



Public Sector Reform Column



MANAGING CHANGE

Change is inevitable. It affects every country, industry, organisation and household in all shapes and sizes. We don't always know what exactly these changes will bring, but we know for certain that change is unavoidable and will bring an element of fear until the end of time.

Negative

In every organisation, there are people who will resist or resent a particular change. People react to change in all fashions, because it causes fear and sense of loss of the familiar. One of the most common reasons for the resistance to change is summed up in the words, "What is wrong with the way things are done now?" Employees that ask this question believe that there is no need for change and assume the attitude that any change will do more harm than good. It must be granted that this type of attitude will occur when employees at the bottom of the ladder feel that the managers upstairs make changes in any fashion without knowing what is going on downstairs. This reasoning is at the heart of why people resist change, because negative attitudes, personal feelings and even a total lack of respect towards the persons making the changes cloud people's ability to be objective. This type of subjectivity can prevail towards the job, an individual, department, or even an entire organisation.

Positive

Whilst employees will view a change negatively, some will be eager for change, because it provides a new challenge. People who like a challenge will react positively to change and they tend to have a healthy attitude. These are the people who will ask themselves, "What is in it for me?" And seek to find the benefits of the change. Possible answers to this question may include better working conditions, job security, job satisfaction or even more money.

Furthermore, some may even say, ‘It’s about time!’ These are the people who have been anxiously waiting for a change to come about. They want the doors of opportunity and pathways to success to open so they can have a better chance at the challenge.

Changing Times

The overall philosophy of management has itself changed. Managers were once persuaded to manage by setting objectives, whereby they were trained to have subordinates help to set their own objectives. This has now developed into management by participation or full inclusion, where employees play a more important role in the management process.

Characteristics

Participative management programs share some underlying common traits. Organisations that adopt full inclusion policies believe there is a pool of information and ideas within the existing work force. This pool is right under their noses just waiting to be tapped. They also believe that it is a necessity to consult with their staff about any change before the change takes place. This makes sense as the people who do the work are best qualified to improve it. Also, when employees are included as important players in the decision making process, job satisfaction is increased along with employee commitment to organisational goals.

Public Sector Reform

Observations suggest that the majority of organisational changes occur in the areas of management systems, training and development and general personnel administration. The Performance Review and Development System (PRDS) is a public sector reform initiative designed to assist the public service with the changes it faces. Government has recognised the necessity to change the way it conducts business and the need for a fully responsive public sector. A new performance appraisal system is currently being rolled out on a pilot basis that places emphasis on change and time management. The PRDS reflects a change from an antiquated subjective appraisal system to one that is more objective and developmental. In line with the ever changing environment, PRDS is a continuous cycle of planning, objective setting, coaching reviewing and feedback. It also links individual work performance and work plans to organisational strategic plans so that the performance of the employee as well

as the ministry or department can be measured. This measurement can identify performance gaps and suggest training for employees with developmental needs. It also enhances and improves the dialogue between managers, supervisors and employees. This system can also facilitate rewards, incentives and recognition schemes.

Vision

John F Kennedy once wrote, “Change is the law of life and those who look only to the past or the present are certain to miss the future.” Therefore, it is critical that managers become visionary leaders and know how to decide on changes and implement them effectively. If they are ineffective, the changes will not be accepted and they will fail. Whether in the public or private sector, managers need to know who will be affected by a change and how people will react to it. They will only know this by communicating effectively. Believe it or not, all managers recognise the importance of communicating well, but rarely display this awareness in their actions. When communicating, managers need to involve and ask employees for their ideas and input. This type of brainstorming at the beginning of the change process is productive as it can elicit ideas to be incorporated into tentative plans.

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