

Management and Performance Associates – March-April-2016 Dealing with uncertainties in a positive way

The world becomes more and more complex on a daily basis. Paradigms are constantly being broken. Crises are everywhere and it's getting progressively harder to visualize beyond the horizon.

These discontinuities are noticed at our offices on a daily basis. Companies are being reorganized, some are being bought and others are being acquired. Strategies change and new products and services are launched. Some companies expand; others need to reduce operations. All of this happens at an ever increasing speed.

So, how can we navigate this turbulence and become stronger from these experiences? This is one of the biggest current professional challenges.

Resilience is one of the most critical competencies to successfully navigate change. Change can be an emotional roller coaster and resilience translates to the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties and provide productive answers to new demands. In other words, it is the ability to adapt – fast – to new scenarios.

Some people are naturally resilient. Others are resistant. If you fall in the second group, the following may help you develop this critical survival competence in any changing environment.

Transition

The emotional experience associated to change is called transition. It is the root of discomfort and the addition of stress in uncertain times.

Some people react with shock and denial when facing change. Not dealing with these emotions in the moment of transition (from *what is (was)* to *what will be*) drastically reduces the ability of response. Negative emotional reactions are natural and expected. Everybody needs time for transition to deal with their emotions. Those who adapt quickly – those who are more resilient – have an

important role in helping those who transition more slowly and have high emotional cost.

Meaning

Research points to two main reasons why people resist change. One relates to the inability to understand its meaning. People are not willing to adjust to the new scenario if they do not understand the reason for the change and its meaning – both overall and personal meaning.

Take the example of a company that sees its main product destroyed by a competitor's new business model. Most probably, all departments of this company – and its employees – will be impacted. There will be changes in processes, the product itself, the sales approach and job profiles. Some positions may be eliminated. The possible initial resistance to this repositioning may be reduced if employees understand the direction the market is moving toward, its trends, the new consumers' mindset, and more importantly, what could happen if the company is unable to adapt.

This could be the easier part of the challenge, if we have information. Therefore, communication becomes critical. People may not like the direction the company is moving toward, but at least they will understand why.

Anchors

The second reason people are resistant to change relates to the degree of commitment to personal beliefs and values. It becomes a problem when some beliefs are transformed into anchors, preventing successful transition.

A good example would be the manager of a much younger team which does not value hierarchy. Imagine that the manager believes the best results are obtained through formal use of authority and obedience, based on the premise that he has more experience and positional power. He therefore expects compliance to his demands and instructions. His probability of building a high performance team is close to zero.

On the other hand, if this manager revisits his beliefs and values, and comes to the conclusion that his management style is out of place in today's world he will be able to acquire the needed competencies to obtain synergy and to productively deal with the team.

Lack of Preparation

Other researchers have concluded that another reason people resist change is their perceived lack of preparation to perform within the new environment (lack of skills, knowledge, competence and mindset).

Preparation is a conscious and on-going effort that includes:

- 1) Monitoring the environment and being alert to new trends in business, technology, consumer habits and the competition.
- 2) Being open to receiving feedback in order to map personal vulnerabilities and development gaps.
- 3) Exploring training and development alternatives.
- 4) Valuing changes and focusing on the opportunities for learning.

Loss

Finally, we propose four questions for reflection during transition:

- 1) What is changing?
- 2) Why is it changing?
- 3) What will specifically be different for me?
- 4) Who is going to lose what?

Change normally brings loss and how we deal with it determines whether transition succeeds as well as how long it takes. When inevitable, these are some ways to successfully deal with the loss:

- 1) Substitute the loss for something equivalent
- 2) Redefine what the loss means, use a positive mindset
- 3) Reinvent yourself
- 4) If the above is not feasible, then resignation and moving ahead as soon as possible is the recommendation.

Not all changes generate negative feelings. But they all generate loss. Take the example of somebody beginning a managerial career. Before this move, her results depended on her dedication and efforts. Now, as a manager, her results depend on the team's performance. The loss of control over results needs to be overcome, to avoid centralization, micro-management, lack of trust of the team and no staff development. What can she do?

1. She can substitute her hands-on approach with the responsibility of monitoring and developing her staff. Instead of meetings to control performance, meetings can provide feedback, provide orientation and offer coaching.
2. She can redefine her loss of control with the possibility of fully assuming her managerial role, i.e.: remove obstacles to her team's performance, support the team during emotional transitions, think about process improvements, better understand the strategic direction of the company and create conditions to effectively contribute to its achievement.
3. She can also reinvent herself, building the image of a manager who develops people, with the same engagement level as she used to achieve her individual results.

The earlier we deal with loss, the faster we can find the needed energy to move on and lead (or be a partner) in the change process.

Resilience – the capacity to adapt to change – is critical because it challenges the status quo and traditional thinking patterns, while valuing creativity, proactively generating alternatives, working effectively when facing ambiguity and collaborating in the identification of development areas for the individuals and the organization.

MAPA Consulting can help you and your team to develop these competencies.

See you next time. We welcome your feedback.