

The Challenge of

C H A N G E

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“Change Management” usually means one of two things—dealing with unwanted or unexpected change due to circumstances beyond control (reactive), or taking steps to bring about deliberate change (proactive). Today’s military services are challenged on both fronts as they face dynamic battlefield logistics and ever changing technology. Approached correctly, change management can result in improved performance, more efficient practices, and updated policies that synchronize smoothly in support of the total effort. On the other hand, improper change management can lead to in-fighting, increased paperwork, resistance from all directions, and in the worst case, failure to meet the needs of our warfighters.

This article focuses on proactive change management—the process of creating successful change from within—and the steps necessary to achieve a positive and productive lasting transformation. As the military services evolve into more agile organizations, the implementation of effective change management techniques is as critical as ever.

The military has unique program goals, but the impact of that change to its organizational culture is no different from that experienced by industry. Change is difficult in either setting, regardless of whether or not the organization is steeped in tradition, indifferent or actively resistant. However, the following

eight key elements will determine a successful outcome¹:

- Establishing a sense of urgency
- Forming a guiding coalition
- Creating a vision
- Communicating the vision
- Empowering others to act
- Planning for and creating short-term victories
- Consolidating improvements and producing still more change
- Institutionalizing new approaches

The elements are equally important; overlooking any one when developing a transformation plan will add significant risk to the change effort. With any given task, it is important to evaluate these elements in relation to timing. Change management is most effective when introduced during initial phases. The tougher the challenge, the earlier the change management process should be planned and implemented.

PRE-IMPLEMENTATION

Establishing A Sense of Urgency

The very first step to establish a sense of urgency is developing the message and communicating it to a factor of 10.

Tactical information must be communicated clearly to stakeholders, describing how the gap between current and future states will be bridged and why the program must be implemented now. Clarity is important. Stakeholders deserve to know program specifics, not vague conceptual proposals.

Other driving factors, such as current political and budgetary concerns and emerging opportunities, should be addressed. Compelling information affecting stakeholder groups can provide greater personal engagement with pivotal issues—What will the program mean to us? Specifically, what are the potential crises that may be averted by the program? What major opportunities can occur? How will these potential crises and/or opportunities impact us all? If stakeholders understand the program in context, “buy-in” can be accelerated.

Establishing A Coalition

The second critical element is to establish a powerful coalition of senior leaders. In broad, major programs, experience dictates that at least one very highly regarded key leader serve as the champion for the change effort. It is

also recommended that other key figures jointly communicate the vision, context, and urgency of the new program. Messages from mid-level management often fail to adequately convey the underlying spirit of the change as embraced by senior management.

Creating A Vision

As with any program or concept, there must be a vision for the future. People want to know “To what end are we driving?” Typically, a business management team, or senior military leader, evaluates an existing organizational or financial problem and implements a solution. From this standpoint, the management team or senior leader must actively endeavor to communicate what that vision looks like, what the change will bring, and the timeframe for action. Failure to define and communicate these concepts will have significant negative impact on program adoption.

Communicating The Vision

There are two considerations for this element of change. First, even if the vision has been clearly communicated, it is important to provide key stake-





holders with specifics about the program plan to describe how the vision will be carried out. Second, these specifics must reach and engage all stakeholders, those both internal and external to the affected organization.

Empowering Others to Act On the Vision

As citizens of a democracy, we work with people who consider it their right to offer comments on change,

especially when it affects their jobs or their colleagues' positions. This expectation to have a vote can create friction when we are confronted with the need to create or implement change in an autocratic "business" environment. Providing a venue in the process for stakeholder buy-in can create a means to express opinion and an opportunity to gather useful information.

DEVELOP A CLEAR ROAD MAP

>> Also critical during any pre-program phase is the need to develop a clear outline—or road map, which details how change will affect stakeholders. In suggesting job, career, and responsibility changes, it is important for stakeholders to feel that they have a voice in developing the program and understand the potential impact on their individual roles and futures.

In order to move from a conceptual framework to a practical road map, specific change management tactics are recommended.

Identify Milestones and Create Short-term Wins

Finally, in this pre-implementation stage, it is important to develop the means to measure, manage, and document achievements as the program progresses. Everyone appreciates feedback on their

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performance. As Program Managers introduce the challenge of change to an organization, they should track milestones and recognize successes. Performance awards or program-related newsletters keep team players motivated and stakeholders involved in the progress.

**POST-IMPLEMENTATION
Consolidating Improvements
and Producing Still More Change**

Even after the "heavy lifting" of the preliminary phase is completed, the task of managing change continues. Throughout the entire process, stakeholders will experience various reactions—from resistance and frustration, to dedication and even pride. As previously mentioned, ensuring stakeholder acceptance is essential. People expect that change will follow proper emphasis on positive vision and consistent movement in new directions. As the program progresses, with achievements large and small, it is the responsibility and duty of the program managers to document the improvements and report the positive results. Relating successful change with meaningful metrics, such as "Right Day Delivery," inventory reduction, or cus-

tomers/warfighter support is as important as every other aspect of the program. Tracking the metrics of the program also enables stakeholders to observe and intellectually consider the positive dimensions of the change.

Institutionalizing New Approaches

It is critical to continue encouraging program sponsors to ensure long-term victory. As with any new program or method of operations management, the daily challenges of implementing change and position realignment offer opportunities for success that become evident as implementation occurs. Reinforcement of success is best achieved through training in support of the business process. While the initial impact of change may feel dramatic, the realization of greater success and career growth will eventually surface. Given sufficient time, even the most inflexible personalities can adopt a new perspective. If the change is urgent and required, the resulting improvements and organizational health will become obvious. To ensure that the changes are anchored in the corporate culture, it is important to continue reinforcing the

KEY STAKEHOLDERS NEED TO UNDERSTAND WHY

>> During the early stages of implementation, focus on providing strong leadership and consistent compelling communication is paramount. Key stakeholders must understand the urgency. Creating change without proper support and context creates conflict, confusion, resistance, and disillusionment.

message. Once the changes are secured, ownership of the change can evolve from the implementation team to the stakeholders. **DTJ**

1. John P. Kotter, "Leading Change, Why Transformation Efforts Fail" Harvard Business Review, September-October 1996.

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