Managing Change: Vital to Your Project and Career Success

INCORPORATING CHANGE MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES INTO YOUR PROJECTS WILL HELP OVERCOME RESISTANCE AND ENTICE AUDIENCES TO 'TRY THE WATER' AND EMBRACE CHANGE.

BY DALE STANLEY

Most major projects fail to meet all of their major objectives, and fully 80 percent of those failures are due to poor change management (Conner 2012). If you have been involved with implementing new systems or projects, it is highly likely you have experienced these and similar sentiments.

- *We had this great idea for improving productivity. We did our homework and had an awesome proposal, but management shot it down because they said everyone is too busy.*
- *Our new SharePoint® site is well-designed and will improve workflows and access to information for our project managers. The training went well, but now nobody is contributing or using it—they've all gone back to their previous inefficient ways of doing things.*
- *We can't get this project off the ground. We're trying to help the staff, but they won't come to the meetings. How do we get staff to buy into this project?*

When you incorporate change management techniques into your projects, you will greatly enhance the likelihood of success, and your work will thus have a greater impact on the organization. This reputation for success, along with the human skills of being a change leader, will contribute strongly to your career success.

My company (SMR International) has worked with dozens of organizations and hundreds of students, and we have always emphasized the practical aspects and value of incorporating knowledge management and knowledge services into existing information-based functions. We even appropriated one of SLA's old taglines, "Putting Information to Work," and amended it slightly to say that "Knowledge Services is Putting Knowledge to Work."

But the challenge with being practical is clear: we need to see results. Sometimes that's a difficult task—especially when it involves people and getting them to change. And when does it not? Helping people in organizations overcome human behavior obstacles and embrace change is what change management is all about.

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Fundamentally, change management involves leadership—and yes, *you* can be the change leader your projects and your organization need. Sure, you can fall back on excuses like "you can lead a horse to water, but you can't force him to drink," but there are a number of effective methods to entice your audiences to "try the water" and embrace the changes you and your project are presenting. Following are some proven change management principles and practical techniques that will help.

Principle: The Change Curve

William Bridges (1991) teaches us that change always involves "transition." At SMR, we've adapted his version of what we call the "Change Curve." The basic principle at work here is that during change, those affected by the proposed changed will need to "let go" of something before the "new" can be embraced.

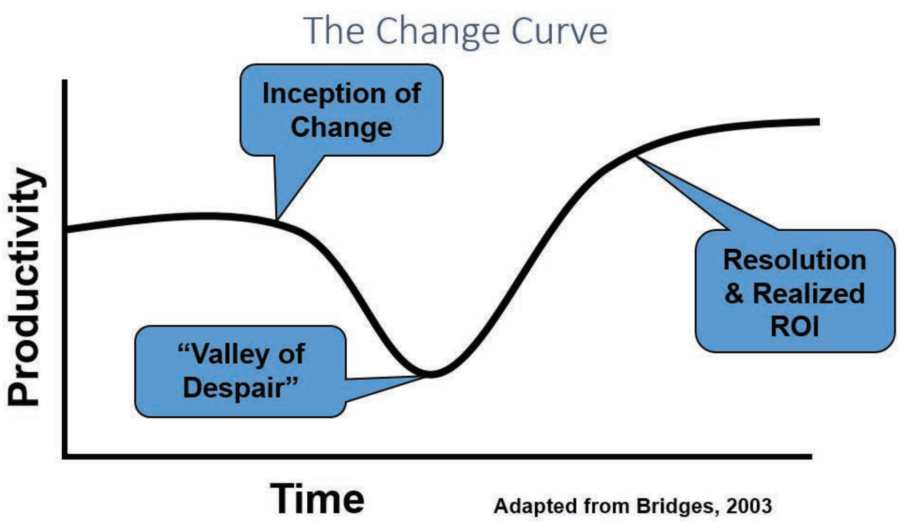
When faced with change, we all go through this curve. We each go through the curve at different rates, and there are different amounts and types of forces that can compel us to move through the curve or get "stuck" at any particular phase. Eventually, if we are successful, we—or most of us, anyway—will make it through the curve and realize the benefits of resolution.

Even the best change management process cannot eliminate the Change Curve. The goal is to create momentum and get through the curve quickly without falling too deeply into the Valley of Despair, where psychological drivers that cause resistance to change will more than likely cause a drop in productivity and attitude.

I will return to the Change Curve when I explain some techniques that you, as a change leader, can employ to help your users "let go" and ensure success.

Technique: Early, Consistent, Clear Communication

It may seem obvious that good communication is an important factor in motivating people to embrace change. However, in post-project evaluations and debriefs, communication (or "lack of sufficient communication") is consistently the number-one reason cited for change failures. Following are the top pitfalls that always show up in such surveys.



Not connecting the purpose of the project to the larger mission, goals, and/or values of the organization. Stating that the rationale of the project is to "increase productivity" or achieve the goals or purpose of your particular department or function is insufficient. If you fail to tie the project to a meaningful, high-level business purpose or rationale, you likely will not sufficiently motivate your audience to engage. Ask yourself how the project affects the mission of your company or institution.

Waiting too long to communicate. Too often, communication with end users happens only at the beginning of projects, during "requirements gathering" meetings, and at the end, during training or "rollout" efforts. While these times are important, it is imperative that there be consistent and frequent communication about the project during its entire development life cycle.

Every phase of your project will present opportunities to connect with your end users. Typically, there are opportunities during the early stages to restate the business purpose and rationale for the project and introduce the statements and role of your sponsor (see below). During the development and testing phases of the project, end users need to be reminded that the project is under way and that there are opportunities for providing additional feedback (see below in "surfacing resistance"). Waiting to "install the system onto the users" with training at the end of the project is asking for trouble in the form of resistance, delays, re-training, demands for scope changes, and cost overruns.

Taking a "one-size-fits all" approach to communication. Sending a barrage of e-mail blasts to all end users on an arbitrary basis is rarely the correct approach. Consider using different messages and media tailored to the different user groups and staff teams, with different points of view and different work flow drivers. Also consider using established communication channels, such as engaging middle managers as champions and sharing information at established communication meetings and in newsletters and other media.

At SMR, we encourage our clients to actually map out their target audiences and then create communication plans for them, starting with appropriately timed, tailored messages and then selecting the media according to the audience and the message content. And speaking of content: Always tell the audience "why" (refer to the business purpose) and then, explicitly, "what" you want them to do.

Technique: Surfacing and Openness to Resistance

Once a project is launched, the last thing you want to hear is someone saying why it won't work. But the very act of asking for and responding to this "resistance" during all phases of the project is an extremely powerful change management tool. It engages users at a time when they are entering (or already in) the Valley of Despair.

Creating forums and other opportunities for end users to share what they are thinking and feeling about the impending changes is highly recommended and can create some benefits. For example, users, while they may not be able to change the project, will know that at least they have been heard and may be able to help you identify ways to influence how or when certain aspects are rolled out. Relinquishing even minor aspects of control to staff members who will be affected by the change can help accelerate the Change Curve significantly.

Following the preceding principle will allow you to identify and categorize users as "early adopters," "resisters," or "fence sitters." The fence sitters (usually 30 to 60 percent of users) are the ones you need to convert, so use the early adopters as advocates and champions to influence them. This will help you create and maintain momentum through the Change Curve, which is your key objective as a change leader. Don't spend too much energy on the resisters—they can very easily monopolize your time and energy and will only be converted when you have created plenty of momentum.

Surfacing and responding to resistance require specific techniques. Here are two of the vital tasks you should implement.

Use "active listening" and ask open-ended questions. Some end users (especially fence sitters) may be hesitant to reveal concerns or resistance, and you must give them space to explore and express the reasons. Creating small focus groups with ground rules, such as confidentiality within the room, and asking questions such as, "What are you thinking about the project now…?" will surface resistance more readily than simply asking, "So, do you like it?"

Exercise care in responding to statements of concern and resistance. Acknowledging and even repeating statements of concern is helpful; arguing or making in-the-moment concessions is not. Peter Drucker, the master management consultant, always advocated turning the question back to the questioner and asking him or her to suggest an answer to the question.

Technique: Using Champions and Sponsors

Earlier, I mentioned using early adopters to influence the other end users. I would expand that concept and recommend that you actually identify and train a set of "champions" for each segment or department or geographic sector, depending on what makes sense for your organization and project. (For example, does the project have phases or variations for different populations?)

Again, at SMR we advocate mapping out target audiences (consider starting with an organization chart) and looking for potential champions. Start with those who you know will be strong advocates, then look for and recruit others to fill in the gaps. Train these champions according to the following considerations:

- Make sure they know and can repeat effectively the business purpose and rationale for your project;
- Make sure they can answer simple questions about the timelines and status of the project;
- Make sure they know what kinds of resistance may be present and how to effectively surface them; and
- Make sure they know how to respond without arguing while also letting resisters know they have been heard and the project is moving forward.

I have saved what is likely the most powerful change management lever for last: You need a sponsor, and you need to select that person carefully to play a specific partnership role.

First, the sponsor must have organizational authority over the group of end users you wish to influence. It's tempting to just ask your boss to do this, because he/she is likely to understand and support your project. But unless your boss also has strong organizational reporting authority over your user group, he/she probably will not be an effective sponsor.

In addition, the sponsor must be an active partner in your project. An executive may not have time to actively participate in managing the project, but you must, at a minimum, get him or her to personally engage in the following manner:

Say it. Once you have made the business case or rationale (remembering to connect the project purpose with the larger organization's goals) and thus enabled the sponsor to say he/she will "sponsor" your project, you must emphasize that you need him/her to do a few things for "our" project. First, the sponsor must "say" that the project—and, by extension, users' compliance with it—is important and required. It's fine if you volunteer to write the messages or speeches for the sponsor, but the sponsor must say them.

Model it. Your change management message will be even more powerful if you can get the sponsor to say and model the desired behaviors. Get the sponsor to say that he/she will be participating in, using, and/or testing the new system or product.

Reward it. Work with the sponsor or his/her staff to develop reward (or punishment!) systems for compliance with specific behavioral requirements.

Finally, take frequent advantage of opportunities to re-engage and utilize the powerful lever you have created with the sponsor. Even very brief meetings for an update on "our project" are sufficient to maintain the relationship and identify additional opportunities for

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institution, but this is self-regulation and does not rely upon the same rigorous educational standards used to accredit degrees and courses.

For badges to be taken seriously, a procedure must be developed to ensure they are only granted by trusted authority bodies that provide evidence-based support for their training and skills testing. This element of coordinated quality control is necessary for badges to be accepted as reliable indicators of expertise.

In summary, badges and other micro-credentials are reasonable, necessary, and already becoming accepted for documenting certain types of learning. Now they need to become accountable and reliable. **SLA**

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the sponsor to be a visible advocate for your project. Work the sponsorship messaging into the ongoing communication plans you have established.

Your Role as a Change Leader

Successful project implementation often requires people to change, and change requires leadership. Practicing and using the techniques and skills described above will enable you to become a change leader and create for yourself a track record of success, both of which are keys to expanding your role and enjoying a successful career.

You can choose to be a reactive victim to change, join with those who resist change, or take positive control of your projects and your career. Consider taking the leadership approach by learning and practicing the vital change management skills of communication, surfacing resistance, and engaging partners and sponsors. You can be assured that when you do so, you will enjoy greater influence, confidence, and success in your projects and career. **SLA**

SOURCES

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Conner, Daryl. 2012. "The Dirty Little Secret behind the 70% Failure Rate of Change Projects." Blog post, July 12. Atlanta, Ga.: Conner Partners.

In the next *Information Outlook*:

Visualizing Data and Information

Good imagery helps you understand data and information much more easily, but its benefits don't stop there. When you gain a deeper understanding of data and information, you ask better questions, make better decisions, and develop better insights and ideas. The September-October issue of *Information Outlook* provides three perspectives on data and information visualization:

- Visualizing the impact of a journal article;
- Creating engaging video tutorials; and
- Using data visualization to enhance user engagement.

Also in the September-October issue—

- Dhanashree Date and Ayesha Mallik, information professionals at Tata Consultancy Services in India, discuss their contributed paper (which was judged the best paper presented at SLA 2017), the state of librarianship in India, and their conference experiences in a "10 Questions" interview.
- David Stern, chair of SLA's Information Technology Advisory Council, offers advice to help librarians create more seamless, powerful, and consistent options that will make using and searching e-books intuitive.
- Michael Gruenberg, author of *Buying and Selling Information: A Guide for Information Professionals and Salespeople to Build Mutual Success*, discusses the responsibilities of employees who attend conferences and trade shows and especially how they should tell their management what they learned, how that knowledge will help them in their day-to-day activities, and how that knowledge will be helpful to the organization.
- Kelly Durkin Ruth and Michelle Mittrach of the Los Alamos National Laboratory Research Library summarize their SLA 2017 poster, "Piloting an Information Literacy Needs Assessment for Early Career and New Employees at Los Alamos National Laboratory."

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