



# TAILOR-MADE CHANGE

Incorporating change management processes into your organisation is not the be all and end all of change strategy, writes **Catherine Smithson**, you need to target and tailor the strategy for each context

**For every problem,** there is a solution that is simple, neat, and wrong.”  
—HL Mencken (1880–1956)

Although change management didn't exist when American social critic Henry Mencken wrote this, we should keep his warning in mind when we use change management to manage the people side of change.

As organisations adopt change management in projects and business-as-usual change, I often see two types of 'simple, neat and wrong' solutions, which decrease the effectiveness of change management. Both can easily be avoided by using an effective change management strategy.

## GUIDING STRATEGY

The good news is that change management has arrived in boardrooms around the world. Yes, it's about 50 years after project management, but better late than never!

CEOs, executives, program managers and project managers no longer think change management is part of information technology or a human resources activity involving group hugs and teddy bears. They recognise it as a key success factor in both business-as-usual and project change. They have seen the studies by Prosci, McKinsey, PricewaterhouseCoopers and IBM that demonstrate that change management drives benefit realisation. They are aware that "failure to implement change" is the number one reason why CEOs are fired!

Ten years ago, the most common question that managers asked me was: "Why do we need to invest in change management? We have a project plan that covers communication and training." Today I'm asked "How can we build our organisation's change capabilities? Our lack of change management causes delays and reduces our project ROI and overall employee engagement."

The downside of this rapid rise in awareness of change management is that too many people view change management as a set of simple solutions to the people side of change and there is no overall change management strategy.

In some organisations, change management has become a collection of tactics and tick boxes that are not based on a sound understanding of the unique challenges and

opportunities of each change. There are plenty of change management activities underway—emails, intranets, newsletters and briefings—but these activities may not be effective in helping employees and managers transition through the change successfully. It's a scattergun approach.

One example I saw of this recently was in a large organisation that has a team of change managers and a multitude of change management structures, roles, processes, templates, checklists and activities, but is still experiencing resistance from managers and employees on major strategic projects. What they are missing is a change management strategy for each change to guide the selection of the tactics, to ensure that they are effective as well as efficient.

## ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

Another welcome change over the last few years has been that organisations are standardising their change management methodologies. Just like the early days of project management, organisations are experimenting with several different change management methodologies, often at all once! One organisation I consulted had all their methodologies in white folders lined up in a bookcase, a 'Who's Who' of change management over the last 20 years. But the organisation had not built capability in any methodology. Project managers and line managers were reeling from all the jargon and conflicting change management approaches.

By standardising change management, change managers can build strong capabilities in using a consistent approach, develop a community of practice to share learnings, integrate with project management and, best of all, make it easier for sponsors and managers to perform their roles without confusion or gaining a Masters in change management.

Today, the majority of organisations worldwide (58 percent) use a structured approach to change management, up from 34 percent in 2005, according to Prosci's *Best Practices in Change Management Benchmarking Report*. But there is a downside to this standardisation. The risk is that change managers also standardise change management practices or activities and embed them into the change methodology, which doesn't work because each change is unique and presents different challenges with different groups in the organisation. To be effective, change management activities need to be part of an overall change management strategy tailored to each change.

## CREATING AN EFFECTIVE STRATEGY

Different change management methodologies will approach this differently. In this discussion, I will draw on the approach in the Prosci Change Management Process, which I believe is fast becoming the standard for change management internationally.

The guiding principle is that each change is unique and presents distinct challenges and opportunities. Even the same change implemented across the organisation will have a different impact and may be received differently. Therefore, the foundation of an effective change management strategy is performing the following steps:

- **Identify the groups impacted by the change:** Who is impacted, by job role, function, level, and location?
- **Assess the readiness of each group for the change:** Are people ready for the change or resistant? How do each group's distinct values, history and culture impact their readiness to change?
- **Assess the impact of the change on each group:** How is each group impacted? Is it incremental or radical change? Which aspects of people's jobs will change?

As an example, in a professional services firm I worked with recently, the people impacted most by the change were the consultants, the fee earners. They would have to learn a new system for managing documents and give up their individual methods.

## EACH CHANGE IS UNIQUE AND PRESENTS DIFFERENT CHALLENGES WITH DIFFERENT GROUPS IN THE ORGANISATION

The readiness for the change varied dramatically across the company. One business unit was so keen it wanted to be the pilot. At the other end, another business unit perceived the change as 'head office bureaucracy' and was resistant to the project.

By performing these assessments and involving the steering committee, the change manager developed a strategy that resulted in targeted change management activities for each group that were very successful. A 'one size fits all' change management approach that treated all groups the same would have been ineffective and may have even increased resistance.

The Prosci Change Management Process identifies other key elements of a change management strategy as:

- **Selecting a change management model:** the structure, reporting lines, selection and training of change managers,
- **Selecting a sponsorship model:** structure and reporting for the sponsor, steering committee, business owners, project management and change management.
- **Assessing the project risks:** is this a high, medium or low risk change?
- **Anticipating resistance and developing special tactics:** a proactive approach to counter resistance.

Strategy is only useful when it turns into action, so the outputs from these assessments and models are translated into targeted, tailored, change management plans, which will educate, engage and equip everyone in the organisation to successfully make the change.

It's results that count in change management, as well as project management, so let's close with a final quote from a master of strategy, Sir Winston Churchill: "However beautiful the strategy, you should occasionally look at the results." ♦

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