error initiatives. These call for very high investments, demand a fair degree of management time, are assumed to be the foundation layers for future direction of the organisation, and when they don't bring in the desired results, the loss is significant.

So what can be done here, and how does one ensure the change is managed well, and even better, maximize the value derived from an effort of such an organizational change? Based on over 17 years of consulting experience, I have always seen this best managed when four basic tenets of change are well implemented. Let us explore them closely:

Communicate the benefits

Silly as it may sound; sometimes the most impactful aspect of large projects is not



in the execution of it, but in simple and direct communication to beneficiaries. When the participant of change process is made aware of benefits that come with it, the degree of involvement increases manifold. Taking extra effort to make employees aware of benefits – be it simpler processes, reduced effort, increased customer benefit or organisational efficiency, the more clear the communication, the more effective its acceptance. Ensuring completeness of message reduces second-guessing and mitigates an invariable element of skepticism.

Maximise participation, drive ownership

I have always found ownership levels automatically driven when you have participation levels increased. It does not matter if the involvement is in just one element of the project or many. The fact that an employee had participated in it itself drives the sense of ownership. A word of special attention here – it is important that the most dissonant unit of the enterprise or stakeholder gets to participate most. The age-old technique of having the bully in the class being made the monitor almost applies in all situations, and change management is no exception.

Celebrate change and increase visibility

Unfortunately, success does not receive the same attention as issues and challenges. Instinctively, management focus always tends to focus on the areas of issues that need attention. While this is key to fix a problem on a timely basis, it also tends to dilute the opportunity of celebrating successes. When an organisation is driven towards a mission where change is the foundation, every element of success on the way deserves a higher visibility and management appreciation – that is the key to institutionalising improvements.

Drive change from the top

What is important to my boss is important to me. And that's universal! Unless the CEO and his direct reportees embrace change, you do not expect it to percolate down the order. In most organisations, this happens to be the most common cause for critical projects not taking off. Neither carrot, nor stick does the miracle when management conviction is weak. Conviction needs to be demonstrated in more ways than just lip service, and the responsibility lies at the top.

The best part of these initiatives is that they are universal, and applicable in most situations. While all four are important, they are not necessarily in a certain order, and each of them have their own benefits and not required to be implemented collectively. And a last word on change – as I said before, the most important part of bringing in change is in comprehending it. Let's say it's not about just comprehending, but about having both the cause and effect being comprehended by everyone who matters!

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