



"Nothing can be done quickly and prudently at the same time"

-Publilius Syrus (1st Century BC); Roman Writer

How to change prevailing attitudes and habits among employees?

What training processes should be applied to effectively introduce changes in companies?

Summary

- 1 Why is changing the employees' attitudes such a difficult task?
- 2 How employees should be trained to overcome existing mindsets?
- 3 Process description and example

1. Why is changing the employees' attitudes such a difficult task?

At school and university, students are taught most often by "route" learning. They sit in a class and are spoken to. Then they get marked on how well they can repeat this information. The **problem** is that the students hardly ever know how to **use** the information.

Many training courses reflect a "schoolroom" style of teaching: one trainer, with many participants, who are usually only passive recipients. The employees are often sent to a number of training courses in a short time. Those who send them often believe that this is an opportunity to gain **knowledge** quickly. Unfortunately, many of the employees **don't use** that knowledge. At work they use, at best, 20 – 30 % of the knowledge they acquired. Information gained this way is often **barren knowledge**, as it is not applied in practice. Very often it is difficult to remember or to internalize it properly. Even, if there is cognitive access to it, in the employees' consciousness there are no functioning procedures for its application. In short: the **theory** is **not put** into **practice**.

In Poland, we currently have a situation where many people focus on just 'getting by' in their jobs, often cutting corners, working inefficiently and having little concern about the direction or success of their company. These ingrained attitudes and skill deficiencies impact organizational efficiency. Upper management, on the other hand, focusing mainly on goals and managing, may feel they cannot influence employees' attitudes, thus accepting them as an integral part of Polish business conditions. Very often, the companies lack a functional **system of promoting** effective habits and introducing changes and modifications from bottom up.

In the competitive environment in which we live, the skillful **use** of **knowledge** is the most important factor deciding the firm's success in the market. The information employees have in their heads and how they use it, can be the difference between a successful and unsuccessful business. To achieve success, employees need to be motivated and encouraged, and their ideas creatively nurtured.





2. How should employees be trained to overcome existing mindsets?

In order to alter this mindset a **deep change** is required: a shift in values, attitudes and behaviors. Employees must look deep within themselves and generate **internal motivation** to use the information and skills they have gained for their own and their firm's good. It is also important to **re-model** the **systems** and **procedures** of **management** in the company so that they promote gaining knowledge and encourage the employees to use it in everyday practice.

In training, this cannot be done through short, loosely connected courses, whether they are based on theoretical, practical or experiential learning. What is needed is deeply considered and specially prepared **training process**.

"It is simply impossible to violate, ignore, or shortcut the developmental process and attempting to seek such a shortcut only results in disappointment and frustration"

-Stephen Covey

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People

Deep changes take **time**. They require people to be able to **open** up; **understand** themselves, others and problems of the team; find solutions as well as developing a positive attitude to **implement** and drive organizational change.

To achieve such deep results, people need a special, intensive training course, which **inspires** them to **real changes** and demonstrates to everyone that it is possible and necessary to improve oneself constantly. Only then trainers have a chance to lead the group process in a way allowing them to diagnose the team problems, find and demonstrate participants' development needs, help them in finding improvement paths (both individual and group), share the necessary knowledge and exercise the skills needed for implementation of changes.

The ideal is the **set** of such training courses, interspersed with periods of monitored implementation of their effects and stimulation of the improvement processes within the company. After each period, we recommend **measuring** the skill levels of the trained personnel and the influence of the implemented changes on the organizational environment. Such procedures should form a several months' **process** of intensive changes.



3. Process description and example

On the individual level, such a **process** should develop the three spheres of personnel functioning responsible for effectiveness of change: emotional, intellectual and behavioral. The process should create positive **attitude** to changes, demonstrate and prove practically the effectiveness of changes and exercise the variety of proper thinking **habits** and effective **behaviors** of the participants.

The training courses during such a process **must** fulfill at least a couple of requirements:

- 1 must be led by trainers, who understand the **group process** and management practice
- 2 should evoke strong **positive emotions** which would inspire the employees to make changes
- 3 **demonstrate** by **experience** that the changes are needed and possible, show the direction of changes
- 4 allow the participants to think over their attitudes, values and behaviors that they follow
- 5 give the participants time for difficult **questions** and **answers** concerning their team and company
- 6 include thorough summaries and feedback sessions
- 7 make participants plan the concrete actions for the future **on their own**

In the initial stages of the process, people are conscious of their knowledge and know what they should do in certain situations, but it is not until they participate in metaphorical projects that they become aware of the fact that they do not use this knowledge. Therefore, people must learn not just **what** to do but **how** to use the knowledge to the best of their ability.

Experiential Learning is a method where a person learns by being actively involved in challenging, action-oriented projects that serve as a **metaphor** for the **real situations** a person faces in life and at work.

The minimum required process is the following:

- Stage 1:** Creating atmosphere of trust, starting to get people to open up, increasing motivation for learning by showing that the 'impossible' is possible for those who train; and initial analysis of group needs by trainers.
- Stage 2:** Defining group problems by experiencing them in a model form and directing group motivations towards resolving them, general teamwork and communication improvement, individual reflection on participant influence on the team.
- Stage 3:** Closing group process, feedback session, creating solutions to problems, planning changes and committing to those changes.

Most people have a **natural fear** of the **new** and therefore to create deep changes people have to understand first why change is needed and how they could benefit from it. The deeper training process allows participants to have time to start **believing in change** and take responsibility to drive change within their organization.





The example of the company XY (*large production company*)

XY had a situation in which a key project was being run by **two** different **branches** of the company, in two separate locations. The process of communication, both horizontal and vertical was inefficient. There were **antagonisms** between the two branches as well as difficulties with defining the duties and personal responsibilities for the tasks. The realization of the projects proceeded **too slowly**, engaging too many resources. The XY management decided to subject the project team to the process led according to the method described above. The employees participated in a special training course, and were given opportunity to verify their opinions and behaviors connected with the project realization. The training procedures were scheduled in such a way so as to lead to a situation in which the branches could work together, realizing the project in time and with expected profit.

As the result of the process, the two polarized groups joined into **one team**. It allowed for methodical work on the issues, and for planning concrete actions to be implemented back at work that would lead to effective cooperation in the future. Since the training course in the spring 2002, the process of improvement was implemented and **significant changes** occurred: the most important problems were solved, the communication channels were open, and new procedures allowing for more effective actions were created. The branches **cooperate**, instead of competing, as it used to be. What we observe now is solving problems together and preventing the new ones instead of "extinguishing the fires" and looking for somebody to blame.

Summary

Changing the habits of the employees is a very difficult task, since the knowledge they gain during the training courses is used only to a small extent. In order to make effective changes within a company an **adequate training process** is needed. To achieve a long-lasting effect it is necessary to treat the training process with a great **commitment**, devoting appropriate amount of time, carefully planning the scope of desired changes and the ways of achieving them. It is important that the participants, through their own actions, both during the training course and after, feel as the **engines** of changes, which allows them to reach a high level of internal motivation. In order for this form of education to be successful it is necessary to hire for such programs trainers who not only have a deep understanding of the group processes but also a thorough knowledge of management as well as the ability to practically share that knowledge.

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