

COMMUNICATION PROCESS WITHIN ORGANIZATIONS DURING TIMES OF CHANGE

Ionuț Barbu¹ Valentin Ilie²

^{1,2} Valahia University Targoviste

Str. Lt. Stancu Ion, nr. 35-130105, Targoviste, Dambovita, Romania
barbuionut88@yahoo.com

Abstract:

People generally go through an adjustment period with all types of change, whether it's an announcement of a layoff, an unanticipated promotion, an upgrade people have craved (or dreaded), an abrupt shift in priorities, or yet another reorganization (to name just a few). Whether people experience the change as positive or negative, their initial reaction may include confusion, forgetfulness, withdrawal, and a variety of emotions, such as anger, frustration or excitement. As they adjust to the New Way, they may experience a dip in performance and an increase in errors. This unsettled and perhaps unsettling transition period is familiar to people who have excelled at a sport or hobby, and who then endure a temporary period of awkwardness and incompetence as they strive to attain the next level. The duration of this adjustment period varies from one person to another and one situation to another; however, if you are in charge of implementing the change, the way you communicate can shorten that adjustment period — or prolong it. To expedite the adjustment process, consider explicitly explaining to those affected that you know they need time to adjust. Point out that adapting to something that's new and unexpected can be difficult. Show respect for the reality of what they are experiencing.

Key words: communication, change, communication process management

1. INTRODUCTION

When change occurs, people resist it for many reasons. In some situations, change threatens security. In others, habits have provided a way to make decisions. In addition, people have selective perceptions of situations, which may inhibit change. Finally, some people resist change because of actual weaknesses in the proposed change [2]. Each of the previously-mentioned reasons are to be presented separately and briefly, for a better understanding of the connection between change and communication.

➤ Desire for security – changes scare people. Individuals tend to find security; new technology, new systems, new procedures and new managers can threaten a person's security and cause resistance. In addition, change often poses problems of power and control.

➤ Habits – provide a programmed method for decision making. The present practices or behaviors require no extreme output of initiative or problem-solving energy.

Learning new processes requires re-thinking or learning to think again.

➤ Selective perception – a person who has a biased interpretation of reality is guilty of selective perception. Reality is what the person thinks it is. This type of resistance can lead to stereotyping the arguments put forth for change – and to giving a stock reply to stereotypes. This resistance, a result of the person's attitudes and experiences, is difficult for a manager to deal with. In its extreme form, it perceives all the actions of management as suspect.

➤ Awareness of weaknesses in the proposed change – a constructive type of resistance is evidenced by some organizational members who are aware of the potential problems inherent in the proposed change. Knowing from experience or from inside information that an idea will not work, these resisters can be valuable for the management. They can help the organization save time, money and energy.

2. MATERIAL AND METHOD

Many changes bring about the perception of threat. As a result, people experience a rush of adrenaline that lowers the intelligence so that they do not communicate well during the change.

There are seven possible ways to improve communication when the time of change has come. Focus on these seven tips, and one will more effectively communicate within the organization.

2.1. Focus on behaviors and not on interpretations

The perception of threat that often creates a conflict escalation cycle usually stems from how some people view what other people do and say. This view often comes from one's interpretation of a behavior more than it does from the behavior itself.

For example, in case of change occurrence, when someone speaks loudly and directly, we may interpret their behaviors to indicate that they are angry. Maybe they are. Maybe they are not. All we really know is that they spoke loudly and directly. As you communicate with other people, focus on and speak to their behaviors more than you speak to your interpretation of their behaviors.

2.2. Avoid the use of *always* and *never*

When someone comments on another person's behavior, avoid these two communication killers. Rarely does someone *always* or *never* do or say anything. If these two words are thrown into the conversation, the speaker just adds "fuel to the fire" and helps to escalate rather than to resolve the change.

2.3. Use "I" statements

At some point in a conflict conversation that occurs in time of change, one will eventually need to address his/her interpretations of their behaviors. When this time comes, it is advisable to phrase the interpretation in the form of an "I" statement. Using the behavior mentioned above as an example, one could say something like:

"When you speak loudly, I feel like you are angry with me," instead of "Why are you so angry!""

"When you speak that directly, I feel threatened," instead of "Why are you threatening me?"

"When you raise your voice, I feel like I am backed into a corner," instead of "Quit backing me into a corner!"

2.4. Say what you want rather than what you don't want

If you would like for someone to change their behaviors towards you, tell them what you would like to see rather than what you don't want to see. One principle of behavior is that we cannot be doing something. In other words, we are always doing something.

When we tell someone what not to do in a relationship, we fail to clarify what we want to see instead. For example, you could say *"When you speak to me, please lower the volume,"* rather than *"Quit yelling at me!"*

2.5. Beware of your non-verbal messages

Remember that the other person will respond negatively to anything you do that they perceive negatively (aggressive, threatening, dismissive, disrespectful, etc.). Calmly maintain steady eye-contact, relaxed posture, and a calm voice tone and you will improve your communication during conflict.

2.6. Apologize for your contribution

Conflicts rarely happen entirely because of one person's actions. If only unintentionally, one probably did something to frustrate or irritate the other person in the moments just prior to or just after the conflict began. The apologize is the most appropriate. It won't cause any harm. On the contrary, it will probably strengthen that person's status with the other person.

2.7. Give them a chance to speak

Remember this key point phrased by Patrick Lencioni – *"people don't need to get their way so much as they need to be heard and understood."*[6] If one slows down long enough to really listen to people, they will probably calm down enough to listen at their turn. When people get a chance to say what is on their mind, they experience what psychologists call catharsis (or cleansing). This

cleansing helps to lower emotional energy and pave the way for a more productive dialogue.

When real change happens in an organization, there will be so-called "casualties:" people who would rather leave the organization than accept change [4]. Change management leaders need to recognize that some extra spike in turnover during change is a good thing, because any other "confirmed traditionalists" that may come aboard board will at least become traditionalists in favor of the new way of doing things.

Anyone with experience in change management knows that efforts can succeed or fail based on communications [1]. Experience consistently teaches that it's almost impossible to over-communicate when leading change. Consequently, a planning change management communication is necessary, in order to surpass the disadvantages caused by change occurrence.

Not many sources, however, give practical advice on how to build a strategic communications plan for change management

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Out of the previously mentioned ideas, it results that the core message for any successful change management communications effort should contain:

- a clear, brief statement of the purpose for the change - how the change will make the organization more successful
- a clear statement of why such a change is in the interests of employees, and ideally how it will make their working lives better once completed.

Once those elements are in place, change management communication plans should be targeted to the different constituencies likely to receive the message. These are represented not only by functional units represented on the organizational chart, but also by different types of people within those functional units [5].

Any kind of organizational change – from the introduction of a new workforce program to a shift in business direction – requires key internal stakeholders to embrace the change

and modify their behaviors to support the change [1]. It involves:

- Mergers, acquisitions, reorganizations, business transformations and changes in communication strategy
- The way executives, managers and colleagues connect to their HR programs through portals and other new technology platforms
- How organizations attract and retain employees, including developing a meaningful, actionable employee value proposition.

The idea of “communication as process” has gained centrality in approaches informed by both behavior change and participatory models. Moemeka's (1994) words illustrate a widespread sentiment in the field: “Communication should be seen both an independent and dependent variable. It can and does affect situations, attitudes, and behavior, and its content, context, direction, and flow are also affected by prevailing circumstances. More importantly, communication should be viewed as an integral part of development plans – a part whose major objective is to create systems, modes, and strategies that could provide opportunities for the people to have access to relevant channels, and to make use of these channels and the ensuing communication environment in improving the quality of their lives.”

4. CONCLUSIONS

When leaders or managers are planning to manage change, there are five key principles that need to be kept in mind [3]:

- Different people react differently to change
- Everyone has fundamental needs that have to be met
- Change often involves a loss, and people go through the "loss curve"
- Expectations need to be managed realistically
- Fears have to be dealt with

There are five specific stages that must be realized in order for an organization or an

individual to successfully change. They include:

Awareness - An individual or organization must know why a specific change or series of changes are needed.

Desire - Either the individual or organizational members must have the motivation and desire to participate in the called for change or changes.

Knowledge - Knowing why one must change is not enough; an individual or organization must know how to change.

Ability - Every individual and organization that truly wants to change must implement new skills and behaviors to make the necessary changes happen.

Reinforcement - Individuals and organizations must be reinforced to sustain any changes making them the new behavior, if not; an individual or organization will probably revert back to their old behavior.

In most cases, management first responsibility is to identify processes or behaviors that are not proficient and come up with new behaviors, processes, etc that are more effective within an organization. Once changes are identified, it is important for managers to estimate the impact that they will have to the organization and individual employee on many levels including technology, employee behavior, work processes, etc. All these approaches are interconnected to the process of communication which is much influenced by change that occurs within an organization.

5. REFERENCES

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