Beatles, Buy-In, and Business Strategies:

Simplifying the Process of Earning and Maintaining Employee Buy-In for Organizational Initiatives

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I. Introduction

During the decade-long and incredibly successful career of the 1960s rock band The Beatles, the band members' collectively bought into the band's vision for success and worked harmoniously (for the most part) to create unique songs that still inspire people today. Even though the famed Lennon-McCartney songwriting duo received the primary songwriting credits for many of the band's hit songs, each member's role in the band's collaborative process was critical to the Beatles' success. While each member of the band brought different backgrounds, ideas, and talents to the group, their ability to collaborate and focus on the importance of the whole helped drive them to fame. Among the many pillars of the Beatles' success, arguably the most important pillar was the group's collective dedication and support of the goals of the band, leading to the legendary songs that it would produce.

Similar to how John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison, and Ringo Starr traversed "The Long and Winding Road" as a band to find their enormous success, company managers and leaders must also endure a long and winding road to developing, implementing, and finding long-term success of company objectives. Through the development and implementation of organizational changes, the need for employee support is constant. Leaders cannot implement their ideas alone, and they need the support of their employees to create meaningful changes in the company. This article will describe employee buy-in as a concept, the importance of employee buy-in to company strategies, suggested guidelines for developing ideas with employee buy-in in mind, and strategies for maintaining employee buy-in by leveraging feedback and ensuring intentional follow-ups.

II. "With A Little Help From My Friends:" What is Employee Buy-In?

In considering employee buy-in as a general concept, Ringo Starr's famous line "I get by with a little help from my friends" strikes a chord with managers and officers seeking to implement organizational changes or affect organizational culture. In order for businesses to succeed and achieve their goals, motivating employees to support and aid in the development of ideas is critically important. Without employee buy-in, company leaders can have difficulties in developing, launching, and implementing meaningful organizational changes.
When implementing a company change, employee buy-in consists of the support of the idea from employees, along with a general consensus to help see the idea through to fruition and long-term success. Ultimately, a leader's garnering of employee buy-in requires employees to have an understanding and general support of certain goals or ideas within a company and a general consensus to continue working towards those goals.

Seeking this support does not mean that employees will agree with all aspects of an idea, and pushback and negative feedback will almost be inevitable. Fortunately, this type of response can prove to be extremely valuable. As discussed later in this article, feedback and opposition present a significant opportunity for managers to develop ideas and allow employees to have a role in the process. Generally, employee commitment to company initiatives occurs when management and employees can "Come Together" and adopt a collective mindset to further the aspirations of the business.

Additionally, employee buy-in is something that company leaders must continually cultivate and work toward maintaining. As discussed later in this article, earning and maintaining employee support is a process, and that process is not complete once an idea is presented or even when it is implemented. It is important for managers to continue to return to the principles and strategies discussed in this article to help promote the longevity and success of the company's objectives.

III. "Come Together:" Importance to Organizational Success

Simply put, gaining employee buy-in is critical to the success of an organization. Without the support of company employees, leaders face issues such as unmotivated employees and disconnectedness amongst managers and employees. Particularly for compliance professionals, earning and maintaining employee buy-in to a culture of compliance is crucial to the success of compliance programs and to the success of the business itself. Engraining a culture of compliance in the business requires a consistent message among company leadership to become a part of the common practices and habits of employees. In order to develop, present, and implement compliance-related initiatives for the company, leaders, such as the CCO, must set the tone and continually engage with employees to foster the culture of compliance. A focus on methods to garner employee buy-in can help compliance professionals to develop and maintain buy-in to a culture of compliance. Offering employees the opportunity to buy-in to company strategies and goals allows for those employees to understand their importance to the overall success of the company and the value that they can bring to the table. Just as much of the Beatles' success stemmed from their ability to "Come Together" and prioritize working collaboratively, an organization will be much more successful in future endeavors if leaders prioritize working together as a team with their employees.

Maintaining employee buy-in not only benefits employees by displaying their importance to the success of the organization and encouraging them to engage more in the development and improvement of company goals, but buy-in also benefits managers who play a large role in obtaining employee buy-in. Managers who lead by example and consistently work towardimproving the workplace environment, growing the company, and encouraging employee participation in important decision-making processes may find that employees begin to engage more in their positions and become increasingly motivated to better their work product and increase their output.

Managers can lead by example and gain respect among their employees by maintaining honesty and transparency when discussing goals of the company and the strategies needed to achieve those goals. Employees' buy-in is a clear test of trusting their superiors. When employees trust their managers with developing strategies that will ultimately benefit the employees buying into the idea, and the leaders of the company succeed in implementing those strategies, then the business relationship between employees and leaders is strengthened. Consistent examples of implementing ideas that benefit both the company and its employees will lead to employees committing to their own work and working together with their team.

Generally, organizations can be successful if they have passionate, responsive, engaged employees who view their success as a result of the overall success of the company. Leaders must lead by example and prove to their employees that they are equally invested in the company and want to work toward its growth. A leader who invites employee commentary on company strategies and uses employee ideas and criticism to improve those strategies is a leader who is well-respected and trusted in the eyes of the employees. While employee buy- in is crucial to the overall success of a company, effective leadership, honesty, and integrity are paramount for encouraging employees to engage in company goals.

IV. Strategies and Implementation

a. "I've Got a Feeling:" Formulate a Clear Vision & Determine Your Goals

The very first step in gaining employee buy-in is developing a clear vision of what employees would be buying into. For the success of a plan, it is crucial for the idea to go from "I've Got a

Feeling" to being built upon strategy and a clear foundation. The easiest way to formulate a clear vision is by answering a few simple questions and discussing the answers to those questions with the key players involved in implementing the initiative. These questions can include:

1. What do you want to achieve?
2. How do you want to get there?
3. Who benefits from this idea?
4. How can employees contribute to this idea?

It is not necessary that the objective is completely formulated, only that there is a clear goal in mind and a general consensus among leaders that employee buy-in is crucial to the success of the plan. In fact, not having a plan that is already set in stone will allow for more flexibility and employee contribution as the strategy develops, which leads to developing an objective that will benefit everyone in the company.

Question One: What do you want to achieve? What is your end goal?

Without a clear goal in mind, employees will not understand their role in the plan and will have no motivation to see it through. Leaders proposing a new company initiative need to put in the work before bringing the idea to the attention of the other company leaders. This preparation includes completing all background research, drafting up proposal options, weighing the benefits and any potential negative impacts that the plan will bring to the company, and finally, developing a clear statement of how this idea will assist in the continued growth and success of the business. It is not necessary to have a fully-developed plan when proposing the idea to company management because this flexibility will allow other leaders to participate in planning the steps required to reach the goal.

Question Two: How do you want to get there? What are the logistics and feasibility of your idea? How do you want to use employee buy-in to your advantage in furthering the progress of the goal?

While it is not necessary to have a set-in-stone plan for achieving the goal, it is important to have a clear foundation and general step-by-step guidelines in place before requesting that employees buy into the initiative. Without at least these general guidelines in place, the feasibility and probability of success is less predictable. This step is beneficial when the entire leadership team tackling the initiative meets together and determines the best next steps for implementation.
Once everyone is on the same page and a clear plan of action is formulated, then that is the ideal time to begin explaining the goal to employees and requesting their participation in the company initiative.

Question Three: Who benefits from the idea? Would employees benefit equally from this plan? If the answer to this question is no, then the chances of gaining employee buy-in from many employees is slim to none, unless the initiative is tailored to a specific audience.

If the company initiative would only benefit a few employees or only benefit the leadership team, then it is unnecessary to request employee buy-in from the entire company. When planning the initiative, managers need to determine the audience for the idea nd focus efforts on those employees who are primarily affected, as the employee response from those employees that are not affected is not as significant. It is essential to request employee buy-in from all employees when the plan is a large company-wide initiative; otherwise, the importance of gaining employee buy-in may be decreased when the end goal does not benefit everyone who supports the initiative.

Question four: How can employees actively contribute to this idea?

Employee buy-in is not simply employees' acquiescence to management's ideas. Company leaders should involve their employees in each step of the goal's implementation so that employees feel important to the company and understand that their continued support is valuable to company leaders. If the goal only requires participation from upper-level management, then employee buy-in is unnecessary. It is useful for leaders to think of the initiative from the viewpoint of an employee to better understand how they can be involved in the process and how they can contribute to achieving the goal.

b. "From Me to You:" Understand Your Audience and Anticipate Opposition

Once a vision and plan take shape, leaders need to share that vision with relevant stakeholders in order to determine employee response and solicit feedback. In considering presenting a new idea to employees, managers should consider several factors in determining when and how to disseminate the information. Much of this decision making will depend on the scale of the idea, company culture and norms, and managerial strengths and weaknesses; however, certain considerations discussed below will help lead the plan to success in a variety of different scenarios.

First, managers should give significant consideration to determining who needs to hear the message and when would be most advantageous to share the information. Part of this determination boils down to the scope of the idea. Will the change affect the whole company, only certain departments, or only a specified subset of employees? Based on the scope of the idea, managers can determine who should hear about the idea and when, and it is important to remember that the audience for an idea will likely increase over time. For example, while a manager may begin by presenting an idea to a small group of other organizational leaders, they might find it advantageous to include more employees in the conversation as the idea develops. For the purpose of encouraging employee buy-in, it is important that the relevant stakeholders receive information and updates on the vision early and often so that they have a foundation upon which they can build their trust.

Second, the leader should determine how to convey the message regarding their idea. Much of this decision is dependent on company culture and capabilities. For smaller companies, an all-hands town-hall style meeting may be common practice or easy to set up, while for larger companies with employees spread around the country or around the world, emails or smaller presentations may be a more effective, realistic method. Again, the scope of the idea is a significant factor here as a smaller idea and a company-wide change would likely require significantly different communication methods.

Third, as leaders are preparing their ideas and communicating them to employees, it is critical to understand and anticipate that there will be some level of opposition to the idea or change. Ultimately, feedback is a gift with which leaders can work to improve concepts, and allowing for that feedback when presenting an idea is an important step in the process. Ensuring that employees know that they can provide feedback and have an impact on business development can be incredibly valuable for encouraging them to buy in to a change. When presenting an idea, the company must make it clear that both positive and negative feedback is welcomed and appreciated.

Regardless of communication method, leaders must communicate in a way that is both inclusive of everyone in their audience and tailored to the needs of different audiences along the way. Unfortunately, it is not as easy as the Beatles put it, "From me / to you / just call on me and I'll send it along." In achieving employee buy-in, managers should ensure that stakeholders

understand that they have a say in the decision-making process and that their input is valued. Managers' emphasis on being able to have an open discussion and being willing to listen, as is discussed further in the next section, is a key to developing ideas and securing employee buy-in.

c. "Help!:" Invite Others' Ideas

I need somebody.
Help! Not just anybody.
Help! You know I need someone, help.

Even the members of the Beatles recognized the importance of asking for help when they needed it. Being a strong company leader means inspiring and supporting employees to actively contribute to the success of the company. Gaining and maintaining employee buy-in is only accomplished if managers and officers not only encourage employee feedback, but also create a streamlined and organized process for receiving it.

The first step in creating an organized employee feedback process is to let employees know that they play an important role in achieving the goals of the company. Business leaders should implement ways to make employees feel involved in the development and improvement of the company while also ensuring that the discussion surrounding the idea continues to be centered around achieving the goal.

The next step in organizing employee feedback is having a simplified approach to allow employees to provide comments and suggestions on current company initiatives or ideas for future initiatives. Achieving and maintaining employee buy-in includes requesting employees to support a company initiative and using employee feedback to better execute that initiative. Employees are more involved in the day-to-day activities of the company and are often the first to notice when something is not going according to plan. Creating a plan for receiving feedback and inviting employees to utilize the process will assist leaders in understanding where problems exist and how to combat those problems. Providing several options for employees to submit feedback will encourage them to interact in the initiative development process. Examples of these feedback options can include sending out anonymous company-wide surveys, discussing recent initiatives one-on-one or in small group settings, or through more informal methods. Finally, it is important to let employees know that the company values feedback by utilizing helpful comments and ideas in developing strategies. Companies should credit their employees who take the time to provide feedback on company initiatives so that employees understand that their input is being used and that they feel involved in the development and continued improvement of the company. Employee feedback is extremely valuable and should be utilized in such a way that employees will be encouraged to continue to participate in company strategy discussions.

d. "We Can Work It Out:" Leveraging Feedback

Think of what you're saying.
You can get it wrong and still you think that it's alright.
Think of what I'm saying,
We can work it out and get it straight, or say good night.

Once managers receive feedback, the next critical step in securing employee buy-in is to leverage the feedback to improve the initiative. For example, Ringo Starr in his composition of the song "Octopus's Garden" provides a pertinent example of seeking out and taking advantage

of feedback. While Starr was an instrumental figure in the band, he had only once taken the lead role in writing a song for the group before he came up with the idea for "Octopus's Garden" in 1969. In the documentary *Get Back*, the film shows Starr and Harrison sitting at the piano working on chord progressions in order to take the song from just an idea to a full-blown song. In order to build on his idea, Starr sought help from Harrison and his other bandmates, and he leveraged their feedback to help build on his idea and bring it to fruition. Similarly, managers should seek feedback regarding their ideas for company change, particularly in areas that may not be their strong suit, and leverage that feedback to improve their final products.

Ultimately, feedback is a gift. Like Starr, managers can utilize feedback from others to strengthen the idea and incorporate new perspectives into the development of the idea. Even the most carefully considered and detailed plans can have blind spots, and leveraging the feedback from employees and stakeholders to address potential issues can help to create more wholistic planning and employee support.

A more difficult task is determining how to filter through employee feedback and apply the lessons learned from the employee responses. While feedback is a crucial aspect of plan development, not all feedback is relevant or helpful to managers implementing new ideas or changes. Managers are in a unique position to determine whether feedback is unrealistic, infeasible, or inapplicable. Filtering out this type of feedback will allow for more time to be spent considering more valuable pieces of feedback.

Next, management must apply the feedback to the idea. Employee feedback can provide different perspectives on an idea and help to create a more well-rounded vision. Additionally, when employees can tell that leaders consider their feedback and that their efforts impact the development of changes, they will be more likely to buy into and support the changes. It is important to demonstrate to employees that they have a role to play in the implementation process, and incorporating employee feedback into the company ideas is an excellent way to demonstrate that importance.

e. "All Together Now:" Communicating Progress

The biggest mistake company leaders make when getting employee buy-in is letting the idea die once they have gotten the necessary support from their employees to bring the idea to life. To circumvent this issue, company leaders need to consistently remind their employees that the goal still exists and that everyone is still working "All Together Now" to achieve that goal. There are several ways to keep the idea alive: (1) company leaders can have periodic check-ins with their employees to update them on the initiative's progress, (2) the company can find ways to include the goal in day-to-day company actions and employee work, and (3) company leaders can offer employees a way to communicate any concerns or proposals to remind employees that the company values their feedback and their continued support. Managers need to understand that throughout the implementation of the new idea, obstacles may appear and that the company may need to make changes to the plan. Overcoming obstacles is where continued employee support is essential to the implementation of company initiatives.

Company leaders need to have periodic check-ins with their employees not only to remind their employees that the idea still exists but also to hold company leaders accountable for their role in achieving the company goals. One way to accomplish this task is by scheduling monthly or quarterly meetings with company leaders active in planning the initiative with set goals to achieve during the meetings. Following the meetings, leaders can issue company-wide reports consisting of what the discussion during the meeting, if any changes were made to the plan, and goals for the next meeting. Not only will employees be able to see that the company acknowledges the importance of employees' actively supporting and participating in the initiative but providing

periodic updates will also hold leaders accountable for seeking progress and improvement in the company's strategies.

A great way to constantly remind employees about the company's initiatives is to include references to company goals in day-to-day business. For example, if the company is working to establish an environmental impact initiative to reduce the company's negative impact on the environment, then the company has many options for keeping employees aware of the goal. Examples of these options can include sending out a periodic newsletter with statistics on the company's recycling habits each quarter, providing employees with reusable water bottles with a quote about the environmental initiative written on it, having events where employees can volunteer during the workday to support their community, and much more. Consistently bringing the initiative up in everyday discussions and activities will help continue to foster employee buy-in.

Finally, it is imperative that company leaders remain open-minded to change as the initiative progresses and invite feedback from their employees. Just because the strategy has been completely formulated prior to implementation does not mean that unforeseen obstacles cannot later derail that plan. Remaining open to change and communicating progress to company employees reminds employees of the huge role that they play in the company's success. Leaders need to be transparent with their employees and update them not only on the progress that the initiative is making, but also on any obstacles that the company has faced while implementing the plan. Furthermore, leaders should invite employees to offer their suggestions for improving the plan. Sending out periodic surveys to gauge employee reactions to the initiative will assist leaders in understanding where the company's priorities should be and offer leaders' suggestions from employees on how to better execute the company's goals. It is important to remind employees frequently that they play a crucial role in the company's success and that they are essential to the company's growth and prosperity.

f. "The Long and Winding Road:" The Power of Repetition and Intentional Follow-Up

For managers, the work related to company changes, particularly changes that relate to company or office culture, does not end when the change is implemented; rather, a manager's work toward meaningful change and employee buy-in is a "Long and Winding Road." While a manager's work in this respect may change after an idea's implementation, patience and persistence are key to maintaining employee buy-in in the long term. As discussed below, intentionality in both the post-implementation analysis of an idea and the communication surrounding the initiative is key for the long-term success of the idea and maintaining employee buy-in.

As discussed in the previous section, communication and intentional follow-up on ideas are crucial aspects of maintaining the support of employees in the long term. While changes are implemented and become part of the company's culture, it is important to keep employees informed of updates and developments regarding the changes. Particularly in the context of compliance-related changes, keeping employees informed about the development of initiatives will encourage them to continue to foster a culture of compliance at the firm.

As part of this communication, leadership should work to receive continuous feedback. The feedback can be formal (a survey, a specified meeting, etc.) or informal (discussions with employees, email check-ins, etc.); however, regardless of the method, post-implementation feedback can allow leaders to improve current initiatives while also using that feedback to better plan future initiatives. This post-implementation feedback provides for a more well-rounded analysis of the pros and cons of this change and how an analysis of these pros and cons can benefit future ideas and employee buy-in.

This commitment also requires leaders to model the values and ideas that they expect their employees to follow. For compliance, this means that leaders have to take the initiative to lead by example and demonstrate to other employees that staying compliant is a habit and part of the company's culture. Ultimately, this dedication by leaders will be a significant boon to developing long-term employee buy-in because it shows employees that company leaders are invested in the long-term success of the company and its initiatives.

V. Conclusion

As discussed in this article, one of the essential factors of both the Beatles' success and organizational leaders' ability to implement organizational initiatives effectively is being able to "Come Together" to support and buy into changes. Similar to how managers may face obstacles when collaborating on company initiatives, the members of the Beatles faced negative feedback and difficulties gaining support on certain ideas. Nevertheless, the end product of the Beatles' collaborative process, a stream of hit songs, was well worth the troubles that they faced on that "Long and Winding Road." Along the path of organizational change, leaders should revisit the steps outlined above to work towards implementing long-term, effective change that benefits both employees and the organization.

Leaders must play an active role in the steps to gaining and maintaining employee buy-in, and they can accomplish this goal by leading by example. Through leading by example, managers can convey a message to employees that proposed plans and initiatives will help lead to organizational success, ultimately benefiting the employees who bought into the idea.

Ultimately, earning and maintaining employee buy-in is a difficult process that requires significant planning, flexibility, and follow-up. This process will most likely not be completely smooth, but having a step-by-step process will assist in keeping the goal in mind while also focusing on gaining the support of employees. Whether an idea consists of implementing a new set of company values or writing a song about an octopus in a garden, working together to support one goal is a difficult process, yet can lead to great success. ■