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Change: The Challenges and Transition Strategies for Employees in Education and Retail

Change is a fundamental and core aspect of human progress, yet resistance to change is a well-documented phenomenon. Although change is a natural order in human nature, the resistance to change is particularly evident in a plethora of professional sectors. This resistance becomes particularly pronounced in various professional sectors when conventional practices are challenged by the adoption of contemporary methods. Understanding this resistance necessitates that one must undertake an exploration as to why employees and educators within traditional academic settings might resist the transition from physical classrooms to virtual online environments. Additionally, it calls for one to examine the challenges that are posed by the integration of new technologies in these academic institutions as well as being able to identify effective strategies to enable them to surmount these obstructing obstacles. This inquiry not only pertains to classroom settings, but it also extends even further to more traditional brick and mortar retail. It is in these retail environments where it is a constant challenge adoption new ideology to combat and contend with their digital retail counterparts. Armed with this knowledge, one will be able to answer the critical question as to why employees at academic institutions often exhibit reluctance in transitioning to online classrooms and how employees can successfully navigate the transition from physical stores to virtual retail environments. In the effort to fully ascertain these challenges and resistances, one must undertake a comprehensive examination as to the reasons behind the resistance to change, the challenges associated with adopting new technologies, and the strategies that facilitate a successful transition in both the educational and retail sectors.

Before one can ascertain all that goes into the changes brought about by the transition to online education, it is crucial to delve deeper into the myriad of factors that contribute to the resistance that is faced by a plethora of educators and university employees. Human nature is commonly referred to as being creatures of habit. If one were to analyze human nature in themselves and those around them, it would be apparent that most human beings like to stick to a routine or a certain way of doing something and do not like to have that “traditional” method altered or tweaked. This commonplace allows for a certain complacency among human beings and the longer that this cycle goes on, the harder it is to alter. In the sector of the classroom, the traditional classroom where students come in and the professor lectures in person has been the norm for centuries. As was seen when the COVID-19 pandemic came around in 2020, this social and traditional norm was disrupted and caused numerous schools to shift from that traditional setting to rapidly adopt a setting in which they could still teach but in an online setting. This change was so abrupt that it caused a lot of panic among educators and there was a plethora of both educators and students that were extremely resistant to this change, but they were forced to adopt this new methodology. The shift to an online classroom setting disrupts established routines, causing psychological resistance both between faculty members and students alike. One of the fears that might be attributed to this psychological discomfort with the new conformity is the loss of the personal touch that the in-class setting provided, which can create emotional resistance. “There is a rising concern that instructors will lose the personal connections they can.

establish with students in a face-to-face environment” (Lloyd et al., 2012) Due to this ideology of the lack of interpersonal connection, some educators may have reservations about their ability to foster a meaningful student engagement and effective communication through virtual platforms.

The transition to online education also poses a significant technological challenge. Many educators are not tech-savvy and may lack the digital skills that are necessary to fully and effectively transition to online teaching. This was also apparent when schools throughout the United States shut down at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. Due to the rapid evolution and changes going on through the economy, both businesses and school had to shut their doors from having people coming in. Even though this shutdown occurred, it did not mean that student's education was cut off or businesses had to stop selling products. Instead, to continue educating students, universities shifted to online classes to finish out the semesters and year. It was in this rapid shift that adopting to a technological based teaching method versus an in person teaching method that caught numerous educators off guard due to not being familiar with technology or how to effectively set up an environment that was able to portray everything that was laid out prior to this shutdown. It is in this confusion that the fear of technological proficiency is a hinderance to many providers because the hinderance of the adaptation might affect teaching capabilities. In addition to this, the question as to the full reliability of certain online tools can also be put into question as well. Some tools are not always reliable, and the technical issues associated with the issues presented by those technologies can also disrupt the learning experience. There is also the idea that the integration of the virtual environment for education might reduce student engagement and interaction with the professor." Much online instruction is through text-based communications and, while there may be live video lectures, the amount of personal time each student receives with the instructor in the online class is less than in a face-to-face class by default."(Kane & Dahlvig, p. 5). The absence of the face-to-face contact could be seen as a barrier that hinders both the loss of nonverbal cues associated with in-person learning

and the fostering of an in-person classroom where discussions and group activities are present in person but not apparent through a virtual learning environment. Another concern and challenge that can be made apparent in the shift to a virtual environment is job security. With the introduction of online education, many educators face the challenge or fear that it might lead to a reduction in staffing requirements due to the lack of the transition to a remote working environment. This fear can be extended to encompass the idea that automation and online platforms might lead to a downsizing within their organization or a change in their current role which in turn adds a resistance factor in their environment.

While all these and many more challenges can be made apparent to a shift from traditional methodology, several strategies can be implemented to address these multifaceted challenges. One of these strategies might involve the organization or university implementing Comprehensive training programs for educators and staff to bridge the technological skills gap. These programs should encompass the use of online teaching tools, virtual classroom management, and digital communication skills. “To effectively teach their adult students, faculty must learn about and implement technology in their teaching.”(Matrosova Khalil, 2013). By providing educators with the necessary skills and resources, universities can boost their confidence in navigating online platforms as well as the confidence of the educators as well. By implementing these training programs, if a situation were to arise like a massive pandemic that was prevalent in 2020 with Covid-19, educators would be more adeptly prepared and not be as resistant to a rapid change in the teaching platform and tools associated with the transition. Emphasizing the benefits of online education is also crucial in changing perceptions that are resistant to this modular change. Administrators should highlight advantages such as increased accessibility, flexibility, and the ability to reach a wider audience. This demonstration as to how

the learning experience can be enhanced can help with the understanding of the benefits as well as to help mitigate resistance. The creation of support networks and a community in which experience is shared for everyone to join in and help one another in the adaptation of this transition might also prove beneficial in the effort to mitigate resistance. By having a commonplace where educators could elucidate their thoughts and opinion with other colleagues might help the educators not feel so overwhelmed and resistance because they have others in similar situations, and it gives them a place to all get together and express their thoughts by offering a sense of camaraderie and collaboration. In addition to all these suggested mitigation tactics, including a decision-making process which involved both the educators as well as the staff members can make everyone feel more valued and more likely to embrace the transition associated with change. By allowing the employees to have a say when it comes to transitions within an organization, the employees can feel more of a sense of ownership and commitment that they can associate to the new education paradigm.

The retail sector also faces significant technological challenges when transitioning from brick-and-mortar stores to online platforms. Traditional retail employees are more accustomed to inventory management involving stocking shelves, tracking items, and managing in-store coordination. In contrast, online retail employees are required to master digital inventory management systems, which demand a different skill set. “In-person interaction has dramatically changed or been supplanted by digital engagement, and early indications suggest that much of this shift may endure in the long term.” (Briedis et al., 2020). They must become proficient in using inventory management software, understanding supply chain coordination, and optimizing the online shopping experience. Brick-and-mortar retail employees excel in face-to-face customer interactions by helping customers make purchasing decisions through personal

engagement. Relying on their interpersonal skills, product knowledge, and the ability to provide immediate assistance. In contrast, online retail employees must adapt to written communication, product descriptions, and customer reviews to assist customers. This necessitates the need to excel in written communication and digital customer service to ensure that customers have a seamless online shopping experience.

Loss prevention is another challenge that is specific to brick-and-mortar retail. Traditional retail employees are trained in in-store loss prevention techniques, such as monitoring for shoplifting and security measures. Online retail employees, on the other hand, must be vigilant about online fraud, cybersecurity, and data protection. In this online setting, it is imperative that it is fully understood on the safeguarding of individual customers, data integrity of the store itself, security breaches and fraudulent transactions. In addition, visual merchandising plays a crucial role in brick-and-mortar retail for product placement and promotion. Employees are trained to create visually appealing in-store displays that attract and engage customers. In contrast, online retail employees must understand how to create visually appealing online displays and optimize product listings. These online retail employees must fully grasp the principles associated with an e-commerce website design, including layout, product imagery, and user experience.

To combat the challenges associated with these changes, several things could be done. The integration of comprehensive training programs that allow employees to understand the processes, tools, and security measures that go into an online retail setting to be more adept if they need to transition. These training programs should include digital marketing, e-commerce platform education and providing customer service in an online retail environment. Employees in

traditional retail can transition to online retail by undergoing comprehensive training programs. By employing this strategy, it would allow employees to not feel so resistant to the idea of the switch because they would be better prepared to handle the transition with more ease than they would be with no prior knowledge of how to handle a situation where they were forced to switch without any prior understanding allowing them to understand digital advertising techniques and be able to provide the exceptional customer service that is provided in an in-person environment. Moreover, employees can also leverage their transferable skills when moving to online retail. Skills such as customer service, product knowledge, and salesmanship are valuable in both physical and online retail settings. If the employers were to encourage employees to identify and utilize these skills, the resistance to this transition is reduced. For instance, the ability to understand the needs of a customer is able to be more easily identified and products can be easily recommended regardless of the setting which in turn allows effective communication if there were a case in which the customer needed to communicate electronically with the employee for certain recommendations or products that are needed.

The guidance and mentorship from experienced online retailers can be an invaluable asset to employees to help employees adeptly switch over to a non-traditional environment that might otherwise be very scary or daunting. This guidance would provide a well-rounded insight into the inner workings of the digital landscape for a transitional ease. Employees that are experienced in online settings can allow the employees to gain insightful knowledge into understanding customer behavior, digital marketing strategies and all the various nuances that are associated with online customer interactions. This mentorship can facilitate the acceleration of the learning curve that is associated with this switch allowing the employees to transition with more confidence and go into this transition with less resistance due to a lack of comprehension or

understanding. It might be valuable to integrate a hybrid approach inside of businesses in which the employer facilitates both environments for their employees. “The savviest retailers have spent years creating omnichannel strategies that blend physical and online channels to engage consumers in the channel of their choosing.” (Briedis et al., 2020). This hybrid environment would involve having the employees work in both an in-store and virtual environment to gain a comprehensive understanding of both. By having this mixture of both in person and online, the employer would be able to ease the workforce potentially and gradually into fully working in a remote setting once a competent understanding of both is obtained. This trial period would then allow the laborers inside of the company to learn new skills and be able to apply those new skills fully once the alteration is made to the company.

Embracing change is not just a necessity; it is an opportunity for growth and development in the modern world. Whether in education or retail, resistance to change can be overcome through comprehensive training, support, and a focus on the benefits of new technologies. Successful transitions in both sectors can lead to enhanced efficiency, competitiveness, and job satisfaction. As one navigates the ever-evolving landscape of technology, adapting to change becomes a crucial skill that empowers individuals and organizations to thrive in the digital age. The journey may be challenging, but the rewards of embracing change are well worth the effort.

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