

Integrate to Change

by Daniel Druwe Araujo

The best organizations have competent functions to take care of important aspects of people management like communication, learning and the rewarding system.

Nevertheless, even the best organizations complain about the efficiency of such instruments, especially when there is the need to promote some difficult changes.

We have observed that one of the most frequent causes of dissatisfaction is the lack of proper integration between the several actions. Without a doubt, in the best organizations, the experts and people responsible for the processes of Communication, Learning and Performance Management do talk among themselves and align their actions. In spite of it, the assessments and prescriptions in each function tend to be somewhat independent. Similarly, the performance measurements of each process tend to be made separately.

There are four actions capable of promoting a true integration of approaches and actions and, in this way, achieve increased efficiency and effectiveness.

In this article we use the term "Learning" meaning all the needs and actions to make individuals and groups of an organization fully capable of performing their roles so that the organization achieves its strategic objectives.

We use the term "Rewarding" meaning all the ways, formal and informal, by which the individuals and groups in one organization are incentivized or discouraged for their attitudes, behaviors and results.

1. Focus on the Change

The difference in the approach that we propose can be more clearly noted in communication.

When we ask "what is the objective of action 'x' of communication", we frequently hear: "to inform about...".

This is not incorrect however we submit that it is more challenging to look for an answer like: "the objective of this communication action is to promote the following changes: ...".

We inherited, from the times when communication was scarce, the preconceived judgment of "communication is never too much". But today's reality is opposed: we are all hyper saturated by communication and information, to the point in which we disconnect and ignore most of what is communicated to us.

Ignoring communications is the price for us to maintain our sanity. And shouting louder or more repeatedly is not the solution: it only makes things worse.

Inside an organization, we learn to filter the communications. And we apply ever more restrictive filters as we lose belief in the criteria used in the organization. "Don't respond to the first email. If it is really important, a second will come, and a third one."

Focusing on the *necessary changes* helps to reduce the actions of communication that are done "just to inform". It also helps to challenge the efficiency and effectiveness of the actions: "will this, truly, promote the change we need?", or: "isn't there an alternative that is more effective to promote that change?".

A third benefit of focusing on the change is that it becomes easier to measure the effectiveness: "how much of the desired change truly happened?".

The same logic applies to the Learning actions. "Learning is never too much" continues valid however, in this aspect too, the profusion of stimuli and requirements force us to be selective. Even I, a generalist and pathologically curious person, have been forced to de-select opportunities of learning so that I can learn what really matters.

In the text "Effectiveness in Communication, Education and Training" (<http://www.t2people.com/artigo-3.htm>), I explain how to manage actions of learning starting with the analysis of the changes needed in knowledge, skills and results. In the same article, I emphasize the importance of measuring the effectiveness by verifying if the changes actually happened.

In spite of the importance of Communication and Learning, I have observed that the system of Rewarding is the most important and essential to promote and sustain any behavior or result desired.

Excellent actions of communication and learning without the enforcement by an appropriate system of rewarding tend to be a waste of resources. On the other hand, an appropriate system of rewarding is able to lead people to autonomously pursue the information and learning they need.

We definitely want excellent communication and learning, however, if we needed to chose only one aspect to do well, this ought to be the Rewarding system.

Again, 'Rewarding' is used here in a wide sense: positive and negative, formal and informal consequences. It includes compensation, promotions and the periodical formal process of performance appraisal but 'Rewards' must be more than those things.

It is, mainly, the appreciation demonstrated in the day-to-day by the bosses and peers, and the infinite number of stimuli and rejections that we give and receive every minute.

It does include, too, the internal stimuli and rejections in each individual - something difficult to influence but which must be taken into consideration when we want to promote changes. Ignoring or disregarding the internal rewarding system of each individual can make our actions little effective or even to produce effects contrary to those we wish.

Thinking the actions of Communication, Learning and Rewards as a function of the changes we need to promote is an important starting point to obtain more efficiency and effectiveness.

2. Focus on the Target

The second action is to focus on the individuals and groups that need to change.

Even in the organizations that are best in the management of people, the actions of communication, learning and rewarding tend to be planned and executed as 'mass actions'.

In Medicine, they use to say that there are no diseases, there are sick individuals. This is neither to discredit all the research and knowledge related to the diseases, nor the mass actions, as for example, vaccination. It does mean the need to understand how the disease (generic definition) interacts with the individual (case in particular). The generic treatment of the disease may not be the best indication for a specific individual. It can even be disastrous.

Similarly, the action of communication, learning or rewarding that is most effective to the 'average people' in the organization tends to be ineffective or counter-indicated for many of the specific individuals. Cumulatively, perceiving that an action was conceived and executed especially for me is, in itself, a powerful factor for effectiveness.

This does not exclude the 'mass actions' but it requires understanding the limitation of their reach and the absolute need to develop other actions that are more specific for the groups and the individuals.

Even where 'mass actions' are appropriate, we often notice a lack of empathy, of understanding of the targets. How many communication, learning and rewarding actions are defined more based on what the expert thinks the targets feel rather than based on the targets' actual values and preferences?

The ability to conform the actions of communication to the characteristics of each individual - mass personalization - has advanced rapidly in the marketing of products and services. Eventually those techniques will be useful also to allow a more accurate focus on the target by the corporative functions of communication, learning and rewarding.

Nevertheless, the only function capable of properly know each target and to personalize the actions is that of the immediate boss. The boss can and should not only personalize the actions but also observe their effects and adjust the actions dynamically. We will further discuss this point in action #4 ahead.

3. An Integrated Change Plan

Even as the people responsible for the processes of Communication, Learning and Rewarding focus on the changes and on the targets, their separate actions tend not to profit from all the synergism that is desired to promote the changes.

Experts and people responsible for each of those processes tend to think through the optics of the respective process instead of through the optics of the changes and of the targets. The most effective way to maximize the synergism is to adopt the changes as the beginning and the measure for everything.

Instead of trying separate plans of communication, learning and rewarding, we need to start everything with an integrated change plan. From there we should ask:

- for a given change or set of changes, which are the most appropriate actions and in which sequence and moment should they be executed?
- how should each action in each process be conceived to maximize the benefit from the actions in the other processes and to reinforce the actions of the other processes?

Instead of asking:

- "what this person or group needs to know or learn?", we should ask: "which information, knowledge, skills and rewards are necessary to promote this change in this person or group?"; and
- "which actions will best provide the information, knowledge, skills and rewards for this change to happen?".

Letting the Integrated Change Plan to determine the actions of Communication, Learning and Rewarding is the best way to ensure that those processes work integratedly since the identification and planning until the execution and measurement of effectiveness.

It is interesting to note that this focus on the change, instead of creating an additional load for the experts and people responsible for the three processes, it actually works as an eliminator of unnecessary actions. We start to do only the essential and to do it with a lot more effectiveness.

4. The Role of the Boss

This fourth action is seen as revolutionary by many of the best organizations.

Many of them will dislike the term "boss": "here we don't have bosses. We only have leaders, facilitators." Or another "politically correct" term.

Be everyone at easy to substitute the term that makes one feel more comfortable.

The role of those we here call "boss" is fundamental for at least three reasons. Those persons are the ones:

1. best capable to know and follow each individual or group that is a target for a change through all the moments of the day-to-day;
2. with the highest direct influence on the rewards the target individuals or groups should receive for their attitudes, behaviors and results; and
3. directly responsible for the results the target individuals or groups generate for the organization.

One of the difficulties is that, in a not so distant past, bosses were perceived as responsible for the optimal performance of the *status quo* but not for changes. Changes should be decided, conceived and implemented by project teams, experts and corporative functions. New processes,

structures and new approaches should be delivered to the bosses of each group, ready to use. Even after that the bosses still held the right to challenge and support or resist the changes.

Fortunately or unfortunately, the demands of the modern world made that old model unacceptable. While an organization chooses to evolve in big leaps, in changes promoted every several years by a new project, a wiser competitor has employees (including bosses) who critically assess the processes they operate in the day-to-day.

As a result of that critical assessment, the competitor identifies improvement opportunities and solutions for the problems faster and the change process is smoother.

Projects will always be necessary, for example, for the installation of new equipment, the construction of a new plant, the implementation of a new system or the launching of a new product. Nevertheless, many unnecessary projects reflect the accumulation of continuous improvement that was neglected for a long time by the process operators and their bosses.

The role of the boss, leader or facilitator, in the modern organization, needs to go beyond the maintenance of the *status quo* and dive, decidedly, in the promotion of the necessary changes.

A second difficulty, even in good organizations, is that the immediate bosses were not selected, were not enabled and are not measured for their competences in the management of people.

In one of my clients, we defined the competence of the boss by "how much s/he obtains results through motivated and enabled subordinates".

The role of the boss should not be that of "top expert", who know more than his/her subordinates and is the only one able to resolve the most difficult problems. Nor should it be "the authority", without whose blessing no decision can be made and implemented.

On the contrary, the quality of the boss should be a function of how much his/her subordinates are able to operate autonomously and produce the results required by the organization. This understanding requires the boss to assume the primary responsibility for the motivation and ability of his/her people.

The third difficulty we want to touch in this article is the paradigm of the responsibility of the corporate areas. "Quality is the responsibility of the Quality Department", "Safety is the responsibility of the Safety Department", "Communication is the responsibility of the Communication..." .

In that obsolete paradigm, if the employee does not demonstrate the necessary competence, the boss should ask the Personnel Development Department to identify what needs to be done, to promote the execution, to fight to get the employee availability and to be accountable for the results.

Nevertheless, no one better than the boss to know what each individual or group under his/her responsibility is lacking and to verify the effectiveness of the executed actions.

As to communication, the main channel in the modern organization needs to be the immediate boss of each individual or group. Only the immediate boss knows the terms in which the message will be best understood - and accepted - by each of the individuals. Only the immediate boss is capable of noticing when a message is misunderstood and needs a different clarification. And only the immediate boss can quickly identify when an individual or group starts to deviate from the orientation given and decide on the most appropriate action: enabling in some lacking competence or providing consequence to motivate or discourage.

In Summary

The dissatisfaction of many organizations with their processes of Communication, Learning and Rewarding cannot be resolved by spending more resources and sophisticating those processes.

"More (or even better) of the same" is not the solution.

Subordinating those processes to an integrated change plan that is strategically decided by the organization is the best way to integrate and to make more effective the actions. With the likely benefit of reducing the resources spent in those processes (increased efficiency).

Understanding the individuals and groups who are targets of changes is fundamental to develop and execute the appropriate actions of Communication, Learning and Rewarding.

Because of this, the role of the immediate boss of the individuals and groups who need to change is fundamental. The corporative areas which are specialized and responsible for the processes should work as coordinators, orientators and as a resource for the immediate bosses. The work of those areas cannot diminish the role and responsibility of each boss for the understanding, enabling and providing consequences to each of his/her subordinates.

Focus on the Change, Focus on the Target, let an Integrated Change Plan drive the actions and enforce the Role of the Boss to achieve the highest effectiveness in the changes your organization needs.

Daniel Druwe Araujo is managing partner of T² People, dedicated to help organizations and people to change better.