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Dear Reader:

Finding a good solution to a problem is not easy task, but it is nothing compared to the difficulty of implementing the solution. When it comes to implement something, we often realize there is some key aspect we simply failed to anticipate. It is like going to the movies, only to realize we didn't bring our wallet to buy the ticket. It sounds pretty obvious, and still, we forget to do it.

This month we present a recent case that reminded us of what makes implementation difficult, and what are some of the simple, obvious details that we should have anticipated.

Enjoy the reading!

Isabel Rimanoczy
Editor

Quote of the Month

"The deaf person thinks that those who are dancing are crazy."

Jorge Bucay, Author

LIM NEWS

We develop your leaders while they develop your business

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HOW CAN I ACHIEVE CULTURAL CHANGE?

by Isabel Rimanoczy

Some time ago I was talking to an HR executive who shared with me a plan he had developed to improve his organization's plant efficiency, by coaching the plant supervisors. This initiative was developed in the belief that, to achieve their production targets people needed not only the motivation, but also skill development, and he determined to use the same working environment as an arena for learning.

Based on this proposal, the organization developed a coaching plan, where a number of specially trained coaches would accompany the supervisors on-site, to see how the supervisors were currently supporting their people and how they might

use the work itself as the means for the continued development of their direct reports. This meant a major cultural shift for the organization, as supervisors were not used to being required to do the additional task of taking care of people's development, and possibly felt satisfied with how they were supporting them. The HR executive knew that there would be resistance to this much needed change, and wondered how he might support the coaches, who would bear the brunt of the resistance.

We, a small group of colleagues who were listening to him, offered to brainstorm ideas and pretty soon came up with several tips and suggestions, based on our own experience in implementing change:
- Communication is key: it is critical to explain why the change is important
- The behavioral changes have to be rewarded, and must be linked to performance measurements and the compensation system
- Coaches need to be people who are already respected because of their knowledge and attitude
- Recruiting the right coaches is key and for this you need a clear profile of the job
- A pilot program would be advisable to get feedback and make the necessary corrections before the larger roll out
- A focus group with some supervisors before launching the program could be helpful to get their opinions, involvement and indications of possible resistance

As I left the meeting, I kept thinking about the challenge, which was one I had heard many times. We realize something is not going right, we develop a solution and we need to implement it. And that seems always to be the most difficult part!

What made it so difficult? What steps were missing? What considerations did we overlook?

The Cycle of Change

It may be helpful to use a model to understand change.

Source: Adapted from Rimanoczy, I. 2004

The first step is to reflect on the action taken, to establish what actually happened. In the above scenario, there must have been some signs that something was not working right in terms of the plant performance. It could have been a problem of missed targets, or a concern about turnover rates, or about the requisite skill levels of the plant workers. For whatever reasons, someone had to have seen signs that something needed attention.

The second step is to get self awareness of each person's own contribution to the current problem. From an organizational perspective, they must ask themselves the tough question: How are we as an organization contributing to this situation? Only once this awareness is surfaced can one proceed to the next step: do we NEED to change something? What would happen if we don't change anything? Can we afford it?

If the answer is that a change is needed, the next step is to develop a plan. From what I heard, the plan had been carefully crafted and now just needed implementation.

So far, the HR person's plan for change seems to have followed the change cycle perfectly. However there seemed to be a flaw in the logic.

Who needs to change? A systemic perspective

For a change to take place, it is useful to pay attention to the five-level systemic perspective.

In the case we are analyzing, the Business level seems to be have been considered (to improve plant efficiency), as well as the Organizational level, in that a plan to be implemented organization wide has been developed. But what about the individuals who are expected to be agents of this change? Do they have the personal conviction, attitude and mindset for this change? Do they have the skills it will require? Are the teams implicated in this change plan actually involved in its planning and execution?

These questions take us back to the Cycle of Change. When there are signs that something is not working, is it only OD or HR who see them? Or do the supervisors see those signs too? And do they agree they are signs of a meaningful problem? Following the cycle, do these supervisors realize how they are personally contributing to the problem? If they fail to see this, then it is likely, not only that not much change can be expected, but that there might be resistance to it.

And then, do they see the need to change something? Do they believe it is worth the effort? The vision of a better future is the fuel for change. Finally, it is just as important to get the involvement of those who will be implementing the plan, in the design of the plan itself.

Just think for a moment what would happen to us if someone wanted to coach us on something we didn't think we were doing wrong. If we thought everything was going well enough, or that it was not our role that had to change, how would we react?

We would probably feel upset, and defensive about something we believed to be unfair, unrealistic, useless or simply wrong. We would express it more or less openly, depending how safe we felt to speak up. If the pressure to comply is intense, we may opt for passive resistance, expressing our feelings and perspectives in small, subtle ways, that ultimately make the implementation impossible.

It could help to remember that our interpretation of the situation is as valid for us as the opposite one is for the other party. It is a right versus wrong situation.

Certainly, an organization has many resources to push people towards compliance: monetary sanctions, the risk of losing a job or having a promotion blocked. These are like a country's war weapons. They help to win battles, but they never are strong enough to capture the souls of the people. We know that force or coercion are tools an organization has to persuade people to do something. But they should be used as a last resort. In other words, by respecting and **asking** for the wishes of the people who are involved in change, we gain not only their commitment but also the chance of a better solution— because they have been involved.

Attend This Session!

"Designing for Learning that Lasts"

Ernie Turner, LIM; Urban Skog, AstraZeneca

June 7, 2005 - 1:45-3:00 p.m.

Practice-Oriented Education (POE) Conference -- Boston, Mass.

Attend this Session!

"Action Reflection Learning"

Tony Pearson , LIM   – Beena Vilas, LIM

Conference Overview, June 14-17, 2005

http://wace2005.waceinc.org/overview.html

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