Ensuring Engagement during Transformation

When travelling down the path of Transformation I found that a very important thing to consider was that of people engagement in the overall strategy. If people don't feel engaged in this strategy then it is probably destined for failure and cynicism on any future improvement endeavours. As with any change program it can be quite easy to slip into the trap of providing information from 'up-top' and expect it to trickle down through the hierarchal management systems we have in place. But by definition Transformation is about building a strategy that will change that top down approach and so this form of broadcast is no longer sufficient. It is paramount that the message is communicated as widely as possible and as frequently as possible too, but how can we succeed when the world around us is changing and our usual communication paths are no longer fit for purpose. If people don't feel they are being given the right information then they won't feel engaged in the overall program and will lose interest quite quickly. They could be then forgiven when they openly criticise such a lack lustre approach.

Below are a few points that have helped me in the past when working through a transformation program. They are by no means exhaustive and as with any framework they need to be adapted for the diversity of the particular Transformation approach being undertaken.

Initial Communication

Getting that first message out there is a really important thing, where C-Level explains '*Why*' we are going down the transformation path in the first place. There needs to be a clear idea on the reason to start this very large change process; is it because we want to improve speed and quality of delivery, move to a more technical approach on product delivery, is it to build more autonomy into the delivery teams or to change from a centralized shared services operations model to one of DevOps? All of these are very valid reasons for trying to make the improvements, but if the employees don't understand why they are making changes then they will no longer feel engaged. They may believe it is just another management strategy that doesn't really affect their day to day work and just shrug it off as just "*more corporate nonsense*". We must also make sure that it is clear that Transformation is not a project and does not have a start and end date. It is a new approach in ways of working and it is there to allow us to make improvements in both how we work and in the working environment around us. Although we need to be careful at this stage that we don't try and design the solution (the 'What' and the 'Why') as this needs to come across the board from teams themselves.

Transformation Workshops

Another good way to keep people engaged is to run as many workshops as you possibly can. At times it may feel like overkill but in reality teams will still feel that they don't understand the reason for transforming their ways of working unless they attend a workshop and feel they are providing valuable input into what the transformation approach looks like. The workshop should reiterate why we are doing it but then also start to approach what it is we may need to change and then how we think we are going to be able to go about it. At this stage ask teams to define their purpose, a brief mission statement on what they believe they do; ask them to identify what they may see as blockers to their autonomy and their ability to deliver at ease; and to identify some KPIs where they can measure if the approach they are taking is showing success in the right direction.

As with any good workshop it will be made up of a diverse group of individuals some of whom will be quite cynical and will refuse to believe it will provide any value to their day to day work. One way I've found to help these folk get involved is to make sure their opinion is listened to. During open discussions, quite often those that are more enthusiastic for change will be the most vocal and may inadvertently drown out those that are not so forward in their thinking. During breakout sessions where the workshop is split into smaller groups for ideas generation there is a good opportunity for the facilitator to help make sure their opinion is recorded. While each person is coming up with idea the facilitator should make sure that each person has been asked "what do you think on… ". They should record the answer and stick it up on the board with everyone else's. Then when the groups are brought back together and are reviewing the major topic themes, make sure to include a discussion on the topics from those who were less enthusiastic on the transformation program. This way they will feel that their opinion does actually count and that they are making a difference to the approach being taken.

Continuous Broadcasts

While teams are working out what they are going to change and how, there needs to be constant communication across the company on what people are doing, otherwise people may feel isolated and lose their initial enthusiasm in Transformation. This does not have to be done via email as it can get quite boring for people to receive a continuous diatribe of mails that they just end up filtering into an archive folder that they never actually read. One possible solution is to use Social Media such as Yammer or Google +, where people can actively engage in the discussions and keep up to date on what is happening in other areas of the company. Creating a Transformation group will help keep all these discussions in one place but it must be maintained correctly and those that post must feel they are being listened to. Most of the time it will manage itself but on occasion one needs to ensure that active engagement is taking place and that it's not just a soap box for the already converted.

Follow up Workshops

After having the initial workshops with the teams it is very important to do smaller follow on sessions to help keep the momentum going. This can be where the mission statement is re-iterated, the improvement initiatives discussed and the KPIs are reviewed for both relevance and ease of collection. I would suggest that this follow-up happens about a month after the initial workshop as it will still be fresh enough in people's minds and they can start to see value being added sooner rather than later. Taking an hour at the end of a retrospective may be the best option as people will already be together and it doesn't impact the team so much. After all even Transformation should not inadvertently affect the team's throughput and velocity.

Conclusion

To me employee engagement is a key part of the success of Transformation. Each person, no matter where they sit within the organisation, needs to feel part of what is going on. They need to feel that it is their input that drives the direction of Transformation and so inevitably it's success. Constant communication through assorted broadcasts, workshops, attending stand-ups, company social media and even water cooler conversations can all help in ensuring people are constantly aware of progress. So keep shouting from the rooftops and make sure that everyone is jumping on to the "Transformation change-train" where people feel engaged in the improvements being made.