

MC&T-Lite Vol 3.1
Issue? Organizational Change Readiness.

A recent interview with an editor got me thinking a bit more about the issue of determining the 'change readiness' of an organization.

In my storage bins I have survey after survey from various OD organizations that will supposedly inform CEOs as to the change readiness of their organization. The fees to conduct such studies are usually 'significant' and the result is a 50-100 page report identifying strengths and weaknesses inside the organization.

These surveys are usually undertaken without ANY reference to a specific change and after examining the questionnaires in some detail, I have, in all but the rare occasion, decided these things are practically worthless to the client, although very lucrative for the consultant.

Now being a 'consultant' myself, you'd think that this would be a minor hurdle in my thinking and that lucrative 'Change Readiness' surveys would be one of my standard services. Trouble is, I find it very difficult to advise folks to spend hard earned money on smoke and mirror projects.

Yet... as the editor who prompted this thought process pointed out, the notion that some companies are naturally better than others, is not exactly a silly concept... is it?

It is IMPERATIVE that we know the 'strengths and weaknesses' of an organization before ANY change takes place. This seems obvious, but when measuring an organization's 'change readiness' what exactly does one measure? And what do these measurements mean?

If the surveys in my storage bin are any indication, then this is NOT an easy question. The surveys seem to 'measure' (or at least interrogate) every aspect of the organization, in great exact and excruciating detail. Then they combine these results in creative (read - weird) and wonderful ways that would make any numerologist green with numerical envy.

In the search to ask the right questions, they ask every question they can think of. The result is a flood of information lacking insight.

The other thing lacking in most of these surveys is 'context.' One cannot really state whether or not an organization is ready to accept 'a' change unless the change in question is known in great detail.

These two huge objections aside, it still means something to state that company 'X' is more 'ready' for change than company 'Y.'

What are the key elements that make an organization more 'ready' to face a new change? Perhaps we can find the answer in the many change failures we've all experienced?

Here are two observations... see if you agree with them.

- a) IF an organization has as an integral component, the unbreakable rule that 'management is always right'... then they will NEVER be 'ready' for substantive change.
- b) IF the employees in an organization don't trust management... then they also will NEVER be 'ready' for substantive change.

Both of the above are merely different aspects of this thing we call 'communication'. Of all the issues relating to change, 'communication' arises most frequently in ANY discussion about what works and doesn't work.

In short? Measuring an organization's 'change readiness,' is the same as measuring the organization's ability to 'communicate.'

Consider the following approach:

A large disruptive change is anticipated by management and a consultant is asked to determine on a scale of 1-10 if the organization is capable of addressing this 'change.' As a part of the assignment, the consultant is given no indication of what the change might be.

Very simply, the consultant could, through a series of interviews (surveys if we must) get some sense of the following key attributes.

- Do the employees trust management?
- Does management respect the input of the employees?

If the answer to both these questions is NO, then they are much LESS capable of handling ANY change, even trivial change, than if the answers were both YES.

Naturally... you could end up with variations on the answers, which you could transform into the desired rating on the 1-10 scale.

HOWEVER... even a perfect 10, where 10 means a 100% unanimous yes from ALL employees and management to both questions, does NOT mean that the company is "ready, willing and able" to adopt a particular change. This is where everything depends entirely on the change in question. What exactly does the change entail? This is where the specifics are necessary to answer the question

Is the company 'ready, willing and able' to adopt THIS change?

Finding out if an organization is 'ready' for change is actually a very small project... all you need do is have a consultant hold a number of informal meetings with folks

throughout your organization. If management is reluctant to allow these types of meetings... then you have part of your answer. And if the staff think the consultant is a spy for the organization... then you have the other part of the answer. I wish you luck on the project.

Yours Truly

Peter de Jager

August 7, 2001

© 2001, Peter de Jager - pdejager@technobility.com