

Does Your Business Need to Be on a Diet?

If your organization is indulging in one transformation or change after another without taking the time to think about change management, then the answer is probably “yes.”

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Why did I just eat that?!

This phrase comes to mind often around the office (or at home) when failing to avoid an unhealthy snack or sweet. There you are, getting through the day, trying to be good: drinking water, not sitting for too long, and avoiding salty snacks, doughnuts, or an extra slice or scoop ... and you slip. You eat it.

For better or for worse, you've gone down the path of indulgence. It's often easier to indulge than it is to find discipline. You may try to stick to healthier eating habits in general, but why? It is far harder and takes way more energy than merely indulging

as you wish. You can deal with the consequences later.

What about on a professional level? How often are you “indulging” in complacency or apathy in the workplace? Are you stopping to think about the consequences of your actions or lack of actions? You can continue transforming, but without boundaries, you could be doing more damage than good.

One particularly powerful boundary or application for workplace transformation is change management. Change management is a structured approach to shifting/transitioning individuals, teams, and



organizations from a current state to a desired future state. We are not all blessed with being at our desired state of physical fitness all the time. Structuring an approach to discipline ourselves and to have ownership of our actions and results enables us to achieve our goals. The same goes for change management. Giving people a personal stake in a workplace change or transformation is what enables achievement and motivates a team to meet or beat milestones. If you don't want real change or improvement in the workplace, stop doing change management. Keep indulging. It's that easy.

Why some diets, or changes, don't stick.

As individuals, we are always on the go. For example, it's easier to go through a drive-through than it is to prep and cook a meal. Companies are always on the go too. Cost reduction, customer experience, IT, and process optimization are all examples of areas in which corporations strive to improve or influence the market. We go-go-go and follow shiny objects before we stop to think or put out fires. With so much movement and at such a fast pace, it takes a great deal of effort and energy

to slow down and plan properly. Change management and a structured approach are thrown to the wayside as we quickly try to enhance.

Regardless of the functional area (finance, IT, marketing, etc.), transformations will always affect people. Who wants to give up their cravings and stick to a diet of raw vegetables? Hardly anyone. The same goes for people and change. It can cause anxiety. This is what makes change management so difficult. People will resist, push back, and sometimes struggle to understand why a transformation is necessary. Until they truly understand and believe what

is happening and what the results will be, they won't want any part of it. Teaching and knowledge transfer take effort. Sometimes it's easier to force-feed, but that won't get you into good habits.

Oftentimes, we choose a diet that's not the right fit for us. We fail to research our individual needs, our level of needed physical fitness, or what a meal should truly consist of. It's not just about having a diet; it's about what the diet entails and how it fits you personally. If the documentation you leverage for a transformation is focused on the wrong things, it won't get you very far. A poorly focused training or communications plan is not going to convince your team to change. A pet's diet cannot be leveraged for a human diet. In the same fashion, documentation and change management collateral cannot come out of a box. It must be cleverly crafted and tailored to meet individual needs.

How to avoid anxiety with change management.

Business is not static; it is an ever-changing environment that shifts and moves in all directions. With all these moving pieces and innovations, it's important to keep the basic aspects of the business running. Today, businesses grow and diversify faster than ever, stuffing more and more in, the same as we may do when we overeat. To prevent a business from getting out of control, you've got to set boundaries. When you start a diet, you must ensure you're covering your basic caloric intake and getting enough nutrients. When you start looking at how to enhance your diet—how to really make it work for you to achieve



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results—that's where change management comes into play.

Think about a change you may have experienced at work. For example, cost controls. Now more than ever, companies are struggling to keep costs down. How can you convince your workforce to do more with less? It's not about doing the same things as before with fewer people; it's about changing the way you operate and becoming more efficient. This type of redesign only works if people adopt updated processes and new ways of working.

Giving your body the right preparation and easing into the change can help you adjust and adopt your new, healthy eating habits. The repercussions of not properly informing and training your workforce as you go into cost-control measures are what cause such projects to fail. Forcing someone to do something often results in pushback or cheating. Leading employees along the process, and giving them a chance to own it

themselves, makes a strategic change such as cost control not only applicable, but also potentially more effective than envisioned.

Healthy eating is not so bad, and people CAN deal with change.

Tell someone they must change their diet, and they will likely resist. But helping people understand why they need to diet and to work with you to choose the best diet to meet desired goals, while also satiating their appetites, will result in a diet that works with, not against, them.

Tell employees they need to cut costs, and they'll push back. From their point of view, they need everything they have and more. With cost controls in place, employees must understand how cost-cutting actions align with the strategy of the company, how cost controls will provide long-term well-being and growth,

and that the measures enforcing cost controls are fair. If all of that is in place and well understood, leadership will bring employees with them along the cost control journey. Help your colleagues and team understand why cost reduction must happen, and let them identify how they can reduce costs themselves. They'll likely produce even more effective methods than you had originally identified.

People are less likely to resist change if they are empowered to contribute to and help own the process. Empowerment, enabling others, and listening to your employees get to the heart of employee engagement—a must-have when you want your business to evolve. When people better understand the strategy, goals, implementation, and governance of the change, they become more engaged. (For more information about employee engagement, see the article “Exploring the Dynamics of Employee Engagement” from the Fall 2016 issue of *The Jabian Journal*.) You can employ change management strategies and tactics to understand the areas the change impacts, processes, technology, culture, etc., and then dig deeper into the human aspects that will drive or prevent lasting change.

The puzzle of integrating change with the business and culture.

Though it may seem counterintuitive, while focusing on cost reduction, investing in change management will help to implement (through employee ownership) effective actions to reduce costs throughout the organization. It's worth the extra expense to invest in healthy and lasting change that will enhance and not hinder your company from achieving its goals.

When you invest in proper change management, you better leverage the assets you have at hand. Business processes, IT architecture, and operating procedures, when leveraged appropriately, can all enhance a change or transformation. Managers who know how to work with (not against) your company's culture and way of working help to align, integrate, and move a change along efficiently and effectively.

Finding the right diet for you, just like finding the right change management activity for a transformation to work, takes effort. A dietician cannot only help you achieve your health goals but can also provide valuable information as to how your body functions and how you can manage your own fitness. These insights will apply not only to your eating habits, but also to your general health (exercise, sleep, mental health, etc.). The same is true of change management: when studying your human capital, you gain valuable insight into your lines of business, leadership, employee engagement, business structure, and more. Change management can move you beyond a momentary change and guide you into larger, lasting strategic movement. Institutionalizing change management practices, like adopting a diet that works for you over the long term, can move your company into a culture of collaboration and welcoming change for improvement.

It's time to use change management for lasting transformation.

If you want to take the easy route, keep indulging. Don't invest in change management. It's easier not to think about it and not to invest in it. The problem with this choice is that eventually, your indulgence will catch

up with you. The same is true of our business choices: ignore the impacts of a change, and you will continuously be dealing with processes that aren't properly adopted, inefficiencies, disgruntled employees, and more. ❌

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