

## Managing Change

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It is a cliché that the only thing that is constant is “change”. Change is taking place constantly and all around us. It is happening in the economy, market, customers, competition, and technology. In specific management terms, it is happening in product life cycle, product design, product diversity and complexity, supply chain, channels of distribution, and quality requirements, etc. Everybody notices that advertising and product communication is changing almost on a daily basis.

The velocity of change is however more pronounced in emerging markets like India. Here the change is not restricted to corporate processes and growth alone, but has percolated to the social aspects like lifestyle and consumption patterns. A significant proportion of urban population is moving up the economic and social ladder, with more and more disposable income in their hands. Migration is taking place from rural to urban agglomerations – mainly because agriculture as a profession is becoming increasingly unprofitable. The question obviously before India is whether the country as a whole and more specifically, its infrastructure and services are equipped to handle this change. The important perspective is that the final impact of the country being unable to cope with these change, will be on economic growth. So, this is the perennial chicken and egg problem – does economic growth drive social development indicators or is it vice versa. The idea being postulated is that in a vast, populous and diverse country like India, the solution is a well thought out long range planning which will work, and not some short term quick fixes.

The corporate sector in India is in the thick of these changes taking place all around them. The expectations to deliver from corporates are very high. They are expected to drive growth in this country and should be in the frontline of strategizing and implementing change. For this, the organizations themselves have to manage the process of change within them – an exercise which is at most times, quite treacherous.

Change management in organizations may be initiated and implemented either proactively or in a reactive fashion. In the proactive mode, changes have to be anticipated and carried out in a systematic and planned manner. The effectiveness of change management lies in proper implementation – whether it is new systems or processes or any other new initiatives. It must be understood that any change in an established organization brings in resistance along with it; hence, circumventing or addressing change management issues with people prior to implementation is a priority in most organizations. The pivot of control for most changes which originate within the organization is with the management and management alone.

In case of reactive change management, it is events which originate outside the organization that influences changes within the organization. The origin of the cause for these internal changes is beyond the control of the organization and is influenced by the external environment. The external cause may be in the form of competitor's activities, or economic changes in the country or around the world. Unfavorable social and political developments may also trigger internal changes. Earlier, government regulations were also considered as beyond the control of organizations. In recent times, however, there is ample evidence to the contrary.

In both these forms of change, the organization requires a body of knowledge. It also requires specific skill sets of its employees along with tools and techniques to implement change effectively. According to management literature on change management, organizations require a balanced combination of various skills and tools/techniques as well as methods in order to plan for and effectively implement change. Planning and strategizing, taking into account all interplay of factors, are a must for effective change management. Presence of suitable structures and proper systems and employing appropriate methods are a prerequisite for successful management of change. However, the most important dimension in this game is that of people. The most difficult part of managing change is to change the mindset of people. All experienced people in this field will vouch for the fact that resistance to change of people involved is the most serious challenge. At the same time, it is enlightened people who act as change agents in organizations and has brought in far reaching positive consequences for their organizations.

Skills required to act as change agents, other than commercial and business acumen, are analytical skills and system skills. These are, more often than not, generic skill sets observed in many management professionals. As has been enumerated earlier, the most important skill is that of people skill, and in certain cases – even, political skills. The process of change is very often unpredictable. Hence, organizations should arm themselves with a set process which has been proved successful over a period of time. Like many other management processes, it helps immensely to articulate a vision or set superordinate goals. Then it is easier to garner commitment from people, which is a crucial component of change management. People must believe in the need for change, and this need should exceed the resistance that it is likely to face. The management of the organization must visualize, conceptualize and implement change which is permanent in nature. Otherwise, there will always be a tendency to slide back to square one. The belief in this case is that only permanent change brings in real progress. Off course, monitoring, controlling, reviewing and taking corrective actions is part of the process of effective change management.

Change may happen in different ways in diverse organizations; but the basic concepts of change management are the same in all cases.

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Received November 08, 2013; Accepted November 09, 2013; Published November 14, 2013

Citation: Choudhury RG (2013) Managing Change. J Hotel Bus Manage 2: e111. doi:10.4172/2169-0286.1000e111

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