

Changing Your Organization for the Better

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“Successfully Managing Change in Organizations: A Users Guide”
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Part 5: What Gets Measured Gets Done

Introduction

Whatever gets measured by an organization receives the majority of its attention. Simply by virtue of obtaining and displaying data, you and your organization are focusing, at least on a minimal level, on those areas that you are measuring. If these measures are not tracking as expected, corrective actions usually follow close at hand. In reality, therefore, whatever you and your organization decide to measure sets up a sub-process that ensures more attention is given to these areas vs. those things which are not measured.

Measurement is usually performed on a periodic basis. A process needs to be set up to gather the data. Sometimes many employees work many hours, both within and among departments to obtain what is needed. This information is then usually reported in some common communication forum, further indicating to everyone that the measure is important. This cycle is self-reinforcing. Conducting the measurement places even more focus onto the measures, compelling even more effort to make them successful.

Although some measures add value, others have little or none. The truly valuable measures bring focus to the organization. These measures promote understanding, clarifying what is working or not working, and even what is working well, but could still use improvement. The statement “What gets measured gets done” needs a corollary. It should state, “What gets measured gets done, but you need the right measures to get the right things done.” This raises an important question: What are the right measures?

What Should We Measure?

What should be measured is different for every company. Because each company, or even plants and offices within the same company, are at different stages of change, the appropriate measures may be completely different or at different levels of sophistication. So there needs to be some thought given to the selection of these measurement tools.

Select and use measures to influence behavior. For example, measuring profitability will positively influence behavior. If your firm was unprofitable and your change efforts turned it around, a chart measuring the effect on profitability would show employees that their efforts had been successful. As they watch the chart reflect the change from an unprofitable to a profitable operation, the measurement reinforces their hard work to improve performance.

It is important to identify what you want to change in the work process, then carefully put measures into place that will affect the selected behavior in the right direction. The key

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word in this last statement is *carefully*. You can easily introduce problems if you use the wrong measures.

Selecting the Measures

You only want to go through the selection process one time—and correctly. Do not undermine the process by rushing the selection step. As you go through the process of selecting measures keep the following points in mind.

- Use measures that are meaningful to others and serve to positively change behavior.
- Include others in the selection but stay focused. This provides a sense of ownership.
- Use straightforward measures. Some measures are so complicated that only a select few will have any idea of what they mean. These are measures you probably don't want to use. Measures should be easy to understand.
- Make your measures timely. Look at your critical work processes and measure weekly where possible. Weekly measures require additional work but they empower the change process.
- Take small steps. Although measures influence behavior in a large way, behavioral patterns and routines generally change slowly. Small steps enable the employees who are involved with the change to get used to what you are doing.
- Communicate the measurement. If you want to change behavior with measures, you need to communicate this information on a regular basis.
- Modify or improve the measure, but stay focused. This is usually in response to those involved exhibiting a higher level of understanding about the process and their role in the effort.
- Feed it or kill it but don't let it starve to death. If a measure is not contributing value, drop it, finding a replacement that will add value. Either feeding or killing measures is acceptable. Starvation is not. Starvation occurs when the measure is left unattended and unused.

Why Measures Fail

Measurement helps move the process of change forward, but quite often the best process and measures fail. There are four likely reasons.

1. The measurement is incorrect.
2. The measurement is being used for the wrong purpose.
3. The measure is being manipulated to show positive results when there are none.
4. There is an indication of organizational resistance.

Each of these is important and must be carefully considered when setting up the measures and throughout the measurement process.

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Accuracy

Some measures of the change process will be statistically accurate, most will not. A problem occurs, however, when management expects all change management measures to be exact and they spend a great deal of time (yours and theirs) trying to achieve perfect accuracy. For those of you who are in this category, you need to change your approach. Change management measures indicate trends. They provide information that then leads you to seek more definitive information for analysis. This is the true purpose of measurement in the change arena.

Measurement is a Critical Success Factor

The change process can be greatly aided and reinforced by good measurement and its communication to the workforce. The process can also be seriously set back by measures which are incorrect, incorrectly used or communicated poorly. The bottom line is to think through what you are going to measure, make sure the purpose is aligned with your objectives, communicate it for understanding, and use it correctly. If you do those things, measures will keep you on track and vividly support the change effort.

This concludes part 5 of 5 of “Changing Your Organization for the Better”. I hope you have found value from this five part article. While change can be over powering with a strategy to achieve success it ca be accomplished.

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