

Making changes in the organisation work for you and your employees

Gregg Brown, Change Management Specialist talks about how the employer and employees can effectively deal with changes in the company, for the good of the company



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In today's world that is moving to become technology-driven, change is eminent both in the professional and personal aspect of life. Back in the day, when the word 'change' is mentioned around the workplace, people would normally picture layoffs, change in management which might lead to negative thinking and result to unneeded fear and stress. Now, change would usually involve upgrading equipment, changes in processing methods, or even new IT systems. It doesn't sound that dangerous or threatening, but employees are still skeptical about adapting to changes around the workplace.

MALAYSIA SME® talked to Gregg Brown, Change Management Specialist and author of the book 'Ready...Set...Change Again!' to get more insight on how to ease employees into changes made by employers for the good of the organisation. According to him, there is actually a psychological reason to why it can be difficult for people to deal with or accept change.

"We like to be in our comfort zone. That is where we are at our most productive because that is also when you will be using the least amount of energy to do the maximum amount of work," he explained.

In his book, Brown highlights some change theories based on the case studies that he conducted, since he believes that there is no single 'right approach' to change. In fact, there are a lot of different ones that needs to be tailored to each situation depending on the environment.

Being someone with expertise in how to manage change, Brown often share stories, wisdom and techniques with various types of people. From corporate entities to hard-core prisoners and even people living on

the street, Brown also believes that the way to create positive change in the audiences' lives is just the same. "I talk about a number of memorable experiences I've had with people in my book and from all that experience, I realise that the strategy that worked on prisoners can easily work on us too. Not everyone wants to make a difference in the world, yet the ones that do, can employ similar strategies to create positive change," said Brown.

Because that he also has experience on helping organisations to be change-ready, Brown goes on explaining that SMEs tend to find it difficult to juggle between all the changing priorities that can happen on a daily basis as they do not have the amount of resources that large enterprises do. Therefore, SMEs tend to deal with the immediate tasks at hand, being strategic and doing more future-focused work such as planning for new markets, new technology and driving business.

For SMEs to become change-ready, Brown stressed that they would need to have foresight, innovative thinking, be skilled at calculated risk taking and be agile enough to change on the fly as there is a balance between being reactive, strategic and tactical.

This also includes being digitally ready, since new and emerging technology is a major driver of change. For example, big data and artificial intelligence will lead to better data collection, the automation of repetitive tasks and the ability to make decisions with immediate access to real-time, in-depth information. Hence, being digitally ready will greatly assist the organisations to allow its customers get the tailored approach that will suit their different needs, regardless of the type of business.

Changing the way you change
In his website, Brown noted that "people

find it extremely challenging to keep up with change in their organisations given the relentless pressure to do more, be faster and better but with less'. In efforts to ensure that employees are more receptive of changes within the company, Brown said: "You need to be in the mind of the other person and ask yourself what would they need to know to be more receptive to this change? You have to take into account the positive and possible negative response that you might get, because we should not shy away from talking about the negative impact of a certain change."

Despite that, leaders of an organisation would at times put more focus on the positive effects of a certain change and avoid discussing about the negative side of things altogether due to fear of the employees not wanting to accept the change. In Brown's view, he believes that the difference of acceptance depends on whether the person feels forced to go through it or not. People handle changes that we agree with very differently compared to the ones they disagree with. That creates a challenge for the leaders to convince their employees about it and this is where honesty and transparency plays an important role in the process.

Apart from that, leaders can also play an active role of helping their employees prepare themselves and be comfortable with ambigui-

ty. The longer and more complex it is, the less you will know about what the future holds for you.

"As leaders, we need to do sales forecasts and marketing plans while being agile in our approach. We need to be able to be ready on the fly. Don't be too rigid and say 'this needs to be done this way or that way'. We have to be open to innovation and new ways of doing things. Even though it may sound simple, but it's not easy to practice when under pressure of getting things done," he advised.

Taking all that into account, the organisation must also think about how the customers will receive those organisational changes as well. There might even be some loyal customers who may not agree with it, presenting a risk in loss of business.

"There's a reason why customers are giving that negative feedback. Don't just dismiss it. Get out there and talk to them! Get into their heads and find out what they aren't happy about. Communicate with in a way that they understand," Brown went on, highlighting the fact that a business is not a business without its customers. "Organisations tend to focus on 'benefits' whereas, in my experience, if the customers are unhappy, it's because the organisation hasn't gotten into their minds and looked at things from their point of view. Always look at the impact. Always!" **MSME**

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