New technology and job design in a phone company

Design

Coordination difficulties and conflicts, most notably at interface between answering centre and repair bureau. Alternatives Firstly, the company should conduct an assessment of the situation prior to jumping to conclusions regarding what issues need to be dealt with. The most obvious way to do this is to open the lines of communication between employees and supervisory or management staff. An open-door policy should be enforced. Should this not prove fruitful, the company may wish to spend time working on employee relations via the union.

Much can be learned from creating a pro-active positive relationship to union representatives rather than working in a reactive " us vs. them" environment. Another way to gather information would be to speak to the employees at the Repair Bureau to try to learn what issues are arising from the liaison between the two facilities. Customer satisfaction surveys should be assessed (since we assume they are being conducted already). Finally, should these options not garner sufficient information, the company may wish to partake in an employee satisfaction survey to get at the source of the problem.

It should be noted, however, that these surveys can prove costly and time consuming. Additionally, the company should only partake in the survey if they are seriously plan to address the issues that are brought about by the company. By undertaking this sort of survey and not implementing changes, employee satisfaction may in fact decrease after the survey. Without the results of the assessments noted above, we must make assumptions on what these forms of communication would indicate. Accordingly, we will make

suggestions based on these assumptions. First, we believe that the source of the employees' motivational issues needs to be addressed.

Such things as rewards (compensation), working environment, recognition, opportunities for advancement, and overall positive environment should be looked at. We can assume that some factors haven't changed, such as the compensation, so that is likely not a factor. Given that there is new technology being used, employees need to receive ample training (contingent on sophistication of the system and aptitude of employees). This should be done in a comfortable setting that fosters learning and allows employees to ask questions free from feeling singled out as though they should already be familiar with the technology.

As we know, adult learning is unique and should be carried out by someone skilled in this area. After the training has been conducted, policies or standard operating procedures should be distributed to reinforce the manner in which the technology is to be used. Additionally, the company should assess employees' capabilities and follow up with any additional required training. Clear job descriptions would also be helpful to outline tasks, responsibilities and expectations. These can be used for the employees' benefit as they will have a concise outline of what is expected of them.

On the employer side, job descriptions are helpful tools when assessing gaps in performance. In line with training, employees will likely have a greater morale if they not only feel that they have some control over their work, but if they are provided with learning opportunities. Although it is almost certain that there isn't an opportunity for every operator to move up within the

company, being provided with the opportunity to do so would greatly improve morale. Even without upward mobility, adjusting the job design or adding responsibilities can greatly improve an employee's morale.

As an added bonus, the company will get more from the employee. Although rewarding an employee for their efforts comes from proper compensation, the importance of recognition should not be understated. This can be achieved by simply creating a positive work environment in which everyone feels appreciated for their efforts. In this setting however, in which workers are relatively individualistic and don't work in a true team environment, this can prove more of a challenge. Accordingly, we believe that a true recognition system should be implemented.

This can be achieved in a number of ways. One idea would be to reward employees monthly based on their customer ratings. As to not create a competitive environment, every employee who achieves a certain standard could be recognized for greatness in the workplace. Going back to the idea of the employees working as individuals as opposed to on a team, this should also be considered. We know that this sort of environment doesn't lend itself well to a team setting, but the management should work with the employees to find ways to build a sense of team.

This could simply be team building exercises in conjunction with the repair bureau or it could involve some sort of a buddy system whereby customer service representatives are paired with one or two repair technicians to learn more about one another. This will allow for better communication and understanding when sending along work orders and should result in greater

satisfaction for all employees involved. On another note, the floor plan should definitely be redesigned. At present time, the supervisors sit at the front facing workers in a classroom style.

Workers tend to have higher morale and job satisfaction when they feel that they have some control over their work and when they do not feel as though they are being constantly monitored. Instead, the supervisors should consider integrating themselves into the group. This will have the added bonus of being closer to all of the employees should a situation arise. We suggest that the desks be rearranged in cubicle-style seating with short walls between employees. This will provide a small amount of privacy and comfort while not interfering with the ability to make contact with others or to be monitored if need be.

Although employees realize that their calls can be monitored and recorded, it sets a different tone to be under surveillance. With respect to the job design, we know that there is a disjoint between the answering centers and repair bureaus given the functional and divisional departmentalization (we assume that the call centre is geographically segregated from the repair bureaus). Given the physical separation and the fact that work orders are being handed off without much discussion (or so we assume), we can understand the concerns.

Surely customer service people are getting flack from both the incoming call (from disgruntled customers) and from the repair side (who likely doesn't like being given orders). Although it isn't entirely clear what can be done to smooth the liaison point, we believe that an increase in communication may

help. The company may wish to assess the way the organization is structured to see if it would be more sensible to set up small teams consisting of customer service employees and repair technicians as to avoid the disjoint between the two.

Working as a team can often increase satisfaction and communication. As well, jobs can be enlarged, simplified, rotated or enriched much easier given the sort of " buddy" system that results from this structure. It can also make such things as flex time easier to facilitate. We are currently unaware of what information the customer service employees have regarding the workload of the repair bureau. Perhaps an increase in communication flow from the repair bureau to the customer service centre would be helpful.

If the tensions arise from a time constraints (expected times to fix a product) the customer service department will be better able to assess the wait times based on the queue. If the issue stems from providing inappropriate work orders to the wrong repair agent, this can also be amended by communication. Is there a problem with the interface sending the work orders? If so this can be fixed once the issue has been identified. (We realize that there are a number of other issues that could be happening at this point, but we believe that learning what the problem is will always be the first step.)

Conclusion By considering all the problems and impacts we can see the importance of having a proper change management program in which employees are transitioned. At the core of the issue is the importance of communication. Because of the stress and confusion surrounding change,

employee concerns should be managed by significant time and effort communicating with the employees. This communication should be reassuring, two-way and assert the need for change within the company. It should also come with the assurance that the company will undertake required measures to make the change as smooth as possible.

In this case, that would include possibly re-designing jobs, integrating information, an increase in training and perhaps a new recognition system. It is clear that when change occurs in an organization, employees need to be advised of the direction that the company is moving and why. The desired behaviors of the workforce should be known and a plan to unfreeze-change-and-refreeze behavior should be identified. In this case, changes in technology were supposed to reduce lead times for customers, require less work per issue and require fewer staff.

We can conclude that in order for this to be achieved, the above mentioned suggestions need to be put into play; a mere change in technology doesn't result in an increase in productivity. Ignoring the human component could prove to be more detrimental than ignoring the technological one. The human factor always needs to be considered when making any change to an organization. There should be a balance between what workers want and need and the technical requirement of the organization production system.

In the case, training for all employees on quality (i. e. Six Sigma), new technology and work flow changes should be conducted. The payoff of these changes would be dramatically positive as it would increase job satisfaction, team culture and high employee moral towards their work. An experienced

Human Resources professional would be helpful in managing the change process. In lieu of that the supervisory and management team should be well equipped to manage the change and to establish and build an open flow of communication. This will allow the organization to respond quickly to whatever is impacting the staff.