

Not whether, but Yes: Gaining Buy-in Commitment in Organization

Abstract: Companies realize without emotional commitment, even the most brilliant strategies will fail. To attain any change, people must not only accept and agree with the strategy, they must buy into it. In this paper, Browne & Mohan consultant share a six-stage empirical model of commitment buy-in.



Ashwini K S

Images courtesy of original copyright owners

Introduction

Buying commitment is a challenge companies face at several fronts. Management persuading a capable yet reluctant associate for a larger role or cajoling group of dissidents to adopt much required change program or an independent board member pushing the case of younger and competent daughter for succession against elder son in family business or an ethics committee asking an errant senior employee recalcitrant to consider an honourable exit are some examples wherein parties have to debate, negotiate and reach a considered outcomes. Buy in commitment is a multi-stage process where in doubts, apprehensions, fear and resistance of a party has to be rightly addressed and replaced by desirable, applicable and practical solutions. Here we are not talking about the Meyer and Allen (1991) models of organizational commitment of the individual and its major components (affective, continuous and normative). What we are addressing is the process of emotional commitment an employee undergoes in listening, considering and adopting to implement a new strategy. To attain this dramatic change of attitude to occur, people must not only accept and agree with the strategy, they must buy into it. Without emotional commitment, even the most brilliant strategies will fail. Once an employee is assessed as a the probable candidate to dawn the new role, what is the best approach to gain acceptance, support and commitment of an associate? Based on our experience we propose a six stage model for employee commitment buying process. The process includes **Goal Enumeration, Assessment, Alignment, Reiteration, and Formalization.**

Goal Enumeration

Once the employee is identified, his/her manager may provide bird eye view of the organization's goals, and immediate concerns, and different team members strengths that are required to reach the goals. The objective of the session is to enumerate the immediate future, how the individual can contribute to the cause and what would be the impact on organizational, team and individual level. The employee is involved in ideation of the goal, the impact it would create at different levels in the organization and the individual's personal life and what resources may be required at each level.

The dynamics of this stage are similar to "broaden & build theory" and "positivity resonance theory" of Fredrickson. Here manager follows a positive approach to broaden the associate's awareness and also to help him to build useful resources like skills, knowledge and productive relationships needed to achieve the desired goal. These resources in turn encourage associate's creative potential and enhance resilience. By following the positive resonance theory, a manager can be successful in eliciting a positive response and mutual care in-between the manager and the associate. The interpersonal exchange of positivity combined with bio-behavioural synchrony

(imitation of body language) in-between the manager and the associate elicits a tinge of commitment in the associate.

Before initiating the conversation, manager should simulate the discussion and rephrase the communication. Manager's only focus should be on strength, latent potential and how to fuel it. Communication is selective; articulation is directed laden with vibrant imagery. Positive emotion and sense of excitation changes the individual's conscious and unconscious drives for better long-term outcomes. The whole process of this stage should be handled by the manager where assessment is carried out by manager himself and is not shared with the associate. He also should selectively ignore the weaknesses of the associate in this stage. Manager should also deliberately plant the ideas, goals and desires in the associates mind in this early stage in order to achieve the desired target.

In contrast, associate, at first may be resistant to the new windows of responsibility and opportunity. Associate may traverse initially through a ground of suspicion uncertain and unsure about the conversation. Later the associate may be grasped by flight or fight tendency. Once the ruffled suspicions are smoothed by positively directed information transfer from the superior, he/she may feel pride of his/her recognition and open to reassesses the significance and impact of the conversation around him/her. Hence, it is important for the manager to lace the conversation with positivity, after which, associate starts to listen and agrees to participate in the conversation. At this stage, manager may have to prepare to elicit a sense of excitement, direct the associate towards the goal using a positive approach and grasp associate's attention, thaw any apprehension, reduce uncertainty and set towards acceptance and open to consideration.

Assessment

Next stage is role visualization and capability assessment. The manager and the associate dwell deeper into the roles. The manager innocuously steers the discussions towards individual's assessment of his strengths, capabilities and gaps. The dynamics of this stage are parallel to "Framing in Negotiation" and Framing theory" where the manager directs the flow based on a certain frame that of allows for self-evaluation without the burden of guilt and incapability. Communications are deliberate; "frame" based thus allowing ruminations in a collaborative, unconstrained environment, devoid of third party influence, bias and fear. Evaluations are deliberated towards role rather than a person. Also, manager influences subsequent judgment where he organizes and tailors information to fit into the situation. He not only contains the information the associate receives, he will constraint it as well. The main intention of this stage is to alter the preconceived notion of the associate where manager and associate collaborate for an agreement of roles, activities, responsibilities and also assess the available resources. Manager and associate confer and jointly take decisions.

Associate, in this stage tends to develop adaptive behaviour which is predominantly based on the "super-ordinate co-ordination theory of positivity" where, emotions are high level of cognitive

programmes which activates the most useful mental and physical state needed at any situation resulting in the adaptive behaviour of the individual which influences the individual's decision making ability. Hence, manager should ensure that he elicits the right kind of excitement and emotion in the associate. A manager in this stage is required to create a curative collaborated platform where he can direct the discussion and he should majorly emphasize on positive aspects of the goal, role and the individual. He should provide the associate with the broad visualization of objects and options. He should appreciate the inputs provided by the associate, should fill the gaps, rate the options available and lead towards approval. Another main objective of this stage is to deliberately shift internal assessment to the associate from the manager. Here, associate understands his own weaknesses and the needs for improvement. In order to do so, associate pushes himself to offer creative solutions and enhances his ability to provide free flow of suggestions which elicits a sense of importance intrinsically within the associate.

At this juncture, associate follows an "upward spiral theory" of Fredrickson, where he, at first is reluctant towards the idea or the goal. Then he carries an evaluation of self and requirements of the role. Self evaluation is followed by recognition of strengths where the associate recognizes his strengths and areas of expertise. This in turn is followed by preparedness where the associate invests his time and energy to not only assess his weaknesses and areas of improvement but also on grooming himself for the role. And finally, the associate accepts the role and inculcates the "Can Do" attitude towards the role. Hence, by the end of this stage, associates, conform to manager's viewpoints, exhibits slight desire towards reaching the goal, and accepts the veracity and moves on to the next stage.

Alignment

Subsequent stage after assessment is alignment, wherein the manager discusses how the individual can contribute to the organizational goal, fitment of the job, role requirements and capabilities. Manager emphasizes the latent capabilities of the employee, reposes confidence in the ability to catch up and expands the role horizon of the employee. The discussion would be open, and transparent to discuss the role expectations, how the role dimensions would impact the short term and medium term, what may be the training and skills sets and sharing of apprehension and experiences. Manager proposes a deliberate break of days to allow the employee to do introspection in-order to help him/her in decision making and avoid confusion or error, carry out minor changes towards the goals and receive internal and external validation of the transformation. External validation and internal acceptance by the associate is the main purpose of this stage. Associate not only self-assesses, he also collates the available information and consolidates them to achieve the required objective. Here associate tends to exhibit obedience behaviour where he/she follows the orders given by the manager.

The dynamics of this stage is chiefly based on the Self-Other Overlap concept where the associate understands another person's perspective and empathizes with them through the following steps,

where, at first he evaluates himself and then he carries an evaluation of others as well, which is then, followed by a process of triangulation where he collates the perspectives of not only his but another person's perspectives and the organizational expectations. Then he reconfirms his decisions and reaches the final stage of affirmation where the associate move towards declaring his/her commitment towards the role. This stage concludes when associate expresses obedient behaviour, follows orders and carries self-assessment.

Reiteration

Once the associate declares his/her commitment towards the role, manager and the associate meet up to recapture the goals, the activities that may be required at organizational, and team level to drive the performance and the individual contributions. Manager digs deeper into the change attempts made by the associate, and appreciates all achievements, however minor they may be. Manager's focus would be to emphasize the value, the associate can bring to the goals and what would be the changes the role mandates. He also makes the employee reassess oneself to own possibilities of attaining the desired goals and activities. He repaints employee's motivation to own and drive the desired goal. Once the associate is convinced, the duo needs to revisit the drawing board to evaluate the fitment of schemata, assets, resources, roles and acts. In this stage, manager refines and repaints organizational, team and individual goals and describes the best suitable approach for the individual.

The main intention of this stage is to move towards formalization of the process model. This is a stage of reconfiguration of schemata, assets, resources, roles, actions and activities of an individual and the organization. In order to reach the final objective of reconfiguration, manager follows a process which involves visualization, configuration, evaluation of fitment and finally reconfiguration. Initially, manager revisits the goal with the associate and together they visualize. Once the goal has been visualized, associate and the manager constitute their process and together evaluate the best strategies and activities to be followed in order to fulfill the preferred ambition. In this stage, again, manager deliberately plants ideas and desires in the associate's mind. And finally, together they reconfigure their strategies and activities right from individual roles, organizational roles and schemata. Also, contextual assessment is carried out by the manager in this stage. Associate in this stage possess the suitable skills, capabilities and roadmap to achieve the desired goal. He also exhibits self-motivated and superfluous behavior to progress towards the ambition. He then displays commitment towards the goal and organization at large.

Formalization

The final stage is commitment formalization stage where, goals at various levels are tied, action plans are discussed and detailed, training and support are documented, platforms for information sharing and support are detailed and review mechanisms are accepted. Formalization stage must ensure while the outcomes are important, the pace and tactics are owned by the associate, there

is plenty of room for failures and learn without stigma so that continuity commitment is not affected. Formalization stage must also detail informal self-review mechanisms where the individual can elicit the feedback, discuss, digest and push the agenda of improvement by themselves.

Manager in this stage formalizes normative activities and behaviour where he highlights an individual's ownership and outcomes, while, an associate highlights individual roles, activities and paths. Manager should also help to codify the approach, investment, activities and actions whereas associate controls and reviews time-wise investments and action plans to attain the goal. Associate in this stage is compelled and displays persistence in attaining the desired goal as well as he strengthens his commitment towards the goal and organization at large. Table 1 presents the dynamics of each side, expectations and desired outcomes from organizational point of view.

Table 1: Dynamics and desired outcomes at various stages

| Associate's State | Manager's Goal | Manager's Action | Desired Outcome from Organization's perspective |
|--|------------------|---|--|
| Uncertain, undirected | Goal Enumeration | visualization of organizational, and individual's goals. Selective communication, controlled articulation, provides vibrant imagery and elicits a sense of excitement. Selectively ignores weaknesses | Elicit interest, sense of excitement for new opportunity, thaw associate's apprehension, drive consideration |
| Ambiguous, Reluctant and wait and watch | Assessment | Collaborated agreement of roles, activities and responsibilities, steers the discussion towards individual's assessment of available resources, to attain the desired goal (role centric), broadly visualize options and alternates, emphasizes on positives only. | Signal sense of importance, promote Self evaluation and accentuate desire and consideration for the opening. |
| Converging, realignment of aspirations, capabilities | Alignment | Deliberately sends the associate to take a time-off to evaluate oneself. | Validation and acceptance by the associate, reaffirm suitability behavior, Agreement to adopt & immerse. |
| Visualization, configurations | Reiteration | Refines and repaints organization, team, and individual's goals, performs a contextual assessment, reconfigures schemas, assets, activities, roles and actions, describes individual's best fit and makes the associate re-assess oneself of his capabilities and skills. | Visualization of goal by the associate, configuration to attain the desired goal, Expresses commitment towards the role and the goal. promise to work towards the role and the goal. |
| Formalization of next steps, change process | Formalization | Documentation of normative contract, highlights individual ownership and outcome, helps in codification of activities. | Activity map of individual role, controls and reviews time-wise investments and action plans to attain the desired goal. Pact to execute. |

Conclusion

Buy-in commitment is an integrative process. Organizations should invest sufficient time and effort to address biases and perceptions so that buy-in is complete. Managers need to plan and prepare themselves to align their communication and influence strategy with underlying dynamics at each stage. Dry runs, prior to planning sessions help in sharpening the engagement process. Finally, the managers must realize the whole process has to be fair, inclusive and outcome driven

Bibliography

Alexander E R, Inter organizational Coordination: Theory and Practice, Journal of Planning Literature May 1993 vol. 7 no. 4 328-343

Bowles, S, C.J.L. Cunningham, G.M. De La Rosa and Picano, J (2007), Coaching leaders in middle and executive management: Goals, performance and buy-in, Leadership & Organization Development Journal, 28, 5, 388-408.

Dimatteo B C., 2006, Get employee buy-in for your vision, Worcester Business Journal, March 20.

Fredrickson B L., 2001 The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, American Psychologist, Vol 56(3), March, 218-226.

Fredrickson B L., 2001 The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, Philosophical transactions of the Royal society B, Published 29 September. DOI: 10.1098/rstb.2004.1512

Janssen J, 2014 The Commitment Continuum System, Winning the Mental Game, First edition, January,, ISBN-13: 978-1892882448

Klein H J, Becker T E, and Meyer J P, 2009, Commitment in Organizations: Accumulated Wisdom and New Directions, Publication of the Society of Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Taylor and Francis group LLC, Routledge, New York

Meyer J. P. and Allen N., 1991 A Three-Component Model Conceptualization of Organizational Commitment, March, Human Resource Management Review Vol. 1(1):61-89

Nelson, T. E., Oxley Z. M., and Clawson R. A, 1997. "Toward a psychology of framing effects." Political Behavior, 19: 221-246.

Levenson, R.W. 1994. Human emotions: A functional view: in K.P. Ekman and R.J.Davidson (Eds), The nature of emotion: Fundamental questions, Oxford University Press, New York.

Plutchik, R . 1980. Emotion: A psychobioevolutionary synthesis. New York, Harper Business

Tooby, J., and Cosmides, L. 1990. The past explains the present: Emotional adaptations and the structure of ancestral environments. Ethology and Sociobiology, 11, 374 to 424.

Browne & Mohan insights are general in nature and are not refereed papers. These are knowledge sharing documents based on cumulative experience of consultants.
© Browne & Mohan 2016. All rights reserved Printed in India