2. The Human Connection

Understanding how individual employees respond to change

This effort is a continuation of our Transformation Tools found at:
OPM.gov/Reshaping

Understanding How Individual Employees Respond to Change Events

If you look at the many online "how-to" guides for successful Robotic Process Automation (RPA) implementation, the focus is on rational thought processes; for example, secure top management support, communicate to employees, train employees, etc.

Yet, responses to change efforts are complex. It is too simplistic to think that people respond to change efforts as either accepting the change or resisting the change. Remembering that individuals' decisions are not always made on logical and rational bases can help us improve how we introduce change to our employees.

The Change Event Sequence

Recent research (Oreg, Bartunek, Lee, & Do, 2018) suggests that change events are triggers for ***emotional*** responses; how people ***feel*** about the change is a driver of their ***behavioral response*** to the change.

If employees feel positive about the change, they are likely to exhibit supporting behaviors, while negative emotions can result in behaviors that not only do not support the change but may even actively interfere with successful implementation.

The Change Event Sequence is as follows:

Change Event → Emotional Response ⇄ Thinking about how the change will affect you → Behavioral Response

The sequence of events that is needed to bring about change in an organization is referred to as the change sequence. Whether the intended change is from a less participative to a more participative corporate culture or along some other dimension, the process tends to follow a certain pattern.

Consideration for Successful RPA Change Efforts

There are some key questions to ask when you begin an RPA effort. What information or event(s) surrounding the change effort have proven to motivate the employee in the past? Why has it proven to be motivational to this employee? The employee can be motivated to resist the change, proactively support it, become psychologically

disengaged from the effort, or passively accept the change. Each of these has differential effects upon successful change implementation.

Nudging

The behavioral science researchers at the Rotman School of Management came up with the concept of "nudging" (Ly, Mazar, Zhao, & Soman, 2013). **Nudging** refers to the process by which organizations influence behavior by "changing the way choices are presented in the organization's environment" (Ly et al., 2013: 5), with the ultimate goal of engineering a particular outcome (e.g., acceptance of change).

The **implication** from nudging research is that organizations should frame the change effort in ways that take into account individual employees' concerns, which usually come from emotional responses, as opposed to presenting only the rational, logical reasons for why the change is beneficial to the workforce. In other words, gauge employees' attitudes (emotions and attitudes), and ensure that information is communicated in an accurate and timely manner with attention paid to how emotions play into behaviors and actions surrounding the change effort.

Successful Practice:
Frame the change effort in ways that take into account individual employees' concerns, which usually come from emotional responses, as opposed to presenting only the rational, logical reasons for why the change is beneficial to the workforce.

Behavioral Science References

Ly, K., Mazar, N., Zhao, M., & Soman, D. 2013. *A practitioner's guide to Nudging*. Rotman School of Management: University of Toronto. White paper (March 15).

Oreg, S., Bartunek, J., Lee, G., & Do, B. 2018. An affect-based model of recipients' responses to organizational change events. *Academy of Management Review, 43 (1)*, 65-86.