

Driving Change and Making It Stick

Change is really a people process, and people being creatures of habit are typically resistant to adopting new mind-sets, practices, and behaviors. To achieve and sustain transformational change, companies must embed these mind-sets, practices, and behaviors at every level. In a recent strategy + business article, several Booz and Company partners describe five factors that make the greatest difference in fostering the behaviors required for transforming an organization.

1. Understand and detail the impact of the change on people.

A prerequisite to any viable change program is a clear-eyed assessment of the impact it will have on various populations in the organization. This analysis identifies the type and scale of changes affecting each segment of employees. This assessment also provides a basis for communicating with team members about what the change means for them personally — the predominant concern of every employee in a business transformation.

2. Build an emotional and rational case for change.

Many leaders excel at building the rational case for change, but they are less adept in appealing to people's emotional core. Yet the employees' emotions are where the momentum for real transformation ultimately lies. Change management communications need to be targeted to each segment of the workforce, and delivered in a two-way fashion that allows people to make sense of the change subjectively.

3. Ensure that the entire leadership team is a role model for the change.

Companies start their transformations from the top. Senior executives must be not only “on top” of the change program, but also “in front” of it, modeling the new behaviors they are asking their people to adopt and holding one another accountable for the initiative's success. When executives talk about creating a performance culture, they must demonstrate through example what that means.

4. Mobilize your people to “own” and accelerate the change.

The hard truth is that most change initiatives are done “to” employees, not implemented “with” them or “by” them. Although executives are pushing behavior change from the top and expecting it to cascade through the formal structure, an informal culture left to instinct and chance will likely dig in its heels.

5. Embed the change in the fabric of the organization.

Change agents often declare victory too soon, diverting leadership, commitment, and focus from the ongoing effort. To embed the change and ensure that it sticks, you should acknowledge the lessons learned. You also should investigate how to engage and involve employees over the long term and how to institutionalize best practices to capture the full benefit of this change and any future changes.

A comprehensive approach to change management requires all five of these success factors. In today's business environment, change is an imperative and this type of approach can help companies enhance their overall transformation capability, increase the speed of implementation, and improve the probability of success.