

Yaremenko E.
Tryhub I.P
National University of Food Technologies
Kyiv, Ukraine

PRINCIPLES OF LEADING CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Since the mid-2000s, organizational change management and transformation have become permanent features of the business landscape. Vast new markets and labor pools have opened up; innovative technologies have put once-powerful business models on the chopping block; and capital flows and investor demand have become less predictable. To meet these challenges, firms have become more sophisticated in the best practices for organizational change management. They are far more sensitive and more keenly aware of the role that culture plays. They've also had to get much better on their follow-through.

The purpose of this article is to provide a broad overview of the concept of "change management." It was written primarily for people who are coming to grips with change management problems for the first time and for more experienced people who wish to reflect upon their experience in a structured way. Practical meaning of change management is to help the individuals impacted by "the change" to be successful by building support, addressing resistance and developing the required knowledge and ability to implement the change.

In thinking about what is meant by "change management," at least four basic definitions come to mind: the task of managing change, an area of professional practice, a body of knowledge and a control mechanism.

The first and most obvious definition of "change management" is that the term refers to the task of managing change. The obvious is not necessarily unambiguous. Managing change is itself a term that has at least two meanings:

1) One meaning of "managing change" refers to the making of changes in a planned and managed or systematic fashion. The aim is to more effectively

implement new methods and systems in an ongoing organization. The changes to be managed lie within and are controlled by the organization. However, these internal changes might have been triggered by events originating outside the organization, in what is usually termed “the environment.” Hence, the second meaning of managing change, namely, the response to changes over which the organization exercises little or no control (e.g., legislation, social and political upheaval, the actions of competitors, shifting economic tides and currents, and so on).

2) The second definition of change management is "an area of professional practice." In almost all cases, the process of change is treated separately from the specifics of the situation. It is expertise in this task of managing the general process of change that is laid claim to by professional change agents.

Stemming from the view of change management as an area of professional practice there arises yet another interpretation of change management: the content or subject matter of change management. This consists chiefly of the models, methods and techniques, tools, skills and other forms of knowledge that go into making up any practice.

The content or subject matter of change management is drawn from psychology, sociology, business administration, economics, industrial engineering, systems engineering and the study of human and organizational behavior. For many practitioners, these component bodies of knowledge are linked and integrated by a set of concepts and principles known as General Systems Theory (GST).

For many years now, Information Systems groups have tried to rein in and otherwise ride herd on changes to systems and the applications that run on them. For the most part, this is referred to as “version control” and most people in the workplace are familiar with it. In recent years, systems people have begun to refer to this control mechanism as “change management” and "configuration management." Moreover, similar control mechanisms exist in other areas.

Managing the kinds of changes encountered by and instituted within organizations requires an unusually broad and finely honed set of skills such as political, analytical, people, system and business skills.

The honest answer is that you manage it pretty much the same way you'd manage anything else of a turbulent, messy, chaotic nature, that is, you don't really manage it, you grapple with it. It's more a matter of leadership ability than management skill.

- The first thing to do is jump in. You can't do anything about it from the outside.
- A clear sense of mission or purpose is essential. The simpler the mission statement the better. "Kick ass in the marketplace" is a whole lot more meaningful than "Respond to market needs with a range of products and services that have been carefully designed and developed to compare so favorably in our customers' eyes with the products and services offered by our competitors that the majority of buying decisions will be made in our favor."
- Build a team. "Lone wolves" have their uses, but managing change isn't one of them. On the other hand, the right kind of lone wolf makes an excellent temporary team leader.
- Maintain a flat organizational team structure and rely on minimal and informal reporting requirements.
- Pick people with relevant skills and high energy levels. You'll need both.
- Toss out the rulebook. Change, by definition, calls for a configured response, not adherence to prefigured routines.
- Shift to an action-feedback model. Plan and act in short intervals. Do your analysis on the fly. No lengthy up-front studies, please. Remember the hare and the tortoise.
- Set flexible priorities. You must have the ability to drop what you're doing and tend to something more important.

- Treat everything as a temporary measure. Don't "lock in" until the last minute, and then insist on the right to change your mind.
- Ask for volunteers. You'll be surprised at who shows up. You'll be pleasantly surprised by what they can do.
- Find a good "straw boss" or team leader and stay out of his or her way.
- Give the team members whatever they ask for — except authority. They'll generally ask only for what they really need in the way of resources. If they start asking for authority, that's a signal they're headed toward some kind of power-based confrontation and that spells trouble. Nip it in the bud!
- Concentrate dispersed knowledge. Start and maintain an issues logbook. Let anyone go anywhere and talk to anyone about anything. Keep the communications barriers low, widely spaced, and easily hurdled. Initially, if things look chaotic, relax — they are.

Remember, the task of change management is to bring order to a messy situation, not pretend that it's already well organized and disciplined. The two perspectives of change management can be referred to as: organizational change management and individual change management. Change management is the effective management of a business change such that executive leaders, managers and front line employees work in concert to successfully implement the needed process, technology or organizational changes.

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