

Engaging the Business Side

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To technical support managers and professionals, it is no comfort to know that others encounter the same business end resistance to new ideas and improved methods that they experience. Implementation of business processes, systems, IT, engineering and other technological advancements frequently draws strong resistance from business managers. Support function professionals and others can execute two critical phases which will overcome this resistance, build enthusiastic participation and create a business side culture that supports change.

Business End Resistance to New Ideas and Improved Methods

The business end functions in a daily world driven by short term output demands and close performance scrutiny, which causes crippling performance errors and uncertainties requiring immediate attention. Business managers are paid to make sure that the products and services they create are delivered as promised. As skilled short term problem solvers, they continually create quick fix innovations. Many of these patched up methods are undocumented and may derail change efforts. Gaining business end support for change assures that these fixes do not become obstacles.

It is no surprise business people are naturally drawn to new methods that promise quick fixes and rapid short short-term performance gains. Their rapid acceptance of Six Sigma, Lean and 5S is due more to the short-term gains realized than long-term improvements. They are understandably skeptical of any idea that takes time to implement, ties people up and cuts into budgets.

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What solutions will they buy into?

Business end thinking is dominated by pressing, practical concerns and is therefore open to new ideas that help solve daily problems. It welcomes new technology when it meets immediate needs. Business people embrace administrative changes when they can easily adapt the new procedures and standards to existing methods. From a leadership point of view, business side people prefer technologies that provide dependable ways of enhancing individual problem solving and create collaborative alliances and team networks.

Four Common Business Side Concerns

Business side people are receptive to new approaches that address their immediate concerns. The closer a solution comes to meeting their most pressing needs, the lower their resistance to innovation.

1. **Performance and Measurement Issues:** They are receptive to new methods that resolve pressing performance issues and measures that allow them to manage performance more effectively.
2. **Technical and Procedural Issues:** They most readily accept cost effective, tangible, quick to implement methods. Quick results are very important. It is more difficult for business end people to become enthusiastic about elaborate, long-range projects where benefits will not be realized for more than six months.
3. **Management and Leadership Issues:** Business side people want methods that allow them to do a better job of managing costs, quality and productivity. They rarely connect technological solutions to leadership issues such as dealing with gray areas like unintended consequences, politics and conflicting priorities.
4. **Tribal and Personal Talent Issues:** Addressing people problems consumes a great deal of time. Tribal issues involving culture, organization climate and organization structure are difficult to address and often defy technological solutions. New technologies designed

to resolve tribal issues frequently set off an innovation rejection reflex because people are afraid of or do not understand the benefits of these changes. Techniques to improve utilization of personal talent are of great interest because the benefits can be immediate and people are less inclined to react negatively.

Phase 1: Five Simple Steps That Overcome Initial Resistance

1. Introduce methods that create outcomes that help meet their daily commitments. The clearer the connection between the method and its resolution of immediate issues, the easier it is to gain support. Be careful to assess how business side people get their jobs done with particular attention to undocumented quick fixes. Informal fixes can force a new project into a non-recoverable failure.
2. Present new methods in a clear, concise, jargon-light fashion. The simplest presentation of information is the best.
3. Emphasize methods which cause immediate, material results. Even when a long time frame project is involved, it is important to identify as many short term benefits as possible.
4. Favor methods that are easy to understand and fall within their technological grasp. This is especially important when first introducing technology changes to a business unit. As they become successful at adapting to change, more challenging technologies can be introduced.
5. Introduce methods they can learn quickly. Business side attention spans are short. The shorter the learning curve the better.

Four Common Business Side Solution Preferences

Solving problems and meeting organizational performance expectations dominate business side solution preferences. To avoid resistance, the proposed changes must match these interests.

1. **Micro and Macro Solutions:** When things are going well, the business side is open to fine tuning their local operations with micro solutions. During downturns, attention shifts to more global macro approaches.
1. **Short term and Long Term Solutions:** The business side prefers tactics that produce quick results in good times and long range strategies when times are difficult.
2. **Cost Containment and Profit Enhancement Solutions:** The appeal of cost or profit solutions is heavily influenced by the company business plan, initiatives and accounting model.
3. **Growth Supporting and Stability Building Solutions:** Market conditions, organization accounting model, executive initiatives and business model will heavily influence whether the business side favors growth or stability solutions.

Four Danger Areas Confronting Technical and Procedural Change

1. **Pre and Post Change Support:** Most good innovations fail due to poor preparation by the business side and failure to provide solid post-change assistance. Arrange adequate time and funds to cover extended periods of support. Because many technical people are neither interested nor talented in pre- and post-change assignments, you might consider borrowing or hiring people who have these skills.
1. **Communication:** Be careful with the expressions you use. Words with mixed meanings can cause confusion. To the business side, the term 'process' often refers to a specific local business procedure or method used to produce a product or service. It is not commonly used as a comprehensive description of all organization work activities.
2. **Ripple Effects:** Unintended consequences from a change can cause collateral damage to productivity. A reverse ripple effect from undocumented quick fixes and a change-resistant culture can quickly undermine the positive effects of change. Proper pre- and post-change engagement with the business side will eliminate unwanted ripple effects.

3. **Priorities:** Business side focus is situation dependent. As conditions change, attention rapidly shifts from one concern to another. Staying highly engaged with business people during the change process will prevent priority drift.

Phase 2: Moving To Long Term Solutions

Long term solutions require technical managers and professionals to build enduring relationships with the business side. Rapport is not immediate. Their trust is earned over time.

1. **Break the vocabulary barrier:** Keep your communications simple. Underestimate the technological sophistication of your business side clients. Produce presentations, training materials, manuals and procedure descriptions that business people who do not have the technological backgrounds to grasp new methods can easily understand.
2. **Build Alliances:** Combine your talents with theirs to solve problems. Collaborative teamwork based on shared problem solving activities form the strongest commitments.
3. **Implement from simple to complex:** No original plan survives the realities of implementation. Carry out change in small stages to allow necessary modifications. Beware of creating disrupting ripple effects and backlash by pursuing overly ambitious implementation schedules.
4. **Accommodate native time frames:** Business side time limits are short and priorities are volatile. Be sure your change plans have room for unexpected delays.
5. **Provide the global perspective:** Business people are paid to be preoccupied with short range solutions. Support functions are better prepared to deliver big scale views.
6. **Accommodate rapid commitment swings:** No matter how compelling your technology, you must expect frequent attention timeouts from the business side.
7. **Be prepared for continuous engagement:** Hit and run change projects create little lasting good will. Ongoing interaction with your business side counterparts during and between projects produces strong alliances and derails resistance.
8. **Institute quick wins:** Big picture technologists with aspirations for executing wide ranging changes often overlook the importance of quick wins that solidify business people's support during the project rollout.
9. **Use strengths to overcome weaknesses:** Business people are good at getting things done. Use their early and continuous input during a change project to ensure success during implementation.
10. **Refine strengths during growth periods:** Correct the most important weaknesses during hard times. Timing of change is critical to success. Even with budget limitations, business side people are more open to addressing flaws during economic downturns.

Business side is required to deliver products and services that meet outside customer expectations. They often perform under difficult conditions to meet demanding schedules. Delivery upsets require immediate corrective action. Major change initiatives that also provide quick wins quickly build support and cooperation. As the business side experiences positive change, the resistance culture begins to transform. Organization culture reflects what people believe they must do to be successful. When business side people see how applying new methods adds to their success, the culture morphs into a change-supporting environment. When you play to their strengths and help them overcome weaknesses, the business side will become a willing and enthusiastic partner in change.

Author

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