

Managing Change in Business

Developing a Solid Plan to Move Forward.

With the completion of our latest presidential election, the question on most executives' minds is: "How is this Administration going to impact my business, my customers' businesses and business in general?"

More appropriately should the question be: "Regardless of who has been elected, is my business in the position to withstand change yet flexible enough to adapt to change?"

Change brings advantages and disadvantages. The key to wading through it is consistent, clear change management processes and procedures.

Now let's take a moment to clarify definitions:

Change Control – a general term describing the procedures used to ensure that changes (normally, but not necessarily, to IT systems) are introduced in a controlled and coordinated manner.

Change Management - a structured approach to change in individuals, teams, organizations and societies.

Most contemporary executives are very familiar with change management within their operations. We use these processes and procedures to manage the change to people and processes due to a change to their workflow or toolset.

Why not apply these same concepts to changes affecting a business?

1. Current state – know what you do today
2. Define the change – research all new regulations, laws, or offerings
3. Identify all areas impacted – map the change to the areas impacted
4. Develop a plan to move from A to B
5. Manage that plan to the new end state

Current State:

Ask the 'W' questions – What happens? When does it happen? Where does it happen? Who does it? Why does this happen?

Often process flow diagrams or other forms of documentation exist to document operational processes and procedures, but if these do not exist, it's best to complete some level of flow so that all points of possible impact are identified.

Define the Change:

Research the complete content of the change including but not limited to minimum requirements, effective date, filing requirements, and auditing/documentation requirements.

Often changes such as regulatory or compliance changes are documented on official websites and distributed, but less formal changes could need more effort to clearly define. Take the time to research not only the change itself, but commentaries, opinions and expert advice.

Identify all areas of impact:

Knowing your current process and procedures will aid in this identification. But beyond just identifying what will be impacted, identify when, how and the level of impact. Rating the level can be as simple as using a scale of 0 to 10 with zero being no impact to 10 being high impact. Identifying the type of impact also will be a requirement for eventually determining the solution.

Develop a plan:

Now that you've identified where you are now, A, and where you need to be, B, you need to develop the plan to move through the change to the new process. The plan should follow the general rule of any project or initiative by having these main phases:

- Initiate
- Plan
- Execute
- Control
- Close

All projects/initiatives have these phases although some phases may occur rather quickly. All will overlap and the Control phase is actually a phase that runs along the whole project from beginning to end.

The secret to a good plan is to have defined tasks starting with a verb. Use a strong action word so that anyone picking up the plan can understand exactly what needs to be done. Another best practice is to have every task assigned to a specific person or group. Beware using titles or roles as these may change. Finally, each task must have a start and end date. This aids with tracking, accountability and helps to recognize when something might be going astray.

Manage the plan:

Even with a well defined plan, the management of the plan through to its completion could still experience delays, issues and changes. The best defense to these is a proactive focus by a project lead or manager to recognize what task may be at risk and to work with others to develop contingency plans or to mitigate.

Regular status meetings and communications will help not only keep everyone updated to the progress of the project, but will also help minimizing fears that may be amidst those involved or those that the change will impact. Often this is overlooked which will possibly result in unneeded anxiety, decreased morale or apathy.

Once the objective has been achieved, take the time to look back on the whole initiative and analyze what lessons could be learned for the next time. Changes will continue to come along in business. Quick recognition of an impending change and a solid plan to move through it will aid in operational adaptability and sometimes, survival.