Achieving Higher Customer Satisfaction: Action Plan for Change

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Organizational context

FarOut is a SaaS company focused on building products for sales teams. Currently, FarOut has one core product, and a secondary product that can extend the use of the core product. While the team has had many years to become great at their core product, they are struggling with the best way to further the growth of their secondary product. In the past, FarOut has succeeded by going fast and collaborating with a small subset of customers. However, as they attempt to scale the secondary product, they find that it is not meeting market expectations, and customer satisfaction is low.

FarOut has determined that it is crucial to fix this problem. The organization aims to increase customer satisfaction scores from 4.3 to 4.7 (out of 5) by the end of 2022. The organization is aware that product gaps contribute to customer satisfaction. Additionally, they suspect that changes need to be made in pre-sales and post-sales to ensure customer alignment and success.

To help FarOut move through the change process, this Action Plan will use the stages of the Change Path Framework as described by Deszca et al. (2019). This plan will cover Awakening, Mobilization, Acceleration, and Institutionalization. Additionally, it will bring in diagnosis techniques from Quinn's Competing Values Framework, and Kübler-Ross's five stages so that those involved can effectively manage the emotional toll that comes with change.

Incorporated Change Models

For FarOut to determine a practical course of action, there will need to be a discovery period, or an Awakening (Deszca et al., 2019) to uncover what problems employees are currently facing and what problems customers feel are most important. There will then need to be a phase where employees can implement change. FarOut has succeeded in the past by having systematic change determined by those in the C-Suite. However, as FarOut has grown, that is less effective. For continued growth and achievement of customer satisfaction targets, it will be necessary for FarOut to engage the people doing the work. As Crosby (2016) states, "when a business is trying to solve a major problem, they must utilize a balance of knowledge" (p. 140).

After this initial discovery period, FarOut will be able to engage in a series of initiatives that lead the organization through changing how they approach customers and each other to ensure growth. FarOut will work through the Mobilization phase by again engaging those who are doing the work and their leaders and helping them understand the changes that will occur. In this phase, this Action Plan suggests that FarOut also reference Kotter's 8-Step Process for Change, Kübler-Ross's five predictable emotion stages, and Quinn's Competing Values Model. FarOut will transition into the Acceleration phase next so that they can execute the change. Finally, the teams will then engage in Institutionalizing the

change by measuring its success and using that knowledge to create more

initiatives to improve customer satisfaction.

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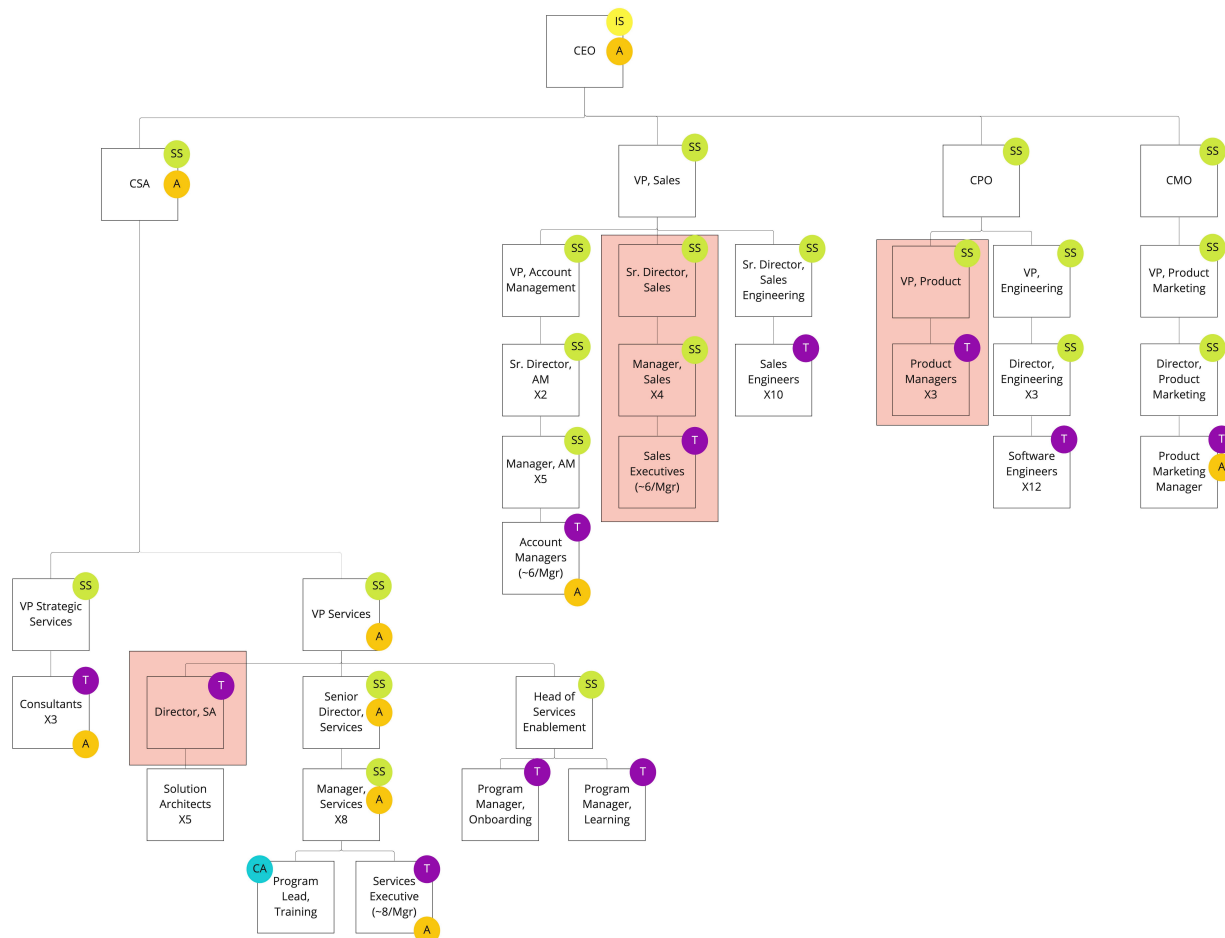
FarOut is a growing organization and has increased its number of managers

in the last year. That means that to execute this Action Plan, Sustaining Sponsors

will need to be informed of the change suggested and that the change is

occurring. As Crosby states (2016), "Without those conversations to ensure that the Sustaining Sponsors between the top and where the change will take place are clear and aligned, there is a great chance that neither enough resources nor time will be forthcoming for it to succeed" (p. 173). Additionally, because FarOut is a growing organization, there will be many initiatives happening simultaneously, all meant to help the company reach its yearly goals. Therefore, follow-up and a consistent message from the Change Agent or the Change Agent's Sustaining Sponsor will be critical.

The Change Agent in this initiative resides in the Services department. Given that most change for this Action Plan will occur in the Services department, that is fitting. However, the Change Agent will also recommend changes to other departments, namely Product and Sales. For the Change Agent, it will be essential to remember not to over-function, particularly for the changes suggested to those external teams.

Targets are spread throughout the company. Some Targets, namely those from Services, felt pain with current processes and tools for over a year and have been vocal in their feedback. Fortunately, FarOut has many mechanisms for collecting this feedback. What has been challenging for the company in the past is taking action on this feedback. Therefore, to ensure buy-in from Targets, beyond engaging their Sustaining Sponsors, this Action Plan will also include mechanisms

for bringing that feedback to light and connecting it to the actions FarOut will take to create change.

The Advocates within FarOut have been vocal about needed change for the past year. They have engaged Sponsors and ensured that even the CEO is aligned with the need for change. Fortunately, the low satisfaction numbers themselves were enough to help turn the CEO into an Advocate himself, and therefore, the need for this project is well known and supported.

A few problem areas will need to be kept at the forefront. First, the product team has a lot of feedback coming in from many different sources about what they should and shouldn't do. These ideas may come from the new leader (VP of Product), who likely has a vision for the future of the product. We need to ensure that we define a single point of authority on decisions so that the team is empowered to solve the problems that exist in the product in the way they see fit (Crosby, 2016). The Sales department will be another area where conflict could occur. Sales have an incentive to sell the future of the product, and post-sales teams have an incentive to ensure that those who have bought can achieve success today. FarOut needs to address this conflict, and it likely needs to happen at the most senior level of the two departments. It will be a systematic pinch point, and, therefore, the CEO will likely need to resolve it. Finally, within the Services department, change and process have historically been led by the Solution

Architecture team. This Action Plan highlights a change plan that is initiated outside of that team and may not even need work done by that team. The Sustaining Sponsors of that team will ensure that they do not under-function and help the team work through the loss of the authority they once had.

Awakening

FarOut has already begun this phase of the Action Plan. Deszca et al. (2019) state that this phase is meant to define the drivers for change (p. 52). The Change Agent assigned to this project is currently researching to understand what problems are influencing the low customer satisfaction scores for this secondary product. This research includes objective research such as reviewing previous implementations of the product and customer satisfaction feedback in addition to more subjective inquiry by interviewing Targets throughout the company and customers.

The deliverable for the research will be a detailed findings report that will articulate learnings and recommendations on what to address to reach the goal we set out to do. Deszca et al. (2019) state that "identifying the gap between the current state and the desired state" is a crucial step in "readying an organization for change" (p. 112). This findings report will help facilitate the additional efforts of the Awakening phase, such as determining the correct change to make, readying

employees for change, producing a vision for change, and then communicating that change through multiple channels and via a variety of Sponsors.

Mobilizing

In Kotter's 8-Step Process for Leading Change, he states that it is necessary to form a "Volunteer Army." This group of employees is bought into the vision for change and is ready to participate in implementing it. Fortunately, FarOut has a structure that will make it easier to mobilize this collection of volunteers or Targets. This structure is both via direct reports and a concept called Crews that allow cross-functional teams to form for an initiative.

While the Crew format has generally been entirely volunteer-based, for this large-scale change, FarOut would be best served referencing Quinn's Competing Values model to determine who would be best to lead each initiative, or act as Change Agent for the given initiative. Quinn's model acknowledges the Targets/ Change Agents' strengths and allows them to do the work they are good at and enjoy. Some work will need to be done quickly and inventively, while other initiatives will need to scale and stand the test of time.

Sustaining Sponsors will need to be responsible for aligning their priorities with the priorities of these changes. This change in priorities will likely cause dissonance within their teams. These Sponsors could then utilize the work of Kübler-Ross's to help their teams process the loss that many will probably feel.

Furthermore, it will be vitally important that the Sustaining Sponsors do sponsorship and provide training and support. If they do not, there is a risk that the initiative Change Agents will not feel confident in their ability to do the work, and it will produce ambivalence amongst the rest of the organization and hinder the adoption of the change (Oreg & Sverdlik, 2010) (Monnot, 2017).

Accelerating

In this phase of the Action Plan, FarOut will start executing the initiatives necessary to reach the goal that it set out to achieve. Kotter states that this is where the company should aim for short-term wins. Therefore, FarOut should find opportunities to provide immediate relief to both the internal teams and customers in ordering the change initiatives. The post-sales team, can achieve short-term wins by giving them clear success metrics but letting them continue to do the work in a way that fits their personal style. This approach will also help minimize the feelings of loss and, therefore, increase the speed at which FarOut can change. Deszca et al. (2019) discuss how change is not always linear. Therefore FarOut will need to watch out for situations where they need to move back to the Mobilization phase to align priorities, communicate a vision, or modify the Crews or the initiative Change Agents picked.

In this phase, all teams, pre-sales, post-sales, and product will need to develop new skills and ways of thinking. The Crews responsible for different

initiatives will need to consider how to implement the change itself and how to teach others about the change. The Change Agent will need to guide these volunteers to consider what is required and who they need to be connected to so that training can happen and success is measured. Since these Crew leads will be closer to the majority of the Targets involved, the Change Agent for this Action Plan will spend time introducing these Crew leads to Quinn's model so that they can understand how their teams may react to change. The Change Agent's actions will ensure that FarOut can achieve wins and celebrate them as they happen.

As change is successful, the Change Agent will need to work with the Sustaining Sponsors to prioritize more significant changes that the teams can implement. This list should be based on the ideas from the initial findings report and feedback gathered while implementing more minor changes that align with the vision set out in the Awakening phase. Listening and incorporating feedback will ensure that Targets stay engaged in the change process. Furthermore, it will show that FarOut is changing its culture for the better by actually taking action on the change suggested by the Targets.

Institutionalization

By the end of 2022, FarOut should have new customer satisfaction results coming in. Those results are currently only shared quarterly. There isn't much opportunity to act on the information to influence the next quarter. Therefore, it

will be necessary for FarOut to make these results more public and communicate trends more frequently. This communication will help the goal stay at the front of the Targets' minds so that they can communicate and advocate for new change as it is needed.

Several initiatives will work, and some will likely not work, so FarOut will want to look back and analyze those initiatives to determine where the failures occurred. This analysis will help them decide which processes are worth scaling and refreezing into the culture (Deszca et al., 2019).

Summary

FarOut is a SaaS company looking to improve customer satisfaction for its secondary product from a 4.3 to a 4.7 (on a 5 point scale) by the end of 2022. It has already embarked on a change project to understand the current state. FarOut has assigned a Change Agent responsible for defining the internal and external environment and recommending areas to change to achieve the goal. The Change Agent has set about talking to the Targets so that worker knowledge influences the finding report and will go into creating the vision for change. Many Sustaining Sponsors are aware about the need for change by Advocates who have been experiencing pain for at least a year. There is risk associated with this change and Action Plan because the organization continues to grow and add new Targets and

many new Sustaining Sponsors. Therefore, communication and awareness of new Sustaining Sponsors will be vital throughout every change phase.

This Action Plan utilizes the Change Path Model by Deszca et al. (2019) as its primary structure but incorporates aspects of Kotter, Quinn, and Kübler-Ross. FarOut is currently in the Awakening phase of Deszca's model of defining the current state, but will soon move into the next stage, Mobilization, by bringing in Targets and utilizing the familiar concept of Crews to create the teams of people who will work on change initiatives. When those groups are set and change is communicated throughout the organization, FarOut will transition to the Acceleration phase and begin the initiatives that will create change, particularly those that can achieve small wins. Finally, by measuring the success of those initiatives and gathering feedback from the Targets involved, FarOut will be able to institutionalize the new processes and ideas that worked.

By following this Action Plan, FarOut will be more able to achieve the goal it is hoping for. By utilizing the models laid out and understanding the role each person is playing in the organization, FarOut will also be able to maintain or improve its culture so that employees feel proud of the change they helped to implement.

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