A Blindingly Stupid Example of Change Management for Big Systems
Defining Change Management

Lead By Example

Motivate

Inspire

Mentor

Coach

Vision

Teamwork

Win
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Overview

Defining Change Management (CM) is tough under any circumstances, especially in the context of a new technology being implemented within an ongoing organization. Mention CM and “thought balloons” seem to emerge from people’s heads, saying “Exactly what is Change Management?,” “Why do we need this mumble-jumble management-speak?,” “Does it really matter in the real world?”

As a result, the best success in defining Change Management comes not from experts at podiums pointing at esoteric charts but by using a silly, some even say stupid, example to which most people can relate. On that lofty intellectual plane:

The Blindingly Stupid Example

Four’s not better than two?

Picture the airline president who wanted his Boeing (generic name usage) two-engine 737s to fly faster. He asked Boeing if they could help, and was assured they could. So, they added two engines to each airplane.

After a few weeks of service with the four engines instead of two, the airline president asked his Operations Manager if his airplanes were flying faster. The president was surprised to hear that, in fact, they were actually flying slower … and the number of oil-related engine failures on the old engines was up dramatically.

As a result, the action-oriented, hands-on president decided to investigate first-hand and sat in the jump seat as one of his crews prepared for a routine flight. The co-pilot meticulously read the checklist and the pilot systematically complied. Co-Pilot: “Start engines 1 and 2,” and the Pilot responded, “Engines 1 and 2 started.” The pilots then proceeded to make the flight with two engines running and two engines not in use.

After landing, the president asked the pilots if they were aware of the extra two engines. They were quick to exclaim: “Are you kidding? Of course we’re aware. Dragging those things around costs us an extra 15 minutes of time and 3,000 pounds of fuel on that last leg alone.” “Then why don’t you start them and use them?” asked the bewildered president. “Hellooo,” said the pilot, “Are you kidding? Our union contract specifically states that we fly two-engine aircraft.”
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Flabbergasted maintenance man

Retreating from the cockpit, the president deplaned to watch the fuel and oil crew do the turn-around of the aircraft for the next flight. He was surprised to see an obviously confused maintenance man scurry back and forth between the four engines...providing haphazard (at best) oil level checking and filling. After the plane backed away from the gate, the president approached the maintenance man to ask him what was going on.

The maintenance man replied, “Beats the heck out of me. I’m supposed to be checking oil on two engines before each flight, but I obviously have four to check now...and not enough time or help to get it done before the pilot starts the engines. Besides, I’m still trying to figure out why two of the engines never need any oil and the other two are too hot to approach to put any oil in.”

Finger-pointing in all directions

The Director of Operations looked up from his desk to see the president storming into the office: “How’s it going, boss?” “Poorly, thanks to you. What have you been doing for the last six months while we were getting the extra engines put on those airplanes?” “I’ve been running this airline’s day-to-day operations. What do you think I’ve been doing?” replied the DO. The president was ready, “I know and expect you to be doing that. That’s your job. What I’m talking about is what you have been doing, or not doing in this case, to get your flight and maintenance crews ready to fly airplanes with four engines?”

“I thought that was Charlie’s job...he was the Project Manager on the Engine Project,” said the DO. “Not so,” said the President, “His job was to work with Boeing and get the engines on and running and, from what I see, he did just that. It was never his job to get the crews ready. They report to you, not to him. It was your job to foresee the union contract problem. It was your job to re-write flight checklists to four engines. It was your job to ensure we had a revised maintenance procedure and extra maintenance people.” And the dialog continued.

Where’s the problem?

The goal of using this blindingly stupid example is not to insult anyone, But, this airline clearly needs an industrial strength dose of Change Management. The technology is there and working (the two new engines), but the manager of the flight crews and maintenance crews has clearly failed in his responsibility to get them ready to work with that technology.
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And his failure to get them ready is already producing very poor results...slow flights, wasted fuel, and increased engine failures. Clearly the problem has nothing to do with Boeing because their engines work.

Without proper Change Management owned and provided by the user organization’s leadership, many Big System implementations wind up in similar shape. The “technology works technically,” but the user organization is not ready to use it to get their work done effectively and efficiently. Failure to ready the user organizations will result in decreased organizational performance and severely decreased employee morale. The goal of Change Management is to keep the organization from looking back months after implementation and mumbling “What we did was blindingly stupid.”

Plugging Change Management into “Go Faster” initiative

Let’s replay this example. Suppose the airline president had decided to use Change Management in his “go faster” initiative. How would that have looked?

Setting the stage properly

Imagine the kickoff meeting run by the president and attended by the Director of Operations, Charlie Four Engine Project Manager from Procurement, the Chief Pilot, and others. Imagine the president giving his vision and charter for his “go faster” initiative:

“Ladies and gentlemen, we’re here today to officially launch this ‘go faster’ initiative that we’ve all been talking about. I want to give you my vision for how I see this thing working out. By this time next year, I see business up considerably because of our faster flight times to our four key destinations. I know in my bones that we can cream Delta and US Air if we can cut 15 minutes off these flights. These new engines will do that when we put our aircraft back in service on October 15.

Charlie, I’m officially naming you as the Engine Project Manager. It’s your job to work with Boeing to ensure that the aircraft are properly fitted with the new engines and that those engines work. I expect all work to be completed by October 15 of this year as we have discussed. On that date, I see a seamless transition to the four-engine aircraft. I want our passengers to be aware of nothing except faster flight times.
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Director of Operations, I expect your flight crews to be fully prepared, trained and under contract to fly four engine aircraft before October 15. I expect you to manage all the training for your people. Charlie can help some there by making some of the Boeing people available, but the training responsibility is yours. Furthermore, I expect that you will have gone through all our maintenance procedures and modified them as needed to ensure those re-engined aircraft get proper maintenance. I expect no glitches in operations or maintenance.

Making the new game plan work

Now, my plan is to personally meet with all of you once a week to ensure that both the engine project and the crew preparation project are going as expected. By the end of next week I want to see a complete project plan from each of you that reflects the critical path activities that we will need to accomplish to both get both engines and crews ready. Questions?”

Now here’s a blindingly stupid question: “Do you think the airline example would have come out differently if the president had given that vision/charter speech and stayed in the game on a regular basis?” The answer is a resounding “Yes.”

What is Change Management (CM) in relation to Big Systems?

The range of different companies’ perceptions of what is included in the scope of CM is amazing. The range includes training, communication, public relations, marketing, reengineering, organizational behavior and others. The truth is that effective CM includes elements of all of these and much more.

Change Management support helps the organization make the mechanical changes in vision, work processes, and employee performance systems that are necessary to get get desired business value from the soon-to-be-implemented Big Systems. Effective CM is not “touchy-feely” stuff, advertising hype, or a bunch of theory. It is a serious commitment of time and resources to get user organizations ready to use the new technology and mitigate risks of failure to maximize the return on the big-time serious investment in the technology insertion.

Companies either commit the resources and management support to CM and get a return on their investment, or they just talk about it and get only a fraction of the benefits they could/should have gotten.
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**Why is Change Management needed when implementing a big technical system?**

Change Management helps the organization revise its work processes and employee performance management systems (its work agreements) to get maximum benefits from the new tool. It helps the organization internalize the vision of a better way of doing work that led the company to undertake the massive job of software tool insertion in the first place.

Successful companies would never make major investments in expensive, state-of-the-art, tangible equipment without thinking through how their work should change to get a benefit from the investment. Why, then, should any company undertake the massive investment in intellectual capital represented by a big IT system without going through the same steps?

**Who must own Change Management in the implementing organization?**

The business/operations management of the company must own the Change Management effort because they have to live with the business its results. Just as importantly, users whose work processes are affected by the technology insertion must own it because they are the stakeholders bearing the most immediate brunt of the change, good or bad.

**What are some of the bad things that happen when there is inadequate Change Management?**

It’s a long and depressing list, but low points include:

- confusion about how to get work done with resultant deterioration in work performance,
- outright resistance to the changes,
- underground resistance to the changes,
- inappropriate work processes of one work group hampering the performance of other work groups,
- exceptionally steep and long learning curves, abandonment of projects, severe morale problems.
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How do we get line managers to understand that Change Management is critical for implementation success?

One of the most powerful tools for helping this understanding is getting the influence leaders in the line organization involved as subject matter experts very early in the tool development technical side of the project and keeping them involved. Line managers are usually very pragmatic people. When they understand that the new system will not support or match old work processes, they look for solutions that will minimize the impact on their work force.

Change Management techniques can then be presented to the line managers as a tool for making work process changes and improving their performance without causing a performance disaster during the learning curve.

So, let’s say an implementing organization is doing a good job of communicating about the upcoming Big System and the vendor is doing training on the software. Isn’t that enough Change Management? Absolutely not, although that is the approach many companies take. The activities described will let the users know that something is coming, and they will probably be able to push buttons within their individual silos and make an electronic transaction happen. But, what’s missing?

- **Management and users will not have a common vision about what the implementation is all about and why the implementation is being done in the first place being done and they must support the vision.** Until there’s a common vision and all the players (including the worker bees) can articulate what that vision means in terms of their jobs, there will be no common direction. Instead, there may be dissension, sabotage, and other unhappy consequences if this shared vision does not exist.

- **Work process changes surrounding transactions in the new system will not have not been examined for needed changes, much less revised or, and tested.** The new IT system typically does not exactly replicate the old system, so old ways of doing work will probably not fit the new system. Additionally, the new way of doing work in one work group may spill over into another work group’s processes and cause havoc there. Until the new system can be described and understood in terms of horizontal work processes instead of transactional silos, there’s substantial risk of undesired results.
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- Nuts and bolts requirements (Plant, Equipment, Tools) surrounding the new system will not have not been reviewed and changed. Great communication and good training don’t accomplish much if the new system has changed the tools that employees need to do the job and the company has not provided new ones.

- The old performance management system will has not have been modified to reflect the new jobs being done by system users. For the new system to be effective, the impact of changed work processes on individual job metrics must be understood and new metrics developed, if needed. Individual users’ supervisors must re-contract with the employees to do their new job.

- New metrics of successful performance must be agreed upon, and management must get a “handshake” acknowledgement from users that they will do the new work -- not the old -- and that they will get paid for performing only to the new metrics not the old.

- An action plan must answer the “What do I do on Monday morning?” question. Communication and technical training are necessary steps, but they do not complete the job of visualizing how the work will be done differently under the new system. Work processes and performance metrics around the transactions in the new system must be modified, explained, and understood at the “worker bee” level before successful change can happen.

Why can’t an organization wait until “Go Live” to do Change Management?

Assuming that the project does not totally fail, waiting until “Go Live” to do Change Management work virtually guarantees the company a longer, deeper drop in productivity and a longer learning time than necessary. In the absence of Change Management work prior to going live, necessary work process changes get discovered when employees try to meet work schedules using old work processes that the new system will not support.

Typically, “workarounds” will then be developed “on the fly” to get the job done with potentially bad consequences from this haphazard approach. Without a proper horizontal view of work processes through the organization, the workaround developed by one group can easily become the next problem for another work group.
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In the absence of prior Change Management work, it is unlikely that management and users will have a shared vision for the project. Support for the new system will be questionable if a common vision has not been developed within the company prior to Go Live. And the lack of shared vision creates opportunities for dissension and disillusionment.

In the absence of a clear understanding of and adoption of changed work processes and performance metrics, employees will attempt to continue performing their old jobs to the old standards of performance. This is a normal reaction since the employees have been conditioned to this performance system for years. When the old performance measures are mismatched with the new system, the stage is set for frustration on the part of both the employee and the management. The instinctive reaction is to blame the new system, when the system may be performing exactly as it was designed to do.

The bottom line is that work processes must be changed if the work is to be done. Changing those work processes after going live greatly increases the chance of a failed project. Assuming that the company dodges that bullet, the consequence for doing Change Management after going live is a much tougher transition for everyone, and there’s loss of productivity as well as limited upside potential for improvements the company sought when it decided to undertake the project.
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