

## Keys to Successfully Implementing Change

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### Introduction

Today's business environment is unprecedented, in terms of the richness of its opportunities – and the scope of its challenges. In these troubled times, the need to make changes in organizations is vital.

But, the troubling statistics regarding efforts at fundamental change is that only 33 percent of them are successful. For more information on this statistic click on the following links: <http://www.trainingpressreleases.com/newsstory.asp?NewsID=4177> [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m3495/is\\_12\\_53/ai\\_n31160724/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m3495/is_12_53/ai_n31160724/) and <http://businessfinancemag.com/article/why-most-change-initiatives-go-thud-0714>. From nearly 30 years of experience (some of it painful) in helping organizations design and implement fundamental change, I offer the following as proven considerations and keys to success.

From our experience with numerous projects to design and implement change for our clients, we have learned that there are a number of key elements that need be or should be present in order to maximize the probability of success. Employing these keys, we have been successful in virtually every change project undertaken, so these principles are proven in the real world in organizations of all types, for-profit, non-profit and governmental.

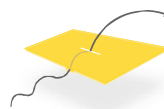
### Keys to Success

#### 1. Gather and Employ Customer Data

Attempts to design and implement change will always meet with resistance. Human beings are often more comfortable, even with a painful condition than with an unknown future, no matter how well it is “sold.” Key to getting employees to embrace change is defining a compelling reason for it. The “why” that everyone can relate to is a dissatisfied customer. At the end of the day, employees will pledge allegiance to the need of the customer. This is true, whether the customer is external (the patient, for example), or internal (the provider whose efficiency is vital). Assumptions are often made about the customer's level of satisfaction. Real data on customer satisfaction can effectively thaw resistance to change as it can help in the design of that change.

#### 2. Sell, Sell, Sell The Big “Why”

The truism is: If given a big enough “why,” employees will find the how. The big “why” is the reason employees should go through the pains of: 1) creating and implementing a new way of operating while simultaneously continuing to operate in the old way (essentially this means much more work in the short run); and 2) tolerating the uncertainty of how one will fit into the new future; what it means personally. Leadership needs a clear, concise message that explains why we are undertaking the change, and it needs to repeat it over and over and over and over again. It is tiring and it taxes the patience of the best of us, but it is vital to success.



### 3. Understand the Potential of the Change and Define its Scope Accurately

The potential for change includes both the hoped-for benefit of making the change (included in the why), as well as the readiness of the organization to undertake it. Change by fiat will not be successful. Attempting new change will not be successful when changes from the past are incomplete, or if there is widespread dissatisfaction with management.

You must assess the readiness of the organization for change before you proceed. If it is ready, then define, accurately, the scope of the change. What processes, systems, and physical space are within the scope? What is outside the scope – perhaps to be dealt with at a later time? Is there agreement? Does everyone see the same picture?

Often the existing system or process is simply a patchwork of coping mechanisms of individuals working in the system, and a common picture doesn't really exist. Get a working group together to define the scope in general terms, and define the key players who should be involved, before you proceed. This will prevent you taking two steps forward, and one back, once you get in motion.

### 4. Those *Doing* the Work Should Re-Define the Work

There are two reasons why those doing the work should re-define it: 1.) They know the work and the customer better than anyone else; 2.) You need them to support the implementation if it is to go well. This is a leap of faith for management. But, we have found consistently that, if given the right tools, front level employees can define innovative, effective solutions. They need support from management, but they don't need management in their working group. Middle management has the highest investment in the way it operates now. Front line employees want to be productive because they bear the burden of trying to close the gap between supply and demand.

### 5. Make sure *everybody* wins

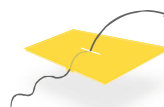
It is well and good, and often enough, to sell the proposed change on what it will do for our external or internal customer, but it is best to think through how the change can be a win for all.

At a minimum, if we are talking about a change that will make us more productive, management must give assurances that existing jobs and wage grades for existing employees will be protected (at least as long as the incumbent is in the position), even if jobs change.

Optimally, you want to make a tangible win for those being asked to go through the trauma of the change. In a profit-making environment, a profit sharing incentive will work. In a non-profit environment, you will need more creative solutions. Examples: investment in continuing education; flex time; job expansion; paid time off for the overtime invested in designing and implementing the change; maybe a celebration.

### 6. Be sure you have stakeholder support

Stakeholders could be a union, board members with a keen operational interest, consultants. You need to be sure that those who can either say “no” to your efforts or who can influence the employees and others that you need cooperation from to be successful are fully on board. For example, several of our projects have been in health care organizations. In such organizations, the health care providers have a special role. Even if they are not directly involved in the change, they are impacted by the change and they can have considerable influence over employees or board members whose support you will need.



## 7. Get Your Design Team “Outside the Box”

Unless you get your team thinking “outside the box,” it will likely design a change that, while it is an incremental improvement in what you are doing now, it won’t get you the 25 percent to 50 percent improvement in performance that we consistently see from innovative teams. To get that kind of innovation, the team must, literally, be in a different space and in a different frame of mind.

We use an exercise that exposes the barriers that we all have to thinking outside the box. We show examples of what is possible when you can *get* outside the box. This changes realities and creates excitement for fundamental change. Existing methods are thrown aside and innovative solutions almost magically appear.

## 8. Gather and Use Existing Performance Data

To sell yourself, and everyone involved, on the investment of time and other resources to make the change, you must gather data on the performance of existing processes or systems. Cycle time, error rate, man-hours per cycle, customer complaints, are all examples of performance data that: 1.) Will help make the case for why and where to change, and 2.) When compared with target performance data for the new process design, will make the case for why you need to invest in technology-enablers, such as software and equipment that you will need to implement the new method.

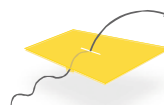
## 9. Document the Existing Process and Its Problems Before You Innovate

We have *never* found a working group, no matter how small the organization, in which, if there are more than three people involved in using a process, there are not variations in how the work is done. Employees design and implement their own work-around for glitches in the system. They don’t tell anyone they’re doing this, for fear that they will be told to cease and desist. But you can’t re-design a process until the team has a common picture of how it works now, and an understanding of what the sources of friction and waste are. Although arduous, this step is crucial to building the teamwork and momentum needed when you are asking a group to innovate.

## 10. Look for Breakthrough Strategies

Doing more with less usually means employing one or more of the following breakthrough strategies:

- Empower the customer. This means getting the customer to do what you are now asking employees to do. Aggressive are strategies used by Amazon, Apple iTunes and others to get the customer to sell themselves on the product (Both now remind you of what you might want to purchase, according to what you have purchased in the past), execute the order themselves, and pay you at the time of purchase themselves. We used this with an air freight carrier, to get customers to complete their airway bill before showing up with their freight. It saved the company personnel time at freight delivery (that is, the customer was instantly more productive) and it saved money. Well, what’s possible in your company in this vein?
- Empower the front-end employee. This means having low cost employees take the burden from high cost, scarce employees. How can you better make use of schedulers, receptionists, assistants, others?
- Technology. Get software and machines to do the work your employees are doing now. Examples: CRM software, automated reminders of appointments etc. What else is possible? We used this with



the right of way permitting process for a State government by putting the entire process on-line including a customer application interface and a workflow management system that had the work residing in cyberspace so that teams in multiple locations could work on a project.

### 11. Define and Execute on the “Low-Hanging Fruit”

A principal contributor to the failure rate for implementing change, which I alluded to at the beginning of this article, is that management loses patience and comes to doubt that the return on investment in change will be realized. Essentially, this means that the “ramp” that leads to any sort of meaningful reduction in cost or improvement in efficiency, is too long. The irony here is that, even though it was management’s idea to begin with, management is often the first to lose patience. The tendency of teams implementing change is to wait until everything is in place before “going live.” To remedy this, define some changes you can make now, before the equipment, or software, or renovation, is in place. Ask yourself what ideas have been defined that we can execute right now? Implement them now, and gather data on their effect. This will encourage management to continue to support the change.

### 12. Define and Execute a Tight Implementation Plan

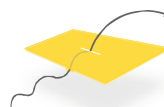
We employ a PERT chart and a proprietary process (Dynamic Planning™) to accomplish this. The process requires that we define weekly tasks, and that we hold accountability sessions on a weekly basis, in tightly structured, efficient, 30-minute meetings. Our teams are trained in how to manage in different ways to get different results. Effective planning and project management produce on-time and on-budget results time and again.

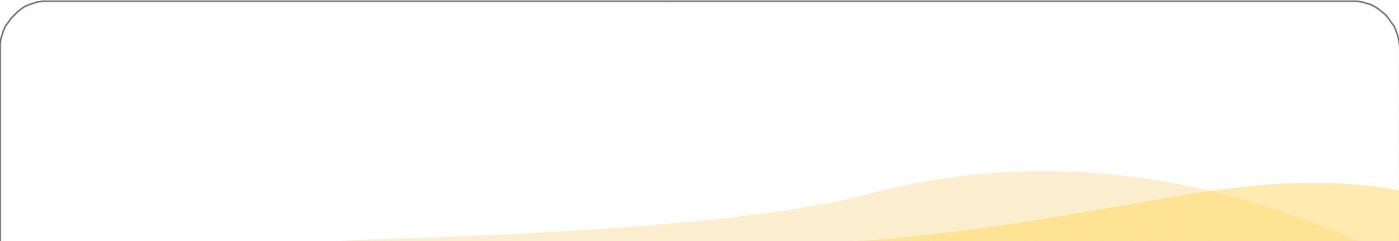
### 13. Manage the Human Side of the Change Process

In our experience, managing the human side of the change process has been the missing element that contributes to the 66+ percent failure rate of attempted change efforts. Bill Bridges captured the importance of this in his seminal book, *Managing Transitions*. Unless you understand, are sensitive to, and manage the personal journey of each individual whose support you need to make the change, you will suffer: 1.) major casualties, in the form of resignations, and 2.) substantial reductions in productivity, due to the wear and tear of the change process. The data on this is convincing. Most organizations focus only on planning and executing the physical change. And they suffer defeat as a result. Educate yourself on transition theory and methods, or bring in a resource to assist you with those topics.

### 14. Structure Management Support for the Project

Structuring management support for your project requires a deft touch. Management defines and champions the need to change, initially. It then empowers working groups to define and plan implementation of the change. But, without ongoing management encouragement and support, teams will falter. We recommend that team leaders meet with the management team at least monthly, and preferably bi-weekly. This can be added to the agenda for regular management meetings (at the beginning often works best) and serves to: 1.) update management on implementation plan progress, and 2.) request decisions needed (new policies and resources, for example) for implementation. A caution here: It is often challenging for management to truly empower these teams, yet this empowerment is vital. And, once it has empowered a team, it is a challenge for management to continue giving it what it wants without having a more active hand in the project. If that is the case, management will often delay, or even reject, requests from the team. This is not only disheartening, but it threatens project failure.





Find a solution to this dilemma that you are comfortable with. It may, for example, take the form of a management team member sitting on the project team and acting as a liaison with top management.

### Summary

As you can see, the keys are significant in number and complexity. Hence, the high casualty rate we have talked about throughout. If you are a rookie or have had failures in the past, you may wish to invest in some proven tools or a shepherd to guide you. For more information or answers to questions you may have about this article, please contact April Hamels at [aprilh@professionalgrowthsystems.com](mailto:aprilh@professionalgrowthsystems.com).

