The Impact of Change on Workforce Productivity and Engagement

By Felix Kugel

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The world's economic change today is driving an increasing need for organizations to adapt quickly and adeptly to dynamic market conditions. How companies and their leaders manage change and engage their workforce can significantly influence their ability to achieve strategic business objectives.

To ensure that initiatives for change are successful, organizations need to develop a workforce that is adept at handling change in whatever form it takes. This undertaking requires not only understanding and fostering effective behaviors and attitudes, but also developing a comprehensive organizational process infusing change agility throughout the company — a system ensuring that the right organizational structures are in place and that individuals have the appropriate capabilities required at each level.

Once senior leadership provides the vision of what change is needed, the organization must then set out to develop and execute a change management plan and engage their workforce in the process. ManpowerGroup's recommendations include:

1. Use assessment tools to evaluate each employee's change readiness.

To create a comprehensive change management system, leaders need to conduct an organizational readiness assessment. One assessment is designed to evaluate structural issues. Another assessment evaluates the change effectiveness skills and abilities of employees by analyzing the specific behaviors and characteristics needed to adapt easily to sometimes difficult and changing circumstances — such as an ability to remain calm even in stressful situations and to reach mutually beneficial outcomes during a time of change.

2. Build change management capabilities at all organizational levels.

To become a change-ready, agile company, each organizational level — senior leadership, middle managers and staff — needs to learn how to effectively respond to and manage change. But these segments require different capabilities, depending on their roles and the amount of control they exert over the process. Specifically:

· Senior leaders initiate, guide and champion change, ensuring engagement throughout the rest of the organization.

To ensure engagement and alignment, senior leaders benefit from encouraging input from employees, keeping employees informed about the change process, valuing and acting on ideas, following through on actions and modeling appropriate responses to change. That, in turn, includes equipping line managers with the right skills — such as developing a common, consistent language to talk about change — to help the rest of the organization adapt to and embrace change.

· Middle managers make change happen, but have little control over the direction of it.

They must facilitate change and help their employees understand the reasons and objectives for the specific change. They also provide direction and support on ways to respond positively and effectively to the change that impacts not only staff, but them as well. Additionally, middle managers must be equipped with the skills and resources needed to help their employees — such as how to better understand typical responses to change, the cycles of change and how to guide people through changes.

· Employees impacted by change must adapt and grow.

The majority of employees have no control over the decision for change. But they need to continue to meet performance objectives during and after an event of change. To that end, employees may need help creating strategies to overcome natural resistance to change.

Through assessments, workshops and team meetings, organizations can show employees how to recognize their own styles, anticipate their reactions to change, understand their role in making change work, set measurable goals and develop a plan of action. Most importantly, employees need to be treated as more than passive recipients of change: They need to be involved. Ensure that employees understand the need for change — why it's important, their role in the process, what is expected of them — and provide a means to contribute and influence the process.

3. Create fit for purpose, structure and roles.

Good structure means every employee has a clear role and set of accountabilities, as well as the authority required to perform. For that reason, organizations need to conduct a high-level overview of jobs considered to be critical to building agility and re-evaluate job descriptions, if necessary. Finally, organizations have to examine whether their operating model and culture are conducive to change agility.

4. Implement effective people systems and processes.

Effective change management relies heavily on people systems that work together to create change agility to implement and embed the change when it occurs.

5. Measure success.

To determine how effective their efforts have been, organizations need methods for measuring success. The best practice is to define goals at the outset and the metrics to be used for assessing whether those objectives have been achieved.

Clearly, the need for successful change management is of crucial importance in today's competitive and fast–paced environment. Effective change management has a strong correlation with high levels of employee engagement, which impacts productivity and performance. Organizations must master the skills needed to manage change so they're ready to react quickly as business demands shift. Indeed, the one constant in life is change, and companies that are able to respond with agility will be better able to compete — in any economy in the global market. Your business depends on it.

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