CHANGE MANAGEMENT

A Practical Guide to Creating a Change Management Plan

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Humble Edition

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Part 1 - Introduction

I don’t believe change management is rocket science. In fact, I don’t even believe rocket science is “rocket science” if you take the time to break the work down into manageable components. Below is the approach I follow when managing change in large organizations.

1.Understand the “why” of the change

First, take the time to truly understand why the organization needs to change. It is very easy to jump ahead and start looking at how employees need to change prior to understanding the reasons for the change. Sooner or later you will be forced to return to this step as many of the employees impacted by the change will want to know the reasons for the change. From my experience, it is much easier to get people onboard with a change when they understand the reasons why. I start my investigation with the following simple questions:
- Why is the organization changing?
- What are the external/ internal forces pushing it to change?

2.Understand the characteristics of the proposed change

Second, understand the characteristics of the proposed change. I make an early attempt to identify the number of employees that are impacted by the change. I do this by recreating the organizational chart on an 11×17 sheet of paper and highlighting all impacted departments right down to the individuals. I also attach a few comments to each of the impacted groups, describing and summarizing the intensity of the change per group.

I also take a look at senior managment’s level of involvement to see if there is appropriate support for the change iniative. Getting the right level of executive support is paramount. Executives need to show active and visible support for the change initiative for project benefits to be fully realized. For this reason, any member of the senior management team that is impacted by the change, but isn’t an official sponsor of the project, should be kept informed of the progress and major decisions at a minimum.

3.Assess the organization – are they good at adopting change?

Third, look at how good the organization is at adopting change. While getting a grip on the “why” of the change, it is also important to gauge the organization’s ability to adopt change. I start this type of investigation with the following simple questions:
- Has the organization tried to implement this solution previously?
- Are there negative or positive feelings related to change in this organization?
- Is there a structured change management approach or do people just “wing it”?

My investigation consists of interviewing key individuals, looking at the success rate of previous projects and possibly conducting survey/ questionnaires to measure the pulse of the organization towards change. Equipped with this information, I’m able to create a catered change management strategy for the organization. For example, it may be suitable for a company to have their employees trained on change management principles and practices prior to any major changes in the near future. It may also be necessary to coach key managers and have them transformed into change agents so that they can better prepare their employees for the transition from old to new behaviours.

The following sections of this document will explain:

a) my engagement strategy
b) my communication strategy
c) my training strategy
d) my coaching strategy
e) my transition management strategy

Part 2 – Building the Engagement Strategy

Once I have completed the groundwork in understanding the organization described in my initial post, I can begin to create a strategy to engage the impacted stakeholders. Successfully involving key stakeholders upfront will save valuable project time and ultimately improve user adoption.

Below is a diagram displaying the 4 change roles I like to assign organizational employees during times of change. It is helpful to not only identify and engage the stakeholders that are impacted by the change, but also those that are in a position to guide and monitor others through the change journey.

Primary Change Sponsor	⇔	**Secondary Change Sponsors**	⇔	**Change Agent**	⇔	**Change Target**
Highest possible ranking officer for the project		Director (or equivalent)		Manager/ direct supervisor		Front-line employee

Note: Each of these change roles are defined in more detail in the Roles & Responsibilities section.

How to Engage the Impacted Stakeholders

Below are some of the guiding principles I use for engaging stakeholders:

1. Assign internal resources to stakeholder engagement roles as often as possible. It is much easier to implement change within an organization when the change is led by internal resources.

2. Active and visible support from senior management is one of the most crucial factors in the success of a change initiative. For this reason, assign the highest possible ranking officer as the primary change sponsor for your project or program.

3. Assign departmental directors (or equivalents) as the secondary change sponsors. For large changes that impact multiple divisions, directors are the link between executive leaders and the change agents (managers) guiding the front-line employees through change. The directors are tasked with creating a supportive environment for the change and actively promoting the user-adoption plan with their departmental managers.

4. Studies have shown that the direct supervisor has more influence over an employee's motivation to change than any other person at work. For this reason, assign the change agent role to the direct supervisor (or manager) of the change targets (end-users).

5. Where feasible, create a straight sequential line from the primary change sponsor to the change targets. An increase in organizational layers between the two ends of the stakeholder engagement spectrum (from primary change sponsor to change targets) increases the chance of miscommunication and conflicting messages. For example, managers that are unaware of the upcoming changes may continue reinforcing behaviours that counter the new ways of working. This will give the opportunity for the change targets to regress back to old ways.

Roles & Responsibilities

Primary Change Sponsor

The primary change sponsor is the individual with the authority to initiate and legitimize the need for change, set the strategic direction, and provide resources (budget, people and technology) to achieve the planned financial targets and goals.

The primary change sponsor is asked to own the following responsibilities.
• To help remove barriers when required.
• To determine measurements of success.
• To participate in activities that will show his support for the overall change program/ initiative. *Active and visible support by senior management is one of the most crucial factors in the success of a change initiative.*
• To influence his executive peers, getting them to believe in the change he is sponsoring, and having them communicate key message within their own departments.

Secondary Change Sponsors

Secondary Change Sponsors are tasked with creating a supportive environment for change and actively promoting the user-adoption plan. Their departmental managers typically act as change agents. The secondary change sponsor's job is to operationalize the strategic direction set by the primary change sponsor. They are the link between executive leaders, including the change sponsor, and the change agents in their department.

I usually assign director-level resources to the secondary change sponsor role. A director's authority can be utilized to allocate time and resources, such as managers and direct supervisors, to guide and monitor the end-users (change targets).

The secondary change sponsor is asked to own the following responsibilities.
• To mobilize their department towards change by allocating time and resources.
• To understand and communicate the change vision and need within their own department to build buy-in and commitment.
• To monitor the progress of change adoption and create a supportive environment.
• To acknowledge resistance and work with the departmental change agents to resolve or reduce resistance to change. *Keep in mind that resistance to change is normal. It is the prolonged resistance that should be addressed or eliminated.*

• To report back to senior management, including the change sponsor, on the issues that are impacting daily operations. *This information helps identify any widespread issues.*
• To work with their direct reports to minimize the stress related to change.

Change Agents (this is a pivotal role)

With a solid understanding of the upcoming change and the change management tools at their disposal, the change agent manages and guides his/her team through change.

I usually assign the change agent role to managers or direct supervisors. Studies have shown that the direct supervisor has more influence over an employee's motivation to change than any other person at work.

The change agent is asked to own the following responsibilities.
• To lead the change and to display personal commitment towards the change.
• To execute the tasks assigned to them in the change plan (or to provide recommendations to increase user adoption for their team).
• To engage their direct reports in daily discussions about the change.
• To coach their direct reports on new standards.
• To measure and manage resistance to change.
• They measure performance, manage resistance to change and celebrate successes.

Change Targets

The change target is the end-user impacted by the change. The change target is any individual impacted by the change that does not fall into the other three stakeholder engagement roles.

The change target is asked to own the following responsibilities.
• To manage and report on their personal response to change. *Feedback from the change targets will help the project team evaluate the change plan and make the necessary changes to stay on course (if required).*
• To integrate change into their daily activities.
• To apply new skills and behaviours and work with new structures (if required).
• To achieve results and celebrate successes.

Assigning 1 of the 4 roles above to the impacted stakeholders helps me understand the depth and breadth of the upcoming change. It also helps me place the impacted individuals into different groups by role and attach activities, such as training and coaching, to help the change initiative move forward.

Part 3 – Building the Communication Strategy

Goals of Communication

My intent with communication is to consistently provide meaningful information to the right audience at the right time. To do this, I find it necessary to cater the communication messages to each of the impacted departments within the organization. If required, I develop different communication messages for users playing different roles within a department as not all departmental employees will be impacted the same way. Of course, catering messages right down to the individual is a lot of work, but no one ever said managing change was easy!

The timing and content of the messages will take into account the audience's current knowledge of the project and their level of readiness to support the change. With this in mind, I typically move the organization (and its organizational employees) through 3 stages of communication:

Stage 1 – Communicate for project awareness

Pre-requisite: none

In this first stage, I focus my communications on the "why" of the change. These early communications explain the nature of the change, why the change is being made, and clearly state the risk of not changing. Although the "What's in it for me" (WIIFM) may still be loosely defined at this stage, I try to include the impact of the change as much as possible.

Stage 2 – Communicate for training and education activities

Pre-requisites:
- Ensure that the impacted stakeholders understand the "why" for change
- Ensure that the impacted stakeholders have the desire to support the change effort.

User-adoption and training challenges increase exponentially if these pre-requisites are not met.

In this second stage, communication focuses on the information, training and education necessary for people to know how to change. This type of communication includes information about behaviours, processes, tools, systems, skills, job roles and techniques that are needed to work in the new world.

Please note that other change management strategies, such as coaching and resistance management, are required to get employees to a point where they are ready to support and actively participate in the change initiative.

Stage 3 – Communicate to reinforcement the change

Pre-requisite: The target audience needs to have the knowledge and abilities to execute the proposed change. Put simply, you cannot reinforce something that people don't know how to do.

In this third stage, communication focuses on reinforcing the change, celebrating successes and encouraging new ways of working. My primary goal in this third stage is to increase the momentum for change and to anchor new behaviours in the organization. Reinforcement messages include public recognition and celebrations that are tied to the realization of the change.

I may be getting ahead of myself in this post, but if this helps, here is a template I use to highlight the key messages per communication stage: template.

Measuring Communications

An important part of a communication strategy is to measure the effectiveness of the communication towards the organization. Measuring the success of communications lets me know if I am getting through to people. This can be as formal or informal as you want it to be – it all depends on the organization with which you're working..

Below are some guidelines for measuring the success of your communications at each stage.

Measuring Stage 1 (Project Awareness)

Here are some standard follow-up questions I use in this communication stage:

1) Have you heard of the change?
2) What is the purpose of the change?
3) Do you know how this will this impact you?
4) Are you ready and willing to support the change effort?

I use these questions to gauge the level of awareness, understanding and desire towards these changes. This also helps identify the stakeholders who are ready for training.

As a side note, I recommend training those that have an adequate level of awareness, understanding and desire to adopt the change. Also, conduct training as close to the implementation date as you can. I know this gets complicated when there are waves and waves of people to train, but it always pays off to have the relevant information available when it's needed.

Measuring Stage 2 (Training and Education)

To measure the effectiveness of communication at this stage, I add a few questions about training and communications in the post-training survey. These questions can be as simple as the following two questions below:

1. The communication I received prior to training was:
    1. Far too little
    2. Too little
    3. Just right
    4. Too much
    5. Far too much

    2. What would you add or change to the pre-training communications?
    [Add comment section]

Measuring Stage 3 (Reinforcing New Behaviours)

I use these types of measurements when the workforce is starting their transition to new models, practices and processes. After communications have been sent, I follow up with the following questions. Again, this can be as formal as a survey or as informal as a hallway chat – it all depends on the corporate culture of the company .

1. Do the impacted stakeholders understand the new behaviours that need to be exhibited?
2. Can they articulate what they are stopping, starting and continuing to do?
3. Are people regressing back to old processes, systems and behaviours?

That pretty much sums up my communication strategy – in a nutshell.

Part 4 – Building the Training Strategy

Below are the steps I follow to formulate a training strategy:

Step 1. Identify the solution characteristics that can be addressed by training

Obviously, not all of the solution characteristics will be addressed by training. For instance, many change initiatives these days have their challenges/ opportunities addressed by the technology itself, such as automating certain components of a manual process. Of course, not all problems can be alleviated strictly by the implementation of new technology. I find that in most cases, technology upgrades introduce more change to the workforce than initially expected.

Identifying the solution characteristics that can be addressed by training can be as simple as using a 2-column table. The first column identifies the solution requirements that will be covered by training. The second column captures the solution requirements that will be addressed by other areas such as transition management.

Solution Characteristics Addressed by Training	
In-Scope	**Out-of-Scope**
Train users to create manual invoices in new application	Train management to create their own custom reports (this will be covered in a future project release)
Train 1st level support group to triage customer calls to appropriate department	…

For me, transition management has to do with the journey the organization takes in adopting a new solution. The requirements needed for transition will disappear once the change is fully adopted. Training, on the other hand, looks after the hands-on abilities required to support the new solution, such as learning a new system.

Step 2. Identify new or existing tasks that will be modified to support the solution

This step identifies new tasks (or existing tasks that need to be modified) to support the proposed change. This exercise not only looks at the set of tasks that is performed with the current solution but also the new sets of tasks that will need to be implemented for the new solution to succeed.

For this exercise, I like to conduct several interviews with the impacted audiences. I like to work with impacted stakeholders to understand the changes they are about to receive. For example, the task of capturing client information and the number of products purchased by a client may need to be altered to meet the goal of improving customer service. Such tasks need to be identified in order to train the impacted employees for success.

Please note that this is not a one-time activity as new stakeholders and new tasks/ processes will be uncovered as we work through the solution with the organization.

Step 3. Assign the identified tasks to organizational roles

At this point, the set of tasks that are included in the training sessions can be grouped or linked to roles within the organization. It is here that existing roles will be modified (or new roles created) to support the new solution.

Step 4. Map the employees to the impacted organizational roles

Once the roles have been identified, organizational employees can be identified and linked to the roles. This creates the initial training roster list for the upcoming training sessions.

Step 5. Anticipate challenges and opportunities for training

During this step, I take the time to anticipate some of the challenges and opportunities for training. For example, I look at the availability of training equipment within the company. Do they have dedicated training rooms or will I be required to book meeting rooms for training purposes? Will projectors be available for these training sessions?

Although not recommended, there may also be the added challenge of training organizational employees during the summer months. There may be a need to work around employee vacation schedules. Because training is most effective close the Go Live date of a proposed changed, it is a good idea to forecast the number of employees and groups of employees that need to attend training prior to Go Live. Training employees too early or too late may impact the success rate of the change initiative. Preferably, I attempt to train organizational employees as close to the Go Live date as possible.

Step 6. Identify the approach to measure the effectiveness of training

Although often overlooked, this is an important step. I work with the organization to identify the measurements to evaluate the effectiveness training. I usually start off with a straw man document and modify it to cater to the organization's evaluation preference. You can have a look at my straw man document here.

I won't get into this in detail, but I like referencing Kirkpatrick's four levels of training evaluation(reaction, learning, behaviour and results) to measure the effectiveness of my training package. I've always believed that measuring performance increases the potential of desired outcomes.

So there is my training strategy in a nutshell. The training design, deliverables and logistics can be created with the training strategy in mind.

Part 5 – Building the Coaching Strategy

It is much easier to implement change within an organization when the change is led by internal resources. The coaching stream is incorporated into my change plan when internal leaders have not yet acquired the skills, knowledge and capabilities to effectively lead their employees through change.

What is Coaching?

Coaching is a teaching process by which a coachee is getting support from a coach while learning to achieve new capabilities. I personally believe that the single most important element as a coach, whether it be in sports or in business, is caring. If you genuinely care about the person you are coaching, you will be able to unlock their full potential.

How is coaching different from training?

It is very easy to confuse coaching and training. Training has more to do with teaching people new concepts and hands-on skills. Coaching, on the other hand, has more to do with utilizing their new-found knowledge (and existing expertise) to awaken their full potential.

A disclaimer – coaching is a two-way relationship

There is a certain level of chemistry that is needed for a coaching relationship to take place. Without positive vibes felt by both parties, the coaching relationship will not happen. This is ok. You can't expect to have a perfect balance of coaching relationships on every change effort. Just be thankful that those that do connect well will make the change initiative a little easier. As for the other leaders that aren't so lucky, a different set of tactics will need to be adopted to move the change in the right direction.

So what's my coaching strategy?

I usually follow an informal approach to coaching leaders and managers through a change initiative. Coaching is one of the five streams I utilize to move a change initiative forward. Full time business coaches follow a more formal approach which incorporates such things as a written agreement between the coach and the coachee. The written agreement, or contract, captures the objectives and goals of the relationship, the preferred interaction/ communication between the two parties, the duration of meetings, the coaching program, metrics to measure improvements, confidentiality, legal agreements, etc…

My coaching strategy is simple. Once I've taken a stab at identifying all impacted stakeholders in the company (as explained in one of my previous posts – A Practical Guide to Creating a Change Management Plan), I identify all of the leaders, managers and team leaders that are in a position to lead the change. Once I've pinpointed these individuals, I look at ways to start a dialogue with them to understand their level of understanding and experience in managing change. With this information, I'm equipped to produce a personal coaching strategy that is catered to each of the targeted change leaders needs. For example, one individual may prefer to discuss their performance at the end of the meeting when everyone has left the room. Another individual might prefer a weekly call to review their activities and questions that have been collected in a note book. Different strokes for different folks.

In Summary

Here is my informal coaching strategy in step-by-step format:
1) Identify the change leaders – (often based on stakeholder impact assessment)

2) Keep an open dialogue with the leaders impacted by the change
3) Evaluate (informally) the management competencies of the change leaders
4) Identify tactics and approach to increase change management capabilities for each of the targeted change leaders
5) Create an environment that invites a coaching platform. Formulate supporting mechanism for coaching opportunities
6) Identify the activities and metrics to measure change management coaching success

Hope this helps in formulating your next coaching strategy.

Part 6 – Building the Transition Strategy

Pre-requisites to transition management

There are a few key activities I perform prior to diving into the transition management strategy. One of these activities is performing a preliminary target audience analysis to identify the individuals that will be transitioning from old ways to new ways. I also conduct a preliminary impact assessment to gauge the level of change that will be experienced for each group and individual within each group (This is discussed in this post – A Practical Guide to Creating a Change Management Plan.) My transition management strategy is also reinforced by the training and coaching strategies. These are needed to coach managers that will be leading their employees through a transition phase.

William Bridges – a transition management guru who deserves to be mentioned

I must admit, I have a bias towards William Bridges' model for transition management. It's a straightforward model that depicts individuals moving between three phases of transition; letting go, the neutral zone and the new beginning. In his model, he makes a subtle, yet important difference between change and transition. In his view, change is described as having predictable hard dates, such as the go live date to a new technology or the start date of a new CEO. Transition, on the other hand, is the more psychological part of change that happens within each of us. It's when we begin to internalize the changes happening around us. A transition cannot be assigned a hard date, cannot be fully predicted and is more time consuming than the actual implementation.

The model also provides a checklist to guide employees through these 3 phases: checklist. You can navigate to my previous post for more information: My Favorite Change Models: Part 3 – William Bridges's Managing Transitions.

Because a transition from old to new ways can be perceived differently by each employee, I always incorporate an "individualistic" feel during change initiatives. In other words, I place myself in other people's shoes to experience the change. I know this is a tedious exercise, but who said managing change was easy? Here is a good video on this topic: Overcoming Resistance to Change – Isn't It Obvious?

My strategy for managing transitions

In addition to using William Bridges' model for transition management, I apply the following strategic approaches where applicable.

A) Identify and engage ‘unofficial leaders’ early for bottom-up engagement and propagation of the change

I call those employees that do not have a high-ranking title but carry tremendous influence to other employees within the company ‘unofficial leaders’. These are the employees that have the ability to act as a communication hub between people and groups of people and have the predisposition of voicing their opinions freely to others. Getting these unofficial leaders on your side will help promote the change from the ground-up. When selecting the first wave of employees to move through a transition period, I make an effort to include these unofficial leaders early in the change process so that the communication of the change is propagated favourably throughout the organization. In addition to executive leaders, the unofficial leaders can be one of your greatest advocates for change.

B) Create Transition Monitoring Teams

Another tactic that I like to apply in large change initiatives is forming Transition Monitoring Teams (TMTs). TMTs are small groups of employees (7 to 12 employees) created for the purpose of providing real-time feedback on the change initiative. TMTs are a good way for the project team to hear back from employees that are not part of the project regarding the perception of the change initiative in real-time fashion.

A word of caution when creating TMTs: make it clear from the beginning that TMT members do not hold any decision power on the change initiative. Their purpose is to report on the feelings and perceptions of the change project. With frequent feedback from the TMTs, the project team can re-calibrate the change plan as necessary. Create as many TMTs as you see fit for your change initiative. This will show the employees that the organization is listening.

C) Make a list of people that will be going through a transition.

Once I start getting a good grip on the type of employees being impacted by change, I like to create a list of people with the following five sequential factors as columns to capture the progress towards change. I find that moving employees through the following factors gives me more favourable odds at implementing change:

1 – Aware of change?
2 – Ready and willing to change?
3 – Understands how to change?
4 – Demonstrates ability to change?
5 – Sustains the change?
Here is a link to my template

With this template, I am able to take a snapshot of the organization at any point in time during the change/ transition effort. This data will let me know if the organization is adopting the changes in a timely manner or if some re-calibration is required to get targeted employees back on track. For example, if a specific group was slated to demonstrate new abilities by a certain date and failed, the training components in the plan may need to be re-visited to get people back on track with the planned timeline.

D) A few words on building a strategy for resistance management

Resistance to change is normal. It’s the prolonged resistance to change that becomes a problem. From my experience, there is no secret sauce to managing resistance.

Resistance to change will likely be present in most change initiatives. I do my best to work with the organization to iron out the pockets of resistance that appear along the journey. With many conversations and interviews, I try to predict the pockets of resistance early in the project and identify the possible tactics to mitigate resistance. In the end, I believe that the best remedy for resistance to change is sitting down with the resistors and having an honest conversation.

Similar to section C, I run through a list of 5 sequential questions that may unravel an individual's need to resist change. Here are the five questions:

1- If resistant (or underperforming), is it because they don't understand why the organization is changing?
If so, the "why" and purpose of the change initiative needs to be revisited.

2 – If resistant (or underperforming), is it because they are not ready and willing to support the change?
If so, their immediate supervisor needs to convince them otherwise. Unless the user has a valid point and the proposed change needs to be revisited. Either option is good.

3 – If resistant (or underperforming), is it because they don't know how the change will work?
If so, their immediate supervisor needs to revisit how the change will be implemented.

4 – If resistant (or underperforming), is it because they haven't had enough hands-on training and need to be trained or guided a little more?
If so, a little more hands-on training needs to be provided to the user

5 – If resistant (or underperforming), is it because it is too easy to regress back to old habits?
If so, find ways to reinforce the change. The options are endless here:
- Reinforce by surrounding the individual with people who are already using the new process/ systems.
- Retire old systems.
- Remove access privileges to old systems. Etc…
* Perform action-research: plan, action, analyze result of action (and repeat)

This tool can be given to managers and team leads for capturing and mitigating resistance to change.

I hope you enjoyed my ebook. Best of luck on your future change engagement. Please don't hesitate to send me a note on my website: www.carldgosselin.com

(Special thanks to Craig Gallant for putting all of this together and for the final push.)