Running Head: FACES & CASES OF CHANGE

Faces & Cases of Change

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Abstract:

This essay seeks to expose some human and social facets of change and the change process. The aspects of the faces of change agents, the owners of the change process, the extent to which he/she should direct change and the author's personal reactions to a specific case study will be addressed.

Change is something we all must face constantly throughout our lives. Nothing, even if it seems to be, is absolutely constant in our universe. One must learn to accept change, perhaps even welcome it. This essay seeks to expose some human and social facets of change and the change process. The aspects of the faces of change agents, the owners of the change process, the extent to which he/she should direct change and the author's personal reactions to a specific case study will be addressed.

The best example of the differing faces of change agents was found in the case study of Pat Kelsoe and Jean Fallon, in *The ID Casebook: Case Studies in Instructional Design*. (2007) In this case study Pat and Jean are eager new harbingers of change. Sam is a proven senior instructor and is reluctant to change an already successful program. Harry is the department chair, in charge of final department actions and decisions. While reading this case study one becomes aware of certain characteristics, biases, and traits that can affect how a person might react to change.

One of the first aspects might be how familiar and/or comfortable people are with the current system that is being changed. Sam, for one, was quite comfortable with a system that in his eyes seems to needed no improving. He is not eager or very supportive of making changes to a system he undoubtedly feels very personally involved with. Harry is looking forward to taking advantage of new ideas, as long as he feels the risks are within a comfortable range. As I have mentioned before, Pat and Jean are both supportive of the changes, because they happen to be suggesting them.

Another aspect that affects the success of a suggested change is the opinion or view of how important the change is. Sam, of course, sees no reason for a change and so does not see it as important at all. Harry is solicitously waiting to hear and see his high expectations of the new hires come to fruition. However, being responsible for his division, he will also not rush blindly

into any new idea. Pat and Jean see the changes they propose as extremely important. This may partially be because the ideas are their own and people tend to see something they are excited about as having great potential and importance, whether it does or not. In this case, they see an actual alternative solution to fulfill an existing need.

Each person has their own personal learning/teaching styles. People generally feel the most comfortable teaching in the same manner in which they are comfortable learning. This is the case with Sam. He is uncomfortable with a different way of teaching/learning than his own chosen path, such as the processes Pat and Jean suggest. This aspect also is a face of a change agent. If the change suggested complies with his/her way of doing things, he/she will be more accepting. If it does not, it may be refused or merely obstructed. This can cause issues in a change implementation process.

All of the aspects above relate to a change agent's motivation to enact change. If the change agent has a problem with any of the aspects mentioned, it is a safe bet that his/her motivation toward change will be at a minimum. This will affect not only the efficiency of the change process and the effectiveness of the changes to be made, but also the degree of desire of the change agent to help others accept the proposed changes. With deficient motivation the support by the change agent of others who are also required to make the change will be lacking and may spread, causing problems in the change process. It is important to maintain a positive attitude toward change to best complete the desired outcome.

One might ask him/herself, "Who owns the change process? To what extent should a change agent manager determine the direction a change should go?" Regardless of station/position/ job type, a change manager is generally still an employee of some sort of administration. In most situations, unless the change agent happens to be the president or owner of his/her own company/organization, he/she is subject to both the authority and/or scrutiny of

upper management. It is an unfortunate fact that the change manager will generally be held personally accountable by upper management if he/she fails in achieving the desired outcome. While a change agent can certainly state the goals/objectives of the change desired, he/she should gain approval from higher up through the proper channels before implementing any serious or major changes.

To fully understand a change process one could put oneself in the shoes of a change manager / trainer. As that person, one might examine steps that could be taken to help ease the way for the changes that employees were dealing within the organization. Although personally this author could relate to each case study presented, the story of Jacci Joya was chosen. (2007) Jacci was a member of a high school staff that had recently had a new school built and was in the process of adjusting to the use of new technology, especially the electronic school record keeping software. Jacci's problem was that she was asked by the school administration to act as a technology coach for faculty and personnel employed who would be required to use this new equipment/software. The software was not easily understood, and Jacci herself had had no real training on the record keeping software.

First of all, the administration may have made a huge mistake in agreeing to buy a school record keeping program that could not be operated by Windows, the operating/computer system they originally decided to provide to the faculty and other personnel. That was a very bad management decision or oversight; one that is completely baffling when examining how it came to pass. One can see no logic in it and can only assume that perhaps the decision makers had no concept of the differing operating systems. The true problem was that the software did not actually meet the school's needs. Before the administration agreed to buy this or any other software, they should have assessed the needs of the school and the needs of the people who most have to use the equipment/software. While the program did do most of what the school

required of it, it did not address the needs of the users at all. This was a serious lack of insight on the part of the decision makers. These sorts of things happen, and so solutions must be found.

Jacci handled the situation to the best of her abilities; however, there are a few things one could have done in addition to her actions. The first thing would have been to completely review the handbook and discover/create a highly simplified handout version. This information would be sent to each teacher in a PDF document or some other document in which they would be able to print or save the information for reference or review at their convenience. In addition, an internet search for online tutorials that might have helped the teachers and other personnel learn the procedures could have been done. Links to these tutorials could be sent out via email.

This author has personal firsthand experience working with school administration. She is fully aware of what it is like to be the secondhand go-to person because tech support is almost never available. It can be hard to prove there is an issue, and even harder to get administration to agree to fix the IT problem. There may be nothing a person can do about the IT personnel problems; however, one is always able to get help with basic computer knowledge and software problems. When working with an office equipped with computers, it is never a bad idea to familiarize yourself with as much computer knowledge as possible. While network and system issues may have to be handled by IT personnel, there are many computer problems that can be handled without the need for extensive special training. When one is able to handle basic computer issues and the IT personnel are aware of his/her ability, they seem to be more willing to make time to examine a problem. Also, if more computer users are able to check simple issues, such as a cord being plugged in at the right location, IT personnel are free to work on more serious issues and so more readily available when truly needed. Tutorials and other information about computer maintenance and software can be found on numerous places on the

internet. Perhaps many of the teachers and office personnel at Jacci's school could benefit from some pointers. The IT personnel might also be happier with less "nonsense" calls for assistance.

It is the opinion of this author that the administration of Jacci's school is reluctant to approve buying another software program for one main reason: Money. Since they have already paid for the program currently required for use, they cannot perceive a reason to spend more money simply to make it easier to use. In this case one might wonder about the level of value/importance of employee satisfaction the school management has, if they can not been made to see that this is not merely a frivolous comfort issue. The first step to fixing this quagmire would be to research the program that best fit everyone's needs and contact the manufacturer. Sometimes schools and other non-profit organizations can get things such as technology and software donated or at a much reduced rate from the manufacturers. This would be a great first approach. Nothing makes administration happier than getting something for free. If the manufacturer is of no help there are other resource organizations that donate technology to schools. Research could be done to find the best possible option for attaining the software.

It is a well known fact that administration generally also does not like to been seen as being capable of making mistakes. In Jacci's case, if attaining the correct software for free or very cheap was not enough of an incentive for administration to agreed to change, a report could be written and submitted about the issues with the current chosen system and IT support. IT would not be needed as often, if the software was more user-friendly. The responses of faculty and other personnel to the questionnaire Jacci sent out could be shared with administration. Faculty and other personnel could be asked if they would mind signing a petition requesting a change in record keeping software. On occasion when a thing is needed badly, playing the nice, quiet mouse is not an option. If administration cannot be made to see reason, perhaps the school board could be addressed and asked for their assistance in solving the issue.

This essay sought to expose some human and social facets of change and the change process. Items addressed included the aspects of the faces of change agents, the owners of the change process, the extent to which he/she should direct change and the author's personal reactions to the case study of Jacci Joya. As afore mentioned, change is something we all must face constantly throughout our lives. Heraclitus, a Greek philosopher of the late 6th century BCE, stated that, "Nothing endures but change." (1997-2007) Rather than be lost in a futile battle, a wise person learns to accept change and perhaps at times even welcome it.

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