

Communicating Change

Around 50% of change management initiatives fail. One of the main reasons for this is a failure to communicate the change effectively to employees. During times of change, uncertainty is rife and fear of the unknown is a common factor. Clear, effective communication is the key to addressing the people problems associated with change.

Internal communications systems

One of the first steps to take when communicating change is to assess the internal communications system of the organisation. As Peter Drucker has stated 'the knowledge worker is the single greatest asset' in business and thus, it is vital that employees are 'kept in the know'. Informing employees about developments within the organisation will enable them to better align themselves with the corporate vision.

Test your presentation

Use senior management as an audience to test run any major presentations before doing it for real with the employees. In doing this you will be able to iron out any differences in opinion and firm up on the specifics. This will also help with finding the right pitch and tone for the presentation. You may find the exercise entitled 'Communicating a Vision for Change' useful.

Choose your language carefully

Plans are normally drawn up by senior management for senior management and thus, the language used is often only appropriate for those with the same background information and strategic insights as the managers. If employees are presented with exactly the same information, in the same way, they may leave the presentation more confused than before.

Introduce your presentation

For maximum impact and effect, a presentation should begin with an outline of the format it will take. If the audience members are made aware that a certain topic will be addressed during the presentation or that there will be an opportunity for questions at the end, they will be more likely to listen intently to each point.

Don't get specific too soon

Do not rush in with names or departments straight away. Instead, present general information and detail the principles behind the change first. If the information presented is too specific too early, employees will become fixated on the mention of their names or departments and will be less likely to absorb the rest of the information.

Be honest

Give employees straight and honest information. Do not try to positively dress something that is negative. If the news is bad – give it to the employees straight. If you do not have the information asked of you at the moment, explain this to the employees and assure them that you will inform them of this as soon as you have the information.

Put yourself in your employees' place

Try to address the personal needs of employees. Often employees' first questions will be concerned with how any changes will affect them personally. You need to have carefully thought through the implications of any change and be prepared for serious questions before announcing it. It is important for people to understand why the change is necessary and this should be clearly communicated.

Be aware of your body language

Your body language and the actions you make can be just as important and effective as the words you use. You should think about the tone of voice you use too.

Conduct regular discussions and meetings

It is essential that employees be kept abreast of the change initiative and development. Use the internal communications system to give employees regular updates, but also conduct regular meetings and discussion where employees have opportunities to ask questions and have them answered by senior management. This works against the rumour mill that flourishes in environments devoid of official communication and information.

Write an information leaflet

It is worth bearing in mind that verbal communication is not always the most effective form of giving information. In fact, surveys have shown that change is most effective when a mixture of verbal and written communication is used. The process of having an information booklet put together will not only make sure that senior management are all beating the same drum, but will provide employees with some hard facts and figures that they can continually refer to.

Prepare for future change

'In business, even more than politics, the only constant is change' (Mickelthwait, 1999). As change is inevitable it makes sense to prepare for it now. If people are made aware of the changes happening within the industry or with the technology used, it will be less of a shock when these changes impact on their organisation or department. Continue to check and improve the communication system within your organisation and you will be better prepared for managing change when it comes along.

Related Items

Related Resources

- Beckhard's Confrontation Meeting
- Communicating Change
- Change at Hart Industries