



## **Toolkit Page 137    23 Great Ideas to Help Keep a Change Alive**

The last phase in the life of a change project is making sure that you get the results you intended. Too often, major new initiatives die after months - sometimes years - of work without ever achieving any significant benefit. You can see the remains of failed change everywhere in mergers that never took hold, major new software systems that never increased efficiency or customer service, or reorganizations that just made matters worse.

How do you sustain commitment for a major change? This white paper addresses how to address that critical phase effectively. While some of the points come from my book, *Building Capacity for Change Sourcebook* (2000) many key points came from clients and colleagues who have successfully faced these challenges. I am delighted to put their ideas forward.

---

### **Strong Leadership**

Major changes demand top-level leadership. Without it, you are doomed. Here are some of things leaders can do.

### **Champion for this Change**

Everyone throughout the organization knows that this change remains a critical priority for senior leadership. The leader(s) makes sure that it is an important agenda item. The change is part of their regular briefings. For instance, one company has a commitment to diversity. I have never heard a senior leader address people without discussing that initiative. It is clear to most in that company that diversity not only has the attention of senior leaders - but that it is part of their strategic thinking about the future of the company.

### **Symbolic Acts**

Show that you are committed to this project. One CEO flew across the country to kick off a major planning meeting. He could have sent an assistant or been shown on a video conference, but he knew the power of personally getting on a plane and being there for those ten minutes.

## Find Places to Embed This Change in the Business Plan

"Whenever a change with substantial savings is introduced, the savings are deducted from next year's budget. This gets good visibility in the organization on a monthly basis as to whether it is working."  
(Lewandowski, Syngenta)

## Protect the Process

It is common to see the people leading the change get bogged down with other responsibilities and lose sight of the goal. Solution: don't do that. **If something is a high priority then keep it a high priority.** That means other things will have to wait.

And beware scope creep. It is also common to assign extra new projects to a team that is doing outstanding work. Soon they are so bogged down by these add-ons that the original project fails.

## Keep Focus

"We don't take on too many major changes at one time so we don't move on to the next thing before this one is sustainable. We accept it's going to be harder than we think, so we don't move on too soon. Our plant manager is a very demanding, yet patient person. He expects lasting change. So he accepts we can't take on everything at one time and we can't move on too quickly." (Rob Chvatal)

## Clear Contract

"Senior leaders need to create clear agreements with those who are expected to lead various parts of the change. At the very least, you need to provide clear direction - vision, goals, timelines, and so forth. But better to allow them to influence you. They are closest to the work and may have a much better sense of what's required.

"If needed, we challenge expectations from our corporate office or even from internal functions each year to make sure we are not diluting our ability to implement sustainable changes.

We also assess all major changes by the amount of time that will be required from key, and heavily demanded, resources like front line supervisors. The impact on key resources is a critical evaluation point when we are determining the viability of a change project (or more importantly when we are considering a number of changes across a year). We have learned that if we dilute the focus of key resources by piling on too much or more too soon, we do not get the results we are expecting from the change. Maybe more importantly, we have found we often dwindle away at our base business foundation as well. Very costly when we do that." (Chvatal)

His comments make sense for senior leaders and project leaders as well. However, the senior leaders are the ones who must push to ensure that the project team believes that it has the authority to push back.

In the excellent book, *Good to Great*, James Collins speaks to the importance of staying on course and not getting distracted by other less-important things. I highly recommend this book.

## **Communication**

The term communication means a lot of things. While its one-way presentations can be effective as you'll read below, interaction is critical as well.

## **Vision Painting**

"Ongoing vision painting and how each person contributes." (Engineer, Aerospace Company)

I like the notion of "vision painting." He suggests that the vision is not a static document but a process that gets added to and clarified as things progress.

## **Frequent and Digestible Information**

"Regular communications, in predictable, easy to digest forms, that focus on how doing this particular change will create stability in other important parts of our work lives. Like: doing this new IT project will allow us to remain a market leader for this particular product line, thus allowing us to keep doing what we are doing." (Matt Kayhoe, *Strategies in Play*)

"Communicate clearly and often about the change and how/what they are/have implemented supports the long-term and near-term strategies/existence of the business..."what's in it for them" in a lay fashion/simple terms. Being very open, honest about competition, sales, financials, etc. builds on-going support for the change." (Rachel Butler, Owner, Total Business Results LLC)

## **Allow Yourself to Take in Information**

"We network with other libraries using the same automation system in the northern part of the state, a large library using the same system, and national LISTSERVs dealing with the system. Using all these contacts brings new ideas and methods for using the system to best effect." (Pamela Murphy, Collection Manager, Rockford IL. Public Library)

In addition to the advice above, keep your customers and others who have a stake in this in the loop throughout the process. Far too often, people do great work on a major change and then hand it off to the implementers only to see the project die. People need to be part of creating what they are expected to support or implement. And for all the same reasons, be sure to keep your sponsors in the loop as well.

## **Find Ways to Celebrate Wins Along the Way**

"I think the key to keeping change alive in any organization is what John Kotter talks about in his book *Leading Change*, Step 6, Communicating the Change Vision. The key for organizations is they must plan, create improvements and wins at various steps in the process. I would recommend creating overt signs of wins every 4-6 months in your journey. The most important action for the organization is marketing the

overt signs of improvement under the umbrella that our change strategy is reaping benefits to all employees. While you really want to market these improvements, you must also stress that these wins are only small steps toward continuous improvements and the organization can't afford to slow their efforts. In large meetings it is important to visibly recognize and maybe even reward those employees/teams who made the wins possible." (Les Young, Human Resources Professional)

By the way, John Kotter's book, *Leading Change*, is well worth reading. He identifies steps in the life of a change and provides clear examples of how others have applied these steps.

**"Publicize success stories; celebrate them and indulge those who succeed."**

(Laura Markos, Ph.D., Organizational Change Consultant)

## **New Structures**

### **Encourage a New Culture**

"Encourage establishment of new culture of decision-making on front lines, active learning, value for data integrity and focus on effectiveness." (Brian Fox, Human Performance Senior Manager, Accenture)

### **Power and Politics**

Most change inside organizations disrupts fragile relationships based on power. Some may gain power and status, some may lose. This is no small thing. When our power is threatened, people may do any number of things. They may wilt and approach work with a "what's the use" attitude. Others may fight to hang on or make sure they come out on top. Others get caught in the political crossfire.

Part of planning needs to address the reality of power. Early in the planning process, you need to ask, What impact will these changes have on the delicate balance of power? Who wins? Who loses? What could be the unintended consequences when people react to shifts in power? Given the truth that power will have an impact, what can we do to support a smooth transition?

Here are some structures that can help sustain change.

### **Project Management Office**

"Project Management Office staffed with people who are knowledgeable about, and focused on, the human side of change, and who are lighthearted problem solvers, rather than project tracking police. Thus, when a change project runs into a problem, the project managers are likely to turn to the PMO for help, rather than hide from them to avoid being caught and reported on." (Kayhoe)

What a fine idea. You might think of this project management office as "debugger central." Another major benefit of this suggestion: people leading and carrying out the change are doing it while trying to juggle many other balls. And the ball that drops is the new one. Performance management systems seldom keep pace with change, so what gets rewarded is what people will be rated on at the end of the year.

## **Process Management Organization**

"I've been working on large scale Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system projects for about the last 10 years. These system implementations always bring along process changes and organization impacts. There's a tendency for people to backslide to the old ways of doing things over time after the go-live. An effective means to sustain the change is to design and develop a new process management organization. Starting with key users or power users in the organization, you build an organization structure of people who have the responsibility to manage the new processes that often span functional areas. Key users funnel their suggested fixes, enhancements, or process changes to their regional process owner. The regional process owners regularly meet to prioritize changes and ensure they maintain integrated processes. If there's another global level above the regional ones, there's another cycle of review and process management at the global level to confirm integration but also to keep regional processes aligned at a global level." (Fox)

## **Organizational Planning**

Sooner, rather than later, make the change part of how you do business. People get updates on it just as they would any other item critical to the success of the organization.

"Organizations with clear responsibilities/expectations are built to carry out the projects needed to realize the vision. Managed within a program, not as a separate directive. . . The change projects are integrated into the master schedule of the program and are regularly statused and worked on." (Engineer, Aerospace Company)

## **Lock in the New**

"We lock the changes into whatever systems we can. When we are designing the change, which as a team of engineers and technicians is quite systematic, we are looking for ways to make the change link to existing systems or add on top of existing systems very early on.

It's usually some combination of training components that get added to employees automated training plans, responsibilities that get added to their job descriptions (which are very alive documents for us, we call them Roles, Responsibilities and Expectations), or a measure added to an existing scorecard reviewed at some meeting at some frequency.

"We have even created new roles in the organization to manage new systems we have put into place. We call the role a "system owner" and expect them to manage all the components required to keep the change going\realized.It's a major way of life around here now" (Chvatal)

"Embed the new elements into all existing organizational systems, including particularly contingent/performance compensation, internal audit protocols, training, orientation, inspections, relationships with partners (and their metrics)." (Markos)

"One of the major things I've found that's worked well is to have the area that was responsible for the change initiative remain responsible for the changes once they become 'core business'. That way, commitment to the change is sustained by the normal business processes." (Abbe Winter, staff and research student, Queensland University of Technology, Australia)

And to close this important section: "Sustainable change occurs when something about the change is "hardwired" into the system." (Mary Morrison, Human Resources, City of Tacoma, WA)

## Resources

It is critical that sufficient resources such as people, money, and tools are made available for this change. Asking people to find time all work within existing budgets, using old tools only works on the smallest changes. If you want something big to happen, you increase the odds in your favor if you ensure that people have the time, budget, and materials they need to do things right. Otherwise, you are basing your strategy on the hopes of divine intervention.

Here are five questions to ask about the people assigned to the project: (Note that resources refers to people.)

- Do resources have backfill responsibilities?
- Do resources have accrued vacations?
- Are the resources available/required full time?
- Are any resources close to retirement e.g., will you need to identify a succession plan?
- Are the resources from the project? Do they require knowledge transfer activities?" (Fox)

## Education

Education/training needs to be a budget item in the initial planning. "Too often this is ignored and then when "the funding is consumed and no behaviors have changed people go back to doing things the way they always have." (Richard Ray, OD and Change Director, US Treasury Department)

"Train interactively, openly, with clear goals but flexible means; listen to those in training; embrace resistance and work with/through it, not to overcome it but to consider it as crucial input/feedback on what might/will/doesn't work. Build mutual understanding, rather than requirements/memorization, in training - and that works both ways." (Laura Markos, Ph.D., organizational change consultant)

## Support the People

"Encourage an atmosphere of risk-taking and sharing openly the learning that comes from trial and error...starts with leadership...I always encourage leaders to "story tell" their trial & error experiences to put folks at ease." (Butler)

"One thing I noted while there was the approach from the consulting group helping with the change to equip the organizations with change agents. The purpose to doing that was to keep the energy and knowledge growing within the company but over time the people rotated out or were given buy outs etc." (Manager in Financial Institution)

"Empower people at the action/operating level to do the right thing to support the change goals, and provide ways for them to stop/change the work or kick it up the hierarchy to ensure that the change indeed occurs." (Markos)

"Assign a higher level mentor who will assist, guide, provide feedback, and coach the team/person/leader on the change...a sounding board and advocate." (Butler)

### **Clear Measures of Success**

"Use a single metric that bests expresses progress for the entire project, and have a relentless campaign of communication on progress on that metric. For example, if the initiative is a quality improvement initiative, find a single, tangible measure that everyone contributes to, like product returns or warranty claims, and have everyone focus on it. This is an alternative to "balanced scorecard" measures, which can serve to dilute attention and infer that all metrics are equal." (Kayhoe)

The type of open book management espoused by Jack Stack (*The Great Game of Business*) is giving people a single critical number. When he and some colleagues started Springfield Remanufacturing Corporation with an 89:1 debt to equity ratio, they used the cost of serving the debt as their critical number. They rightly believed that if they failed to make interest payments, they would be out of business. Once debt subsided, they found other areas to be their critical number.

"Change the metrics; measure against the new goals. . . Publish the metrics, and how each business unit is doing against them. . . Consider a top 10/bottom 10 listing of under/overachieving units. . .Get rid of anything that contradicts the change goals: behaviors, habits, metrics, procedures, protocols, performance standards, management/leadership habits, etc." (Markos)

### **Use Those Measures to Enhance Performance**

"Tie the change to individual performance measurements and make sure the expectations are clearly communicated...more often than once every 12 or 18 months at a performance review. It needs to get to "the way they work" as opposed to a one-time topic that they must report on at a staff meeting!" (Butler)

In addition, teams, departments, divisions, should be aligned around common performance goals. I am not a fan of individual performance reviews unless they are coupled with a serious look at the reasons why performance is high or low. Often the individual gets undue credit or blame when the overall environment had a significant part in the outcome.

"I'm always amazed that after a big change is put in place, many companies fail to go back and ask some simple questions - what is working well, what is not working well, what do we need to adjust? So planning the post rollout phase up front, before the implementation is key. Ensure that there is a point person driving the post-rollout process and the right group of people providing feedback about the change and what additional work might be needed." (Nicki Anders, Manager, Ultimate Software)

## Commitment to Monitor Support

". . . most of the time organizational change initiatives don't have a process in place to 'sense' the target population's true level of engagement. The person leading the change becomes surrounded by 'converts' and gradually becomes saturated with the converts' (frequently) unrealistic (overly optimistic) perspective. Having a processing place to sense how the change is perceived, valued (or not) and supported, can help avoid being blind-sided when the inertia of the organization finally becomes apparent and the initiative fails or can only be partially realized.

The process for determining the 'health' of a change initiative can't be based on just a self-administered questionnaire or an outcome of a project review but, where possible, the questionnaire needs to be administered face-to-face with persons affected by the change, supplemented with some open-ended interviewing. An unhurried confidential conversation with several people at several different levels and locations on a regular basis can help confirm or disconfirm the more widely self-administered questionnaire's findings. Face-to-face conversations provide the opportunity to pick up on the level of candor and genuineness of the responder. When face-to-face is not possible, a self-administered questionnaire provides 'some' insight into how the initiative is faring but as importantly it provides an opportunity to compare findings from the face-to-face sessions with the self-administered sessions. If the face-to-face sessions reflect the same findings found in the self-administered questionnaires, then the self-administered 'sense' of the organization may be accurate. If the face-to-face sessions show a (typically) less 'rosy' picture than the self-administered questionnaires, then we can take action in the form of dialogue with 'rosy-hued' (self-administered) others to explore the possibility (probability) that the change initiative may need to be tweaked or receive even more radical attention. Without mentioning who made what concerns known about the change initiative, the more candid face-to-face findings could provide 'permission' / safety for the 'rosy-hued' others to express themselves more candidly." (Robert Bryan, Principal, RB Associates)

Determining the 'health' of a change initiative is a key first step.

## Pulling It All Together

So that's a lot to think about and do. But consider a major change that didn't get the results your organization needed and look at the list again. How many of these items - strong leadership, communication, new structures, resources, support the people, clear measures of success, and commitment to monitor support - were neglected? Our own research indicates that these are the items that can turn all that effort into real benefits. I wish you well.

© 2010 Rick Maurer. Rick uses his Change without Migraines™ to advise organizations on how to lead change effectively. He is author of many books including *Beyond the Wall of Resistance*. In 2009, he created the Change Management Open Source Project, a free resource for people interested in change in organizations. You can access the open source project as well as many free articles and tools from his web site: [www.rickmaurer.com](http://www.rickmaurer.com)