

**Change Management:
Strategies for Successful Change**

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Partial fulfillment for TEPM 6301

Project Management for Technical Professionals

Submitted: December 6, 2004

Summary

Change management is the process of directing companies through change from one state to a newer state. To successfully navigate your company through a change initiative, you must harness numerous forces: political-building a coalition behind your initiative, emotional-overcoming stakeholder resistance and gaining commitment, and logistical-securing resources and managerial attention.

This paper will focus on resistance as the most common barrier to successful change. When transformational change efforts fail, typically, the problem is not with the change programs themselves. For major organizational change to occur, the initiative must spread across organizational boundaries and down through hierarchies to individual employees. It must also touch upon employees' fundamental psychological motivations for working in the organization.

Successful change must involve top management, including the board and chief executive. Usually there's a champion who initially instigates the change by being visionary, persuasive and consistent. Weak executive sponsorship has been named as one of the main reasons for change failure.

A change agent role is responsible to translate the vision to a realistic plan and carry out the plan. Change is best carried out as a team-wide effort. Communications about the change should be frequent and with all organization members.

A successful change management process has three phases. During the start-up phase, the project team, as the change agent, must first create a strong vision of the future that is capable of focusing the group's energy. Change must become a core organizational value, and be linked to overall performance and profitability. Next is the design phase during which the project team's main goal should be to execute work plans.

Finally, the implementation phase is where you seek, not only to make the change, but to institutionalize the change. Once systems and processes have changed, you establish policies and procedures that support the new way, and solidify the change. This change in the structures of the organization typically involves an unfreezing, change and re-freezing process where past behaviors are “unlearned”, new behaviors are changed or learned, and then the new behaviors are reinforced and measured.

Change Management: Strategies for Successful Change

What is Change Management?

As early as the 1800’s, people regarded organizations from the “machine” perspective, and conducted change on a process and systems level. This represented the engineering approach. On the other extreme, in 1980, William Bridges proposed ideas on human adaptation to change that influenced businesses’ approach to managing change. By the mid-1980’s, Jeanenne LaMarsh was actively using her structured organizational change model with companies like AT&T Bell Laboratories and later with Ford and Caterpillar. Change management, at its simplest level, is the task of managing change (from a reactive or a proactive posture.) It has evolved into a critical focus within organizations as the perception of the role of organizations developed. (Hiatt, 2002)

Why is Change Management Important?

If you are a manager of any type where your job is to manage people, you likely have experienced resistance to change from employees. However, you may not recognize the role that you can play in preventing that resistance and leading change. Most managers do not make this connection until they have personally experienced failure in an important change project.

(Prosci, 2003) In a study of companies implementing major business changes, 327 project leaders, consultants, and managers answered the following question about their project overall:

“If you had the chance to do it again, what would you do differently?”

The most common response was:

“Utilize an effective and planned change management program.”

The participants did not emphasize design or technology issues, nor did they say they lacked vision or an understanding of the marketplace. The most common barrier to success was a lack of change management. They fell short when managing the people side of change which impacted their success and introduced risk into their projects. (Hiatt, 2002)

The new values of business today require a different approach to the way businesses change. The response of the employee has shifted from “yes, sir” to “why are we doing that” – and the change leader must adapt. It affects every person relevant to the organizational processes that must undergo change: employees, managers, executives, clients, and vendors or business partners. These people are known as the “stakeholders” of the change.

The Most Common Barrier to Successful Change: Employee Resistance

Change management practitioners often underestimate the level of comfort with the current state. People are afraid of the unknown. (McNamara, 1999) The natural and normal reaction to change is resistance. Every individual has a threshold for how much change they can absorb based on their personal history dealing with change, the current events in their life, the current changes at work, and how much other change is going on. Moreover, some employees will resist change no matter what you do. Even when individuals can align the change with their self-interest and belief system, the uncertainty of success and fear of the unknown can block change. (Lawson, 2003)

Resistance to change can spread and become a significant barrier to success. Although initial resistance is a natural reaction to change, ongoing resistance left unattended can become a threat to the business and customers. A critical component of any good change management process will be a program to proactively manage resistance.

Employee resistance to the change process usually stems from a lack of awareness. In most cases, employees do not quite understand the business goals and are thinking of themselves. “What is in it for me?” They also have a fear of losing their jobs. “Will this change cost me my job?” (Johnston, 2000) Other reasons for employee resistance are comfort with the status quo and fear of the unknown, organizational history and culture, and opposition to the new technologies, requirements and processes introduced by change.

Manager resistance comes from a slightly different perspective. Managers fear a loss of power and control. This is the leading reason for manager resistance to change. Change often eliminates something over which the manager had control or introduces something over which the manager does not have control. Some managers perceive a change as a personal attack by other managers and react to the change initiative as a “battle for turf.” (Prosci, 2003)

Additionally, many managers feel that they will have limited input in a project for which they will ultimately be responsible for maintaining. They feel an overload of their current tasks, the pressures of daily their activities, and limited resources to assist them with the new responsibilities given to them during the change process. (Durant, 1999)

Managers can also feel that they lack the skills and experience needed to effectively manage change. Some managers are uncomfortable with their role in managing the change because they realize they do not have the experience or tools to effectively manage their employees’ resistance. Also, managers can be concerned about the skill, knowledge, and

responsibilities placed on them by new business processes and technologies. This can cause them to start worrying about job security. (Johnston, 2000)

Some managers disagree with the new way of doing things and are skeptical about the need for change. They do not feel that the solution was the best approach to fixing the problem or do not perceive that a problem actually exists. Managers who do not play a role or provide input in the design and planning phases for a solution, tend to resist it. Some company personnel state that the resistance they experienced from their managers was due to the solution not being the idea of the manager. They referred to this as “not being invented here” syndrome. (Prosci, 2003)

As a change management practitioner, you have to address resistance quickly. Often the quickest technique for developing support, at least on a short-term basis, is coercion. The principle underlying the use of coercion is very simple: “Do this or else.” (Pierce, 2002) For the best long term results, you should understand three critical and relevant lessons for change management related to employee resistance and the power of comfort with the status quo. One, do not react to resistance with surprise; expect it and plan for it. Be patient with individuals as they work their way through the change process. Two, assess resistance not only from an individual’s natural dislike for change, but also based on how much other change is going on. What is the capacity for the more change? Three, persistent and prolonged resistance from middle management, or other organizational personnel, that is not addressed by executive sponsors can threaten a project and compromise its success. Sponsors must determine and understand why the resistance exists and deal with the root cause.

Executive Sponsorship

In many cases, poor executive sponsorship has been named as one of the main reasons for change failure. Some of the most common mistakes made by executive sponsors are sponsors that do not visibly support the change throughout the entire process thereby running the risk of becoming disconnected from the change; abdicating responsibility or delegating down, essentially setting it up and leaving it to the project manager; failing to build a coalition of business leaders and stakeholders to support the project; moving on to the next change before the current change is in place or changing priorities too soon after the project has started; failing to set expectations with mid-level managers and front-line supervisors related to the change and change process; spending too little time on the project to keep it on track and with the project team to help them overcome obstacles. The largest mistake that executive sponsors make is underestimating resistance to change and the need to manage the people-side of the change process. In many cases, they are unwilling to deal with resistant managers or stay the course when resistance increases. (LaMarsh, 1995)

Effective Executive Sponsorship

The greatest contributor to project success has been shown to be effective and strong executive sponsorship. Effective executive sponsors must recognize that they are ultimately accountable for the success of the change. However, change management practitioners or consultants must coach these business leaders. Part of this role as coach is making sponsors and managers aware of the critical nature of their involvement at each phase of the project and providing them with the guidelines and tools to be successful.

An executive sponsor has three key audiences: peers, mid-level managers, and employees. From the perspective of their peers, the executive sponsor has the responsibility to

create a positive background conversation about the change and to build a support system. As a group, the primary sponsor, executive-level peers and key stakeholders will play one of the most important change management roles and will enable the project to be a success. Kotter (*Leading Change*) refers to this support structure for change as the “guiding coalition.” (Kotter, 1996)

From the perspective of mid-level managers, the executive sponsor has the responsibility to provide information about the change and to communicate their expectations of mid-level and supervisory level managers in terms of supporting the change. The executive sponsor must take on the responsibility to manage resistance from senior and mid-level managers.

From the perspective of employees, the executive sponsor is a preferred sender of change messages. The sponsor plays a key role in communicating the business reasons for the change and the future vision for the organization.

Observing others perform the new activities successfully can generate expectations in observers that they can improve their own performance by learning from what is observed. The more powerful the role model, the larger the impact, (Carr, 2002) which is why many project teams and corporations have a key executive justify the need for change, model and monitor the process, define acceptable performance, and demonstrate how improvements can be made.

The Process of Change Management

When working with change management, there are three phases (Start-up, Design, and Implementation) of the process that should be addressed systematically in order to give your project the greatest chance of success. Each of these phases has three perspectives that should be considered. First, you must address the perspective of the project team that is the team that is actually doing the work developing and implementing the change. Second, you must consider the perspective of the stakeholders. Stakeholders are the people who have a vested interest in the

success of the project. Lastly, you should take into consideration the perspective of the employee. Employees are the people that will be working with the new system on a daily basis and, in their eyes, have little or no say about the change itself. (Daly, 2003)

These change management phases and perspectives can be represented in a 3x3 grid with the vertical separation for project timing (start-up, design and implementation) and the horizontal separation for the audience or group (see Figure 1).

	Project Team	Stakeholders	Employees
Start-up	Select and Prepare the Team	Create Sponsorship Model	Create Awareness
Design	Execute Work Plans	Involve Sponsors	Engage Employees
Implementation	Transfer Ownership	Coach Sponsors	Train Employees

Figure 1 – Team Responsibilities

(Prosci, 2003)

Start-Up Phase

Vision and leadership are the lynchpins to successful change. The project team, as the change agent, must first create a vision of the future that is capable of focusing the group’s energy. The vision should contrast the “old” with the proposed “new” and it must be comprehensive enough to discuss the journey to the proposed “new.” Change must become a core organizational value, and be linked to overall performance and profitability.

Commitment from senior management at the earliest stages of the process is required. In order to effectively manage the change process, all players must understand all of the variables at play, and sufficient time must be allocated to allow for implementation.

Project Team

A key point in this phase of the change management process is selecting and preparing the team. One of the most significant essentials for success during transition is teambuilding. Successful leaders challenge, motivate, and empower their teams throughout the change process. (McKee, 2003) It is crucial to select the “right” change management team members and do not be afraid to use outside expertise when necessary. Once the team has been selected, train the team on change management methods. The team should understand the scope, overall timeframe, and goals of the change. They should understand the reasons behind the change, who is impacted by the change, and how as well as what will change and what will stay the same. These things are referred to as the “Future State.” (Hiatt, 2003)

The project team should assess and analyze the current organization. This is a critical step in the change management process. No matter how good the idea is, or plan is, if the organization is not ready for the change, it will most likely fail. Members should analyze the organizations change capacity by analyzing how much change the organization has made recently and how much more change can the organization absorb. The team should then look into the change history of the organization to get a feel for the effectiveness of past changes and employee view on successes and failures. (Beckhard, 1977)

The project team should perform a culture assessment to answer the question “To what degree do the values and norms of the organization support or oppose this change?” If the

culture of the organization supports the suggested change, it will greatly increase the chance of the project being a success.

Next the team should analyze the authority and capability of the initial sponsor. You want to make sure the initial sponsor has sufficient power to lead the change. Poor executive sponsorship is listed as one of the top five reasons for failure in the change management process. (Prosci, 2003)

Based on the gathered information, analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the organization to support the change. At this point, you should have a good idea what is working in favor of the change as well as what is working against it. These factors will help you decide if it is a wise business decision to push forward with the change process or if it should be postponed for now with the intention of revisiting it in the future.

At this phase it is a good idea for the team to create a sponsorship model. (Prosci, 1998) A sponsorship model identifies key managers and stakeholders as well as assesses their current level of support to the change process. It also provides executive education on the change, creates key messages to be communicated to the organization, and creates specific actions that managers can do to support the change.

The team should take the time to develop detailed change strategies and plans such as a change management plan (overall strategy), a communications plan, a sponsor and stakeholder management plan, and a training plan (change management training). They should develop a detailed schedule to set the timeframe, and a budget for the change. They should review these plans and get approval from steering committee. A Steering Committee is usually a group of high-level stakeholders who are responsible for providing guidance on overall strategic direction. They do not take the place of a sponsor, but help to spread the strategic input and buy-in to a larger portion of the organization. The Steering Committee is usually made up of

organizational peers, and is a combination of direct clients and indirect stakeholders. (Prosci, 2003)

Stakeholders

During the start-up phase, key stakeholders of the project should be identified with an understanding gained relative to their ability to help or hinder the change management process. To get this right, it is a good idea to create a “Sponsorship Model.” In this model, you will identify key senior managers and stakeholders throughout the organization who are needed to support the change. (Prosci, 1998) The stakeholders should be considered an asset to you as you move the project through the different phases. You should also assess senior managers and stakeholders to determine their current level of change support and their competency to manage change. It is always better to have senior managers and stakeholders of the project that have the authority and ability to commit to the necessary change and see it through to the end of the project.

Once you understand who has the authority to assist in the change, you should train senior managers on change management techniques. Executive education should be provided on the overall change, current organizational readiness, as well as the future state after the change has been institutionalized.

Key messages should be created for managers to communicate to the organization. You should use formal presentations when available for establishing communication and the less formal elevator conversations when appropriate. A steering committee should be created for the project. A steering committee is a cross-functional group of management, line staff, and other stakeholders that actively manage a project. Their primary roles are to charter the teams, track efforts, gather input for periodic reports, set priorities, reset goals or objectives, and terminate

projects as appropriate. (Daly, 2003) Steering committee should help keep the project on track through working with the project teams, as well as sponsors for the project.

Another important step would be to create identifiable actions that senior managers can perform to begin supporting the change. There are five areas that are key roles and contributions from top-management sponsors. One, senior managers can support the change by taking the lead in establishing a budget and assigning the right resources for the project including setting priorities between project work and day-to-day work, being an advocate for assigning the best resources to the team, providing the necessary funding and budget for the project, and appointing an experienced change agent to support the project. Two, they should be actively involved with the project team throughout the project in helping define the program and the scope, attending key meetings, setting deadlines and expectations, asking to see deliverables, making themselves available to the team members, and expecting results and holding the team accountable for deviations from the expected results. Three, senior managers should engage and create support from other senior managers by representing the project to their peers, educating key stakeholders, communicating the need for change and selling the process to other business leaders, holding mid-level managers accountable, forming and leading a steering committee of key stakeholders, and combating resistance from other senior managers. Four, they should strive to be an active and visible spokesperson for the change by communicating the need for the change to employees, sharing the financial implications and risk or not changing, articulating the vision and goals of the change, being a champion of the change throughout implementation by staying visible in the project, and connecting the change to the business strategy. Lastly, senior managers should help manage key resistance points by helping the team understand the political landscape and hot spots within the organization, using authority when necessary, and clearly setting expectations for employees and mid-level managers. (Holt, 2003)

Employees

A good change manager should create awareness of the change through initiating communications with employees regarding change. You should explain the current situation and the rationale for the change, why the change is needed; explain the vision of the organization after the change takes place; make sure the employees understand the basics of what is changing, how it will change, and when it will change by explaining the goals and/or objectives of the change in as much detail as necessary. (Daly, 2003) Employees should know the change will happen and it is not a choice. This can be accomplished by explaining the risks involved in not changing. It is important that they know the impact of the change on the day-to-day activities of the employee. Employees tend to think in terms of “WIIFM - What is in it for me?” – the need to feel informed as to what they will get out of it as well as the implications of the change on their job security. (Johnston, 2002) If the change will mean eliminating a few jobs, research shows that it is better to explain this up front than at the end of the change project. (Daly, 2003) It is also important to explain to the employees what specific behaviors and activities are expected from them during the change process. Lastly they should know the procedures for getting help and assistance during the change. During the change process, many things go into a state of flux and it is sometimes unclear to employees to whom they should be asking questions or to whom to provide answers to questions.

Design Phase

Project Team

During the design phase of a change process, the project team’s main goal should be to execute work plans. To do this, they must implement change management strategies, from start-up phase, including specific plans for communication and training, identify pockets of resistance

and develop strategies to counter this resistance, begin to define future skills and competencies for employees, use as input for training plans and curriculum design, develop coaching and mentoring strategies for front-line supervisors including development of change management competencies, train the trainers, and hire external resources necessary to support the change. (Lawson, 2003)

Stakeholders

It is important to involve sponsors during the design phase so that they are able to understand what is being done. You should interview all critical stakeholders and senior managers to determine their expectations as well as the desired outcomes of the change. You should maintain regular contact with senior managers and stakeholders. The more they are involved during the change process, the more of an asset to the team they become. To use the steering committee in a way to maximize its benefit to the project, you must conduct regular steering committee meetings. (Kotter, 1996)

You should work to develop “sponsor” capabilities. What do they need to be doing to support the change? How can they best accomplish those goals? The answers to these questions will help you determine activities sponsors should perform to support the change effort. The “identifiable actions” that you created during the start-up phase for stakeholders would be the activities to consider here. Using their current level of change support and their competency to manage the change as a guide, you should assign appropriate activities. (Cable, 2003)

A good change manager provides ongoing updates to stakeholders and senior managers on project progress and design issues. Do not assume they are watching and know what is happening. When informed of the progress of the project, they will be better able to assist you. You need to seek their input on critical design decisions. Do not overstep your purview by

making decisions with which you assume they will go along. It is always better to have a formal procedure for seeking design decision responses or changes. Seek approval from key stakeholders and senior managers at key decision points in the process; this will help to keep them engaged in the project. (Hiatt, 2003)

Another aspect with which stakeholders should be involved is the identification of resistant managers. When manager resistance is discovered, you should engage other sponsors to address this resistance. A detailed explanation of manager resistance is addressed on page 5 of this document.

Employees

A good change manager should engage employees/stakeholders during the design phase to build their confidence in the project. You want to build awareness around the overall change so that they are less likely to cause problems during the change process. Employees should be directly involved in the design process of the change effort. Employee participation can be obtained through gathering input from them for the design and by using pilots, tests, or models to test ideas with them. Do not be afraid to share the future state with them.

Face-to-face meetings to share the vision and strategy are effective tools to promote employee participation in the change as well as an efficient method of gathering employee feedback. “Question and Answer” sessions or memos can also be used to address employee concerns and share information on a regular basis. (Holt, 2003)

You should share ongoing progress of the design team, including updates to the schedule so that employees know what to expect as the process moves forward and they begin to see the changes taking place in the organization. You should also continue to answer questions about the personal impact to employees. They will continue to be anxious about the change throughout

the process so you should try to understand their questions. How will this impact me? How will this change my daily work? How will I benefit from this change? By considering their questions you will be able to help them understand the process and put their minds at ease. (Hiatt, 2003)

Final Stage - Implementation Phase

Project Team

It is at this stage in the change process that the project team transfers ownership of the project. The team will migrate the change leadership to operational managers, extend the team structure to involve local area groups in the change activities, support local trainers within the organization in implementing education and training about the new processes and systems. (Kotter, 1996)

You should also create “coaching aides” for supervisors to enable them to help their employees through the transition. Coaching aides should include concrete activities that front-line managers and supervisors must perform to support the change with their employees, tools to communicate the new roles and responsibilities to their employees, self-assessment guides for employees to assess the skill and knowledge gaps, resistance assessments and mechanisms to collect feedback from employees during early implementation phases, and tools to create individual development plans. (Prosci 2003)

Stakeholders

To ensure the greatest opportunity for change intervention success, you must coach the sponsors. You should educate the stakeholders and senior managers on the solution and the

implementation plan so they will be aware of the changes as they occur. (Bridges 2000) This will reduce the amount of resistance by managers.

You should provide managers with concrete activities that they can perform to support the change implementation and increase the level of senior manager communications with employees. This additional communication will help the employees feel at ease with the change process as the changes are being implemented. This is also an effective way to use senior managers to manage resistance. (Kanter, 1999)

When problems occur, you should report the roadblocks to senior managers promptly. You want to resolve critical issues quickly through effective use of the steering committee as discussed earlier.

Employees

You can not implement a change without training employees regarding changes to their responsibilities, so it will be necessary to implement training procedures on the new processes, systems and job roles. You should also align employee training with the gap analysis completed by front-line supervisors for their employees. (Hiatt, 2003)

You should celebrate successes and achievement of significant milestones, implement rewards and incentive systems for employees, and continue ongoing communications about project outcomes and progress, including specifics about what changes will be happening when and why.

It will be necessary to audit compliance with the new processes and implement corrective action when needed. When noncompliance with new processes is discovered, use executive sponsorship to help identify the cause and address pockets of resistance quickly as noncompliance can be “contagious” in an organization. It should be well known that for the new

processes and procedures to work, employees must adhere to them. Make it known that suggestions are welcome and will be taken seriously. To prevent the breakdown of the implementation process, you should listen to the employees and value their feedback since they are the ones that will be institutionalizing the change. You should move quickly to adjust the design and/or resolve issues that surface during implementation phase. (Daly, 2003)

Institutionalizing the Change

As part of the implementation phase of the change process, you seek not only to make the change, but also to institutionalize the change, i.e. make the new way the standard and build on that standard. Once change has been successfully made, you make the new way of doing things the norm by establishing policies and procedures that support the new way. A good change manager will perform an assessment of the results of the change management activities by collecting feedback from employees. The data collection process also includes compliance audits to determine if the new processes and tools are being used properly. For simple changes, this process is as straight-forward as listening and watching. These assessments form the basis for corrective action plans and resistance management activities. The change management team analyzes the results of the feedback and compliance audits, determines the root cause of key problems and creates plans to correct these problems.

You should also perform an after-action review. It is at this point that you stand back from the entire program, evaluate successes and failures, and identify process changes for the next project. This is part of the ongoing, continuous improvement of change management for your organization and ultimately leads to change competency, which occurs when each level in the organization has internalized its role in change and developed the skills and knowledge

necessary to react to constant change; the organization has become ready and able to embrace change.

The Three Stages of Change Institutionalization

In order to successfully implement the change, the project team must utilize elements of both behaviorist and cognitive learning theories. This phase of the change involves a three-stage process of unfreezing, change and refreezing. (Lewin, 1947)

Unfreezing

Unfreezing consists of unlearning past behavior. The change process begins when the organization experiences disconfirmation. Disconfirmation is experienced in the form of cognitive dissonance, which is a concept taken from the field of psychology that refers to the “distressing mental state that arises when people find that their beliefs are inconsistent with their actions.” (Lawson, 2003) Inconsistencies from the desired state are uncomfortable and we try to reduce the dissonance and thus the discomfort.

Cognitive dissonance may be caused by external pressures or convincing data from within the organization. For example, an external trigger might be the pressure applied to the company by shareholders to increase the return on their investment. Dissonance may be generated by internal reports that reveal problem areas in the organization. Support for unlearning develops when existing systems are challenged. Unfreezing involves taking apart past learning.

Learning

Once the process has undergone “unfreezing,” the team must work to incorporate new behaviors into organizational processes. Embedded behavior and ideas in the corporate culture must be replaced with behavior more appropriate to the new goals. The development of skills to enable people to do things differently is required. Training must be provided to insure that employees understand their roles in making change happen. Skills and competencies to enable people to do things differently must be developed. Employees must understand the dynamics of the change process and also the functional requirements of the job.

New rules and policies that reinforce the desired ways of operating must be created and documented. Old customs and norms that reinforce the old ways of doing things must be replaced with norms that reinforce the new ways. For example, if the organization is developing teams and moving away from functional departments, then team work across departmental boundaries should be emphasized. Rewards should be specific to the change goals that have been set.

Refreezing

Refreezing is the final stage of the change implementation process. It consists of reinforcing and measuring behavior change. After the training requirements are defined, the reward system, reporting relationships and other systems can be designed to reinforce the new behavior. Performance appraisals, promotions and bonuses can be formulated so as to be based on the desired performance outcomes.

Conclusion

We are all aware of the problems encountered when working with, or managing, individuals. When implementing change each person you come into contact with will have their

own perspective of change and their own individual aims and objectives. The complexities of change management should therefore not be underestimated. Any change needs to be well thought out, have the support of senior managers, the support of the majority of those affected and deliver something better than was there before. All too often changes are made using a 'top down' approach and those affected are seldom consulted on the changes or allowed to feedback regarding the outcomes. However, there are some common principles that can be used to implement change, both small and large, and their effectiveness can be improved by having empathy with, and listening to, those affected.

Although the majority of individuals may not embrace continuous change, very few will resist change that they see as beneficial to themselves, colleagues or the organisation as a whole. Effective change management will ensure that the individuals affected are aware of why the changes are necessary, how they will be implemented, their individual role in the change process and the benefits the change will bring.

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