Corporate Change – an Engineers perspective

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Much has been said & discussed regarding the continuous changing nature of the Universe. Man on earth while passing through various eras of changing civilizations has also always changed Physically, Mentally, Socially & Culturally, in Wisdom & intelligence. Change is thus unavoidable & nothing in the universe except Allah is permanent.

 Changes may be brought about by nature alone. These changes along with their results are usually beyond human control. The results-desirable or undesirable have to be accepted involuntarily. These changes however cannot be ignored. They should be dealt with such that the bounties that come with these changes are maximized & the devastations are controlled to be minimal. Whereas there are changes that are brought by us, outcome of these changes depend upon the purpose of change & how they are brought about. Well intended & constructive changes will bring about prolific results. These should be brought about counciencly in a planned manner. Destructive ill-intended, ill-planned change will bring about negative & destructive results. These should be avoided & combated if necessary. Change may thus either bring joy, pleasure & satisfaction or they may result in rile, grief & sorrow.

Changes may be in all walks of life such as Culture, Politics, Educational, Business, Agriculture, Economics, Technology, Ecology, Weather, Demography & many others. The fore going discussion will be confined to 'excellent business or corporate changes'-how they are seen by an engineer'. The emphasis will be to describe how a change is to be conceived, how important it is to define the purpose & objectives of a change, how to set & track the targets for the change, how to decide upon the appropriate time to bring about a change, what are the other elements of first-class planning of a change & how to execute the change so that best desired results are achieved. The sine qua non of any good corporate change is multifold in nature. Such as:

i.   Modernization or replacement of equipment or procedures.
ii. Maximized Profit by addressing competitive issues.

iii. Respond to market demand & Increase market share.

iv. Enhanced scope of work.

v. Enhanced staff capability or address a change in technology.

vi. Enriched quality of corporate/ social responsibility

vii. Improved working environment for employees or respond to safety issues.

viii. Improved remunerations or perks for employees.

ix. Improved employer-employee relationship.

x. Compliance of any statuary obligation.

Before jumping in to bringing about a change it is essential to frequently review the existing needs targets & processes implemented in the organization. From here onwards (i) Describe the need for a change & define it's specific objectives; (ii)Assess what essential resources are required and evaluate if they can be made available at the right time; (iii)Appraise the readiness & fitness of the change team (iv) impart to them training in pertinent skills that will enable them to perform their function proficiently. Only with these arrangements in place, one will be able to efficiently plan the other elements of the change. If one does not learn to change proficiently, than one would get extinct very soon. Old beliefs do not lead to change, searching new avenues is necessary. The quicker we think of change & let go our old beliefs the earlier we will get it's benefits.

TYPES OF CHANGES;

Changes can be classified in many ways some of them are:

I. Voluntary changes planned by Man; Involuntary changes made by Nature.

II. Short time consuming changes; Long time consuming changes.

III. Major Changes; Minor Changes.

IV. Easy to make Changes; Difficult to make Changes

V. Changes requiring low investment; Changes requiring, high investment.

VI. Changes involving few people & resource; Changes involving many people & resource.

VII. Changes yielding Low Return on Investment; Changes yielding High ROI.

VIII. Changes having small effect on the existing system & people; Changes having big effect.

IX.   Changes having small effect on environment; Change having a large environment effect.

X.   Pleasant Changes & Unpleasant Changes.

SEQUENCING A CHANGE;

In certain cases it becomes very difficult to decide upon which proposed change should be brought about & which ones are to be set aside. Removing this confusion should be the first step of entering into a change process. The team should hold a firm & genuine conviction that the change they want to make is essential & fruitful. Whenever it is possible, the low hanging fruits should be plucked first which means, initially fast changes that consume less resource should be made. Fast changes require lesser time to assess it's results. In this way if alterations in modus operandi are required to minimize rework or obtain more reward they can be made at this stage where fewer resource have been consumed and more time is available at hand to bring about required improvements to the change. Even if the change is to be abandoned at this stage it can be done without drain down of too many resources. On the other hand if the results of this small change are found rewarding & encouraging this low cost low time consuming change will become a source of inspiration and motivation throughout the larger change process.

 All changes can be brought about planned & executed in these three ways; Pilot change: Parallel run: Overnight & Sudden change. All these plans have advantages & disadvantages, understanding the mechanism of these changes is of a preliminary nature and not considered necessary to be discussed here in any detail. The criticality of the operation being changed, time required for rectification in case of an error & the effect that an error may cause on the business may be considered before selecting one of these modes of change. The organization should definitely consider bringing about change in a manner that befits it's requirements, can be successfully handled by its employees with available resources and also take into account which changes will have a maximum return on investment.

PLANNING CHANGE;

Once the need of a change is realized & conceptualized, it is defined along with setting it's goals & success targets. Once again It's ROI should be worked out & it should be checked for an acceptable payback period using more care & detail. The next step is to design & execute it in a

most profitable manner. This is the **planning stage**. All care should be taken during this phase to avoid reworking, because rework ravages resources.

Readiness of the organization should be reviewed: Emotional & physical readiness of personnel should be ensured: All activities should be phased out: Starting & finishing time of each activity should be worked out: Control mechanism including all required communication channels should be established: Review meeting schedules should be laid down: Chain of command should be established: Financial & human resources should be affectively allocated & timed, any hiring if required should be done in time: training of existing or new staff if required to impart specific skills should be organized such that the appropriate human resource is available right in time: Care should be exercised to have an optimum manpower: Managers& Leaders for the Change program should be assigned. Most important is that a mechanism of reward & recognition for the change team should be created, the team will remain motivated at all times in this manner.

<u>CHANGE TEAM LEADER;</u>

The program should essentially have at least one leader who has a genuine & firm conviction regarding the objectives, scope & necessity of the change. He should be vibrant, innovative & visionary, in order to lead the change effectively. At all times through the change process he should keep the team members fully involved: encouraged: highly committed: motivated: continuously mobilized & they should keep a high morale standard.

 He should be fully capable to control the dynamics of the change & to address them specifically. He should foresee on coming problems, take post haste corrective action & alert his team members well in advance. He should possess abundant professionalism & openness to listen to criticism & opinions of others. In this manner he can incorporate good suggestions in his program.

He should also undertake his responsibility to ensure that all employees should also develop habits, attitude & behavior as apt to the new environment of change & they should give up previous undesired & unwanted practices.

CHANGE TEAM MANAGERS;

It is recommended that the program has sufficient Managers. They should fully share the vision & aspirations of their leader. They should also have a complete understanding & commitment regarding the necessity of the change. They should possess sufficient communication skills, ability to judge the strong points & weak areas of his team members in order to put the right person at the right job, they should be able to see the program getting along according to plan, ensure minimum resistance to the change program, plan out all details, compile 'change results' & analyze them (over analyzing & complicating issues should be avoided), they should also be capable to make small instantaneous alterations in the program where ever necessary. They should control the change budget effectively & ensure that the allocated resources are available at the right time.

CHANGE TEAM MEMBER;

Team assigned to execute the change should comprise of members with appropriate & relevant *pedagogical background.* Their level of practical/theoretical readiness should be suitable to take up during change & post-change responsibilities (especially important in the case of front line supervisors). The workmen specially should be physically fit. Everyone should be psychologically on top form. If the change is within the fields of public relations marketing, counseling etc than the team members should have amicable personalities: acceptable physical appearance: good speech & commendable communication skills.

The team members should be selected such that they have heterogeneous skills, so that the program is enriched with a variety if skills & each manager have a better choice to select the right person for the right job.

SPEED OF CHANGE & ALOCATION OF RESOURCES;

It should be understood that no speed of changing events can be classified as fast or slow in general, for example we cannot say that deletion program for imported parts of a certain car being assembled indigenously, is slow or fast if deletion is 20% per year. The speed of change depends mainly upon its need, the complexity of operation involved, resource allocation & their availability schedule. However it is essential to set the criteria for rate of a particular change.

This is to be decided at the **change's planning stage**. A mechanism should be devised to sense any deviations that occur in the original program, so that corrective actions are taken to make up time delays by altering the speed of 'next events' in the sequence.

The speed of change is important. Too fast a change may cause confusion amongst the team members; stretch them for extra work, sometimes beyond realistic limits. This may lead to reworking due to mistakes, errors & omissions thus causing further time delays and increasing the cost of change. On the other hand, a slow change may fizzle out the desired effects. Like the change in product or process may become obsolete and irrelevant even before the change is complete or the competitor considering the idea to be advantageous may adopt it with increased speed in his change program to obtain market's advantage before the company that had originally conceived the change. Also change too slow may cause de-motivation amongst the team since end results will not be visible in the beginning for a long time, work may appear to be unrewarding and change may be considered an exercise in futility.

Like-wise making resources available at the right time is very important making resources available ahead time will increase the financial cost of the project owing to tie up of capital & higher capital cost; whereas delayed availability of resources will definitely delay the completion of change process, which is never desired.

EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION;

All elements of a change should be revealed to the team members at an appropriate time. Too much information at the initial stage may again cause confusion due to lack of understanding. The information should be given stage wise, making sure that all previous information has been mentally absorbed by team members to the desired level before new information is given. Conversely if sufficient relevant information is not shared at an early stage the change may appear unnecessary & preposterous. The team members may turn indifferent, apathetic, slow & sluggish. An intelligent balance of working in this area is essential.

The speed of change and quantum of information being let out at a particular stage should be such that a minimum of rework is needed on the program, at the same time no delays are created due to lack of information or resources. Everyone may have the required resource & information, sufficient to keep them functionally involved: encouraged & motivated. In this

manner they will thus always maintain maximum interest and confidence in the change process. This activity should be planned at the initial stage when communication channels are being established & meeting schedules are being prepared.

IMPLEMENTATION OF CHANGE;

With all the above elements of change taken care of the execution should be started at the scheduled time. For success of the change process, at this stage it should be ensured once again that the complete plan is clearly understood by all levels of the organization. Everyone should be reminded of his specific function. The managers & leaders should always remain involved to ensure availability of adequate resources at the right time & fallow their other assigned functions. They should make necessary changes to fit in with the prevalent circumstances.

Industrial peace should be ensured throughout the change tenure, any condition of unrest anywhere in the system is not desired at any time and if a situation of conflict arises than it should be solved quid pro quo. All control mechanisms & working procedures should be diligently implemented & fallowed; Safety procedures should be strictly implemented & followed, because vocational accidents & health problems cause project delays & unnecessary financial loss. Likewise environmental issues should be addressed from the very beginning since this should be considered & recognized to be everyone's social responsibility. Moreover if there is a breach of any environmental statuary regulation than this can be expensive in the form of fine or penalty.

Progress should be regularly & strictly monitored. Delay in any area should be immediate noted, route cause analyses for these delays should be done & obstacles should be removed to avoid further setbacks & steps should be taken to make up for the already occurred delay.

The results as they come by should be noted analyzed & compared to the change objectives; necessary amendments should be made on the run, to get as close to the objectives as possible.

Once most of the major indicative results are obtained checked, verified & they show that desired objectives have been achieved. The change will then be pronounced as successful & complete. The project along with it's control documents, at this stage on wards should be handed over to the relevant implementation or production team whichever is the case.

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