

In modern organisational environments, the addition and integration of technology has and now forever be essential and vital for survival and competitiveness. StitchCo, a textile manufacturing company, attempted to implement a technological change, a shift from a manual production process, to an automated production process, using the help of machines to aid employees in their work. Despite StitchCo's good intentions to improve efficiency and productivity, the lack of support and communication from leadership resulted in employee resistance, a decline in morale and reduced performance. This essay argues that StitchCo's failure to implement technology into their workplace failed due to a lack of management and poor communication to staff. By introducing participative leadership, enhancing communication and rebuilding culture trust, StitchCo can begin to rebuild engagement and improve employee performance.

Previously, StitchCo worked under a Tayloristic design, distinguished by repeated tasks, close supervision from management and a piecework pay system that rewarded employees output. Facing a financial crisis, StitchCo decided to introduce new technology into their workplace to help aid production and reduce manufacturing costs. Organisational change can be defined as a process in which a company will change or modify their structures, processes or behaviours to improve outcomes (Al-Haddad & Kotnur, 2015). Organisational culture encompasses shared values and assumptions that influence behaviour at work (Schein, 2010), whilst leadership refers to the ability to influence and guide individuals towards achieving common goals (Northouse, 2021). Employee engagement represents the level of commitment, motivation and mental investment employees will direct towards their work (Bakker & van Wingerden, 2021). Analysing these concepts shows clearly how StitchCo's approach created resistance, uncertainty between employees and disengagement from their work.

StitchCo's attempt to switch from a manual system to an automated one whilst simultaneously encouraging managers to take on a more distributed and engaging style of leadership failed due to limited training to the employees on the new technology, failure to support employees when it was needed and an unclear set of expectations from leadership. Older employees feared being made redundant and the piecework pay created rivalry rather than collaboration, undermining the teamwork required for technological problem-solving (Smith & Lewis, 2020)

Lewin's (1947) three stage change model shows clearly the failure StitchCo faced. During the unfreeze stage, employees were not prepared for the change, resulting in low readiness (Vakola, 2013). During the change stage, technical support was lackluster and management was viewed as unavailable, causing frustration in employees. In the refreeze stage, the new automated process failed to integrate into the companies culture; morale decreased, absenteeism spiked and employees fell back to what felt familiar to them. To understand why and how these issues

emerged, it is vital to explore the relationship between culture, leadership, communication and motivation.

Schein's (2010) model of organisational culture shows insight into StitchCo's difficulties. At the artifact level, piecework pay, visible control from management and managerial hierarchies set everyday work. At the espoused value, StitchCo prioritised productivity, compliance and efficiency and finally at the level of basic assumptions, there was a pre-existing belief that management knows best and employees should follow their orders.

The addition of automation into the workplace began to challenge the underlying assumptions. The change to distributed leadership required peer collaboration and autonomy, both of which contrasted with the previously existing culture. When cultural assumptions are changed, employees will begin to feel anxious or uncertain (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2015). In this case, resistance was more so about lack of trust and loss of control, rather than the fear of new technology (Alvaro & Garrido, 2020)

Older workers resisted the change because they believed the use of automation would threaten their identity and skill relevance at their work. The use of piecework pay further reinforced rivalries and competitive behaviours, instead of building teamwork like upper management had hoped for. When employees view a sudden change as a threat to them or their work, they will withdraw, avoid new responsibilities or become absent, all of which was prevalent at StitchCo

Prior to the change, StitchCo's management adopted a transactional leadership style, mainly focusing on monitoring employees outputs, correcting mistakes made and rewarding obedience (Bass, 1990). Whilst this approach is good for a repetitive routine and tasks, it is far less effective when innovation and change is required. (Brown & Trevino, 2020).

StitchCo attempted to transition from their original Tayloristic management style to a transformational and distributed leadership model, which would have given employees a voice and offer shared decision making, empowerment (Northouse, 2021). However, after the change, managers received no training in aiding the new autonomy. They delegated jobs and responsibilities without offering reasoning, help or feedback, resulting in confusion among employees.

Employees saw this as an abandonment from management rather than the empowerment they were looking for. Based on Muller, Droui and Sankaran (2019), leaders must develop essential skills such as communication and support to successfully aid distributed work. Without these skills, engagement from workers declines due to them feeling unsupported and unseen.

StitchCo's communication strategy heavily contributed to resistance. Instead of explaining the reason for the introduction of automation, management gave employees instructions rather than physically involving themselves in the process (Khan & Malik, 2021). Due to this, employees began to lack a sense of significance in their work, their ability to interpret change and understand its relevance fell (Hameed & Anwar, 2021)

The lack of a two way communication channel meant workers' concerns were not properly voiced and misinformation could begin to spread between employees. When employees are not provided with clear channels to ask questions, it spikes anxiety and their motivation will begin to decrease (Smith & Lewis, 2020). Because of this, rumours will start about job losses, intensifying fear and resistance.

Herzberg's (1966) Two Factor Theory highlights hygiene factors, such as job security and working conditions, prevent employee dissatisfaction, but will not increase motivation in workers on their own. Employees, particularly older employees, believed that StitchCo's use of autonomy threatened their job security, causing widespread dissatisfaction. Alongside this, motivators, such as personal growth, growth within the company or recognition, were not introduced. Without these vital motivators, employees lacked the means to embrace the new technology.

Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs gives further insight. The use of autonomy interfered with employees' safety needs and the sense of their belonging, further preventing them from achieving higher level needs such as self-actualisation (Lubke & Hein, 2020). When basic foundational needs are threatened, employees will become defensive, rather than innovative.

To improve motivation between employees, StitchCo will need to offer retraining programs to help strengthen job security, as well as introduce reward systems to recognise when employees innovate or succeed in their jobs. They will also need to offer mentoring relationships between management and employees to help rebuild their feeling of belonging (Ryan & Deci, 2020)

For StitchCo to fully recover they will need to implement several strategies into their workplace. Participative leadership training will help the managers coach, communicate and support employees, doing so will help employees understand the new technology and boost autonomy, with this being the original goal StitchCo was aiming for (Northouse, 2021). Another improvement needed is a transparent communication channel for employees, such as routine meetings, efficient feedback and ways employees can voice their concerns to help reduce the spread of misinformation and increase trust with leadership (Smith & Lewis, 2020). Retraining programs will help reduce anxiety between workers and help empower older staff members, helping reduce absenteeism in their demographic. The addition of celebrating milestones will help restore morale and further encourage engagement in

employees' work. Addressing these motivational needs is not optional for StitchCo, it is vital for building a strong and trusted workforce that is capable of embracing and adapting to change. If StitchCo can successfully implement these changes into their management and workforce, they will begin to see the benefits they had originally hoped for when they brought in new technology.

StitchCo's failure to successfully implement autonomy into their workplace shows clearly that technology alone cannot change or transform an organisation. Viable change requires proper leadership, open communication between employees and management and a supportive organisational culture. When employees begin to feel uncertain or unsupported in their work, resistance will build and performance will decline, creating further problems. By creating and adopting a participative leadership style, improving their communication and building a culture of trust, StitchCo can start to rebuild employee engagement and finally achieve the productivity they had originally sought after.

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