

# Change Management: The Key To Realizing Results

To realize the results of your technology deployment, don't make the mistake of overlooking one very important thing — change management.

**C**hange management. Business transformation. Field transition. User buy-in. Whatever you choose to call your field change program, the goal is the same: stakeholder acceptance and ownership of the new way of doing things so you can realize sustainable, quantifiable benefits. The process to realize acceptance can be complicated and requires many skills. Why are people resistant to change? Change creates uncertainty. In many cases, change threatens a sense of security in altering what people have been doing for several years. Even if we are fixing known issues, it can still be received negatively since we are asking people to change what they have become comfortable doing. Change also causes people to question their basic level of security: Will I have a job tomorrow? Overall, change can be an uncomfortable, unclear, and a messy process without a clear vision and understanding of the benefits.

However, resistance can be reduced and success maximized if you focus on four elements: plan, communicate, motivate, and educate.

**Plan:** The path to acceptance is complicated, so change management should be treated like a project within the project. Therefore, the same structure should be developed incorporating

scope, budget, timeline, and success criteria.

- **Scope:** Consider not just immediate users, but all stakeholders: other departments, senior management, stockholders, vendors, customers, and others. Who should be involved, consulted, and informed?
- **Budget:** How much can we allocate to change management? Properly assessing the current level of resistance can help you plan your budget needs.
- **Timeline:** How long is the plan? It should start prior to project kickoff and continue through postrollout until the change is deemed sustainable. In addition, the plan should include when certain events should kick off, to whom, and the resources required to accomplish the plan.
- **Success criteria:** How do you know when you have

achieved acceptance? Truly successful change is not just sustainable, but stakeholders feel a sense of empowerment, own the change, and look for ways to realize continuous improvement.

**Communicate:** Quantity of communication is important, but even more so is quality. The right communication is based on sincerity, is targeted and timely, and includes regular feedback. Communication is particularly challenging in the field: Their hours may vary, they aren't readily accessible out on the road, they lack the time or desire to review emails or other online communication, and they likely felt ignored from previous initiatives and therefore believe that their opinion does not matter. Take the time to communicate to them frequently and solicit their feedback throughout the project; this will draw them in and make them feel a part of the process. You will find that there is a direct correlation between communication frequency and quality, and acceptance rates.

**Motivate:** Change causes significant levels of frustration and fear, and we can't get users to accept the change until the frustration and fear is reduced (e.g. What will happen to my job?). Until these concerns are addressed, desire for the change will not be realized. Think of the last time change was forced on you. What were your frustrations or fears? Were you willing to accept the change until these issues were addressed?

**Educate:** The plan should include much more than just a training course. Providing nothing more than a course puts a lot of pressure on the trainer to effectively deliver all the necessary content and puts a lot of pressure on trainees to retain all of the knowledge. Instead, a full education plan should be developed that includes content throughout the duration of the plan and multiple forms of education: eLearning, user guides, tips and traps, mentor programs, user sharing forums, and more.

In many ways, change management is an art that continuously evolves throughout the project life cycle. However, by effectively planning, communicating, motivating, and educating, you reduce resistance and maximize results. The result? Stakeholder acceptance and ownership of the new way of doing things so you can realize sustainable, quantifiable benefits. ●

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