Change Management Approach
In order to fully analyze a change leaders approach, we need to begin by taking a look at the current state of the organization, specifically the perceived need for change and readiness for said change. Once we have this information, it will give us a platform from which we can view the change leader’s competencies and effectiveness as it relates to implementing effective change.
My change leader, Mark Harwood, has over 30 years of experience in the healthcare industry and has held titles of Senior VP, President, and CEO of organizations valued at over $30B. Currently, Mark is the President of the life safety medical device company I work for called RF Technologies. About six months ago, when I started my employment with them, RF Technologies had no sense of urgency when it came to change. The growth which had been dominant for nearly the past decade had stagnated over the past three years and the CEO who has owned the company since day one decided change was necessary. However, he didn’t know how to do it himself. So he brought Mark on board to take the reins of change.
Mark had a difficult task ahead of him because the organization, excluding a handful of people who had been brought on board within the last year and a half, was not ready for change. They had been doing business the same way for over 20 years and were comfortable with the way things were.
When I asked Mark what is the first thing he does after he goes into an organization in need of change and gets a feel for the way business is being conducted, his response indicated a level of competency and experience that was almost ‘text-book’. He said the first thing he does is sit with the major stakeholders (in this case it was the CEO and owner who hired him) and go over the plan of action. Once he has the stake holders’ buy-in, he establishes a sense of urgency throughout the company by being honest with them about what he sees as opportunities and what failing to capitalize on those opportunities looks like to the future of the organization. He then clearly communicates his plan with everyone, through the management team, until they all have a sense of understanding. He said it’s important to communicate through the management team most of the time because it shows that the managers have bought into his idea of change (M. Harwood, personal communication, January 31, 2011).
This approach to create a sense of urgency and establish a guiding coalition (by communicating through the management team) is directly in line with the first two stages of Kotter’s change process (1996, p.21). Additionally, his approach to using straight talk and honesty, without being brutal, matches well with Graham’s idea of honesty from a change leader (2002, p.42-47).
Another example of where Mark Harwood’s change theory is in line with the theories and practices we’ve learned throughout this course came when I asked him what advice he would give to a new change leader. He said, “Never settle for second best. If you’re willing to settle, you’re in the wrong place. You also have to understand the market, what the average rate of growth is, and where you stack up. Lastly, and I can’t emphasize this enough, surround yourself with the best people (M. Harwood, personal communication, January 31, 2011).
This advice to new change leaders follows the principles of Collins who indicates that mediocrity is the enemy of greatness (2001, p.1-16), and Kotter’s idea that a guiding coalition needs to be made up of the best people you can find (1996, p.57-66).
Lessons Learned
One of the most prominent lessons I took away from my interview with Mark Harwood was that for change to take, it has to be done at the culture level. He said that if you don’t change the culture of an organization, then any change you see is only temporary and a result of some other type of manipulation whether that be fear of losing a job or whatever else it might be. He taught me that people have to believe in their heart that change is both necessary and possible; and that has to be the culture of the organization (M. Harwood, personal communication, January 31, 2011).
Another lesson I took away from Mark was the importance of continual change. He said that some organizations are in need of an “overhaul”, and that’s where he and other change leaders come in. But, he also said that if the organization doesn’t develop a culture of change and make it an ongoing and ever evolving initiative then they won’t be able to change with customer demands and needs which change whether an organization is or not. He said, “If customer demands are changing, you better be changing with them or else you aren’t going anywhere.” Simple, yet true. (M. Harwood, personal communication, January 31, 2011)
These lessons that I learned from Mark have helped to shape my personal change management theory in a few ways. First, even though many change leaders come from outside the organization, the change itself needs to come from the inside out. Second, I used to believe that change management was one process that took a defined period of time. I now believe that, while major change may take place, continual change needs to become a part of the culture at an organization for it to be effective.
Conclusions and Recommendation
It is clear that Mark Harwood is an experienced and studied change leader who has implemented large scale, effective change in international organizations. I was grateful to have the opportunity to interview him for this professional challenge. I learned a lot from what he had to say and find value in the lessons I learned. However, there are some recommendations I would make to Mark.
1. Empower Internal Employees: Mark has a guiding coalition that he brings with him each time he changes organizations. While they are successful, mentoring and empowering internal employees will help sustain a culture of change, which is one of the things he taught me was important about my own theory.
2. Keep Channels Open for Response: Once the vision is established and shared, it seems to be set in stone. A vision is fluid and ever changing, and to sell the vision, it needs to allow for people to share their voices (Senge, 1994, p.317).
3. Keep Asking Why: For change to take, it needs to be focused at the root of the problem. Mark realizes that culture needs to change, but to dig deep enough to find the root of the issues, I would recommend continuing to ask ‘why’ and demanding answers (Senge, 1994).
4. Address Concerns Head-On: Mark has a gift of answering questions without actually answering them. One of the questions I asked Mark was in regards to what he fears about his change efforts. His answer ended up being about points which had already been made. While valid, those points showed that he skirts certain issues, a trait which can diminish employee’s confidence in him.
5. Repeat The Vision: The vision was clearly communicated initial, but a vision should be said and lived out until it becomes a part of the culture. Having experienced this lack of repetition in this case, but experiencing it in a previous organization, my personal change management theory incorporates the value of vision repetition.
6. Squelch The Gossip: One thing that Mark is aware of is that certain groups in the organization believe he is around because of a big profit sharing option with the owner, indicating that he’s only in it for the money. Money making may be a big part of it, but my personal change management theory would be to continually communicate that the growth that each person will experience as a result of major change will be career enhancing experience.
I’m confident in Mark’s ability to take this organization to places it never thought it could go, and I’m “on the bus” with him (Collins, 2001). This interview taught me some lessons that have helped me shape my personal change management theory both based on things Mark said, and didn’t say. My recommendations to him are based on my personal theory which is founded in previous experience with exceptional change managers as well as books I’ve read on the topic including the course text books.

Reference:
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