

Implementing Change: Bad feedback requires attention

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Introduction

In a constantly adapting world, organizations designed to drive a profit often seek innovations that will allow them to stay relevant, profitable, and ahead of their competitors (Reeves & Deimler, 2011). Moreover, those industries within the fields of hospitality, customer engagement, and food service tend to be highly focused on earning the attention and loyalty of their consumer base (Myo, Khalifa, & Aye, 2019; Rather & Hollebeek, 2019).

Change management theory provides the framework for this case, which examines plans to develop a “Dining Innovations Team” (DIT) within a contract foodservice unit located in a Midwest higher education institution. The purpose of this case is to illustrate how change management theory can be used to implement a change initiative designed to help the foodservice provider retain the management contract and remain profitable. The DIT will be tasked to handle menu development, client communication, and other implementation tasks. This change initiative is guided by initial feedback from satisfaction surveys that will allow readers to decide whether such a team is a necessary and beneficial addition to the operation. Additionally, the case provides a structure for others seeking to implement similar change initiatives.

Change is inevitable, necessary, and motivational. When accepted, change can be harnessed to allow a business to develop better and beyond its initial expectations. It is with this assertion that change concepts are explored and used to support the desire for change within the foodservice’s operations.

Background

A Midwest higher education institution has selected a contract food service provider to oversee the dining services for the institution. Annual evaluations of the food service provider’s performance identified several areas in need of improvement. To address the problem areas, a DIT is formed within the unit to focus on improving daily operations. The DIT will be involved with implementing menu improvements and increasing guest satisfaction. It is expected that the DIT give focused attention to these two areas for approximately 1 year, at which point the team will be evaluated for their success, usefulness, impact, and future direction.

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The DIT will be charged with re-imagining and implementing an updated menu format. These menus will follow a 4-week cycle to meet the expectations of the institution. The end goals of this initiative are multi-layered. The unit will: 1) expand offerings that follow standards of the advised United States Healthy Plate Program; 2) inspire and observe the parameters set by the organization’s menu guidelines; 3) incorporate items that allow both allergen-and-dietary-restricted guests to select from a wide and inclusive menu without having to compromise on taste or quality; 4) add food items that have either been limited in previous years or nonexistent before the creation of this team. The menu enhancements will provide guests the opportunity to experience various local, regional, national, and international cuisines, including menu items indicated as in-demand by the annual “Hot Trends” publication, and coalesce with the overall guest demands and preferences.

The DIT efforts will adjust as the client’s needs and desires evolve. However, efforts will primarily focus on three aspects: 1) a wider and more interactive daily-changing menu focused on guest preferences; 2) an inclusive atmosphere that is cognizant of guest needs and allows anyone in the facilities to dine comfortably, and 3) the increase of residential events that allow the team to highlight important causes favored by guests. Ultimately, the DIT hopes to create dining experiences that include activities and events that prove a reprieve from all the stresses of young-adult life including college, work, and social responsibilities.

Reasons For Change: The food service providers perspective

Updating menu practices and standards are necessary to meet current guest preferences, align with company standards, and provide better marketing of the guest experience. Most importantly, change is needed so that the food service provider can retain the institution’s contract and remain profitable.

A review of recent guest, associate, and client satisfaction survey scores indicated a notable level of dissatisfaction with the current menu cycle. Survey results noted participants want: healthier menu options, more ‘interesting’ food, trendier food (i.e. quinoa, free-range poultry, and heirloom vegetables), and a more ‘valuable experience’ as related to the current cost of a dining meal plan. Among specific complaints about this unit, a large portion of the participants stated

being dissatisfied with the food being offered. Survey participants mentioned that menu items were 'old,' 'plain,' or did not meet their dining experience expectations.

Additionally, employee satisfaction surveys indicated that 22.6% of frontline associates felt there was poor communication and interaction between management and hourly associates. Interestingly, the surveys revealed associates did not feel like they successfully impacted or influenced the menu cycle in a meaningful way.

The client requires all residential students and some faculty members to purchase meal plans. Additionally, volunteer meal plans are available for purchase by commuter students and staff. Both plans include several surcharges that are beneficial to both the client and the contract food service provider. Because the food service provider has a high focus on client contract retention and ultimately extension, client satisfaction is imperative. Meal plan sales directly correlate with the ability of the company to achieve financial goals and maintain client standards. As the company generates more revenue, it will be able to offer a different array of menu items and events, which in turn provides an opportunity to increase sales, developing a cycle for success. The food service provider's current financial status has placed it in a critical position to improve satisfaction levels. Additionally, the company must adjust product purchases to protect profit margins while correcting the current service model.

The DIT will be dedicated to focusing on the issues noted and will monitor the relationships among Employees, Guests, and the Client to facilitate the service and menu model. By monitoring these relationships, the DIT intends to bridge previously-existing gaps between the three groups. Depending on the success of their integration, the DIT could become a regular fixture within the unit. If not successful, the DIT will be disbanded after the first year of implementation.

Literature Review

Charles Darwin's theory of fittest survival suggested those who most aptly manage the inevitability of change will best succeed and sustain in a continuously adapting world (Kasemsap, 2018). In the modern age of business, change is an inevitable factor an organization must address. The profit-driven nature of business (Holbeche, 2015) requires organizations to continually strategize and evolve to maintain an edge over the competition. The need to be fluid and nimble sometimes results in immediate changes that seemingly transform policies, people, procedures, prices, and products 'overnight' (Sah & Nadda, 2017). As such, businesses must recognize, accept, and respond to change in a timely and rational manner to remain effective and efficient.

Change is often the result of a previous initiative or stressor, which serves as a 'trigger' for further development. These triggers are typically categorized as either internal triggers or external triggers (Case, Vandenberg, & Meredith, 1990). Whether internal or external, triggers and subsequent changes are commonplace within the industry and often come with a unique set of challenges, benefits, and risks.

Internal triggers tend to have a great impact on the primary features that make the organization distinct and set it apart from similar competitors; this includes the internal environment (i.e. the company's mission statement, organizational culture, and leadership), policies and procedures, styles, systems, and attitudes (Case et al., 1990). As such, when a trigger is an internal one, it is more likely to have a greater influence on organizational activities, decisions, and behaviors of the company stakeholders including employees, staff, and clientele (Case et al., 1990).

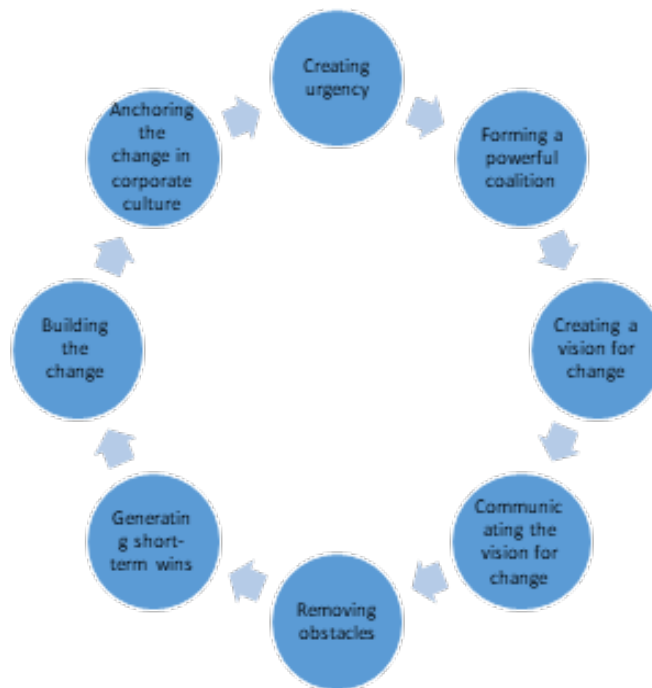
Extending outside of the organization are external triggers that can serve as the impetus for changes. External triggers are outside of an organization's control, but perhaps within their sphere of influence. These triggers might include political, social, technological, and economic stimuli and changes, as well as customers, competition, and resourcing (Case et al., 1990).

The vast nature of the external environment makes external triggers more common than internal triggers, and more impactful over a longer-term (Volberda, Van Den Bosch, & Mihalache, 2014). However, internal triggers can be more pressing as they tend to 'hit closer to home, faster' than external triggers (Case et al., 1990). Regardless of the trigger, organizations navigating change may meet a unique set of obstacles that can deter the successful implementation. While change is inevitable, it may not be embraced by those potentially impacted by the possible outcome (Case et al., 1990). Kotter (2012) explains that people are not going to embrace change as fast as they want, but your job is to get the right process, focus and win and make it happen despite all the challenges, hard-wired problems, and natural barriers.

When experiencing change, conflicts may arise as feelings of uncertainty and fear occur. This can leave the team feeling distracted or disenfranchised and impede the success of possible change (Kotter, 2012). To address the potential turbulence, leaders must have a change initiative plan that maps out the proposed change process in a systematic manner and considers both the pros and cons of the change. In addition, change leaders must assume setbacks and resistance to the process will occur, which makes a well-thought out change management plan a must (Kotter, 2012). Those responsible for a change initiative must commit to their mission, understand the planning required to make the transition successful, and acknowledge gaps between the current state and the targeted end result (Kotter, 2012). Awareness of the change initiative's impact on the current organizational structure and the manner in which it will be changed after the initiative is implemented must be considered (Kotter, 2012).

Figure 1.

Kotter change model



Planning and leading change, whether internal or external, is one of the more challenging and essential parts of a change initiative. As a result, most change initiatives will revolve around a change agent – a person (or persons) from within the organization that assists with the transformation (Kotter, 2012). Effective change agents possess the commitment and skills necessary to successfully guide change and make themselves fully available during the process (Kotter, 2012; Westerborg & Bode, 2018). Change agents have a clear vision of the change being implemented, are patient and persistent, pursue answers to difficult questions, lead by example, and are able to develop strong relationships based around their organization (Kotter, 2012). Change agents are key to successful change implementation. They boost morale, share necessary information with others, and are able to effectively share updates with other change leaders. Change agents often serve as the link between change initiatives proposed by management and the associates that may be impacted by the change. These individuals bridge the gap between the two and allow the vision to be aptly and accurately communicated to all levels of the organization (Kotter, 2012). Change can still occur without change agents; however, it may not be as productive if there is not an interpreter to connect the people involved to the process (Collings, McDonnell, & Scullion, 2009).

Change Management Processes

The manner in which change management is approached varies. Santos, Passos, and Uitdewilligen (2016) suggested that in order for change to be from an organizational perspective forming an effective team is imperative. A truly effective team must have members with a certain amount of buy-in that allows them to work with one another in order to accomplish tasks and be successful beyond the parameters of their own personal goals (Santos et al., 2016). The team must have good communication and a chain of command to guide this process. However, it is important to let the team 'grow organically with their ideas' and allow their creativity, experiences, and thoughts to be recognized during the process (Santos et al., 2016).

To structure and facilitate the change process, Kotter (2012) developed an 8-Step Process for Leading Change that highlights the critical steps necessary when initiating innovation. These steps include creating urgency, forming a powerful coalition, creating a vision for change, communicating that vision, removing all obstacles, generating short-term wins, building the change, and finally anchoring that change in corporate culture (Kotter, 2012).

Kotter's theory of change is unique from others in the sense that it places more personal responsibility for change on leaders, rather than followers. Change is a fluid process that all organizations must

face at some point if they are to survive. Often, a change initiative is only as successful as its staunchest supporter (Kotter, 2012).

While understanding the change process is critical, it is equally important to understand why some change initiatives succeed and others fail. Hiatt (2006) developed the ADKAR Model as a tool to examine the key characteristics of successful change implementation. ADKAR is an acronym that represents the five building blocks needed for successful change: Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, and Reinforcement (Hiatt, 2006).

The ADKAR Model acknowledges two dimensions—the organization and the employees—that influence successful completion (Shah, 2014). The ADKAR Model is sequential. Change is most effective when all employees understand the need for change, have extensive knowledge of the change processes, and understand the anticipated results (Hiatt, 2006). Navigating change often involves learning new skills and altering behaviors, which will help [ideally] sustain changes upon implementation (Hiatt, 2006). As steps of the ADKAR Model are implemented, stagnation must be closely monitored and prevented. Change leaders must closely examine where organizational issues may occur and how best to improve them (Shah, 2014). The ADKAR Model also targets the elements that have the highest chance for success and provides a road map of where the change process should be imitated.

Change Management Plan

Participants in the Change Initiative

Selection of DIT members will be based on those who would present the largest gains, losses, connections, and dedication to the overall end-goals of the process. Prospective members include the following:

1. **Students Groups.** The institution's students possess unique knowledge and relationships with their peer group that will allow them to survey students' needs, wants, and expectations of dining services. Student members can build a bridge between the DIT and their customers. This can improve the likelihood that menu concepts and events will meet the overall student body preferences. Two key student groups, Resident Advisors and Meal Plan Students, will have representation on the DIT.
2. **Campus Personnel.** The campus employees can provide valuable insight into the expectations they have of the dining center. Including this demographic on the DIT provides an opportunity to build an alliance with college personnel, previously unreachable, and allows the food service provider to better cater towards the other half of their contract, which includes Faculty and Staff meal plans. Two key representatives from this group, the institution's nutritionist and marketing coordinator will be utilized by the DIT.

3. **Foodservice Associates.** Individuals employed by the contract foodservice provider can offer knowledge of kitchen operations and team functions. Their ability to create and implement menus recommended by the DIT can improve the likelihood of success. Three key associate representatives will be involved in the DIT process including the head chef, marketing director, and guest-service staff.

The DIT will have a clear line of leadership and authority. While teams function most effectively when the 'table' is chaired in a community sense (Kotter, 2012), evidence suggests that teams with multiple 'drivers' at the charge can be ineffective, if not overall detrimental to the primary cause (Mohammed, Klimoski, & Rentsch, 2000). The additional time required to manage multiple leaders can create unneeded stress and reduce productivity if it is not properly guided and channeled into actions that lead to goal obtainment (Waller et al., 2001). A detailed list DIT of members for each of the three groups discussed is outlined in Table 1.

The potential success of the DIT initiative was determined using the ADKAR Model and will utilize Kotter's model for implementation and follow-through. The foodservice provider has historical guest satisfaction data collected annually from its Marketing team. In addition, the institution's staff and students are aware of the primary comments and calls for change from customers. Meetings with the client (i.e. institution), the food service provider, and foodservice associates have occurred to discuss guest satisfaction scores, address customer complaints, and detail compliancy issues. As a result, all parties are aware of the need for change to occur.

The DIT is one solution to address challenges noted in client meetings. Participation in the DIT will be strictly voluntary yet highly encouraged as a way to make a difference through strategic menu development. Communication of the team's work is important. DIT information (membership, goals, meeting minutes, etc.) will be made public on the institution's website so that outside stakeholders are aware of the team's progress. The foodservice associates will be updated in weekly Calls To Action and college personnel will receive updates in monthly All-Campus meetings where the DIT has secured a time slot to team progress. Updates will also be published monthly in the food service provider's newsletter for clients and associates.

While the DIT initiates and monitors proposed changes, the team champion, or lead, will ensure communication is a top priority amongst all team members. Regular progress updates and benchmarks for success will provide opportunities to celebrate successes and regroup from unanticipated challenges. This communication strategy will address Kotter's assertion that successful change is best measured with 'small wins'. As the DIT achieves early-stage benchmarks (i.e., creating the first data-driven menu, generating the first post-implementation survey,

Table 1

Groups involved in DIT

Student groups	Resident Advisors supervise their fellow students and often hear complaints or comments from students under their charge. Some of the feedback they receive may be tied to the student dining experience.
	Meal Plan Students who have Meal Plans represent a key demographic in the DIT. Since they are guests who most frequently eat at the dining center, and have greater levels of insight about what is and is not necessary for the dining center to provide.
Campus personnel	Institution's Nutritionist can provide knowledge of healthy innovative menu practices and nutritional standards that align with the goals of the DIT, the foodservice organization, and the client.
	The institution's Marketing Coordinator / Activities Director can offer insight on ways to mesh industry trends with the current preferences of Generation Z. Being able to effectively communicate those trends in a manner appealing to both students and campus personnel will be important.
Foodservice associates	Head Chef / Sous Chef of the foodservice provider can offer knowledge of current menu items offered, culinary skills available, and time needed to manage and guide the kitchen team.
	The Marketing Director of the foodservice provider is well-versed in market trends and can validate items selected from the Hot Trends list. Also, this individual is in a position to survey and communicate with students to gain menu preferences data. The Marketing Director can also work with the Marketing Coordinator to tackle larger projects and plan new food-related events for the client.
	Foodservice Associates especially those who have a unique connection to students (i.e. FOH during lunch and dinner hours). Frontline Associates are often the first to hear complaints and can provide students an outlet to provide feedback useful to the DIT. These associates will also be able to see and determine immediate reactions from the client in real-time as they execute the plans established by the DIT.

Table 2

Resources needed for the DIT initiative

Resources	Description
Time	The time needed will be determined by the DIT members. The team will meet during mutually agreed upon hours, and all foodservice associates will be compensated through their hourly wages or salary. Time given by the institution's students and personnel will be in line with the campus service policies.
Money	Innovation expenses will be split between the Marketing Department for publicity, giveaways, and décor, while food costs will be taken by the Culinary Team.
Space	Free meeting space is available in the dining center. Availability is flexible and can be utilized as needed.
Tools	Each DIT participant has access to unique, innovative thoughts, ideas, processes, and education. While DIT members are expected to contribute their personal knowledge and research, any physical tools (cooking equipment, advertisement tools) needed will be provided by the food service provider's Marketing and Culinary teams.

etc.) these small wins will serve as a source of encouragement to further and ultimately feed into the larger vision of the DIT.

Unanticipated challenges are likely as the work of the DIT unfolds. The DIT organizational structure will enable the team to effectively work through these challenges. A food service associate, most likely the Marketing Director, will be responsible for championing the DIT and assuring that meetings are productive. This team champion will keep the Director of Dining Services apprised of the DIT recommendations and will serve as a bridge between the team and upper management. Additionally, the team champion will serve as the go-to person for any team issues. In the event the DIT is too much for one person to handle, the Marketing Director may divide team lead responsibilities with the Head Chef rather than adding additional members.

The team champion will be responsible for arranging accessible meeting times, but DIT participants must willingly show up and be engaged. It is anticipated that the DIT will meet one (1) hour each week and spend an additional 2 – 5 hours each week working on DIT efforts. The team champion will also be responsible for the coordination of resource allocation including time, money, space, and any additional tools. Anticipated resources are included in Table 2.

The DIT will operate in a collaborative fashion that encourages serious input of members, provides guidance from the team champion, and utilizes a structure of accountability. Meetings will happen regularly and will be organized so that DIT members stay focused on team goals while continually scanning the environment for innovation opportunities. As changes are implemented that impact revenue, sales, and awareness polls, results will be analyzed by the team champion, shared with the DIT members, and used to further the DIT's position with the Director of Dining Services.

Progress Management and Evaluation

The weekly/biweekly DIT meeting minutes will be kept on digital and paper records for approximately one (1) year and will serve as a frame of reference for future DIT work. Upon completion of year one, the Director of Dining Services, the Head Chef, Production Manager, along with other company and campus stakeholders will convene to determine if the DIT has been productive. If the efforts are deemed successful, guidance will be provided as to the extent to which the DIT should be allowed to progress, develop, and grow.

Both quantitative and qualitative annual survey results will be used to evaluate client and guest satisfaction and areas for improvement. To obtain this data, three surveys will be administered to three groups—Resident Students, Faculty/Staff, and Non-Resident (Commuter) Students. The campus services approximately 260 Resident Students and 60 Faculty/Staff. Typically, survey responses are received from nearly 50% of this population. Additionally, the institution serves 450 Non-Resident (Commuter) Students. A Survey of these students

will occur in phase two of data collection to determine if the DIT recommended changes to menus, production, or dining center events made them want to participate more in dining programs. With a previous average of 67.9% satisfaction across all cost centers, there is room for improvement. This number is expected to improve as a result of the DIT's efforts.

The DIT has established goals of 90% participation in the dining center programming from campus life as a whole, an 85% participation in Meal Plans from Non-Resident Students / Faculty & Staff, and a 90%+ on satisfaction levels within the dining center and Auxiliary service units across all three annual surveys. Administering the surveys, collecting the data, and analyzing the results will take more than the initial year allowed for the DIT test run. Therefore, for the first year, the DIT will focus on the following action items:

1. Modify the current 4-week Menu to make it 80/20-compliant.
2. Design an alternate 4-week Menu to incorporate the foods, cuisines, and dishes that were recommended by the food service provider's associates, students, faculty, and staff in the 2019 food feedback and vision surveys.
3. Poll students to determine three events that they would like to see hosted in the dining center.
4. Plan and execute one of the recommended events in the spring semester.
5. Work with the Marketing Coordinator and Student Activities Director to poll students at the first event and gauge participants' reactions to the new format.
6. Utilize DIT research to aid in the design of the upcoming Meal Plan Campaign.
7. Plan and execute the remaining two recommended events from the fall semester.

The proposed action items will provide each DIT member with opportunities to take the lead as well as provide support. The DIT milestones for their first year are noted below and serve as opportunities to celebrate small wins when achieved:

1. Obtain 75% positive residential and retail dining results on the food feedback survey launched in the spring.
2. Obtain 70% positive residential and retail dining results on the vision survey administered in the fall.
3. Increase Meal Plan sales by 5%.
4. Plan and execute the first DIT dining center event.
5. Grow DIT membership to include 15 stakeholders within the first year.

The DIT's efforts will be discussed openly and shared with both foodservice associates and campus stakeholders, including RA's and students, to the extent the institution allows. This will help generate further knowledge of the DIT's work and continue to grow awareness of progress made. Additionally, making the community aware of the

DIT's initiatives may encourage additional participation and buy-in of the initiative.

Change Management Implications

As changes are initiated, progress will be measured in three primary ways: improved guest satisfaction increased revenue generation, and engaged client participation. The outcomes of the project will affect all initial stakeholders listed, as well as the institution as a whole since the revenues are impacted by meal plan sales and enrollment increases. Successful implementation of the DIT's recommendations can provide positive publicity opportunities for both the food service provider and the institution. It is anticipated that this publicity will help boost overall morale on the campus and among the foodservice associates. The foodservice provider wants to change that allows the dining center team to stay relevant and future-focused, which will mean altering the menu development processes while remaining open and accessible to students. It is anticipated that the operational process will be altered by the DIT's efforts and input.

Guests and associates who are impacted by the team's actions will serve as primary determinants of the DIT's effectiveness. It is anticipated that guest satisfaction will improve as new menu offerings are rolled out. In addition, the responsibilities of food service associates are expected to shift as innovation and change in operational alteration occur. Benchmarks for measuring guest and associate satisfaction are noted below:

Guest Satisfaction

- Guest satisfaction scores are expected to increase as a result of the DIT changes.
- The number of customer complaints requesting menu modifications and updates is expected to decrease as a result of the DIT efforts.
- The rate of participation within the 'special events' hosted by the foodservice providers is expected to increase as a result of the DIT recommendations.
- Overall participation innovation among foodservice team members (salaried and hourly) is projected to grow as positive results from the DIT changes are realized.

Associate Satisfaction

- Associate satisfaction will be measured by the successful execution of DIT menus in a timely, efficient, and positive manner. Additionally, associate input on how both associates and guests are responding to the new menu items.
- The maintenance of Meal Plan sales is expected to increase as a result of the DIT's efforts. Additionally, the rate of refunds and disputes for Meal Plans is expected to decrease.
- Associates' ability to continue their regular-allocated work in addition to their commitments to the DIT is expected to either remain

steady or dip in a manner that will not outweigh the benefits.

- Overall innovation participation among all foodservice associates is projected to grow.

Overall, the DIT is expected to increase satisfaction with meals and events [per staff and students] without extraneous additional strain on foodservice associates. DIT changes are expected to drive dining center participation among students and campus personnel, which will lead to increased Meal Plan usage. The increased Meal Plan usage is expected to drive higher sales revenue from Meal Plan options. If operated correctly, the DIT success will help justify the continuation of the program, which will allow time for the team to make a larger impact. Eventually, the DIT concept can be implemented within the foodservice provider's other higher education accounts.

Leadership and Management Development

The successful implementation of the DIT's recommendations is anticipated to address immediate client concerns. It is also quite possible that those involved in the DIT process will further develop their professional skill set. Successful navigation of the change process may improve participants' comfort level with initiating and leading change, which could have long-term benefits. Positive experiences with change initiatives can help teams remain nimble and willing to quickly address future internal and external triggers. To some extent, the processes the team uses in the successful implementation of the DIT strategies can serve as a road map for future necessary changes.

Working through the DIT processes may also improve how the team approaches crisis management situations. As teams work together and realize success, their confidence in approaching and resolving stressful circumstances can increase. This becomes particularly useful when the team is forced to manage events that may negatively impact business such as natural disasters, public relation debacles, or public-health crises (i.e., a pandemic).

Ultimately, successful integration of the DIT efforts may lead to improved client relations, a critical component of foodservice contract retention. Successfully working with a client to integrate enhancements can be beneficial to future initiatives the food service provider and the client deem necessary, which may further develop the partnership between the two. As the client begins to view the food service provider as a partner in success, the likelihood of the food service provider retaining future contract extensions increases.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the factors that can trigger change in an organization?
2. What prompted the change in this case?
3. What are some resources needed to implement change? Can you think of any other resources not mentioned in the case?

4. What are the steps in the change management process according to Kotter?
5. What are the key characteristics for successful change implementation according to the ADKAR Model?
6. What are some of the ways to evaluate the success of the proposed change?

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