

# Employees Skeptical of Change Efforts Look to Influential Peers

By Phaedra Brotherton

**Senior leaders worldwide aren't getting the employee support they need for change initiatives.**

**Employees in the United States and abroad are skeptical of corporate change efforts and are reluctant to give senior leaders buy-in, according to a recent survey on global change management practices.**

"We found that four out of five initiatives start out with employees distrusting the change effort. Leaders are starting behind the eight ball," says Lawrence Polsky, managing partner, PeopleNRG Inc. "Change efforts are hard enough, but if you're starting out with low trust, you have your work cut out for you," he says.

The report, "Leading Global Change: A Best Practices Report," conducted by PeopleNRG, a change management consulting firm, compared the change management practices of 907 HR, organization development, and workplace learning professionals and leaders from the United States and 50 other countries. The survey looked at such areas as amount of change, sense of urgency, communication, buy-in, and trust.

The survey found that organizations and employees are dealing with as many as three to five different change efforts at a time. Although employees may shake their heads as though they support a change (81 percent), the data show that they don't really mean it. In fact, employees are overwhelmed with constant change, says Polsky.

"What that means for learning professionals is that when you're rolling out

programs and you're trying to teach people new skills, you have to assume that people are distracted with other issues," says Polsky.

Leaders across the board scored well in communicating the benefits of change to employees, with agreement at 61 percent in the United States and 50 percent in other countries. However, leaders scored lower on involving employees in change effort planning and in giving details about the change. Only 26 percent of U.S. companies consulted frontline, nonmanagerial employees versus 23 percent of companies in other countries. Leaders did better in communicating the details of change efforts, with U.S. leaders at 39 percent and leaders in other countries at 35 percent.

"The change announcement is a critical moment," says the report. "Employees are waiting to hear the formal word on what is happening. Leaders are judged on competence and trustworthiness from these announcements."

This lack of communication seems to have affected employees' trust in the efforts. U.S. employees (78 percent) and

## The BIG Number

# 83%

of U.S. employees accept change when supported by influential nonleaders.

employees from around the world (77 percent) are skeptical of change efforts. In the U.S., only 7 percent of senior leaders received automatic buy-in to the changes; senior leaders in other countries received slightly more buy-in at 17 percent.

Employees, however, are willing to put their trust in change efforts, supported by influential peers or nonleaders—U.S. employees scored 83 percent, and employees from other countries, 67 percent.

Polsky advises organizations to handle communications about the change effort by encouraging dialogue, teaming up with influential peers, and stressing how the change will benefit employees.

Weight conversations in terms of what's in it for employees in the short-term and long-term, and why they should care, says Polsky. Employees will then be more receptive to learning the skills needed to support change efforts.

*Phaedra Brotherton is senior writer/editor for ASTD; pbrotherton@astd.org.*



### >> The Trust Factor in Organizational Change

	Percentage of employees who are skeptical of any announced change	Percentage of senior leaders who get automatic buy-in from all employees
United States	<b>78%</b>	<b>7%</b>
Other countries	<b>77%</b>	<b>17%</b>

Source: PeopleNRG Inc.



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