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# The Great Barrier Grief

## How to steer clear of change-initiative heartache

Most of you have been involved in a change initiative of one form or another. Along the way, you no doubt learned that leading change is one of the most difficult, gut-wrenching experiences an organization can undergo. There always is resistance to change, even in spite of overwhelming evidence of its need. What's wrong with these naysayers, anyway? Maybe nothing—or maybe we're not listening.

Getting people to commit to change relies on their answers to the following questions:

- What's in it for me? Everyone wants to know why change is necessary and what its impact will be. Will I still have a job when it's all through? Will my pay be affected? The corollary is: What's the consequence if I don't help enact the change?
- What is expected of me? How will this change affect what I do? For what will I be held accountable under the new system?
- How do I meet these new expectations? There is a Gary Larson cartoon that shows a dog with a worried look on his face standing on a tightrope high above the crowd at a circus while balancing a ball on his nose and twirling a hula hoop. The caption reads, "Fido realizes that he is an old dog and this is a new trick." For many of us, change represents a new trick and, like Fido, there's no net beneath us.

There also is one more question, asked primarily by frontline employees: Why do I need to change? I'm making a quality product. I work hard. Maybe somebody else needs to change." Here is the heart of the challenge—defining exactly what needs modifying. And the change needed often isn't how the work is done, but how the work is supported. That is a management process issue.

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Examples of management missteps include the failure to convert the business plan into a realistic sales and operations plan; developing a master schedule that does not effectively compare resources to requirements; and, more often than not, a broken support process. Broken support processes

often involve communication breakdowns between product development and operations; a disjointed enterprise resources planning system, which can inhibit an original equipment manufacturer's communication with its supplier network; insufficient visibility and capability to match available capacity to customer requirements; and the inability of the execution and control system to manage workflow.

For instance, consider a company known for high-quality products, which, in spite of its reputation, became unprofitable and eventually went bankrupt. Some early attempts to revive the business focused on changing the manufacturing processes. While managers supported the effort, severe pushback from frontline employees eventually derailed the change initiative.

The "we make a good product—maybe someone else needs to change" argument forced a review that ultimately revealed the root cause of the problem: ineffective planning and execution systems. By fixing those support processes, manufacturing performance improved dramatically, even though no change was made to the ways products are manufactured.

More often than not, if support processes such as planning and execution are continuously improved, then frontline employees should be able to produce the right product meeting the right requirements in the right quantities at the right time for the right customers. And that's a change everyone can support.

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