The reality of today’s business environment is not only that change is a constant, but also the rate at which this change is occurring is building momentum, with no clear sign of slowing. Within this environment, the need for business and corporations to change is no longer in question, with each company wading into the waters of implementing change efforts in a variety of form and fashion. What is amazing is the amount of failed change efforts, being that so many efforts are put in place. Kotter (1996) identifies eight key reasons for the failure of these change efforts, the first two being failure to address complacency and the lack of a powerful guiding coalition. This post will address first a successful change project, and then a change project that suffered failure, both of which will highlight the importance of these two factors.

One change project that has proven successful (to this point) has been the restructuring and combination of two district offices into one larger reporting office. This change has been successful for a variety of reasons including the buy-in and support from senior management as well as the logical sequence through which the change occurred. This reorganization was announced 2 months prior to the actual change date which providing a time frame by which to prepare as well as a drop-dead date to start. This eliminated the complacency that can creep in when these changes remain left as unaddressed rumors. Even though not all names had been announced, the overall reporting structure as well as new roles and responsibilities were clearly communicated to all involved, helping to ease the resistance to this change by providing a vision for the future. One key factor in the success of the change is what was left alone. While the reporting structure and some middle management were shuffled, the day to day operations of both offices were left pretty well intact, which has benefited the continuity of operations as well as continued customer support of the highest level. While some managers lost more important or prestigious titles, each one has presented a unified support of this change, creating a powerful coalition and influencing their direct reports in buying into this change as well (Kotter, 1996). The combination of eliminating the complacency and a unified and powerful guiding coalition, along with the clearly defined and planned sequencing of this change process has provided for a relatively smooth transition and has put in place the framework to anchor this change into the culture of these offices (Kotter, 1996).

A change project that did not go well is evidenced in the creation of a new position within our office to fill a need as voiced by several employees. While the need for the position was indeed correct, and the sense of urgency to create the position was in place, those involved placed the proverbial cart before the horse. As described by Collins (2001), management had the right people on the bus; however, they were in the wrong seat. This one mistake led to a two-year experiment gone wrong, and the unfortunate termination of a valuable employee, who had simply been placed in the wrong role. The implementation of the new role operated just fine, and was indeed warranted, however, by rushing through the creation of the coalition and selecting the wrong individual to fill the role, the position created little change in the way of any noticeable or needed improvements. While urgency was in place to create the new role, change because of this creation was slow do to the acceptance of the status quo as adequate. In this example, sequencing played a huge role in the overall failure of this change effort, although the process never actually made it passed the guiding coalition before results were expected.

References

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