Change Champion Network

What is the Change Champion Network, and how can it help you?

The Change Champion Network is a group of employees that serves as a bridge between peers and leadership during an organizational change initiative in order to increase buy-in for and reduce resistance to change.

A Change Champion Network will help:

- Facilitate strategic communication within the organization.
- Ensure changes are understandable by staff at all levels of the organization.
- Identify and communicate challenges for quick resolution.
- Facilitate communication of staff needs for resources and support.
- Build trust through communication and feedback.

How to implement a Change Champion Network:

1. **Define the champions' role, responsibilities, skills required, and the desired outcomes of engaging them.**

2. **Select champions.** Individuals may self-nominate, be nominated by peers or supervisors, or be part of an existing network(s) that can be used to support a change. Criteria for selection may include:

   - Work in areas of the organization affected by the proposed change
   - Knowledge of the organization's culture/processes/procedures
   - Good listening and communication skills
   - Available to attend project meetings, training sessions, and support colleagues
   - Seen as a "go-to" person with influence

3. **Conduct training for champions.** During the training session:

   - Explain the goals, benefits, and rationale for the planned changes, project milestones and timeline, roles and responsibilities, and materials and resources. Have champions identify how they will work together.
   - Review the **Change Curve** for how people react to change and how to support them.
   - Provide training on listening and communication skills, as needed.
   - Compile frequently asked questions (FAQs) and helpful resources.

4. **Announce the role of the change champions** during the launch of the change initiative.

5. **Ask champions to inform peers about changes and encourage feedback** to address challenges, exchange information to identify common challenges, and share success stories. Change champions, managers, and project implementers should meet regularly to keep each other informed on progress and to make adjustments to plans. Champions communicate frontline staff needs, improvement suggestions, and support needed. During these meetings, key productivity, outcome measures, and emotional reactions to change are monitored to identify needed actions.

6. **Publicly acknowledge and thank the Change Champion Network** for their work. To build trust, highlight actions taken as a result of employee suggestions provided through champions or reasons why any actions were not taken.

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7. **Debrief on lessons learned** with champions, managers, supervisors, and leaders when outcomes have been achieved to identify what can be applied to future efforts.

8. **Celebrate the Change Champion Network efforts and accomplishments.** Reward and recognition are important to show champions their role is highly valued and beneficial to ensure sustainable change.

Case Study: Using a Change Champion Change Network to implement an Electronic Health Record (EHR)

A Title X site needs to implement a new EHR system. Concerned that staff may be resistant to adopting a new system, the clinic manager selects peers from reception, clinical services, and billing to form a Change Champion Network. The champions are recognized as "go-to" people by their peers, have good interpersonal and computer skills, and are familiar with organizational processes to support implementation of the new EHR.

Champions are trained on the EHR system benefits, features, timelines, and resource materials. They receive hands-on practice with the system and give feedback to the vendor to make training materials more relevant to their setting. The group reviews potential staff resistance to change and practices, responding to peers who are less comfortable with the technology.

The clinic manager provides an EHR overview and introduces the Change Champion Network. Champions continuously check in with colleagues about their challenges and support peer needs. The champions share common problems with the EHR vendor. During weekly meetings, champions, together with the clinic manager, monitor EHR entries. Organizational updates acknowledge the Change Champion Network's efforts and highlight specific actions taken and accomplishments as a result of peer feedback that supported the change initiative.

After six months, the EHR system is integrated into routine clinic processes. Change Champion Network members debrief leadership on strategies they used to engage peers for implementing this system as well as on how the network can be used to manage other change initiatives. A staff recognition lunch celebrates the successful EHR implementation and acknowledges the work of staff and the Change Champion Network.

References:
1. Warrick, D. (2009) Developing organization change champions: A high payoff investment. OD Practitioner 41(1): 14–19.
2. Cullen, L. et al. (2020) Evidence-Based Practice Change Champion Program Improves Quality of Care. J Nurs Adm 50(3): 128–134.

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