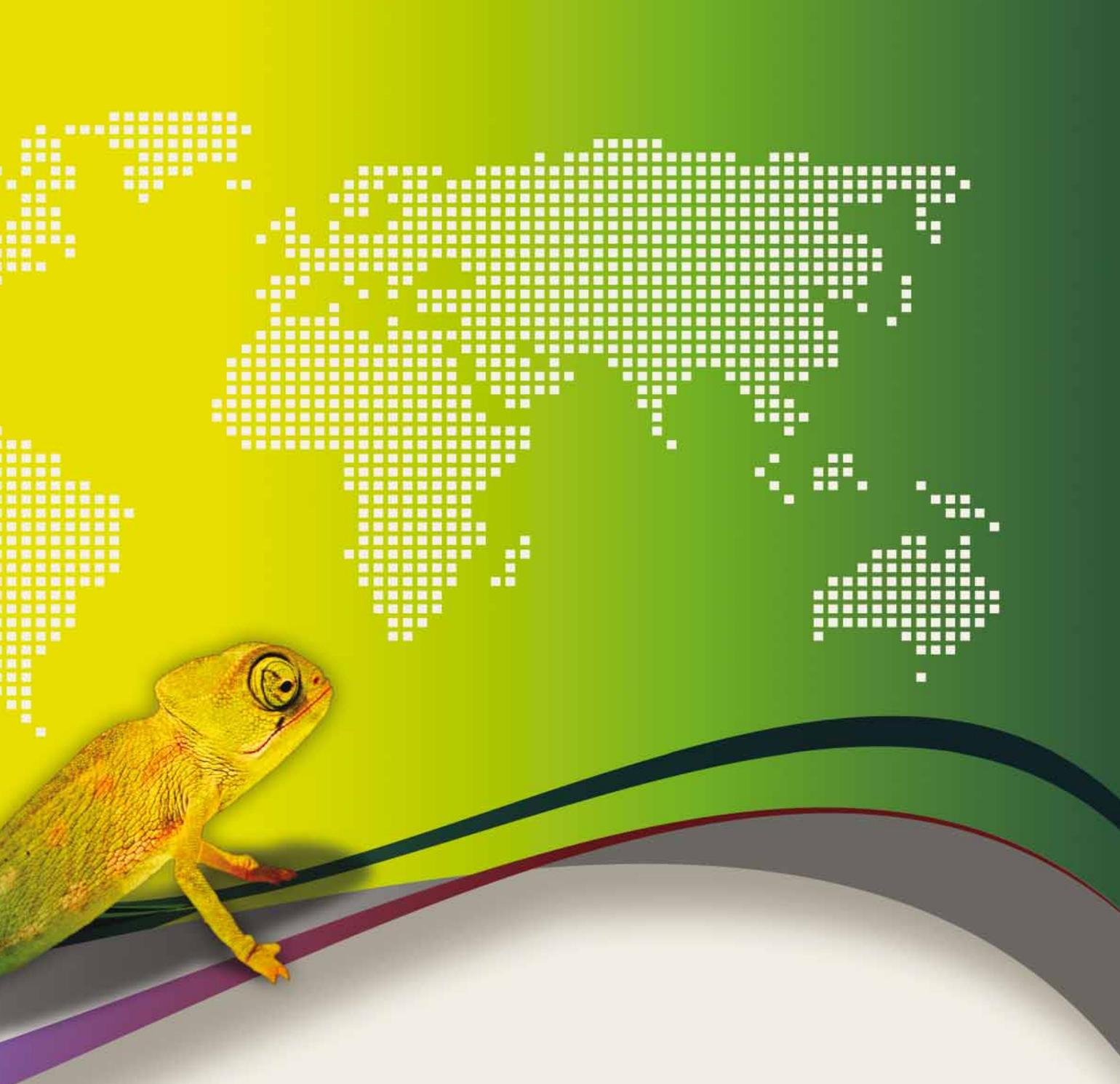


# Be Willing to Make Changes

But Not Change for Change's Sake

*Wayne Turk*





**C**hange is hard for most of us, whether it's personal change or organizational change. Change takes us out of our comfort zone. The fact is, you are going to have to implement changes at some time in your professional career. They may be changes you want to see made, or they may be changes that are directed by others. Regardless, you need to know how to

manage change in ways that will give you the best chance at success. This article gives some tips for managers on how to manage different kinds of change.

### **The Need to Change**

Changes in an organization are made for different reasons. Some are externally driven by changing technology; a different

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kind of workforce (older workers retiring and being replaced by younger workers with a different mindset); uncertain funding; increased competition; global instability (wars, economics, politics, etc.); or changes in law, public policy, or regulatory requirements. Others are the result of internal decisions to increase productivity, efficiency, or profitability; to implement better management; to improve processes (perhaps with more automation); and so on.

Planning, implementing, and managing change in a dynamic environment is the situation in which most managers must now work. At the same time, the organizational culture may be hierarchal, structured, and change-averse (DoD is a perfect example), in which case, it can be difficult to institute meaningful changes. That is especially true for effectively managing change to successfully respond to opportunities and threats. If we do not change, we run the risk of growing stagnant and unproductive in the way that we run our organizations; and we fall behind, which is something no organization can afford.

### **The Change Process**

It can be useful to think about the change process as problem solving. Managing change can be seen as moving from one state to another—specifically, from the problem state to the problem-solved state. Diagnosis or problem analysis is essential. Figure out what is wrong and what is needed for a better result. Discuss approaches with others. Set goals. Plan carefully and obtain buy-in, support, and commitment

at all levels. Then move forward. The net effect is a transition from one state to another in a planned, orderly fashion.

Participative involvement from others at all levels is a big help for each step in organizational change. Without that participation and involvement, there will be more resistance to the change. Having people from all levels involved brings in multiple perspectives, identifies unexpected problems, and can generate innovative ideas and solutions. It also creates some of the buy-in that is necessary to overcome resistance and make changes succeed. The participants also plant the seeds of the change movement in their levels of the organization.

Organizations are first and foremost social systems made up of individuals and groups. Ignore people and how they react, and any changes are guaranteed to fail. Organizations are intensely political at all levels. Sometimes it seems that the lower the stakes, the more intense the politics. That describes change at the working level, where people feel their turf is being invaded. Change agents have to understand that and let people know about the change, why it is happening, and why it is good. In order to be willing to change, workers need to know what's in it for them.

### **Goals, Objectives, and Standards**

Too many organizations go for activity-centered changes. We've done it in DoD at times. Management is convinced that if they carry out enough of the "right" change or improvement activities, actual performance results will automatically flow. Some of those "right" improvement activities are collaboration, empowerment (managerial and employee), process benchmarking, customer satisfaction surveys, and other similar techniques. Don't get me wrong—I am a supporter of all of those activities. But without setting specific goals, objectives, and standards, there may not be measurable results—or any performance results at all, for that matter.

Goals and objectives have to be achievable, quantifiable, and measurable. They have to be specific. They cannot be too broad. There should not be too many goals at once. In the beginning of organizational change, go for the low-hanging fruit—the successes that are easiest to achieve. Success breeds success. If people can see that a change has made something easier, better, or more profitable, they are more willing to make other changes.

If goals are too broad or if there are too many of them, people can get discouraged and give up before achieving anything. That is why the results need to be specific and narrowly defined.

It is important to understand the difference between a goal and a standard. Standards describe the minimum level of performance and quality that you are prepared to accept. Goals and objectives are what we aspire toward; they are

targets. Sometimes, however, the change that you implement may just be in the standards that you set. Raising the standards—or raising the minimum levels of acceptance—means that both managers and workers will simply not tolerate anything less.

When you make a change, especially in standards, you may also have to change your beliefs (particularly those that limit change) and those of your people. If you raise your standards but people don't really believe the new standards can be met, then the chance of success has already been sabotaged. Beliefs are like unquestioned commands telling us how things are. Our beliefs tell us what is possible and what is not, what we can and can't do; they shape every action, every thought, and every feeling that we experience. So changing the belief systems is central to making any real and lasting change. It's difficult, but with good communication (including justification, explanation, and plenty of telling them what's in it for them), it can be done.

### A Change Management Checklist

For those in search for a checklist for change management, there is no one best way to implement change. We can learn from the experiences of others, however. Change expert Todd Jick, who taught at Columbia and Harvard universities and has written a number of books on organizational change, provides a tentative list of suggestions upon which the following points are based:

- **Analyze the organization and its need for change.** Look at the organization's history of changes (successes and failures) and patterns of resistance. Analyze the forces for and against change. What will help and what will hurt?
- **Create a shared vision.** This should reflect the values of the organization and incorporate those from the top management down to the working level. The vision should include the rationale, the benefits, and personal ramifications (the "what's in it for me").
- **Develop a non-threatening and preferably participative implementation process.** Involve people from all levels in the planning, if possible. Present the plans to all involved, and make information readily available. Explain the benefits for end users. Start small and simple if the changes are large and significant. Go for quick wins. Publicize the successes.
- **Separate from the past.** Create a sense of urgency.
- **Support a strong leader role.** The change-advocate role is critical to create a vision, motivate people to embrace that vision, and craft a structure to recognize those who strive toward realization of the vision. Usually this falls to the middle manager.
- **Line up political sponsorship.** Broad-based support (both formal and informal) is important. Identify and target individuals and groups whose support is needed. That includes those in upper management and the formal and informal leaders at all levels. Define the critical mass of support needed and identify where each key player is on the continuum (from "no commitment," "may let it hap-

pen," "help it happen," to "make it happen"). Work to get them all on the side of the change.

- **Craft an implementation plan.** A plan maps out the effort. It identifies what is changing and how. It doesn't have to be a formal document, but it helps to lay it out in writing.
- **Develop enabling structures.** Examples of enabling structures might include pilot sites, offsite workshops, training programs, or symbolic changes like redesigned workspaces. Do whatever might help. Sometimes, especially for minor changes, just an explanation of the new process (or whatever the change) will be all that is needed.
- **Communicate. Involve people, and be honest with them.** Not every change effort calls for full involvement, communication, and disclosure—but most do. Where possible, there should be meaningful dialogue that gives people a stake in the change. This is possibly the most important step for success. Forcing change from the top-down with little or no communication results in almost a guaranteed failure.
- **Ownership.** Try to develop a sense of ownership in all those involved. If they feel they have some stake, they will strive to make the change a success. This is a part of communication.
- **Reinforce and institutionalize the change.** It is important to reinforce the change. Reward or recognize those who take risks and incorporate the new behaviors. Don't allow people to slip back into the old ways. Acknowledge their hard work, and thank them for their support.

### Resistance to Change

*Most of us are about as eager to be changed as we were to be born, and go through our changes in a similar state of shock.*

James Baldwin

Strong resistance to change is often rooted in deeply conditioned or historically reinforced feelings. Patience and tolerance (and sometimes creativity) are required to help people in these situations to see things differently. Certain types of people—the reliable, dependable, steady, process-oriented types such as we find in government and the military (and I am not knocking them; I was one for many years)—often find change very unsettling. There are exceptions, of course, but many changes are met with the attitude of "I'll just wait it out. Something will happen, and I really won't have to change." Resistance to change is aggravated because many people (managers and workers alike) have seen supposed changes for improvement come and go with little to show for the process. They have also seen changes that don't make sense, or that make their jobs more difficult.

Another reaction is, "We've always done it that way, and it's worked. So why change it?" The common adage is that if it ain't broke, don't mess with it. When people are confronted with the need or opportunity to change, especially when it's forced on them with little or no explanation of what's in it for the organization and for them, they become emotional and recalcitrant. They resist the change, either actively or

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**3** Number the pages in your manuscript and put your name on every page. It makes our life so much easier if we happen to drop a stack of papers and your article's among them.

**4** Do avoid acronyms as far as possible, but if you must use them, define them—every single one, however obvious you think it is. We get testy if we have to keep going to [acronymfinder.com](http://www.acronymfinder.com), especially when we discover 10 equally applicable possibilities for one acronym.

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**6** We'll acknowledge receipt of your submission within three or four days and e-mail you a publication decision in four to five weeks. No need to remind us. We really will. Scout's honor.

passive-aggressively. The managers who try to manage the change (if they are not believers) sometime fall into that mindset, too.

Some of that may be changing. Today's workforce is getting younger, and many younger workers want to see change. More work is being contracted out, and contractors (from a profit motive, if nothing else) are implementing changes. Also, because of changing technology, some organizations have had no choice but to change the way that they do business.

## Problems and Pitfalls

Let's look at the dark side of organizational change management. No matter what, it won't be easy for any significant change to be implemented. Organizations often just aren't prepared for major changes, or even minor ones, for that matter. If you don't understand and plan for the difficulties, the change will probably fail. And no matter how much thought has gone into the effort, there may be unforeseen impacts. One of those may be unintended consequences, those results that weren't planned for (see "The Law of Unintended Consequences in Project Management," *Defense AT&L*, May-June 2006).

Pointing that out is not meant to scare people away from trying to institute changes; it is just a warning that it won't be easy. A recent study from New Zealand identified the following problems that a majority of the organizations undertaking change experienced. Most can be avoided:

- Change took more time than had been anticipated or allocated.
- Unforeseen problems surfaced.
- Coordination was ineffective.
- Competing crises distracted attention.
- Those involved in the implementation had insufficient capabilities and skills.
- Inadequate training was given.
- Uncontrollable external factors had a major adverse impact.
- There was inadequate support for change.
- Expectations and goals hadn't been clearly defined.
- There was failure to involve all those who would be affected by changes.

In many cases, organizational change has to happen to prevent stagnation, inefficiency, low productivity, and losses to the competition. This article isn't saying that successful change is impossible. It is very possible. But change is hard on everyone. Change is best approached through thorough analysis, good planning, large doses of communication, conscientious implementation—and expectation of the unexpected.

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