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Consistency Spells Productivity

Driving Worldwide Standards for Technical Practices

Today's industry leading companies operate on a global scale, conducting business around the world and around the clock. Even with modern communications, implementing a consistent set of workflows and processes for such far-flung teams can be easier said than done. Our client, a centralized technical center of excellence within a major energy corporation, called on Expressworks to promote a new, standardized way of working that would boost productivity and performance without reinventing the wheel time after time.

Prepared for resistance

After extensive research of internal best practices, our client had developed and documented a universal approach to certain scientific and engineering workflows. The new technical framework established a standard set of tools and techniques, to help bring new employees up to speed quickly and allow the company's most experienced practitioners to focus on advancing higher-level technical work.

Expressworks' challenge was to drive adoption of the framework among more than 4,000 key stakeholders scattered around the globe. But like any major change project, truly engaging employees in a transformative process was going to take a lot more than handing off a documented set of standards. Generally, the affected employees were said to be confident in their current methods and not overly fond of wholesale directives from headquarters.

Building believers

Change works best when the target audience has its say in the solution. So we started by engaging the business-based technical leads, to discuss the rationale

for the standard framework and hear their concerns and suggestions. We modified the standards based on their input and developed a comprehensive set of communications and training/learning materials to clearly convey the benefits of the initiative. By providing the practical details they needed to take action, we were able to win the favor of even the toughest critics. Determined to make the new framework more than a flash in the pan, we worked with the technical center to develop a model of governance, transitioning ownership of the standards to the technical leaders in the business.

As change sticks, business grows

As with every project we pursue, our goal is not only to introduce the change, but to implement it in a way that engages the audience and incorporates their expertise, so the results are sustainable. Today the technical framework is firmly rooted as the go-to guide for our client's engineers in every corner of the globe. Most importantly, the leaders who once resisted change are now vocal advocates and governors of the standardized system that they had a hand in developing. As the productivity gains add up, so does the return on investment.

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Leaders Driving Change

Aligning Diverse Viewpoints Toward a Common Goal

Major business transformation requires visible leadership. The sheer diversity of people and priorities involved in most corporate change calls for strong and consistent messaging from leadership around the ultimate vision of the change. Even teams with the best intentions can derail a project through a lack of alignment in priorities and direction.

Leaders as Guides

Our client encountered this common challenge as it formed a cross-functional team responsible for implementing a new enterprise software platform on a global scale. The team of 500 members, including internal executives and partner representatives, was charged with delivering industry-leading capabilities to the company under the intense pressure of aggressive deadlines. Expressworks was brought in to help the team work together as quickly and effectively as possible. This meant galvanizing the strong leadership base to a common goal and direction.

Leaders as Collaborators

Hampered by clashing cultures of the client, software provider, integrator and end-user community, the implementation was misaligned from the start. Expressworks stepped in to get the initiative back on track, starting with a two-day off-site intensive workshop with the 35 top leaders of the team. The meetings included a session where every organizational leader was asked to define what they needed for the program to succeed, and then share those requirements with every other leader in a “speed-dating” format. The leaders left the meeting with a common understanding of what success looked like, and how they needed to work together to reach their goals. The next challenge was to cascade this alignment and focus throughout the rest of the program team.

Leaders as Support

With the visible support of the initial leadership, Expressworks consultants ran similar workshops with each of the organizational teams over the next four months. The culminating event was a 3-day all-hands meeting of more than 450 members of the implementation team. A large component of the workshop was a cross-functional simulation exercise where groups were presented with challenges and asked to solve them as a team. The results were creative and inspired, and several of the ideas were implemented immediately by “Challenge Action Teams” when the groups returned to work. Over time, Expressworks led follow-up workshops and ongoing communications to revisit project goals and develop new capabilities and behaviors.

Leaders as Sponsors

Expressworks was able to help these disparate teams find common ground and create a shared commitment to success. On a more practical level, the workshops and follow-up activities gave individuals the information, contacts and systemized plan they needed to execute on time. The massive effort succeeded not only in meeting the daunting timeline for the software rollout, but in forming a leadership team with the strong collaboration and group leadership skills to execute under pressure.

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Getting Real Estate Right

Making the Most of a Workplace Transformation

The corporate world is in the midst of a global real estate realignment, as major companies work to relocate, consolidate or otherwise transform their physical workplaces. It's a phenomenon brought on by other business mega-trends such as the explosion of mobile working technologies, cost reduction opportunities, and sustainability programs designed to shrink the corporate footprint. Ultimately, a well-executed real estate transformation can bring forth a bounty of cost savings, increased employee satisfaction, greater collaboration and productivity, and reduced environmental impact. Missing the mark is easy, though, if the effort is not executed well and can result in losses to productivity, employee engagement, and morale that can far outweigh the cost benefits gained through real estate consolidation. Getting to the positive outcomes is a change initiative of mammoth proportions.

Our client, a multinational Fortune 10 company, faced a unique set of circumstances with its real estate portfolio in one particular market. The client had recently merged with and acquired several other companies. As a result, offices were scattered throughout the city and suburbs, making it difficult for team members to work together efficiently. An earlier attempt at consolidation had backfired, disrupting employees and stifling productivity. The client needed to get it right this time, and called in Expressworks to lead a transformation.

Creating consensus

One of the biggest challenges the project faced was selling the benefits of moving from traditional offices to open workspace. The results from a prior move were not good, with 46 percent of employees saying they were dissatisfied with their new environment. So Expressworks began by asking for input. We partnered with the company's employees and external architects to outline the decisions needed, identify decision-makers for each step of the project, and drive alignment between the company's goals and stakeholders' goals for the workplace design. This helped to make the design job easier and smoother with less time spent swirling on design decisions. We then organized a team of employee representatives, facilities personnel, and other stakeholders to agree on standard workspace designs and transition plans for more than a million square feet of interiors. Then we helped them develop an efficient, repeatable move process that everyone could get behind.

Keys to success included visible executive sponsorship, an effective governance council to make quick decisions, and strategic communications throughout the project to keep stakeholders informed and inspired. After guiding the first implementation to success, we transitioned the standardized process to the client's operations group, allowing them to take the lead on the build-out of additional facilities.

Happy people do the best work

By the end of our engagement, seven office buildings were consolidated into three, building out and/or converting 2.8 million square feet of office space and moving nearly 10,000 employees to redesigned workspaces. Post-project surveys and analysis drew high marks for employee satisfaction, productivity ratings increased, and each subsequent move took less time than the one before it. Today, the client has adopted Expressworks' approach to workplace design as its own, as it continues to reshape its physical footprint for a more prosperous future.

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