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# Introducing changes to the workplace

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by | 05 Mar 2012

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There are models aplenty but a really good (and simple) way of thinking about managing change is the elephant and rider analogy (based on work by Jonathan Haidt in the *Happiness Hypothesis* and followed up by Chip and Dan Heath in *Switch*) - which asks:

- Have you appealed to the intellectual / rational arguments?
- Have you appealed to the emotional?
- Have you cleared all the roadblocks and is the path "free" to make the change?

Consider this statistic:

*AMR Research shows that "approximately 50% of Customer Relationship Management implementation initiatives had difficulty with end user adoption due to a failure to anticipate the impact of strategic changes on day to day operations. Unless CRM projects are planned and implemented so that end users derive benefits; corporate benefits will rarely materialize.."*

Or this one from Gartner Research:

*"..... more than 80% of failed technology implementations will be caused by people, processes and politics rather than poor technology implementation.."*

So, some things to consider around introducing changes in the workplace:

- We tend to think of change management as large, enterprise wide

How many times do you hear of organisation introducing changes (for example new software) only to find that six months down the track, employees have developed workarounds to avoid the new systems are operating an excel spreadsheet to get their work done.

Change management has become somewhat of a buzz-word in recent times, but introducing changes to the workplace successfully remains one of the big (and expensive) challenges for organizations.

Research consistently shows that organisations that use a considered change management approach not only are able to implement the changes, but also have a better chance of embedding and sustaining these changes.

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changes such as a merger or acquisition or introducing a new piece of software – but the principles of change management can and should apply equally to the smallest of changes, even if that only affects a small group of employees.

- Significantly more time and effort is now spent on the project management, but unfortunately consideration of the impact of such projects on the people often is left to the end of the project (if at all). Taking the time to consider change management on the people from the beginning will result in a more successful project implementation.

- For anything to change: someone has to start acting differently - organisations cannot change unless the individuals within it do. So, communication of the change is not enough. Many a time managers complain 'but we told them about the change' and are surprised that there hasn't been greater take up. There needs to be consideration as to what are the benefits for the individual, what's going to trigger their desire to want to change individually? Consider the advertisements for occupational health and safety over the years; they've moved from being about complying with the law to now the impact of health and safety on an employee, and their family and friends – much more about the emotions, hopefully leading to a desire on behalf of the individual to change their behaviour.

- Change is rarely a one size fits all equation. Changes to the workplace will affect different groups in different ways. In addition, the personal circumstances of an individual can mean they react differently given what the change will mean for them in the context of their personal lives. Giving consideration to this prior to introducing the change, and thinking through what different messages will be needed for what groups or individuals is a good investment of time.

- Managers are often expected to be champions of change, but are often caught as the 'meat in the sandwich' – either because the impact of the change on them as a group hasn't been considered or because they are required to deliver unpopular or difficult news without the benefits being sold to them, in the first place. This often results in "I don't necessarily agree with this, but have been told to tell you that ..." type conversations with their teams. The impact of the message is invariably diluted at best, or destroyed at worst.

- Actively plan for the resisters to change prior to the change being introduced, rather than being surprised that there are pockets of resistance. Resistance does not have to be a negative, but it does have to be actively considered and managed. Any time spent thinking about and planning for the introduction of change will be a good return on investment and will only supplement and support good project and financial management.

#### About the author:

Tammy Tansley is the Principal of Tammy Tansley Consulting, a boutique HR Consultancy in Perth, WA specialising in workplace relations, change and organisational design.



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