



Leading Change in Changing Times

Pandemic, shelter at home, work from home, 6 feet, masks, business shutdowns, school shutdowns, hurricanes, fires, police involved shootings, social unrest, protests, riots, elections, political turmoil, voting rights, Supreme Court nominations, world events, domestic terrorism and more. Welcome to 2020!

Many people say this year has been the worst since the beginning of time. It is a matter of personal, and not necessarily, historical perspective. Studies have shown people typically reflect on their experience as their individual scope of history like what they remember and how it affects them personally and professionally.

Lots of factors play into the perception of change including a person's age and generation, the 24/7 news cycle, the internet and social media, confirmation bias, identity, personal experience, political affiliation, social involvement and rural vs. suburban vs. urban life.

It is incumbent upon organizational leaders to listen to others while experiencing and navigating the future. What considerations do you need to make to incorporate lasting, meaningful change that anticipates and incorporates known and unknown factors?

1. Create a clear and compelling message regarding the change. Make it concise and meaningful. Much better to have a message like Microsoft of "A computer on every desk in every home" vs. "Let's sell as many computers as we can".
2. Spend some time developing a communication plan regarding the change. It should clarify the need for a change, the benefits, acknowledgement of perceived struggles and a section on what is in it for those affected. Example: "The new system will reduce time spent processing claims to 24 hours" than "This new system should make some things easier."
3. Anticipate questions and have prepared answers for those. In times of change, people will fill in the gaps regarding unknowns with rumor and gossip. Do what you can to fill those gaps with data or tangible plan descriptions.
4. Demonstrate your vulnerability by communicating how you were concerned, fearful or unsure when you first developed or initiated the new idea. Over time, with additional information, you became more confident in the advantages as you moved forward.

Do not shift blame if a change initiative comes from a higher level including State or Federal mandates. There is nothing wrong with letting people know where the change proposal came from. However, you should seek to avoid creating "us" and "them" positions, setting up an adversarial relationship with the goal.

Most change efforts require more than a checklist and a project plan to create a different outcome. Leaders need to consider an inclusive approach that encompasses both human and organizational factors and that lasts long enough for sustainable change to take hold. By paying appropriate attention commonly held mindsets, such as “this is how we’ve always done it” or “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it”, you can design a systemic change effort that has a higher likelihood of success than traditional process-based methods. A personal or even individual approach may have a direct effect on whether the change process is successful or unsuccessful. It is much more difficult to have an implementation do-over or restart. The time you spend up front, in consideration on impacted employees can be worth the effort.