Change Management Strategy

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Inspire Secure Enablement of Business

Abstract

Evaluation and analysis of potential stakeholder resistance and overcoming such resistance using change management planning. The analysis encompasses communication planning, training planning, and stakeholder decision-making processes, while examining the relevant evaluation of change management theory in the context of developing a business change management plan.

Keywords: change management, innovation, communication plan, training plan, stakeholder decision-making, leadership, management, transformation, process improvement

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Introduction

Organizations in the modern global marketplace must understand that change is constant. Businesses face ongoing, relentless change, and only organizations that can build effective cultures of change will survive (Roberts, 2014). IT leadership must embrace change since they are ultimately responsible for implementing it across the entire organization (Roberts, 2014). Enterprise-wide change requires examining daily IT processes and assessing whether IT helps the company innovate in products and services (Roberts, 2014). A key focus is maintaining a competitive edge through effective product line development processes. These processes demand change management involving people, processes, and technology to be successful, where Roberts (2014) states, "…successful change has to be planned, structured, monitored, and led, with purpose and intent" (p. 20). IT leadership is rarely unaware of change.

Change is a constant aspect of IT leadership and delivering IT products and services to an organization. However, IT leaders may lack the necessary knowledge to manage change through to completion successfully (Roberts, 2014). They might also develop various plans to address issues, constraints, risks, and contingencies (Roberts, 2014). To succeed, IT leaders must incorporate change management into their thought processes and provide the purpose and intent needed to ensure that product pipeline development is well-planned, structured, managed, and monitored until finished.

Background

Organizations with an embedded culture of change are driven by their IT leadership's vision as well as the responsiveness of stakeholders and personnel (Long & Spurlock, 2008). The size and pace of change present trust as a predictor of success (Long & Spurlock, 2008). The more change required, the more trust or distrust from personnel and stakeholders towards leadership (Long & Spurlock, 2008). The transformational change being undertaken will require gaining commitment from personnel and stakeholders while removing distrust and resistance. This will include providing a methodical process to implement the change. Likewise, the change will need to be managed towards success.

Managing change will be key to driving necessary product pipeline development processes. When changes go unmanaged, the stakeholders generally do not commit to the project or even embrace the change or their responsibilities (Roberts, 2010). Personnel will become disengaged, hostile, and refuse any involvement at any stage of the project (Roberts 2014). Resistance might even lead personnel towards sabotaging the project (Roberts, 2014). Getting change implemented, even when in the best interest of the organization and its personnel, can present significant issues.

Change Resistance

Change resistance is normal and a part of overall organizational dynamics. It will be IT leadership's responsibility to help personnel affected by changes to the product pipeline development processes understand, accept, and embrace the changes being implemented (Roberts, 2014). Not doing so will put IT leadership in a precarious position. IT leadership will need to develop the skills and tools to make change happen, or the change to the product pipeline development processes will appear as ineffective, costly, and replaceable (Roberts, 2014). To move towards reducing resistance, leadership will need to move away from compliance towards commitment.

Compliance is not an ideal state, where commitment is. Compliance is when personnel go along with change or new processes without having any personal belief in it (Roberts, 2014). This is usually through mandates that might change behavior but do not change personnel's mindset (Roberts, 2014). This generally means personnel will fall back into the undesired behaviors, usually when no one is watching (Roberts, 2014). Commitment looks to change behavior away from simply complying.

Commitment within effective change is an ideal state. Personnel, when they are committed, are both emotionally and intellectually bound to the course of action for the change or project (Roberts, 2014). Commitment cannot be forced upon personnel; they should come to their conclusions, and when they do, IT leadership can expect full participation (Roberts, 2014). When commitment is achieved, personnel believe in what they are doing, why they are doing it, and where they are heading, and they will be invested in completing the change or project (Roberts, 2014). However, IT leadership should remember resistance is natural.

Humans tend to resist change. While working towards gaining commitment from stakeholders and personnel, resistance will be a natural part of implementing change (Roberts, 2014). This will depend predominantly on the individual and the level of severity perceived by the change (Roberts, 2014). It is an instinct for humans to try to protect themselves, their comfort zone, their competence, and maintain their core values (Roberts, 2014). Within this instinctual paradigm, individual capacity for change will vary by personnel, and when the limit is reached, it can produce anxiety, frustration, and feelings of being overwhelmed (Roberts, 2014). This is when resistance will potentially produce diminished returns within the change or project (Roberts, 2014). The worst thing IT leadership can do is ignore resistance and drive personnel deeper towards resistance or even compliance by their actions or words (Roberts, 2014). IT leadership needs to be cognizant and aware of resistance.

When IT leaders are cognizant and aware of resistance, they can use what is learned to overcome it. IT leadership should expect resistance, listen to what can be learned, and leverage resistance to gain new information, including the energy individuals and teams have invested in the status quo (Roberts, 2014). This is where IT leaders have an opportunity to turn negatives into positives and build commitment from personnel (Roberts, 2014). Resistance to change should not completely derail a change or project, but help drive it forward if managed well and leaders listen.

To ensure change resistance does not derail a project, IT leadership needs to understand key aspects of resistance from stakeholders. Fear of technology is common among older, experienced employees who have a lower comfort zone with technology (Long & Spurlock, 2008). There may be trust issues seen through the lens of monitoring and cybersecurity protocols implemented (Long & Spurlock, 2008). Of high concern to IT leadership and leadership in general is burnout and stress of personnel who are overloaded and over-allocated (Long & Spurlock, 2008). IT leaders will be prudent to address these potential sources of resistance within their change management planning.

Change Management Theory

Kotter (2007) developed a change management theory comprising eight steps for leaders to transform a business and achieve success. Many organizations have led change efforts under differing names. These include terms like total quality management, reengineering, rightsizing, restructuring, cultural change, and turnaround (Kotter, 2007). Regardless of the name, change still requires change management, which necessitates a method to ensure successful implementation.

Per Kotter (2007), there are eight steps to implementing a change. These steps include items such as having a sense of urgency, a guiding coalition, creating vision, communicating vision, removing obstacles to the vision, creating short-term successes, consolidating and creating more change, and institutionalization. The first step is having a sense of urgency.

A sense of urgency is driven by the examination of market trends, competitive realities like declining margins, potential crises, and reviewing significant opportunities (Kotter, 2007). For instance, driving the product pipeline development processes to deliver high-quality products to maintain market share and profitability. For change to occur, cooperation from many people is required, and without motivation, those individuals will not help (Kotter, 2007). Leadership might become paralyzed by adverse alternative outcomes, stakeholder resistance, morale dropping, a drop in stock price, etc. (Kotter, 2007). Leadership needs to drive urgency rates by not necessarily playing it safe to move transformation forward (Kotter, 2007). However, change should not be solely for change. As noted by Roberts (2017), change should be driven with intent and purpose while being planned, structured, and monitored. Likewise, gaining commitment for change can drive a sense of urgency without manufacturing crises that could be illegal or unethical. The second step is leveraging a guiding coalition.

A guiding coalition or steering committee is an assembly of stakeholders with enough power to lead change efforts that will potentially start small and grow over time (Kotter, 2007). The coalition will encourage the team to work together (Kotter, 2007). The structure and hierarchy, even though made up of senior leaders, can include others outside of the company, non-senior leadership personnel, and even client representation (Kotter, 2007). There should be an acknowledgement that the non-standard hierarchy is necessary in part because of failures in the current structures that are leading to transformation within the organization (Kotter, 2007). Additionally, having a high sense of urgency will determine the success of forming the coalition and building trust and lines of communication (Kotter, 2007). Failure here is generally the result of senior leadership's inability to work as a team or their failure to see how such a coalition is necessary to produce results (Kotter, 2007). The third step is creating a vision.

The guiding coalition will create a vision for the change. The creation of a vision will help direct the change effort and develop strategies for achieving the vision, and not necessarily within a typical five-year strategy roadmap (Kotter, 2007). It may take several months to build a high-quality vision that can tie all the various projects and initiatives together in a meaningful manner (Kotter, 2007). Anyone should be able to communicate that vision in five minutes or less, where understanding and interest are byproducts of reaction to the vision (Kotter, 2007). Lots of disconnected and disjointed plans with no vision, or a complicated or fuzzy vision, will not be useful or ensure success (Kotter, 2007). The fourth step is communicating the vision.

It will be in the guiding coalition's interest for success to communicate the vision effectively. In doing so, the coalition should leverage every manner of communication available to spread the vision outward (Kotter, 2007). Success at communicating the vision means doing so often and in as many ways as possible that get people's attention (Kotter, 2007). Using outdated and boring communication methods is not advisable, as those types of communication will largely go ignored by lower-level personnel involved in or directly affected by the change (Kotter, 2007). Likewise, members of the coalition, through a sense of urgency, will need to ensure they embody the change as examples to everyone, as their actions are a strong form of communication (Kotter, 2007). The fifth step is removing obstacles to the vision.

Obstacles to change exist; some are tangible while others are not. The coalition will need to move past simply communicating to digging to remove the barriers, whether those obstacles are in someone's head or are very real issues within the organization (Kotter, 2007). This might include restructuring roles and functions, swapping out a performance-based appraisal system, or reigning in leaders or management who are refusing to get in line with the changes within the vision (Kotter, 2007). Additionally, it might require encouraging risk-taking and breaking down other forms of resistance, or it might require dealing with an individual consistent with the vision (Kotter, 2007). The sixth step is creating short-term successes.

Action will be critical to garnering and maintaining credibility while also empowering others (Kotter, 2007). Creating short-term successes includes planning for visible performance improvements, then making those improvements while recognizing and rewarding employees involved (Kotter, 2007). Not doing so will reduce credibility because goals have not been planned to drive change within the vision while providing no relevant proof of improvement (Kotter, 2007). Likewise, personnel driving incremental wins and improvements must have a clear bar to achieve, which includes rewarding their achievements (Kotter, 2007). The seventh step is consolidating and creating more change.

Effective leaders don't declare a victory but continue to utilize the success of short-term gains and the credibility developed to drive additional change by focusing on bigger problems (Kotter, 2007). Such leaders will consolidate improvements and create more change across systems, structures, and policies that don't fit the vision defined by the coalition (Kotter, 2007). Such leaders will focus on items outside of the vision that have not been confronted, which will be bigger in scope, require engineering, and will potentially take years to complete (Kotter, 2007). Additionally, such leaders will keep tabs on promotions, new hires, and how personnel are being developed or trained (Kotter, 2007). Such leaders will understand the curve of and amount of change that will occur over time (Kotter, 2007). The last step is institutionalizing the change.

Institutionalization of the change will require rooting new behaviors within the organization to ensure the changes stick (Kotter, 2007). The new behaviors must seep up out of the norms and shared values of the organization, or they will degrade back to the status quo before the change (Kotter, 2007). It will become material to the change that connections be articulated in a manner that is not ambiguous to personnel through showing them what is expected within new approaches, behaviors, and attitudes (Kotter, 2007). Likewise, it will be imperative to do the same within executive succession to ensure changes are maintained in the presence of new leadership (Kotter, 2007). This includes ensuring the eight steps of change management are trained and practiced to ensure successful changes can occur.

Communication Plan

A communication plan is a particular requirement for the success of change. Leadership has often complained that, after sending emails and memos regarding a change, personnel do not seem to understand (Roberts, 2014). This can produce belief transformation efforts and initiatives are marginally successful within the overall organization (Roberts, 2014). This is due in part to the types of communication utilized and how change was communicated. A strong communication plan will reduce these issues.

Leveraging many different avenues to communicate change within the communication plan is necessary. While addressing the changes to the product pipeline development processes, engage the eight steps of change management. The steering committee can produce a variety of materials, including company newsletters, wall posters in cafeterias and breakrooms, monthly emails, status reports, and face-to-face meetings with stakeholders. Additionally, they can hold lunch and learns as the change effort proceeds. Likewise, ideas can be borrowed from previous research and projects by outside organizations by using a case study method, utilizing narrative interviews to understand their change management planning better (Long & Spurlock, 2008). Instituting various annual meetings, pilot projects, and feedback processes to keep personnel engaged and gain an understanding of where stakeholders and personnel felt the change was, was going, and if there were areas that needed to be addressed (Long & Spurlock, 2008). A similar process can be enacted to get key feedback and information from customers on changes being made to company products.

Employee Training Plan

A key to transforming the product pipeline development processes is employee training. Training is another aspect of the communication plan and the overall change management plan. As portions of the change are being implemented, personnel affected by the change get trained on the new systems, processes, and software development lifecycle (SDLC). Staff not directly involved in the change, however, are encouraged to take the training. All management, however, are required to take the training. This ensures staff are adequately apprised of how the system, processes, and SDLC work. Training also provides feedback into the change management plan by getting immediate feedback from personnel on what might be or is going to be a problem with the new systems, processes, and SDLC. This allows leadership to make a pivot decision if needed or drive scope change to address issues.

Stakeholder Decision-Making Process

The stakeholder decision-making process includes how stakeholders view change. Stakeholders may be cautious but optimistic; they might share project goals but not the entire vision of the change, there might be differences of opinion between technical and non-technical personnel, and there might be a belief that not enough information is being presented (Long & Spurlock, 2008). It becomes imperative to success that communication is achieved and stakeholders have the information necessary to make appropriate decisions.

Leadership as a stakeholder also requires information. It becomes necessary for leadership to have all the information and all stakeholders share the goals of the change to ensure decision quality (Long & Spurlock, 2008). Even though subordinate stakeholders might not have relevant expertise, their acceptance is essential to the change (Long & Spurlock, 2008). Additionally, although stakeholders might use the same vocabulary, it might mean something different to each, so having a standardized method to communicate with each stakeholder is necessary (Long & Spurlock, 2008). Bringing stakeholders together can also increase decision-making.

Group decision-making is essential. Its importance comes from the perception that senior leadership has not provided enough information, even if they show significant enthusiasm (Long & Spurlock, 2008). Group decision-making can then bring together the technical and non-technical to address the risk and concerns of each stakeholder (Long & Spurlock, 2008). This will allow for pre-planning exercises, group identification, and time around each, as well as relevant work processes (Long & Spurlock, 2008).

Conclusion

Change is ever present for all organizations. To move forward with transforming product pipeline development processes, it will be necessary to implement the eight steps to change management. It will also be necessary to reduce resistance to change by having a high-quality

communication plan that is tied to a training plan and integrated with group decision-making processes with stakeholders.

Change resistance is a natural part of organizational dynamics, and IT leadership must address it to ensure the successful implementation of product pipeline development processes. To overcome resistance, IT leadership should aim for commitment from personnel rather than compliance, as commitment leads to full participation and investment in the change. Kotter's eight-step change management theory, which includes creating a sense of urgency, forming a guiding coalition, and creating a vision, can be a valuable framework for IT leaders to navigate the change process effectively.

A guiding coalition will create a vision for change, communicate it effectively, and remove obstacles to ensure its success. Short-term successes will be created and consolidated to drive further change, and the change will be institutionalized to ensure it sticks. A comprehensive communication plan, including various avenues of communication and employee training, is crucial for the success of the change management process.

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As a cybersecurity leader, author, and researcher, James is passionate about developing and delivering effective programs. He focuses on assessing and understanding current maturity levels and capabilities and then creating short- and long-term strategies, goals, budgets, metrics, and roadmaps to progress toward higher maturity. The emphasis is on aligning the cybersecurity strategy with the business and technology strategy and integrating it with portfolio, program, and project management.

Background

James is a cybersecurity professional who started in information technology in 1995 and moved into cybersecurity in 2005. James has worked with or within many different industry sectors, including healthcare, FinTech, marketing, skilled trade unions, business process outsourcing, high-end retail, publishing, and manufacturing. Additionally, James has worked with DoD/Fed prime and subcontractors. He was even a paperboy.

Education

James received a Master of Science in Information Assurance and Security in April 2016 (from Capella University), a double major Bachelor of Science in Management and IT Management in March of 2006 (from Kaplan University), a vocational diploma as a Networking and Systems Support Specialist in June of 2000 (from Ridley-Lowell Business and Technical Institute) and a Certificate in the Essentials of Government Contract Management in August of 2013 (from Villanova University). And he cannot say he is done yet because of his philosophy and passion for lifelong learning.

As a working cybersecurity professional, every attempt is made to separate professional and personal endeavors in a manner consistent with reducing conflicts of interest and maintaining ethics. Statements contained within this whitepaper are the explicit and implicit goals, objectives, endorsements, and educated opinion of the author and not those of current or former employers.