

OPINION

Winning Hearts & Minds

IS KEY TO SUCCESSFUL TRANSFORMATION

Leaving no stone unturned in an approach to major organisational transformation projects requires a detailed plan and an analytical approach in pursuit of a smooth transition. Yet how often is workforce engagement overlooked as a route to unlocking long-term transformation success?

BY DAVID HALEY

Supporting businesses by developing and optimising customer journeys, maximising the value in data and creating a customer-first culture, empowered to deliver excellence are laudable business transformation objectives. Yet with all the bells and whistles a business process focussed or significant ITO project can provide, the absence of a strong vision and strategy to engage teams in a collaborative programme of change can be the difference between success and failure.

Authentic and coordinated cultural engagement is the cornerstone on which total transformation, the broader process of business reinvention supported by digitisation, can succeed. This is no mean feat. Understanding the culture of an organisation, working with it and then understanding how technology can fit seamlessly into it, even advance it in new ways to aid the total transformation, is the challenge that must be met.

On the journey

Many organisations, whilst they acknowledge the traditional people-related barriers to change, choose

merely to communicate with their employees rather than to engage. Delivering growth through long term organisational transformation cannot simply occur by telling people what is happening - it will only truly take place by bringing your most critical asset, your employees, with you on the journey. Culture is usually more difficult to change than technology or business transformation services, especially so in conservative organisations. In general, people usually start to resist change when they believe they will lose something of value, or they fear they will not be able to adapt to new ways.

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What's more, when organisational change goes wrong, this is often because it is being treated purely as the implementation of a new process. Any momentum that is established at the start of a transformation journey erodes and traction is lost just at the time when a strong will and determination to succeed is most needed.

Communication versus Engagement

A degree of trepidation when transformational change is communicated is completely understandable, even unavoidable. If teams feel they don't understand the vision and strategy or feel that they haven't been able to contribute to that strategy, those logical tensions arise and the blockers to change materialise. Therefore, it is so important to understand the differences between communication and engagement. Communication focusses on content and target audience, while engagement is more about who to listen to and what they hear in that conversation and that the communication has landed with the target audience. While communication can happen without engagement, engagement cannot happen without communication: they go hand-in-glove.

Building trust through open and honest engagement and listening to feedback - all feedback - and acting on that stimulus will demonstrate that change is a collective effort. Employees will then feel more valued and truly part of the solution, worrying less about the impact of a failed programme or what impact the programme will have

on their own role. Employee engagement in transformational change should not be seen as a line item of a project plan; it is at the very heart of successful transformation.

Collective effort

It's no surprise that an effective and sincere engagement strategy is more likely to get buy-in and co-operation from key stakeholders because they are engaged and become part of the solution. This means they are not, as so often happens, sitting on the side-lines predicting failure. In sporting terms, they are on the pitch trying their best for their team.

At Atos, we have developed a robust approach to helping to ensure that engagement objectives are fulfilled and in developing a culture where the fundamental objectives at the core of any digital transformation projects are recognised, understood and ultimately embraced. At the core of our approach to transition is our communication and engagement strategy with two workstreams that need to be aligned to ensure continuity of service and the creation of excitement and interest in the future direction of the business.

The first covers off in a demonstrably successful way, all aspects of TUPE using clear and methodical communication methods, individually, collectively and from a union perspective to ensure safe passage. The second brings the crucial elements of engagement to life. In larger organisations especially where there tends to be myriad channels and methods to land the right messaging at the right time with clarity and purpose, the use of digital employee communications provides dynamic opportunities to engage the audience. Regular bulletins, CEO town halls and video blogs might run alongside bespoke techniques



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such as drop-in hubs - as we did recently for a significant programme involving a large financial services client - so that new colleagues can discuss any concerns that they may have confidentially. Establishing feedback via culture champions; which can be swiftly acted upon is another recent example of a technique deployed to good effect.

True collaboration

Ultimately, the methods employed to engage can be tailored and will evolve

over the period of the project. What cannot be given such a degree of flexibility is the consistency of the core messaging that should be repeated and reinforced at every available opportunity.

The cultural engagement approach needs to be supported from the top and be treated with the same structured approach as all core objectives of the project. If working with an external transformation provider, this can only really be achieved through true collaboration - with objectives of the client and the service provider aligning not only to deliver the technical and process solutions to exacting standards but in a way that is sympathetic to the specific organisational culture.

Inconsistencies within messaging, tone or engagement can really undermine the engagement plan, sowing confusion which can lead to doubt and even discord, again with considerable implications for the overall project. Therefore, while recognising that a prevailing organisational culture exists, within this teams and people are diverse - a key strength to be recognised, harnessed even. Different departments with different backgrounds, business objectives, and points of view need to come together, first to understand then align and unite around a common objective.

Get this right and the huge satisfaction of knowing that you have a workforce of advocates for advancing change is a hugely powerful transformation enabler that is integral to co-creating a truly customer-centric service culture. ■

David Haley is senior vice president, business transformation services, Atos UK and Ireland