

Change needn't topple the business

PUBLICATION: BIZCOMMUNITY

DATE: 13 AUGUST 2007

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There is at least one guarantee in life: things change. In the corporate world, a lack of awareness of how change is experienced by people has the potential to bring down a business. It is not change itself that is a problem; it is how we think about what is changing that is the problem.

Many businesses are investing in executive coaching to help their staff use change as a catalyst to learn and grow.

It is natural for people to feel confused, uncertain or even a bit overwhelmed when faced with unanticipated change. As human beings we constantly strive to give meaning to the world we live in. Our world has meaning through the set of beliefs and assumptions we take on from our cultural and family context and through the experiences we are faced with through our passage in life. With this we construct a set of expectations of how the world should be.

Worldview

This becomes our worldview.

So, when events happen that do not fit with our belief system, many of us have a crisis of meaning. We struggle to make sense of what had happened. We go into denial, feel angry or depressed. The impact of this kind of experience can have a serious impact on his or her effectiveness at work.

Imagine the impact of social transformation on the 50-year, loyal executive who has worked hard and diligently all his or her life. Until recently, this person would have had the reasonable expectation of, at least, a solid career until retirement.

His or her worldview, constructed over the fifty years of life, would in all likelihood not have taken the possibility of these changes into account. So, it is not surprising that this individual's first line of defense would be to resist, argue against, or even go into denial. At a deeper level, they would feel insecure and possibly incompetent as old trusted ways of thinking would be failing them.

Any form of change that is not anticipated can cause this kind of reaction. Even a promotion, unanticipated or otherwise, can challenge an executive's way of thinking as the demands change – moving from a functional to a management role, having to make decisions in more complex organisational systems or environments, having to manage in a new cultural context, etc.

Proactive

In a business context, when reactions like these are noticed or anticipated, organisations can proactively step in and support their staff through these experiences. As executives become

aware of their reactions to these circumstances and how their thinking (i.e. their assumptions and beliefs) underpins these reactions, they are able to take on ways of thinking that incorporate the new set of circumstances and allows them to operate effectively.

This process of changing the way we think is a critical part of what constitutes personal and leadership development.

Executive coaching provides a context in which an executive can reveal her way of thinking about herself or the circumstances in which she finds herself without the risk of being judged or, at worst, vilified. This process allows the executive to become aware of how thinking gives a particular meaning to their world that leads to actions that may or may not be in their personal interest or that of their organisation.

Explore new ways

Through this process, the executive is able to explore what new ways of thinking can be taken on which are more empowering and likely to create new possibilities for action.