

# A Perspective on “Change”

## Implementing Change

How should we implement change? It's a simple enough question. But, is there a simple answer? Especially since we get to do it so often. Every time we implement a new system, we're implementing change. There are some things that work and some things that fail and, hopefully, we're intelligent enough to know the difference.

Many people believe that there are deep mystical secrets of change implementation. Is it because we think they are beyond our reach that we choose to ignore them so often? I don't believe there are deep secrets. I think the answers are easier than we believe possible. Consider that Robert Fulghum was very successful with a simple little book entitled, “All I Really Need to Know, I Learned in Kindergarten.”

Perhaps, when it comes to change, all we really need do is paraphrase Fulghum and state ‘*All I really need to know about change, I learned in my last failed implementation*’ and add to it this commentary... “I ignore it at my own peril.”

When faced with change, any change, our immediate response is “How will it affect me?” Will it destroy a way of life? Or just disrupt a sense of comfort? Will it threaten jobs? Or will it just be perceived as threatening jobs?

Everyone shares these simple, personal, self-preserving questions. Answer them and you've solved one major element of implementing change. Ignore them and you guarantee yourself a difficult, if not impossible, transformation.

There are no silver bullets in change management. No guaranteed, money-back solutions. Your change strategy will depend on the present situation, your past history and the future you're trying to create.

The bottom line is that there is nothing you can say to someone you're about to lay off that will make him/her feel better. If you're looking for such a solution, then you're looking for the Holy Grail. It doesn't exist.

The following list of questions and suggestions are intended to entice you to think about the whole situation—past and present—not just the uncertain future you're trying to build.

## Phase I: Understand the Change

Before we implement change, it's imperative we understand all the reasons for it. We must become experts in the change, because people will look to us for answers. They might even look to us for guidance. Everyone impacted by it will ask at the very least the question, “Is the change necessary?” It would be nice to have an answer.

### What/Who is the foreign element?

The foreign element is the event, or person, which will disrupt the “way things were,” otherwise known as the status quo. It's dangerous to assume the foreign element is obvious to everyone. If the foreign element is mis-identified then the change will be more difficult to manage.

### What happens if we don't change?

What are the consequences if nothing changes? How certain are we that these consequences will take place? If the target audience does not believe the consequences will occur, or if the consequences have no noticeable positive or negative impact on them, they will not be motivated to move forward.

### Who will be affected by the change?

Closely tied to the question of consequences. Will “I” be affected? If I'm not affected, why should I change?

### When will the change take place?

The more imminent the change, the more people can relate and respond to it. Problems in the far distant future have little personal impact. Distant change is less real than imminent change.

### Why now?

What forces this change upon us at this point in time? Why not next year? Why not last year? What makes it important that we act now?

### How will the change affect us?

This is the key question. Another version is “What's in it for me?”

## Phase II: Establish Rapport

As someone involved with 'selling' the change, remember the lesson from sales. People buy from people they like. Do they trust you? Change management is an exercise in diplomacy, influencing, consistent and constant communication, and above all, perseverance.

### Don't have all the answers

Change agents have a tendency to outline the entire change. They see the change as something they own and must therefore dictate the exact solution. A system designed with the users input will *always* have a better chance of success than a solution thrust upon them by an isolated expert, or worse, a seemingly disconnected-from-reality mandate from senior management.

### Support empowerment

Empowerment means giving the target audience the option to make decisions. The flip side is that you, the change agent, must give up the desire to make all the decisions. The more you leave in the hands of the target audience the more you build their sense of ownership.

### Don't ask for 'buy in'

When you ask for 'buy in' you've already failed. It means you're presenting them with both a need to change and the solution. To be more precise, you are presenting them with *your* solution. You've invalidated any empowerment you may have created. You *must* allow them to self discover the need for change by the application of a variety of tools and techniques.

### Seek out their vision

This meets their need for ownership in the change. We resist change most when it leaves us powerless, when we have no control over our future, and when we have no idea of why it's happening.

### Identify influence leaders, early adapters & resisters

Influence leaders are those whom others look to for guidance. They are not necessarily those early adapters who take to a new change first. Your time is best spent getting influencers to change, rather than catering to the early adapters or resisters. (Of course, sometimes you'll be in a situation where the biggest resister is also the biggest influencer.)

### Change thinking: 'change agent' vs. 'inflictor of change'

The term 'change agent' creates an image of a person on a mission. Another phrase more in keeping with the reality that changes hurts is a change inflictor. It forces you to keep in mind that your primary task is to disrupt the status quo. When you think like a pain inflictor then you have one strong objective -- reduce the pain. Consider your local dentist. His/her single goal is to minimize the pain experienced during a specific change. By showing concern for people's reluctance to leave their status quo behind, you also reduce their resistance to the proposed change.

## Phase III: Understand Status Quo

Creating something new is always an act of destruction. When implementing change you replace the old status quo, known to everyone, and with everyone comfortable within it, with a mere vision of a goal in the future. Having respect for the existing status quo builds respect for you. You must link the status quo with the need for the change.

### How long did it take to establish?

Some status quos have been around for only a few months, others for years. The older the status quo the more likely it will be difficult to remove. Culturally embedded status quo is the most difficult to change, and it can take several years to accomplish.

### What investment/sacrifice did people make to achieve it?

How much have people invested in this status quo? Did they build it on their own time? Was it something that cost them personally? The more they've invested in the past the more difficult it will be to move them forward.

### How many people subscribe to it?

Is this a corporate wide status quo or is it only something that a handful of people share? Is it a part of the corporate culture? Or just a local way of doing things?

### What values does it encompass?

If the status quo is also a part of personal values, or beliefs, then it may pose additional challenges. Example: getting rid of the corporate Christmas turkey may be more difficult than changing the accounting system because the turkey connects with ideas of gift giving, Christmas, bonuses and friendship.

### What mythologies support it?

Each corporation re-enforces its beliefs/status quo through stories; e.g., Nordstrom's and the late night delivery of a customer's parcel through snow, etc., re-enforces the concept of certain level of customer service. If your goal were to change customer

service levels then that particular story would have to be addressed somehow. Even if it is only because the staff would remember and look to that story for support of the status quo.

#### **Who are the heroes & heroines?**

Who are the people in the history of the corporation who have become major influencers... even if they are no longer around? What stories are connected to them?

### **Phase IV: Create Desire to Change**

Nothing's perfect, and that includes the present status quo. It has flaws, imperfections and built-in inefficiencies. What are they? They represent your points of leverage.

#### **What problems exist in the status quo?**

What is it about the current situation that has been a well-known hindrance in the past? How dissatisfied is the target audience with the status quo? What exactly causes that dissatisfaction?

#### **What are the alternatives?**

What alternatives are there to the current status quo? There is always more than one way to do things. Why did we choose this particular status quo? What other options did we have? What options can we create?

#### **What are personal benefits to changing?**

Just as there are always problems with the current status quo, there will also be benefits in any new situation. It's a useful exercise to help the target audience list those personal benefits.

#### **What problems would change solve?**

Will the change being proposed solve existing problems? How? If not, why not? It is a mistake to think everyone involved in the change sees all the benefits of the change. It's perhaps a tedious task to list the benefits. It's also very beneficial to those who may not fully understand all the implications of the change. It's difficult to communicate enough during change. It's impossible to communicate too much.

#### **What opportunities would change create?**

Change is not just about escaping problems in the existing status quo. It should also be about creating an environment of new opportunities. Do not assume the target audience can see those opportunities without being told, informed, communicated to, etc. The primary task of the change inflictor is one of a communicator. Informing and re-informing person of what is going on and the why is essential.

### **Phase V: Desire Becomes Action**

The only person who likes change is a wet baby! A wet baby is aware of the imperfections of its current situation and will cry and scream until a change is brought about. This analogy is a simple one, but it does contain a core of truth. If your target audience is dissatisfied with their status quo they will be willing to change to something else.

#### **What is their vision of the future?**

Where would they like to be in 1 year, 5 years? Can they define what they would like their future status quo to look like? The better they can define it and the more detail they can describe, the more tangible it becomes.

#### **What solutions can they suggest?**

Here is where empowerment comes into play. If they can describe a future status quo, then they can suggest ways to get there.

#### **What can they do to achieve it?**

How can they become involved in their vision? What can they do to move towards it? Surprisingly enough, they have answers to these questions. And those answers can become a plan of action... if we let them.

#### **What commitment will they put in?**

Change is never easy... What will they contribute to get to the future they've described? If the answer to the question "What's in it for me?" is satisfactory to them... they'll be willing to contribute more than we expect.

#### **What do they need from you?**

Staff needs management support. This is what is meant by the phrase 'top down support' and is crucial to successful change. If top management does *not* believe in the change then it becomes very difficult to achieve... not impossible, just needlessly difficult. Before going to the troops with a change make sure the political battles in the upper ranks have been resolved.

### **When will their 'transition plan' be ready?**

Set a date for the completion of the change. Nothing happens without a deadline.

### **What will *not* change?**

People need to know what parts of the old status quo will remain.

## **Phase VI: Reinforce New Behaviors**

Doing something new means that you'll do it wrong at first. You'll do it wrong until you learn how to do it right. Being told you're making progress motivates you.

### **Reward all successes**

We all like to know that our efforts in any endeavor are being rewarded with progress towards a goal. During the first stages of change when we are learning to do new things there is very little progress. Watch someone learn a new system and you will see them make error, after error, after error. At the bottom of the learning curve, progress comes slowly. At the bottom of the learning curve we make very few correct choices and many errors.

### **Reward all attempts... and failures**

During change, management needs to change their behavior from rewarding only 'success' to rewarding all attempts at progress. People need to hear their attempts to learn the new way of doing things are seen and appreciated.

### **Reward all questions**

When people ask questions during change they are demonstrating involvement in the change process by seeking out additional information. Take the time and make the time to answer those questions, no matter how busy you are. It does not take many instances of management not being around to answer questions for people to get the message that management does not really care about the successful implementation of the change, even if that was not the message you intended to communicate.

### **Acknowledge those who resist!**

Sometimes the question will be, "Why is this change necessary?" This is *not* an indication of a bad attitude, nor is it an indicator of someone who is out to scuttle the change. The question 'Why is this change necessary?' is a legitimate question by someone who is protective of the status quo they've already invested in. Do not mistake natural, normal, healthy resistance as a subversive attempt to destroy what you're trying to accomplish. Sometimes, a question is just a question.

### **Don't ignore those in denial**

Denial can be defined as "the continued use of solutions, once appropriate to the task, no longer useful, due to the introduction of the foreign element". It takes time for people to change old habits. Punishing people because they learned the old lessons well is not exactly a compelling incentive for them to learn new ones.

## **Phase VII: Create Closure**

Getting to the beginning of the new status quo is a long and difficult journey. It deserves celebration, both to say good-bye to the past and hello to the future.

### **Celebrate achievements**

No organization today is undergoing only one change. Every organization is undergoing a storm of changes. It is unreasonable to expect that one day soon everything will settle down and you'll get back to a sense of calm. This makes it all the more important to recognize when a particular change has been accomplished and completed. The celebration can be a major party, a trip to a foreign land... or just a team meeting with coffee and doughnuts. Celebrating does not require a huge financial budget. It does require an attitude, an understanding, that people work better when their efforts are appreciated. People also just like to party.

### **Hold a good-bye party for the passing of a status quo**

People also like rituals. They enjoy burning the mortgage papers... or the source code for the system they've just replaced. Saying good-bye to the old status quo in some formal, pompous manner puts it behind us, allows us to seal it off in our memory and accept the new status quo with no reservations.

### **Funerals respect the dead... they also allow the living to move ahead**

Sometimes a change generates casualties. It's all too easy to try and hide the fact that 20 people were laid off in a change. It's healthy to find some way to talk openly about the past in order to get it 'out of our systems.' Do this carefully. It's possible to re-open old wounds. Sometimes the best way of addressing this is by focusing on the types of resistance: passive and active. When people were let go based on their refusal to adapt, comply, or accept the change, a strong case can be made for the future culture.

The above list of steps, questions, strategies, suggestions and guidelines are independent of any particular change. They are useful if you are considering moving your family from one city to another, implementing a set of policies and procedures for PC usage, or automating some accounting process, or changing the e-mail system throughout your organization. They must also be considered if you are contemplating a transformational change in your basic business strategy.

Finally, these steps, questions, suggestions, and guidelines should be at the very least, considered while any change implementation is being conceptualized. Studies and experience indicate that there are three areas relative to change consistently underestimated by senior management and leadership:

### **Communication**

Effective, multi-media, accurate, and constant throughout the initiative

### **Resistance to change**

Cultural resistance, failure to recognize it, and failure to deal with it effectively and promptly. Worse, it's divided into both *passive* and *active* resistance, the former of which is most difficult to recognize and deal with effectively.

### **Structured methodology**

Lack of a structured methodology to implement the initiative in a timely, effective manner

They are also, due to the very nature of change, incomplete -- they address some key concepts and ignore others. They are mere sketches of what should be taken into account during any change. To get the full picture of what is required during a change, you must be involved in that particular change. To get *results* on a particular change initiative, you must employ a structured methodology that addresses these and the myriad of other issues you will surely encounter.

It has been said that change management is an oxymoron. Hopefully, the above list will suggest to you that while change management is difficult, it is not impossible to have some positive impact on the process.

## **Integrated Change Process**

The ICP is applicable to many types of situations, from mergers and acquisitions, ERP implementations, project management, etc. It is also used extensively in more subtle applications such as effectively integrating departments, divisions, and support organizations both domestically and internationally. One of its most effective applications is in the implementation of IT projects. The key objective in the latter application is the creation of ICP "Black Belts" throughout the implementation teams, and shaping the culture for embracing change-related technical activity in the IT world.

This process is known as IT integration management, and specifically addresses the problems associated with rapid growth, multi-cultural departments, divisions, M&A activity, other dissimilar workforces and cultures required to functionally perform in a common, cooperative, and ever-changing IT environment. The ICP focus is on influencing people to self-discover the need for change and adapting rapidly to the constant changes technology demands.

## **Six-Step Process**

### **Step 1: Project Plan**

Develop a comprehensive project plan that includes executive summary, scope of work, business case, implementation strategy, timeline, communication plan, risk management plan, metrics, anticipated resistance, plans to overcome, and targeted objectives.

### **Step 2: Sponsorship Alignment**

Present comprehensive project plan to project executive sponsor(s). Align issues and discrepancies, with special focus on targeted objectives, key stakeholder obstacles, resistance, timeline, and metrics.

### **Step 3: Communication Plan**

Develop comprehensive and effective, multi-dimensional communication plan. Make certain to address all constituents. Include action tasks for key stakeholders. Design, develop, and implement in order to sustain interest and momentum throughout the entire project lifecycle.

#### **Step 4: Focus Group Assessments**

Conduct extensive focus group meetings to both help communicate and assist in the reduction of resistance. Develop a comprehensive presentation of the overall project, targeted objectives, cost elements, and a well-defined “how life will be after successful implementation.” Make certain the focus groups self-discover the need to change from status quo to project destination. Utilize ICP Tools extensively, such as Threat/Opportunity Matrix, Constituents Mapping, and others.

#### **Step 5: Recruit/Train Local Change Leaders**

Include heavy reliance on local change leaders from all areas of the affected workforce, which is a critical success factor. Identify local change leaders by their obvious support and passion for the project. With appropriate training and direction, these leaders become the project team’s extension in the field that identifies and overcomes resistance, deals with issues and obstacles, effectively communicates information to their peers, and works closely with the project team. Local change leader training is tailored to specific projects.

#### **Step 6: Implement Project and Sustain Momentum**

Implement all phases of the plan with daily, weekly, and monthly monitoring, measuring, and reporting. Develop, communicate, and implement workaround plans to address issues and obstacles. Formal reporting to the project sponsor is typically accomplished on a monthly basis. Extensive utilization of the ICP tools should be employed. Considerable core-team member time must be spent in the field to fully understand issues and resistance, gain feedback, and create a wave of grass-root support for the initiative. Celebrate early successes and “spread the word.”