Disagreeing Employees? Use This People-First Strategy for Better Efficiency

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

As leaders, it can be difficult to let go and give our teams autonomy. This might look like discouraging disagreements, whether out of a misplaced desire to always be right or mistakenly believing conflict is detrimental to business performance.

But when I let my front-line employees disagree, the best leaders and ideas rise to the surface. While this helps create a no-blame culture of innovation, I want to focus on how this approach also allows businesses to identify the right processes to automate.

By listening to employee insights, we have implemented automation strategies that have dramatically improved our workflow efficiency and scalability. While large tech companies often focus on enterprise solutions, automation tools designed specifically for small businesses can be transformative.

Related: 4 Ways Leaders Can Increase Workplace Efficiency

Here's how:

The benefits of workflow efficiency

Improving workflow efficiency was traditionally done incrementally, but disruptive technology is now making rapid

optimization possible through digital transformation. By automating repetitive tasks, organizations can streamline their internal processes and unlock value by reducing human error and saving brainpower for innovation.

Fostering an environment where disagreement is welcomed allows pain points to surface from those closest to the work. Without this employee input, automation efforts can create new frustrations instead of the intended efficiency gains. One unexpected benefit I have witnessed is a remarkable service and product innovation increase. Automated tools freed my employees to focus on creative initiatives tied to strategic goals.

After allowing them room to maneuver and making their workflows as efficient as possible, my employees have taken us in directions I would never have thought possible. This “flex” capacity can free up to 50% of an employee’s time, enabling businesses to scale operations and increase profitability without sacrificing work-life balance. So, make sure your employees are empowered throughout the adoption process. It’s the very opposite message of seeing people as collateral damage to a company’s ambitions.

Related: 6 Transformative Methods for Boosting Workplace Efficiency

Challenges to adoption

As with any disruptive technology, companies looking to streamline workflows by adopting new automation tools will face some challenges. By expecting and planning for these difficulties, businesses will be better positioned to overcome them.

People are the company’s soul, and no workflow efficiency can make up for a workforce that feels stifled or threatened by the change they are trying to adopt. The most successful

leaders are those who can reengineer their workforce to adapt to automation, so I suggest:

- Open the lines of communication to be an available presence throughout the modernization process.
- The workflow optimization theme is about enhancing employee productivity, not replacing it.
- Ensure they know the benefits of automation, which will allow them to upskill or make lateral moves within the company to execute more value-added tasks.

Other problems are less human and more technical. For instance, interoperability with legacy systems means existing tools will lose some of their utility when the new tool is fully onboarded. To maximize interoperability:

- Conduct a comprehensive assessment of existing tools to determine potential issues.
- Collaborate with old system engineers and new tool providers to ensure compatibility and smooth integration.
- Develop a robust, compatibility-focused adoption strategy.

In many cases, tough decisions must be made about moving away from the old system. This might mean retiring legacy software, investing in upgrades, or even temporarily reducing productivity during the transition. Bringing people along for the journey will help reduce resistance to change and make everybody a part of realizing the full benefits of automation.

Related: 8 Little Things That Make Remote Work More Efficient for Everyone

Practical tips for workflow

efficiency

At my company, we have adopted several technologies that have optimized our workflows and made work life simpler and more productive for our employees. Even simple automation can make a big difference. Electronic signatures, for instance, have reduced waste and allowed employees to quickly sign a document without needing to print it, sign it, and then scan it back to themselves.

This has allowed us to embrace complete digitization of our business documents more fully while reducing errors and improving responsiveness to clients. Meanwhile, implementing an automated telephone answering service or using software for payroll and HR compliance can save significant time and reduce errors.

Another emerging technology is intelligent process automation, which allows businesses to enhance forecasting by using data analytics. Companies can use these insights to:

- Streamline manual processes and quickly identify processes that could be digitized.
- Improve interdepartmental communication, flatten organizational structures and speed up issue resolution.
- Enable real-time data sharing across marketing, sales, and customer service.
- Give finance and operations teams a unified view of business performance.

For small businesses, it is crucial to find automation solutions that are effective, affordable, and easy to implement without a significant upfront investment. As we have seen these benefits accumulate, it has become clear that automation is not just about optimizing individual tasks – but transforming how an entire organization operates and scales.

Scaling operations through automation

While adoption rates vary globally, with some countries leading in areas like mobile payments or professional services automation, the trend towards increased automation for small businesses is universal and accelerating. New tools can enable businesses to handle increased workloads without a proportional increase in staffing. In other words, with modern technology, companies can do more with the same.

At the same time, adoption can create a happier, healthier, more productive workforce – and people will stay competitive, even when change is rapid and unforeseen. Ultimately, reasonable adoption will deliver better value to the customer, so it should be on every business leader's radar for that reason alone.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/science-technology/disagreeing-employees-use-this-people-first-strategy-for/478371