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Understanding what the focus needs to be when measuring change

MEASURING THE RIGHT CHANGE ISSUES

With so many change initiatives currently underway, it's important to measure how they're being received. But don't fall into the trap of measuring just what management wants to measure, warns Angela Sinickas, as executives may not be focused on the right issues to expedite the changes they're hoping to achieve.

All too often, our leaders ask us to communicate a specific set of messages, and we dutifully run off to disseminate that information very creatively. And then we measure if our audiences actually heard, remembered, believed and acted upon those messages.

Unfortunately, management's key messages are often the wrong ones to achieve the goals they're striving to reach - or they're unaware of some of the messages that really need to be communicated.

Examples of the wrong messages

For example, one of the key tenets of change management is that we need to start by communicating a "burning platform" so that employees understand the urgency for change. However, take a look at Figure One, which shows survey results just before one client launched a major change initiative. About 96 percent of employees agreed that the company needed to change in order to be an industry leader. If this company had spent a great deal of time pushing the need for change, employees' reaction would likely have matched some of the write-in comments, such as: "I'm glad management finally woke up. Employees have seen the need for us to change for years!"

The other important point to note in Figure One is that less than half of employees believed the company was

prepared to make a major change. This tells us that our messaging will need to focus heavily on how the company is committing major resources toward the supporting the change if we want employees to have confidence in the company's ability to change.

Looking at Figure Two, note that while 70 percent agree that they're motivated to help make the change a success, at least 29 percent don't believe the company's new direction is the right one. This tells us that another key message stream will be to explain to employees why other possible strategies for the company would not be as successful as the one that management has chosen to pursue.

Finding the right messages

In order to develop the right message tracks, and to know what needs to be measured during your change process, it's best to start with qualitative employee research. Conduct some focus groups to get employees talking about:

- How they see the company's current position.
- What they think the company should be doing differently.
- What it would take for them to make

changes in their own jobs that would be consistent with the company's new direction.

The last point is one of the most important. Once your leadership team is able to articulate what specific behavioral changes they want to see from different employee subgroups, you need to find out from those employee groups what it will take for them to change their behaviors:

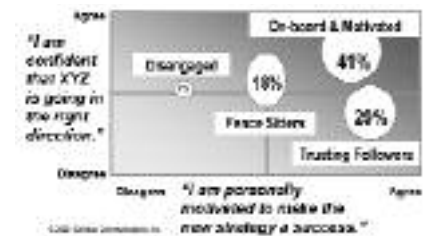
- What knowledge will they need in order to change?
- What would be the best ways to learn that new information?
- What new attitudes are needed?
- Which people sources are most likely to influence changes in their attitudes?

Once you've identified the real key messages that employees will need in order for the company to see change, you can develop your quantitative research tools to track how uptake of those messages is increasing. Your survey will then include the messages that executives want to communicate, as well as the additional messages employees need to hear in order to be able to do the right things.

Figure One: Nearly all saw the "burning platform", but only half saw the company ready to change



Figure Two: 70 percent of staff were committed to making the change successful, even when they didn't believe the direction was right



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