

Strategic commentary

Organizational behavior management strategy: thought leaders share their views on the HR profession and its direction for the future

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Although organizations and individuals have many different visions, the number one goal for both is to survive. Historically, survivability has often been strongly correlated with ability to change. However, knowing that “staying put” is not an option does not necessarily help to prevent resistance to change, and this is true for both organizations and individuals – that is, employers and employees.

Reaction to change

According to the traditional tripartite approach, reasoning can be compartmentalized into cognitive, emotional and intentional dimensions. Cognitive research is interested in inner reasoning, or tacit reality, where emotional and intentional domains can be considered more explicit and can be judged by actions. There have been numerous attempts to identify interactions between the three segments. For instance, noncognitive categories can be significantly (negatively or positively) polarized; they are usually framed as variations of different degrees of fear and overconfidence, and thereby create distinctive behavioral typologies for

both entities and individuals (Figure 1).

Different typologies entail different audience types. Without knowing the audience of each behavioral typology, it is impossible to manage change and determine a suitable deployment plan therefore. According to the literature, this will not only jeopardize the plan’s success but also the company’s future or survivability. This is also true for employees, as a lack of self-awareness might hurt their efforts to adapt to change and thus their ability to keep their job – that is, continue to survive. The contrast between the emotional and intentional axes in Figure 1 pertains to time. The former is a first response and is impulsive, whereas the latter is a subsequent response that is more conscious. Although there appears to be a hierarchal order, they can both contain the same piece of information, such that no change of mind is necessary, which creates the distinction between typologies.

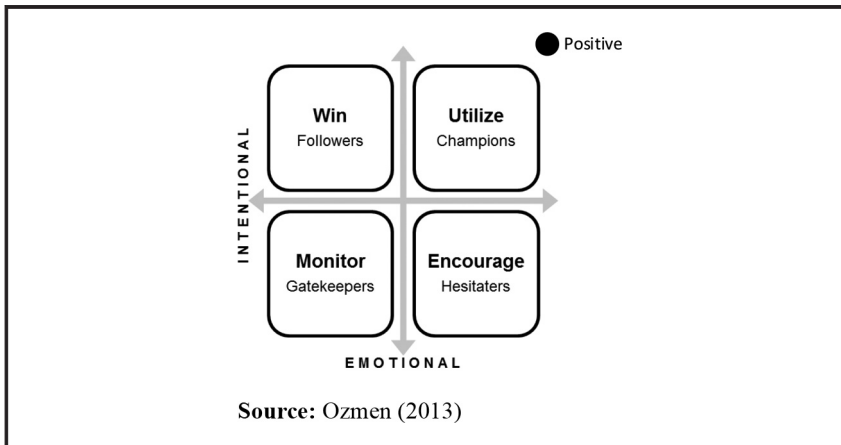
Champions: use

This is the most balanced group with respect to emotions and intentions. Depending on their skill set, champions might want to



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Figure 1 Organizational behavior management strategy



contribute for good. Thus, organizations should ensure that they are using this force to leverage ambassadors of new changes within the company. From this perspective, failing to use champions might entail some opportunity cost. Therefore, the sooner change managers identify this group, the more likely they will be to create a healthy start with strong foundations.

Gatekeepers: monitor

There are two main arteries for this group. They hold either fear or, conversely, a sort of “boiling frog syndrome” or overconfidence. In one sense, the former is hypothetically easier to address, as to develop fear one must have certain knowledge about what it is going on. However, the latter may refer to a group that thinks everything is perfect, or, worse, that is not even aware that there is a need for change. Organizations should monitor gatekeepers closely to ensure that they are not part of any crucial step, as gatekeeper type is the number one factor that hinders efforts toward change. However, in rare cases, the first (emotional) or even the second (intentional) response does not reflect the real intention or reaction.

Therefore, it is important to distinguish gatekeepers from “always-tells-the-truth” types (which makes HR management an art).

Followers: win

This group is somewhat driven by emotional negativity, though not in a harmful way. In general, emotions are momentary and therefore easy to fence. A slight form of fear may be identified, primarily through job skill-based self-questioning. Typically, proper training is sufficient to bring this group into the game. Ultimately, organizations should ensure that they manage this candidate pool to promote new champions.

Hesitants: encourage

This group is largely driven by intentional negativity. If the negativity is more momentary, encouragement might be enough to win these individuals over. However, residual negativity is more complex to address and doing so might take more time, whereas success in regain might be lower. Such success usually requires not only team (re)building sessions but also more profound techniques, such as focus groups or the Delphi method. However, this group is certainly

more than just a simple pool of candidates for champions and deserves credit as such.

Conclusion

The worst-case scenario for organizations is “not even knowing what they do not know,” whereas for employees it is being unaware that job stability is only possible with adaptability, meaning that change is not an enemy, but perhaps a friend. From this viewpoint, both parties are really in the same boat. The sooner they realize this, the less management will value top-down approaches and the more intelligent and helpful employees will become. In sum:

- Those who are unaware of their audience’s behavioral typologies cannot manage change.
- Failing to identify who is negative on either emotional or intentional dimensions (Gatekeepers) might jeopardize change attempts within the organization.
- Failing to use “Champions” might entail an opportunity cost.
- Emotional negativity is easier to address compared to intentional negativity.

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