

Co-Create Solutions with Employees

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Just a reminder, try to involve employees when making changes in your organization.

Over the years, I have had numerous opportunities to assist clients who want to improve their organizations using various organizational interventions such as employee satisfaction surveys, teambuilding, restructuring, etc. They typically evaluate the organization's strengths and weaknesses and then implement recommendations to try to make a happier and more productive workplace. Sometimes management chooses to deeply involve employees in the process, sometimes they choose not to.

Recently, I have been noticing a trend which shows less emphasis on involving employees in the change process. This is not based on any scientific research, just general observations I have made myself, and observations made by other consultants who do similar work. Let's take an employee survey process to illustrate what I mean.

An employee satisfaction survey is administered, we harvest the survey data, present the results and recommendations to management, and develop action plans to implement the recommendations. Next, management presents the recommendations and action plans to the employees to solicit their input, after the fact. It's an efficient and comfortable way for management and consultants to address employee satisfaction survey results, however, not always the most effective. Most of the time, it is more effective to involve the employees in co-creating the recommendations and action steps rather than just presenting them to the employees for input.

I am sure that everyone who reads this knows that when we involve people in creating solutions that impact their work, they are more apt to "buy-in" and support the implementation of the solutions. Yet it seems to me that we have been straying away from this approach that was so popular in the early and mid-nineties. Some of the reasons for this may be:

- **Less resources.** Involvement costs money – with the economy in its current state, there are less resources available to allow for employees to be involved in the problem-solving process.
- **Increased complexity.** The world is getting more complex and requires more specialists with deep skills. Consultants are specialists experienced in developing recommendations to address complex organizational issues and therefore should provide solutions.
- **No time for employees.** With all of the workforce reductions that are taking place, employees are under increased pressure to do more with less and really don't have the time to be involved in anything outside the scope of their normal job.
- **Less patience for process.** Because of the speed of change, management is becoming less tolerant of process. They want decisions, actions, and progress, and if the progress is not in the right direction, they make adjustments.



Now let's take a look at some reasons why we should consider involving employees more in solving organizational issues.

- **Saves money in the long run.** The initial “up front” cost to involve employees will be saved over time because it will reduce false starts and save implementation costs.
- **Builds a sense of value.** All employees need to feel like they are adding value to the organization. What better way to make them feel valued than to ask what they think and actually use their ideas.
- **Mutual empathy.** Many employees don't see the “big picture” but most managers don't see the “small picture”. Co-creation helps employees start to see the big picture and managers start to see the small, giving each a renewed appreciation of each others role.
- **Employees contribute to problems.** Employees contribute greatly to the dynamics of the organization and need to take part in changing it. Both managers and employees need to know what they should do differently to improve it.

I am not suggesting that we need to involve employees in all organizational problem-solving. What I am suggesting is that as leaders and consultants we step back, evaluate the nature of the problems we are dealing with, and ask ourselves, “Would these problems be addressed more effectively with employee input?”

If we don't enlist employee support and commitment to improving organizations, we can liken it to rowing a boat upstream—you make progress but it takes a lot of energy. If we can involve them, we can all row with the current, make progress, and expend less energy in the process, and even have time for a short lunch!

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