Successfully Managing Change Within Your Organization

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ABSTRACT

The only constant in business today is change — change to organizational structure, technology, business processes, policies, budgets, and regulations — all in the name of progress. But change is not that easy. You cannot simply announce new initiatives or implement new ways of doing things within your organization and expect these concepts to be embraced and accepted. Change is a process that has to be managed. The critical action that ensures change occurs successfully is to engage the people who will help make the change happen. And that’s the toughest part, as most often, it’s not the change itself that causes failure, but the process of transition.

KEYWORDS: organizational change, change management, employee engagement

INTRODUCTION

In response to external drivers like the economy, technology, and regulations, utilities must change the way they do business. Some organizational changes are small efforts requiring only a segment of the organization to change. Others will involve multiple departments or may impact the entire organization. Regardless of the type of change happening in the organization, there will be resistance even if the “old way” of doing things was cumbersome and outdated.

We can’t stop change, but we must manage the transition from the “old way” of doing things to the “new way” to be successful. In his book, Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change (2003), William Bridges separates the change event from the transition process. Change is the way things will be different, transition is the how.

- **Change**: The physical event – someone leaves, someone joins, the budget is cut, a new organization structure is implemented, new technology is installed, new regulations are passed, utility revenues decrease (or increase).

- **Transition**: The process that we as human beings go through to adjust to the change - being anxious and upset about the change, trying to figure out how it will affect us, being nostalgic about the old way of doing things, learning new skills, building new relationships, trying new methods, and gradually becoming accustomed to the new methods and environment.

For transition to be successful, we must manage the transition process.
According to Bridges, this transition process has three phases (Figure 1):

- Losses and Endings: letting go of the old
- The Neutral Zone: a disorienting sort of "nowhere"
- New Beginnings: embracing the new normal

![Figure 1. Bridges’ Transition Process](image)

Bridges asserts that if people don't deal with each of these phases, the change will be just a re-arrangement of the furniture. And then we'll say the change didn’t work.

**HOW TO MANAGE THE TRANSITION**

The key to successfully managing the transition is to take a proactive approach toward the upcoming change. This is best accomplished by forming a Change Management Team (CMT) to help prepare the organization. (Figure 2)

![Figure 2. The structure of a Change Management Team (CMT)](image)

This team should have a reporting relationship to the executive steering team, project sponsors and the project team. The charter for this team includes:

- Setting a clear direction early on in the process
- Defining ownership of the change components and leadership in the change management process
- Establishing and promoting open and frequent communication with employees on a recurring basis
- Creating a flexible change management plan
- Managing and measuring the change process

The CMT serves as the project’s voice. It should be comprised of cross-functional team members who can tap into the pulse of the organization and communicate with employees by providing accurate information and project updates to alleviate employee concerns. The CMT members listen and watch for signals that indicate positive or negative acceptance of the change and deliver feedback to the team so any concerns can be acted upon to ensure the change effort remains successful.

The CMT can follow a successful model for change (Figure 3) by utilizing the structure outlined in Jeffrey Hiatt’s book ADKAR: How to Implement Successful Change in Our Personal Lives and Professional Careers (2006).

![Figure 3. The ADKAR Model for Change](image)

The ADKAR model for change provides a path to incrementally walk the organization through the change effort.

A - Awareness of why the change is needed
D - Desire to support and participate in the change
K - Knowledge of how to change and what the change looks like
A - Ability to implement new skills and behaviors
R - Reinforcement to sustain the change
The CMT, in collaboration with the project managers, can follow this model by accomplishing actions to move the organization forward.

**Awareness** – Develop an evergreen change management plan that details stakeholders and steps to be taken with each group to ensure their awareness of the change is addressed.

**Desire** – Integrate discussions about the change in every meeting and look for opportunities to talk about the change in day-to-day interactions. Use open-ended questions (how, who, what) to determine how the people in the organization feel about the change.

**Knowledge** – Provide training and detailed information about how to use new processes, systems or tools. Educate employees about new roles and responsibilities.

**Ability** – Ensure that employees can actually demonstrate the change desired, like operating a new program or performing a new skill. Provide readily accessible support resources.

**Reinforcement** – Use formal and informal opportunities to reinforce that the change is good for the organization and its people. This can be as simple as a “thank you” for embracing the change or a major event that celebrates the new way of doing things.

**MONITORING THE TRANSITION PROCESS**

The CMT must create a feedback process to ensure the transition is moving along in the organization. This can be accomplished within every change message by including information about how to give feedback on the change (e.g., send feedback to the CMT at cmt@yourutility.com, drop your feedback message in a suggestion box, talk to your supervisor, etc.). It may be helpful to create and distribute a flowchart like the one in Figure 4 to help change agents who are delivering messages to determine what path to take.

![Change Message Flowchart](image)

**Figure 4. Change Message Flowchart**
It is also important to measure how the change is transitioning within the organization by conducting periodic surveys. (Figure 5) The survey interval will be determined by the length of your project, but should be administered at the beginning of the transition process as a benchmark and then every few months as the project progresses. The survey should be short and contain questions about the key areas of concern.

Sample Change Management Survey

Before you begin, please enter today’s date and your division in the spaces above. This survey is confidential. The following statements describe what you have seen and/or heard about the implementation of the [Project Name]. Please rate each statement by circling the number that indicates your level of agreement or disagreement with the statement.

1= Strongly Agree  2= Disagree  3= Agree  4= Strongly Agree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>[PROJECT NAME] SURVEY</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 I have heard of [PROJECT NAME]</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 I understand why [ORGANIZATION NAME] is implementing [PROJECT NAME] in my division</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 My supervisor shares information about [PROJECT NAME] on a regular basis</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 I have attended training that will help me when [PROJECT NAME] is implemented</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 My division leadership seems to be knowledgeable about [PROJECT NAME]</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 My division is prepared for the [PROJECT NAME] implementation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 When I have a question about [PROJECT NAME], I know who to ask</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 [PROJECT NAME] will have a positive impact on the way I do my job</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 I read news about [PROJECT NAME] progress in the monthly newsletter</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 I know how to easily provide feedback on [PROJECT NAME]</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5. Sample Change Management Survey
CONCLUSION

Changes and transitions don’t have to be impossible, dreaded activities for organizations. Preparing for and implementing a structured change management strategy can help the organization achieve success and move forward into a new way of doing business.

REFERENCES


Hiatt, Jeffrey M. (2006) ADKAR: How to Implement Successful Change in Our Personal Lives and Professional Careers, Prosci Research, Loveland, CO