

Creating Flexibility Through Technological and Attitudinal Change

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Abstract Flexibility is well recognized as a predictor of organizational performance. There are two major contributors for creating more flexibility—one through technological changes and the other through attitudinal changes. The moot question is, which one of these two changes is more effective in bringing out flexibility in the organizations. Though flexibility can be enhanced by both the means, one may prove to be more effective than the other. The technological changes in terms of implementation of ERP, e-governance, analytics solutions, and other smart technologies are intended to create more flexibility in terms of reduction in cycle time, more options, and quick changes. On the other hand, the working of organizations can be made more flexible with a constructive attitude of actors involved; even without any use of technology. It is comparatively easier to bring technological change. The case of attitudinal change might be still more complex and time consuming. The attitudinal change is more fundamental that acts as an enabler of the successes of any technology change initiatives in an organization.

Keywords Attitudinal change · Flexibility · Technological change

Flexibility is well recognized as a predictor of organizational performance. It has been studied in the context of telecom service providers (Sharma et al. 2010); strategy

execution (Srivastava and Sushil 2013), innovation and entrepreneurship (Bishwas and Sushil 2015); performance management (Yadav and Sushil 2015), and so on. Thus, in order to create high organization performance it is imperative to manage change to bring more flexibility in organizations.

There are two major contributors for creating more flexibility—one through technological changes and the other through attitudinal changes. The moot question is, which one of these two changes is more effective in bringing out flexibility in the organizations. Though flexibility can be enhanced by both the means, one may prove to be more effective than the other.

The technology is expected to provide us more flexibility and agility. In particular, information and communication technologies (ICT) have offered us plenty of choices and speed of interaction. All web based and mobile technology applications have made our daily as well as work life easier and hassle free. The technological changes in terms of implementation of ERP, e-governance, analytics solutions, and other smart technologies are intended to create more flexibility in terms of reduction in cycle time, more options, and quick changes. With ERP implementation, information about any part of the organization can be retrieved by any other functional unit as authorized by the system. E-governance with paperless office reduces cycle time of any activity and also results in effective control. Other technological interventions such as smart cards, cctv cameras, and sensor based controls enhance convenience and security, and tend to reduce wastage of resources. The effective usage of such technological interventions would, however, depend on the attitude of people/actors dealing with them. A positive attitude would further enhance the technological flexibility, whereas a negative or neutral attitude would result in

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low usage, criticisms and, at times, damaging/hacking such solutions.

On the other hand, the working of organizations can be made more flexible with a constructive attitude of actors involved; even without any use of technology. If people at various levels develop listening abilities, be accommodative to others' concerns, looking for speedy resolution of grievances, develop a culture of involvement and inclusion, sharing of knowledge and so on, a lot of change can be brought out. In case of attitudinal change, leadership (as a role model) plays a crucial role. People down the line in any organization usually observe and, at times, emulate the attitude exhibited by the leader. A dictatorial attitude of leader may result into a hardening of processes handled by the subordinates as well. Whereas a more inclusive and open attitude of a leader (though may take more time) is most likely to make the handling more flexible and open down the line.

Another dimension is of interaction of attitude with design and use of technology. It can be observed that rigid minded designers may result in designing inflexible technological systems. I see a lot more to evolve on this front, with the freedom that technology can offer, but the designers of these tools, the web pages, and the forms to be filled online somehow use the technology in an inflexible manner. A few instances are of filling a form online, may be for booking air tickets, hotels, visa forms, GRE forms, forms for admission to any university, and so on. I can take at least three areas of inflexibility that can be better designed: the mandatory fields (for example, name fields); fields that provide 'select' facility out of a number of predefined choices such as city, country, date, etc.; some mandatory boxes such as '*I agree with the terms and conditions*'; without clicking that the form cannot be submitted. Designers of such technology enabled tools may do a great disservice to a large number of users.

It is comparatively easier to bring technological change, which may be supported internally or by external experts. It requires identification of needs, selection of proper technology, procurement of technology based systems, customization as per organizational processes, and so on. A lot of this will depend upon the availability of resources, but more than that on the attitude and commitment of people from concept to commissioning and further operation of the new technological solutions. A wrong choice of technological platform and the vendor may result in waste of resources as well as enhanced cycle time of implementation. At times, after implementing big technological solutions, it may be realized that it is not suitable for the purpose or is not user friendly and might make the processes more cumbersome. After investing a huge amount of resources and time, at times, it becomes difficult to either reexamine or to do

patch work. This is a common experience with implementation of ERP systems, that are implemented without proper planning and business process reengineering. This requires a lot of involvement of user groups before hand in order to minimize unnecessary customization, which may increase the budget on one hand and result in delays in implementation on the other.

The case of attitudinal change might be still more complex and time consuming. It directly deals with people throughout the organization. It might be more cumbersome to reengineer the mindsets rather than reengineer the systems/processes. The flexibility would be more effective with the right change mix of people and technology. It usually works both ways; change in the attitude of people enable the technological change to be more effective, whereas change in technology might drive to change the attitude of people. This has been evident in the case of implementation of internet based and mobile technologies. The attitude of people has evolved to demand anytime/anywhere service. Another important area of attitudinal change is towards safety and security. It would require to develop a culture of practicing safety and security as a way of life. This becomes far more relevant when new technologies are to be implemented.

The above discussion leads to an overriding influence of attitudinal change supported by technological change to infuse more flexibility in organizations. In this regard, the leadership role is crucial. Leadership in any organization drives both technological and attitudinal change. It is the leadership that not only sets priorities to infuse new technology in various processes, but also act as a driver for people to change the attitude and create a techno-savvy culture. The attitudinal change is more fundamental that acts as an enabler of the success of any technology change initiatives in an organization. Both attitudinal and technological change would influence in creation of flexibility in organizations in terms of speed of execution, adaptiveness and responsiveness to changing environment and customer needs, and creating a more open and inclusive work culture. The flexibility on multiple fronts is expected to result in higher performance for the enterprise as well as its stakeholders.

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