RAPID HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IMPROVEMENT: DEVELOPING A TWO-MINUTE DRILL MINDSET TOWARD CHANGE

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"It seems like we have a lot of different tools that we can use to drive change but we get bogged down more than we should on too many initiatives that either don't get fully implemented or seem to take longer than they should to reach the finish line and I don't think that we are alone."

-An HR Executive's lament

One of the major challenges facing human resource management leaders in the 21st century is that of planning and executing effec-

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tive change and performance improvement initiatives.1 HR leaders are playing a more integral and critical role in the performance and success of their organizations as an organization's human resources can be the difference between success and failure in competing in our global economy.2 As the world marketplace moves faster, organizations and their people must make changes at a faster pace than in the past and that is a reality that all leaders must address in their approach to organizational change and improvement. Thus, it has become a business imperative that HR executives and managers become more proficient at the art of leading and managing change.³ Also, that they learn how to speed up the change process regardless of the type of change that they are responsible for leading.

While improvement in any organization requires change, the challenges of effectively leading and managing change are well documented and strongly suggest that there are a wide variety of fac-

tors which can prevent organizations from effectively implementing change.4 Ask any HR leader these days how they are spending their time and they'll surely share that they are engaged in a wide variety of change initiatives with the hopes of improving their organization's performance. To this end, we recently conducted a series of focus groups with senior HR executives and asked them to respond to the following questions: 1) "What is your HR function currently doing to enhance the performance of your organization?" and 2) "What are the greatest challenges you face in attempting to make these changes?"

A content analysis of their input to the first question revealed a rather diverse collection of improvement efforts that included the top ten following initiatives:

- Improved manpower/succession planning
- Compensation system redesign and improved incentive programs

- Employee retention improvement programs
- Strategic wellness initiatives
- Creation and implementation of a performance management system
- Benefits realignment
- More effective management development processes
- An improved selection process
- An enhanced safety and ergonomics initiative
- Improved labor relations

All of these initiatives were viewed by HR leaders as necessary ways of improving their organization's performance that required significant effort and activity on their part. The second question asked of these HR leaders was quite revealing as they identified the greatest challenges they faced in creating these changes and implementing these desired improvements. Over 90% of all the challenges associated with the changes HR leaders identified in our focus groups fell in to one or more of the following five categories:

- Cost—Possessing the necessary resources to create change
- **Time**—Finding the necessary time to create the change on top of an already busy work schedule and ensuring that the improvement effort moves forward in a timely manner.
- **Execution**—Taking the improvement initiative from plan to practice
- **Buy-In**—Encouraging organizational members to be engaged with and take

- ownership of the proposed new practices
- **Measurement**—Ensuring that the proposed activity can be measured and improvement can be tracked

These challenges are not uncommon to leaders attempting to drive improvement in their organization⁵. However, they can represent a significant and additional challenge to HR leaders who are frequently under increasing pressure to make performance improvements happen sooner rather than later and demonstrate a return on investment (regardless of the issue). Many HR improvement initiatives fail to provide their organizations with a return on investment because the five challenges identified above are not properly dealt with or addressed in a systematic fashion by those leading the change initiative. It has been suggested that business leaders are using outdated mindsets, approaches and tools in driving HR improvement that fail to adequately address the challenges identified that can derail any attempt at organizational improvement 7.

DEVELOPING A TWO-MINUTE DRILL MINDSET

For the past decade, we have been studying successful and unsuccessful organizational change initiatives in a wide variety of manufacturing and service organizations. We have collected data on over 1,000 successful and unsuccessful change initiatives that span the spectrum ranging from stellar improvements to catastrophic meltdowns. While sporting analogies are frequently overused in the modern workplace, we have found that the characteristics of successful change and improve-

ment initiatives can best be captured with the use of a metaphor in which we are all quite accustomed. Let us challenge you to think about your next organizational change as a two-minute drill in the game of football. Stop right now and think of a close football game that you have witnessed where your team was behind on the scoreboard and time was running out. Write down your observations on what your team did to come out and win the game. Be specific.

Your team came out onto the playing field and attempted to execute an effective two-minute drill so that they could come from behind and win the game in the time that was remaining in the contest. Your team did not come out on the field to simply "go through the motions" but came out energized to do what was necessary to win! Two-minute drills require effective preparation, great quarterbacking, a sense of urgency, well-designed plays, motivated players, executing each play, moving the chains, monitoring the scoreboard and doing all of these things with extreme sensitivity to time constraints. What if you could bring these same attributes into your efforts to redesign your organizations compensation system, or design and implement a new organizational training or benefits program? Developing a two-minute drill approach to HR improvement can help you effectively deal with many of the five primary challenges our senior HR executives identified as threats to effective improvement.

WHAT IS A TWO-MINUTE DRILL (TMD)?

We would ask that you would use your imagination to think about

your next organizational change initiative as a two-minute drill. Having said this, we would now like you to systematically think through the steps in running a successful organizational two-minute drill using the following eight practices that we are confident will help you make real and rapid improvement in whatever type of HR initiative you are attempting to employ.

What is a TMD? A TMD is the critical leadership practice of applying the principles of rapid scoring from American football to the process of leading organizational change. The TMD is designed to give leaders a vehicle that they can use to drive real change and improvement when time is short and real results are needed! Right now we would like you to explore a process that can help you as a leader accelerate effective change in your organization. Please allow us to walk you through the key principles that have emerged and evolved from our research and practice on rapid organizational change and improvement that are chronicled in our new book. The Two-Minute Drill: Lessons on Rapid Organizational Improvement from America's Greatest Game ([ossey-Bass, 2007).

Change in the HR arena is serious business. Failing to take a change effort seriously, or to just go through the motions, is damaging to your credibility as a leader which can have far-reaching implications in both your organization as well as your career. As we walk you through the TMD process, compare the attributes you wrote down from your favorite "come from behind" football game with the research findings that are the basis of the TMD and see what you learn. We be-

lieve that every leader needs to develop their own interpretation of the key components of a TMD remembering that these principles should be viewed as "absolutes" necessary for successful change and improvement.

TMD PRINCIPLE #1: YOU ARE THE QUARTERBACK OF THE CHANGE PROCESS!

Very few, if any, successful TMDs are executed without effective leadership on the part of the quarterback who must possess a special skill set. And while most business supervisors, managers and executives have been encouraged to think and act like coaches in recent years, leading rapid change and improvement requires handson, trustworthy, on-the-playingfield leadership that is much more demanding than simply being a coach. Coaches stand on the sidelines or sit in the press box where they have a clearer and more perfect view of the field of play and the opponent. Coaches do not face career-ending injuries on every play and they do not have to make decisions in nanoseconds with large people trying to hurt them on every down.

For real and rapid change to take place in any organization the manager in charge of that business unit, whether a work group, a department, a division or an entire enterprise, must be on the playing field quarterbacking his/ her team and taking charge of the change process. They must enact their role as leader so as to instill confidence in their players and to create the realization that this effort must be taken seriously. Consultants, black belts, and facilitators can help the change process but they are no substi-

tute for effective leadership. An improvement quarterback must demonstrate their commitment to the cause and that the purpose of everyone's efforts is to win and not simply go through the motions. The quarterback must make everyone on the team realize that success is possible if everyone executes their assignments on every play. Or, in the words of Hall of Fame quarterback Terry Bradshaw, "The quarterback's job is to make everyone believe that the team can win and that takes commitment and courage."

Just like in football, the role of the quarterback is central to success. In a nutshell, HR leaders in their role as improvement quarterbacks must take charge, make effective decisions, communicate intensely, encourage hustle, be able to take a hit and create the momentum necessary to win. If you are serious about leading a successful organizational change, you must start to think of yourself as a quarterback. If someone else is going to lead a change for you, they must be empowered to be the team's quarterback with all of the requisite skills and authority.

Winning TMD Research Finding: Real and rapid change does not happen without effective, trustworthy, hands-on leadership from the person in charge of that unit.

TMD PRINCIPLE #2: AT THE START OF ANY IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVE, YOU MUST KNOW THE SCORE AND DEFINE WINNING

Two-minute drills always start with knowing exactly what score you need to win, where you are on the field, how much time you have to work with and how

many timeouts remain. These are critically important factors when attempting any change or improvement in an organization's HR function. Knowing the score requires using information effectively which has a strong correlation with a successful outcome of any TMD and any organizational change. As a leader, do you have a clear sense of whether or not you are currently winning or losing the performance game on a particular important organizational metric? Do you work hard to always know how your work group is performing against the performance variables that are most critical to success? Do you use a scoreboard to make rapid adjustments? While these questions may seem elementary they are critical to a leader's ability to implement rapid change and needed improvement. Using an appropriate scoreboard to help drive any change effort can be an invaluable source of information. inspiration and motivation.

Start every improvement initiative by clearly defining the desired outcome. Your team must know the outcome they seek and must be led to develop a game plan to achieve it. The successful execution of two-minute drills in both football and in the workplace requires clearly defined improvement goals and using accurate performance data on key metrics that can be viewed by players on a scoreboard that is seen and understood by all and that is constantly updated.

Winning TMD Research Finding: Successful change efforts are triggered by the realization that performance on a specific metric or activity is not where it needs to be, things must change and clearly defined goals must be set.

TMD PRINCIPLE #3: YOU MUST KNOW YOUR OPPONENT(S) AND YOUR OWN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESS IN APPROACHING CHANGE

Going into any football game, teams expend great resources scouting their opponents so that they will know "what they are up against" and how their team's talents match up. Teams do this assessment so that they can formulate a clear game plan based on actual knowledge of their opponent's strengths, weaknesses and tendencies. Do you do this in preparing for the HR improvements you are attempting to make in your organization? Football teams are very careful to make sure that they have an accurate assessment of their opponents so that they are in a position to create matchups that give them a competitive advantage. In both organizational change and on the football field we need to take a different twist on an old adage, "What you don't know CAN hurt you." Going into any HR change effort without analyzing who your real opponent(s) are can be naïve, short-sighted and can cause you to not address the challenges HR leaders identified as threats to successful change.

While business leaders are quick to come to the realization that their competitors are their opponents, they might be less quick to realize that people within their organization might attempt to stop their improvement scoring drive for any number of reasons. They might even find that their team or even their own leadership style might hurt their efforts at improvement. Effectively scouting who your real opponents are, and assessing the talents that will

be needed for a successful HR improvement effort are critical and must be taken very seriously.

Winning TMD Research Finding: Leaders of successful change efforts know their opponents as well as their team's strengths and weaknesses in developing improvement plans.

TMD PRINCIPLE #4: YOU MUST CREATE CLEAR FOCUS AND SENSE OF URGENCY AROUND WHATEVER CHANGE YOU ARE ATTEMPTING TO MAKE

When a football team finds itself on its own 20 yard line with 1:53 left in the game and they need three points to win, the entire team focuses its energies on helping the team get into position to kick a field goal. In such a situation, there is an exceedingly clear focus on the fact that a field goal can win the game and the time factor creates a sense of urgency for players, coaches and fans alike. Once an organization knows the score and realizes what performance outcome is necessary for success it must create a clear focus and a sense of urgency around that performance improvement and the process it will use to get there. Organizations are exceedingly busy with competing priorities for people's attention and resources. If an improvement effort is to get real results it must be given proper priority and a sense of urgency and importance.

People frequently ask football coaches the following question after a TMD victory, "Coach, your team just drove down the field and won the game, why didn't they just move the ball like that the entire game?" While the question might be logical, it fails to recognize two of the most important factors that

galvanize players to achieve a higher level of performance.

The lack of time has an energizing affect on the team so the pace, tempo and intensity of the final minutes of the game increases exponentially. When organizations approach the change process, these key ingredients are frequently found lacking. Thus, an HR leader interested in executing rapid improvement must find healthy and creative ways to develop and communicate a clear sense of focus and urgency for those involved at every level in the change initiative.

Winning TMD Research Finding: Real and rapid change takes place when people have clear focus on achieving a specific, desired outcome and they believe the changes are important and must happen sooner rather than later or there will be negative consequences.

TMD PRINCIPLE #5: YOU MUST DEVELOP A WINNING TWO-MINUTE DRILL PACKAGE OF PLAYS AND PLAYERS

Successful football teams go into any every game with a collection of plays that are designed to help them achieve success using the right talents of the right players when they are behind with time running out. This collection of plays and the players who execute them is called a "two-minute package" and is special in a number of important ways. Every play in the TMD package is designed to use time sparingly and to get the ball into the hands of team members who are described as "difference-makers," "go-to guys," and "money players". Each and every play has a starting and stopping point and is practiced

and rehearsed so that team members know their assignments well and are capable of making adjustments at the line of scrimmage.

In the workplace, each play in a TMD package is designed for a specific outcome to advance the improvement effort and put the team in a position to score, just like in a football game. Most organizations have some improvement model such as six-sigma, lean, TOM, and TPS among others. All of these models have a series of steps that organizations will follow that include needs assessment, gap analysis, idea generation and selection, implementation planning, execution, measurement, and follow up. It is important to realize that each step is a "play" designed to move your team to the actual "improvement end zone" while being sensitive to time and having the right players engaged during each play.

Teams will use plays that have been specifically designed to get them the results that they need to win the game. Interestingly, in the modern workplace, organizations frequently approach the change and improvement process in extremes. Sometimes organizations approach change in a lackadaisical and cavalier fashion despite the fact that the stakes are infinitely higher. Efforts at change can be poorly planned, half-hearted or simply exercises in compliance without commitment or passion. At the other end of the continuum, organizations frequently develop momentous change plans that are frequently too complicated, complex, too slow, and too rigorous to have any real effect down in the trenches among the people who have to execute the plan and live with the changes.

In leading any HR change, leaders must balance complexity with common sense, analysis with action and process with people to develop change plans that have a high probability of success. To go into a TMD without taking great care to make sure that the right people are in the right positions with the right talents is to invite failure. The difference between winning and losing is almost always the quality of play of your players on the field. Just as football teams know and understand the skill sets necessary for each position on the field, organizations must do exactly the same thing when serious change is required. Imagine asking a quarterback to play center and a center to play quarterback for just one play! While the outcome of such a decision might be humorous to watch, the impact on the team's ability to score would most likely be catastrophic. Yet all of us have seen similar personnel decisions made during our careers with the same sad outcomes.

As an HR leader, your goal is to create a TMD package of plays that represent your game plan for change. Sometimes your play package might come from your boss or from a corporate initiative. Sometimes you might develop your own change package or use a problem-solving team to do so. Regardless of the source of your TMD package of improvement plays, they must be linked to the outcome that you are trying to improve upon.

Winning TMD Research Finding: Effective change is based on plans of action that are realistic, understandable, designed to get a specific result using the talents of the right people and have a high probability of success when properly executed.

TMD PRINCIPLE #6: SNAP THE BALL, EXECUTE THE RIGHT PLAYS, AND KEEP THE CHAINS MOVING

In a successful TMD, time is the single most important resource and the value of each play that has to be executed is critical. Wasted plays kill scoring opportunities. Knowing the snap count for each play is a basic and yet vital component in a team's efforts to score.

Effective TMDs are characterized by a clear starting point in which coordinated action commences at the direction of the quarterback for each step of the improvement process. Successful efforts at HR change are characterized by individuals and groups knowing that it is time to execute their individual assignments. One of the key components to any successful TMD is the principle of "moving the chains." "Moving the chains" is the process of executing your improvement plays so that first downs can be achieved and that the improvement drive makes progress.

Getting off to a proper start in any change effort increases the likelihood of success by avoiding false starts which have a debilitating effect on the morale and confidence of team members. Once the ball has been snapped every person on the team must execute the assignment that they have been given to support the team's effort at change and improvement. A team may have a great play on paper, but if individuals and groups do not execute their assignments, the likelihood of failure increases significantly. Successfully executing each and

every play in your improvement process will help the team score the desired outcome.

Winning TMD Performance Principle: Successful change initiatives have a starting point where individuals and groups clearly understand that their performance will determine the success of the effort and that it will be measured and critiqued accordingly.

TMD PRINCIPLE #7: SCORE, CLOSE OUT THE GAME, THEN CELEBRATE

Closing out the improvement game is critically important because it means that leaders and their teams take the necessary steps to ensure that an improvement effort holds up before victory is celebrated. We have all seen teams come from behind and go ahead on the scoreboard, only to see their opponents defeat them in the final seconds because they did not do the things necessary to protect their advantage. Scoring has a powerful motivating effect on the players on the field and the fans in the stands because everybody likes to win. In the workplace people frequently do a good job at improving performance or making a significant change. The same is true of improvement teams that have just implemented a new HR process or solved a pressing HR problem with great success.

Sadly, these high performers are often not reminded or told that they have done a great job and scored. Why is there no celebration? Successful change efforts are characterized by the fact that people know what score they need, what they need to do to get that score and the fact that they

will be congratulated for scoring and helping their organization improve. But scoring celebrations should be moderated until the game is closed out and the effects of the change efforts have been maintained and become part of the organization's operating fabric and daily modus operandi. At that point, the team's successes should be celebrated at both the group and individual levels in a meaningful way.

Winning TMD Research Finding: Leaders must let performers know when they score, must make the changes stick and learn to celebrate victory/success.

TMD PRINCIPLE #8: ALWAYS CONDUCT A POST-GAME ANALYSIS AND PRESS CONFERENCE TO LEARN FROM YOUR EXPERIENCE

One of the hallmarks of winning teams is that they are constantly looking for new and better ways of doing things and learning not only from their successes, but also from their mistakes. A successful team will always review game films and statistics, not simply wanting to relive the glory of the moment (but this is one of the reasons why they do review game films), but also to better understand what went right, what could have gone wrong and what could have been done better. To this end, change is a never-ending process in modern organizations so that the more a team can learn about why a successful change was successful, the better off they will be when it's time to make the next major change. In addition to simply knowing and understanding the causes of success, it is important to share that information with others in

your organization. This is especially true in the HR function. While coaches hold press conferences to share their insight on their winning ways, leaders can do something similar to create benchmarks and encourage others in the organization to make change happen. This process can also provide your team with an additional opportunity for reflection and celebration.

Winning TMD Research Finding: Organizational change efforts should be reviewed and analyzed so that lessons can be documented and shared with others.

A CALL FOR ACTION: NO SPECTATORS ALLOWED!

Our goal in this discussion was to get you to think about HR change and improvement as a two-minute drill in the game of football. Whether you are attempting to implement a new

performance management system or new safety program or redesign your compensation system there is a great deal to gained by approaching such changes with a two-minute drill mindset and the practices described above. Having said this, take the opportunity to complete the The Two-Minute Drill SELF-ASSESSMENT in Exhibit 1.1 and determine the extent to which you use the practices identified in our research that are most critical to successful organizational change. Remember that you are the quarterback of your life, career, and operation and that any changes that are going to be real and effective need your leadership and willingness to play to win!

NOTES

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| | wer each of the following questions as they pertain to your appage happen in your organization: | proa | ch to | | ng H | R |
|----------|--|-------|--------|-----------|---------|--------|
| Vhe | en approaching change how often do I | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Usually | Always |
| ١. | Take control of the change process and lead by example? | | | | | |
| 2. | Do all of the things necessary to lead change so as to drive better results and performance? | | | | | |
| 3. | Know when change is required by using an accurate scoreboard? | | | | | |
| ١. | Clearly define what success means when entering an HR change initiative? | | | | | |
| 5. | Know and understand the opponents we face when entering an HR change initiative? | | | | | |
|). , | Know the strengths and weaknesses of my team so as to create favorable match-ups in a change effort? | | | | | |
| | Create and communicate a clear sense of focus on what we are trying to change and how we are going to do it? | | | | | |
| 3.). | Create a sense of importance and urgency around the change initiative we are trying to build? Have a clearly developed set of "plays" that advance the | | | | | |
| • | improvement effort and lead to improved performance and success when properly executed? | | | | | |
| 10. | Have the right players on the field equipped and ready to play at an optimal level on each and every play? | | | | | |
| 11. | Make sure that we move the ball down the field and take corrective action to make adjustments on each play when performance is not where it needs to be? | | | | | |
| 12. | Ensure that our players are doing the right things, the right way, at the right time so as to execute change? | | | | | |
| 13. | Do the things necessary to ensure that improvement/change sticks? | | | | | |
| 4. | Let my team members know when the game has been won and celebrate success? | | | | | |
| 15. | Review and analyze change efforts when they are completed? | | | | | |
| 16. | Share the lessons learned from an improvement initiative with others? | | | | | |

HR ADVISOR