



AVOIDING CHANGE FATIGUE

BY BRANDON MEISNER

Attempting a new recipe when cooking can be a challenge. While you may have all the correct ingredients and perhaps even a photo of how the end result should look, when you finish the dish and sample the creation, there may still be room for improvement. The next time you attempt the same recipe, you may slightly alter one or two ingredients in an effort to perfect the taste. Facility management professionals often operate similarly, implementing frequent business model adjustments to achieve a desired result.

YOU CAN LESSEN CHANGE FATIGUE AND INCREASE ACCEPTANCE BY MAKING EMPLOYEES FEEL THAT THEY ARE PART OF THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS.

Although constant change is often an attempt to accomplish positive results, perpetual change can be expensive for companies as well as exhausting for their employees. With the relentless pressure to “do more with less,” companies are always looking for ways to improve their processes, procedures and existing organizational structures.

However, management sometimes takes too lightly consideration for how changes will be perceived by the majority. Employees can accept only so much change at a given time — especially at large organizations in which change may feel like the only constant. The people creating the change must keep in mind that the employees facing it typically go through four stages:

- Denial or shock
- Anger/resistance/defensiveness
- Exploration/acceptance
- Commitment/adaptation

These stages are often more pronounced when the change is something that staff may question or feel uncomfortable implementing. The originators of the change must take the range of possible responses into account when presenting a proposal to employees.

Why do people resist change?

People who are most comfortable with the status quo may find it difficult to be effective leaders in companies that have constant change initiatives. Teams typically resist change when:

- It's too sudden
- There is no focus or vision, no reason or unclear intent
- There is poor communication
- There are low levels of involvement and engagement
- There is initiative overload
- They are reluctant to try something new because they fear unexpected consequences

Ensure that these perspectives are considered when infusing change into your organization. You can ease the transition by assessing the mindset and structure of employees prior to instituting proposed changes.

What are the repercussions?

As once stated by a Citibank CEO, “as improvements increase, expectations increase. Customer perceptions will change and they will drive you to places you never knew existed.” These customer expectations often lead to the implementation of change initiatives within organizations.

Change is often required for companies to succeed, but constant change is fatiguing for everyone impacted. Studies show that often it is not the actual change that negatively impacts organizations, but how the change is communicated to staff. You can lessen change fatigue and increase acceptance by making employees feel that they are part of the decision-making process.

A common response to change fatigue is a shift in team morale. If the employees are confused by the change, it can create anxiety and lead to low levels of engagement and productivity. This demoralizing impact can result in overwhelming costs in correlation with an increasing employee turnover rate. An additional cost factor that can be attributed to change fatigue is the expense related to training employees on new systems and procedures. Productivity decreases as new procedures and systems are implemented. If change is perpetual, then constant relearning is required.

An additional consequence of change fatigue is loss of information. If organizations do not have well-documented materials (building drawings, statements of work, financial information, etc.) this could create extra work when change occurs. For example, if your organization continually restructures, this may result in a loss of documents, procedures and first-hand knowledge. If this happens while building modifications are underway, the new team will need to recreate many of these documents and procedures, search for needed information, or undertake a project without proper supporting documents.

Lastly, constant change can negatively affect customer service. If the management structure is constantly reorganized, customers will have a difficult time knowing whom to seek for information and services. If employees have anxiety about the approaching change and how the change is being instituted, these ill feelings will cause customer service to suffer, especially when added to the loss of or confusion

about pertinent information or channels for approvals. In an FM organization, for example, it is imperative that the people running the helpdesk have information at their fingertips. They must know whom to contact to achieve specific results, or whom to question to obtain answers for their customers. If their information constantly changes, then the confusion (and wait times) will filter down to customers.

Change is inevitable and is a critical part of any growing organization. We are constantly faced with changes in leadership, processes and directions. The task is to manage this change through a healthy and productive approach.

It can impact the work culture both positively and negatively. While the need to change may not be in question, management must still acknowledge the direct impact it will have on their employees and how employees will perceive the change. They must also be aware of how constant or excessive change appears to outside customers and other organizations. Too much change can lead to a lack of trust in management. Employees may perceive constant change as similar to moving a dartboard: shifting the target makes the bull's-eye harder to hit. The appearance of trial-and-error management is not reassuring to employees and undermines the trust that is needed in order to have a cohesive team.

How to implement change

Changes must be well justified and support a business need; otherwise it will be difficult to gain employee support. For example: Many companies are instituting rotational roles in their management structure so that their leadership can gain a better understanding of other positions within the company. Although this may be beneficial for the managers, what impact does this have on the team? Is the rotation justified? Does it support a business need rather than a personal one?

In order for change to be successful, take its impact into consideration.

Phase changes in a structured manner to ensure that employees can acclimate.

Recommendations

- Focus on small improvements instead of large-scale transformations.
- Explain the reasoning behind the change.
- Create a vision/framework for implementation. Communicating the vision is vital. When it comes to change, over-communicating is better than under-communicating.
- Infuse the change through a thoughtful approach:
 - » *Involve the team so that the change has meaning for them. Counter to most companies' inclination to over-manage, if management can lessen control and allow employees to implement change, it is likely to happen through a more positive, unforced evolution.*
 - » *In other cases, more structure may be needed to help employees understand what is expected of them without too many shades of gray.*
- Provide detailed information so the team can assist with instituting the change.
- Create a properly defined communication plan to ensure consistency.
- Implement a system for employees to address concerns and provide feedback about the change.
- Reevaluate the plan. New data will arise and new processes may be required.

Keep the five Ps in mind

Change can often be daunting.

Managers need to acknowledge that it can be fatiguing to an organization and will have a direct impact on the

teams charged with implementing and dealing with the change. When executing change, practice the five Ps by Dr. Abigail Brenner, an expert on the internal process of transition (quoted below):¹

Learn patience. Generally, things do not happen overnight. In fact, it may take some time to reach a desired and/or reasonable outcome. Don't be impulsive or try to rush the results. Patience will help you arrive at the best possible place.

Be persistent. It's easy to want to give up, especially when things are not going your way. Keep chipping away at the issues; the outcome or solution you're seeking may be just around the bend.

Be practical. Some changes require an immediate response to remedy a situation, but in most instances, there's simply no rush to the finish line. Go about your life in a way that focuses attention on maintaining balance. Stay present, firmly rooted, in the here and

now. In other words, create a structure that provides stability and support while you're in the process of transitioning.

Be positive. Expect up and down. In fact, that's more the norm while you're going through change. A sense of optimism will help equalize the hills and valleys and will keep you focused and committed.

Have a purpose. No matter how many major changes and transitions you go through during the course of your life, having an organizing guiding principle that is vital to you and gives meaning to your life is essential.

Companies and individual organizations will always look for ways to improve their processes, procedures and their existing departmental structures. If you understand the impact of change and how to implement needed modifications, the recipe for the change and the outcome will not be fatiguing for customers, management or employees.

The final result may yield a justified and accepted creation for all to embrace and to feed upon. Bon appétit. **FMJ**

REFERENCE

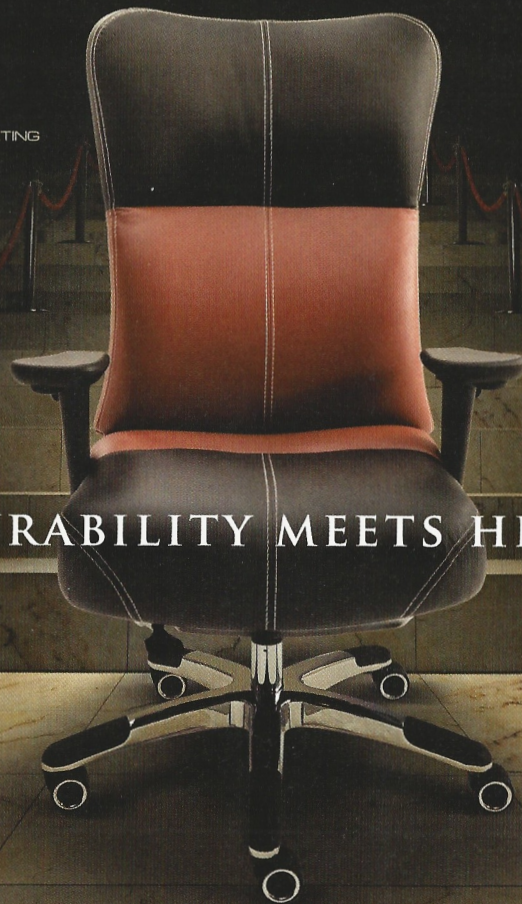
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