

Organisational Change...

Creating and sustaining engagement from a Project Managers perspective.

In this Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous (VUCA) world, change is both inevitable and unpredictable.

Be it either process-focussed or technology-focussed, a critical element of any change programme is to change the ways in which people do things.

When change is needed in an organisation, we need employees and those affected by the change to be engaged for it to be successful.

The word 'engagement' is a critical talking point amongst business leaders and senior executives, and widely discussed when it comes to the topic of delivering and managing a successful change project.

Change projects, quite often make employees feel that they must just accept change; sometimes feeling that it is forced upon them by the senior leadership team. Similarly, the project team can feel frustrated with unrealistic deadlines and inflated assumptions that the project will deliver "one big fix" for all business problems.

Does the above situation sound familiar?

As a project director or manager, the above challenges may be all too familiar. This article offers some useful hints and tips on how to solve project management issues and build stakeholder engagement when managing a change programme.

Do you know your stakeholders? And, do you manage them well?

Starting with understanding your stakeholders; identifying and engaging your stakeholders right from day one will not only reduce misunderstandings but also provide an opportunity for them to get involved and contribute from the outset of the project.

An early analysis of the extent to which people will be affected by the change and their potential influence on it (whether negative or positive) can help you to prepare for your initial discussions.



As a project manager, you will benefit from helping your stakeholders understand the benefits of the change programme and highlighting the associated risks that the project may present to them. Gauging their interest in the project and what is important to them, will help you to formulate strategies to meet or even exceed their expectations.

Dealing with unfamiliar risks

Each change project will inevitably bring about unique challenges and risks. Brainstorming can prove a useful approach to gaining an insight into your team's experience. But, bear in mind though, that brainstorming alone may not be enough to identify all risks, especially when it comes to complex change projects.



There are alternative tools and techniques though, that can be used to identify the wider-range of risks within projects.

A few are brainwriting, horizon scanning, work break down structure (WBS), interviews with key people within the organisation who may have a broader insight into problems, historic analysis, affinity diagrams etc.

It's important to involve a team from throughout the organisation to identify potential risks.

Putting out the question "What might cause this project to fail?" during a brainstorming session will enable the project manager to get a feel for what participants are worried about.

Based on this discussion, you can build confidence amongst the project team by underlining the significance of their contribution to increase the chances of a successful project.

Aside from identifying risks, this activity will organically promote collaboration and engagement amongst the wider team and stakeholders.

**Everything is priority number one.
Everyone wants everything immediately!
All tasks are urgent! Sound familiar?**

There are various prioritisation techniques you can use for both issues and solutions. Tools and techniques like nominal grouping, decision matrices are useful tools that will help you to rank the importance of activities and initiatives – not forgetting to take stakeholders' views into consideration during the process.

Another, great tool is the 'Ease Benefit' matrix (Eisenhower matrix). Again, engage the group and ask them to determine for each task or initiative whether it would be easy or difficult to implement; and whether doing so would give high or low benefit in tackling the root cause of the problem. The 'easy, high benefit' ideas are then developed further. Involving everyone in the decision-making helps build consensus across the group which, in turn, increases the likelihood of a workable solution being adopted.

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Do you have a communication plan?

So, now that you understand your stakeholders, and have identified key risks and prioritised the activities, it's time to start thinking about how to communicate with stakeholders and the rest of the organisation. Understanding peoples' current perceptions will also help you plan and prepare for difficult encounters. As the project or programme progresses, the stakeholders, their needs and their levels of understanding will change too. It's vital that you revisit your communication plan as frequently as your project plan and ensure that the two are co-ordinated. In this way, your stakeholders will develop an accurate and up-to-date awareness of the project progress and how they can support you.



What else?

Finally, developing your own range of interpersonal skills to complement your problem-solving and project management skills can help you to sell ideas, negotiate resources and build relationships. Being able to establish rapport, understand perceptions and help people to reach conclusions - through questioning, demonstrating active listening and observation, and being able to give and receive feedback constructively - all enhance your ability to tackle strenuous challenges that are the people aspects of change management.

Conclusion

The hints and tips we talk about in this article are just a few pointers of how to use participative strategies to build engagement when managing change projects. Once you are successful in using these tactics, you will find yourself building your reputation as a change leader, setting yourself apart as an effective project manager with the necessary skills and of course, adding more value to your organisation.