
Research Capsules

W H Y D O N ' T W E C H A N G E ?

Why don't we change? Why don't people grow, and why don't organizational leaders establish the type of climate, policies, and structures that result in human and organizational development?

We certainly have heard enough warning bells and clarion calls. Restructuring, reengineering, and corporate downsizing are bringing the message into almost every niche in the workplace. And the need for change will continue and accelerate.

Saginaw Valley State University professor Joseph Ofori-Dankwa, whose research is featured in this column, cites three important trends that will affect American business and its culture: massive demographic changes in the workforce, fewer international companies locating in the United States, and more U.S. companies going global.

How will we cope? How will we compete?

The researchers featured in this column have addressed key questions vital to our success. Their findings have implications valuable for human resource development professionals.

Resisting or Committing to Change

Peter Carlson and Jill Logan of Healthy Companies investigated the factors that determine whether people will be committed or resistant to organizational change.

They found that we can trace employees' resistance back to the assumptions organizations make about people and change. Many of those assumptions are misleading, outmoded, or simply unfounded.

A catch-all phrase. For example, the researchers determined that "resistance to change" is often used as a convenient catch-all way to explain re-

sults that managers did not expect or did not understand—because it is a simple description of a complex set of human responses to new situations. They suggest that people's largely unconscious reactions to change may not be based on willful obstinacy, but may in fact be the result of assertions of their own sense of dignity, autonomy, and integrity.

Considerable research supports the existence of a strong link between employee participation and commitment to change, but the researchers noted that commitment is really a by-product of genuine respect for individuals and their values.

The implications. Through their research, Carlson and Logan arrived at the following insights:

- ▶ Organizations need to manage their emotional life as well as their economic life. When organizations deny the validity of emotions, they foreclose on the possibility of commitment, which involves the heart, not just the mind.
- ▶ Resistance and emotional responses are important sources of data for organizations to collect and analyze. They point the way to problems that lie at a deeper level and need to be addressed.
- ▶ Change takes time and is ongoing. Radical overnight overhauls are likely to provoke the most resistance.
- ▶ Organizations need to balance a top-down approach to change with a bottom-up approach. A bottom-up approach allows organizations to discuss the perspectives, values, and motivations of different people and to build communication.
- ▶ Organizations need new tools to manage change effectively. Strategic dialogue is such a tool.

For a copy of the report, contact Peter Carlson or Jill Logan at Healthy Companies, 1420 16th Street NW, Washington, DC 20036; phone 202/234-9288; fax 202/234-9289.

Building committed, competent people and workforces just may be the biggest business challenge of our times. These three research studies provide insights into that challenge.

Building Empowerment: One Small, Intriguing Step

According to Leon Kappelman and Tom Richards, professors in the business school at the University of North Texas, early participation in the change process is an important element in successful change elements.

For participation to pay off, the researchers say, it must be combined with meaningful information and real influence. They contend that real influence is what employee empowerment is about. Organizations that provide workers with opportunities to influence decisions promote worker motivation and reduce worker resistance toward organizational changes. Empowerment fulfills individual employees' need for a sense of control.

One small step. Kappelman and Richards document a first step that one organization took on the road to employee empowerment. The step was small, but it resulted in large benefits to the organization, and it is widely replicable. It increased employee motivation regarding the change program. And because the early empowerment was provided in conjunction with training, it enhanced training outcomes.

The setting for Kappelman and Richards's field study was a \$40 billion interstate bank. The research took place at 52 recently acquired bank branches, during the information-system conversion phase of a larger organizational change. The system had been operational for more than five years at more than 600 existing branches in five states. It was already a success; it met the bank's technical and organizational requirements. Because there were no concerns about the quality of the object being changed, the researchers were able to focus on the characteristics and effects of the change process itself.

The information system was a key technological component of the organization's total-quality-management program. The system provided real-time integration of all customer activities so that any branch or service center could provide complete service.

Researchers pretested a questionnaire about two weeks before the switch to the new system. Five weeks

Empowered to Change

Compared with other employees, empowered workers were

- ▶ 88 percent more motivated to take part in organizational change efforts
- ▶ 146 percent more satisfied with their training
- ▶ 99 percent more satisfied with the overall organization change.

after the changeover, they distributed the primary research questionnaires. They polled the entire population of 512 branch employees; 146 usable questionnaires were returned.

All of the data were collected by self-reports on the questionnaires.

Attitudes and behaviors. For each employee, the researchers measured two behavioral variables and three attitudinal variables. Behaviors are the visible activities in which employees participate. Attitudes are the invisible psychological states of employees.

The two behaviors researchers mea-

REAL INFLUENCE
IS WHAT
EMPOWERMENT
IS ABOUT

sured were training and empowerment. Training was simply the fact that an employee went to training sessions; all employees participated in the training activities. Empowerment was the fact that some managers permitted their employees to schedule their own training—allowing them a small degree of control during the change process.

The three attitudes measured were motivation for change, training satisfaction, and satisfaction with the change.

When examining the correlations among the five variables, researchers found that, compared with the other employees, the empowered workers were 88 percent more motivated, 146 percent more satisfied with their training, and 99 percent more satisfied with the organizational change as a whole.

The researchers also analyzed the contribution of training and empowerment to changes in each of the three attitude variables. That simultaneous analysis revealed that empowerment explained 440 percent more about the variation in levels of motivation, 623 percent more of the changes in training satisfaction, and 375

percent more of the variation in overall satisfaction (calculated in terms of standardized coefficients from each multiple-regression analysis).

Training provided an opportunity to empower and motivate employees. Empowering workers in one small way (allowing them to schedule their own training sessions) during the implementation of the organizational change provided them with a small degree of control over a change process over which they otherwise had no control. Providing workers with this small amount of control, say Kappelman and Richards, also gave management the opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to empowerment.

The researchers contend that such early demonstrations are likely to breed early worker buy-in to a change—reducing employee resistance and increasing the chances of program success. And in this situation, allowing employees to schedule their own training was a sensible, low-cost, low-risk first step on the road of employee empowerment.

Kappelman and Richards believe that their findings have implications regarding the success of most organizational change that affects or relies on employees. The results support the concept that empowerment is critical to the success of organizational change efforts.

Also important are the economic implications of these findings. Motivated employees are more productive employees, say the researchers. And satisfied workers are more productive workers.

Other conclusions. Considering people's psychological dimensions is essential to management of a change effort. Researchers found that providing employees with an empowering experience in conjunction with their train-

ing significantly improved the outcomes of that training. It also increased employees' motivation and satisfaction with the change. This occurred because the empowering experience provided employees with a need-meeting sense of control during a time of organizational change.

To make training investments pay off, HRD professionals must consider the entire training experience—not just the content, but the context. In this study, training alone provided little measurable change in employee attitudes and explained almost nothing about their attitudes toward the success of the change effort. Training combined with empowerment provided a great deal more statistical insight into the outcomes.

Even limited empowerment can have big payoffs. Most employees will never have the empowering opportunity of contributing to the early design and planning of a major organizational change. But almost every employee will receive training. This study shows that giving employees a small empowering experience can have a profound effect on their motivation and satisfaction with organizational change.

For a copy of the study, contact Thomas Richards or Leon Kappelman, Department of Business, Computer Information Systems, University of North Texas, Box 13677, Denton, TX 76203-6677; 817/565-3110 or 800/735-2989.

Switching Paradigms

As we navigate change, we need to be asking some critical questions: Where have we been? Where are we going? Do we need to change direction? To tack with the wind?

Professor Joseph Ofori-Dankwa's research on diversity and "diversimilarity" addresses those questions about diversity management in organizations. His article, "From Diversity to Diversimilarity: Shifting Paradigms To Match Global and National Realities," will appear in *Policy Choices for Michigan* (Michigan State University Press, 1996.)

Ofori-Dankwa describes intensive diversity-management efforts of such organizations as Avon, Dow Corning, Ford, General Motors, Pacific Gas and

Electric, and G.E. Silicone. Such efforts have led to a variety of improvements:

- ▶ reducing the costs of integrating a diverse workforce
- ▶ attracting the best personnel
- ▶ gaining a marketing edge because of organizational members' new insights and cultural sensitivity
- ▶ increasing organizational creativity and problem-solving abilities
- ▶ creating organizations that are more flexible and adaptable to changes in the environment.

The diversity paradigm provides many benefits. But according to Ofori-Dankwa, it focuses primarily on valuing and appreciating individuals; it pays little or no attention to appreciating and valuing the similarities among people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Ofori-Dankwa calls for a new paradigm that values both differences and similarities—diversimilarity. Its premise is that individuals from diverse demographic and cultural backgrounds have similarities that also have to be identified, valued, and appreciated.

According to Ofori-Dankwa, we cannot meet national and global realities unless we begin the process of "similation"—the search for commonalities across diversities. This differs from the notion of assimilation, which uses the dominant culture as the standard of reference and attempts to make minority cultures and individuals similar to that dominant culture.

Suggested strategies for policy-makers and leaders include increasing community awareness, undertaking transformations in educational curriculum, and changing diversity paradigms that underlie training programs.

For more information, contact Joseph Ofori-Dankwa, Saginaw Valley State University, 7400 Bay Road, University Center, MI 48710; 517/790-4000.

"Research Capsules" is a quarterly column by **Linda Morris**. Send submissions, comments, and suggestions for topics to her at *American Management Systems*, 4000 Legato Road, 10th Floor, Fairfax, VA 22033; phone 703/267-2215.

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