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Managing Change in  
Organizations:  
It's Management's  
Responsibility

# Managing Change in Organizations: It's Management's Responsibility

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## Introduction

OnDemand Software, a division of Global Knowledge, recently commissioned a Change Management Implementation Survey. This survey found that:

*Ninety-nine percent of IT directors realize that effective change management is vital during enterprise software deployments. Despite this, one in three surveyed felt that a lack of understanding among end users remains the key problem when deploying or upgrading enterprise-level software.*<sup>1</sup>

Mismanagement of change is not relegated only to the IT industry. In fact, a 1993 study by Hammer and Champy claims that 70% of reengineering projects fail.<sup>2</sup> Other published studies tend to offer the same conclusion. In an article written for the International Society for Performance Improvement, Martin E. Smith provides a summary of Success Rates for Organizational Change Efforts.<sup>3</sup>

Type of Change	Number of Studies	Sum of Sample Sizes	Median Success Rate
Strategy Deployment	3	562	58%
Restructuring and Downsizing	9	4,830*	46%
Technology Change	5	1,406*	40%
Mixed Collection of Change Efforts	1	23	39%
TQM-driven Change	5	863	37%
Mergers and Acquisitions	9	395*	33%
Re-engineering and Process Design	7	3,442*	30%
Software Development and Installation	6	31,480	26%
Business Expansions	1	200	20%
Culture Change	3	225*	19%
All	49	43,426*	33%

\* One or more reports did not state the sample size

**Table 1. Summary of Organizational Change Efforts.**

Over the years, a lot of time and effort has been spent studying the causes of failed organizational change initiatives. The majority of studies have found that employee resistance and a lack of proper training are key hindrances to organizational change.

## What Causes This Resistance to Change?

Realignment of the power structure: No matter what type of change occurs, someone or some group will ultimately lose or gain “power” as a result. Until the costs/benefits are made clear, staff will anxiously await the effect the change will have on them personally.

- **Fear of job loss:** A common fear during a change initiative is whether positions will become redundant or jobs will become unnecessary.
- **Fear of increased responsibility:** Some staff may question whether they will have more responsibilities and/or accountabilities as a result of a change.
- **Frustration with process:** If staff are not consulted before, during, and after an organizational change, they will likely be disheartened - particularly if the change has a direct impact on their jobs. If they were consulted and their positions or suggestions were not incorporated, they will also be frustrated – unless their managers can satisfactorily show that their input was not ignored but, rather, discussed and shelved for logical reasons.

## What Can a Manager Do?

### 1. Do not ignore the people side of “change management”

The practice of Change Management is a combination of the methods used by people (usually management teams) within organizations to ensure organizational transition is completed efficiently and effectively. It is extremely important that management teams consider the “people side” of any organizational change. Too often, managers look at change management as a technical process, rather than a human one. This makes sense, since the field of Change Management is described as the study of “approaches” or “processes” an organization follows when moving from its current state to a desired state. Many academic pieces discuss how changes to structures, processes, policies, and technologies will improve efficiencies. The buzz-words used to describe this type of organizational change include: organizational reorganization, corporate restructuring, process re-engineering, resource reallocation, etc. For any of these change processes to work, however, the impact they will have on people cannot be overlooked or discounted. If these impacts are ignored, the change initiative will likely fail.

### 2. Hone interpersonal and communication skills

During the 1980s and 1990s, managers were told that they needed to focus their efforts on managing resistance to their change initiatives. The most common suggestion was for managers to hone their interpersonal and communication skills so that they could help their staff overcome the pains associated with change. Courses like Global Knowledge’s *Management and Leadership Skills for New Managers* and *People Skills for Project Managers* offer managers training in the types of interpersonal and management skills needed to help with staff deal with change. The skills that can help managers “manage change” include: motivational techniques; team building, coaching, feedback, setting priorities, negotiating priorities, stress management, dealing with conflict, systematic problem-solving, and effective delegation.

### 3. Stop thinking of change management as a stand-alone initiative and start accepting it as an everyday reality

Managers need to accept the fact that organizational change is inevitable, and, its pace is quickening. Basic economics dictates that an organization must constantly adapt or risk failure. The introduction of new technologies, new global competitors, new legislation, new management, new customers, new ideas, new geopolitical shocks/crises, new investors, etc., force organizations to change the way they do business. According to a survey done by the American Management Association in 2006:

*[They surveyed] 1,400 executives and managers and found that 82% of them reported that the pace of change experienced by their organizations has increased compared with five years ago. Further, 7 out of 10 noted their organizations experienced disruptive change during the last year.<sup>4</sup>*

If organizations do not constantly seek to adapt and keep pace with new demands, or to take advantage of efficiencies, they run the risk of under-performing in the market and, ultimately, being forced out. Similarly, given the world we live in, if organizations do not plan for major disruptions to their essential systems (e.g., a terrorist attack, a power outage, the disappearance of a raw resource, global supply-chain interruption, etc.), there is a greater chance they will see their demise sooner than rather than later. In short, managers in the 2000s need to accept the reality of constant and quick change, and manage accordingly.

### 4. Anticipate what and where the resistance will be and plan for it accordingly.

All managers need to realize that resistance to change is normal. Given that change is an ever-present reality in today's work place, it is safe to say that resistant behavior is inevitable in most organizations. Managers need to identify this behavior and help staff manage it by utilizing the proper interpersonal and communications skills. However, as time has shown, management training alone will not guarantee that organizational change initiatives will succeed. Students of organizational change today are looking at "managing resistance" as a reactive answer to change management. To manage a successful organizational change, leaders need to be more proactive in their approach. The question that organizational leaders need to ask themselves today is: Who is responsible for making transitions successful? The answer is clear – their management team. If staff are not prepared for change, they will resist it. Therefore, managers need to minimize resistance by anticipating what and where the resistance will be and plan for it. This makes sense as it is ultimately the manager's responsibility to ensure that employees are ready and willing to embrace change.

#### **How Do You Manage Resistance to Change?**

##### **Part One**

- Tell people the truth and give as much information as you can. Keep giving information as soon or as often as possible.
- Give them time to digest the news. Do not expect buy-in initially.
- Give them time to vent – there may be anger, and this is normal.
- Listen and empathize! That means truly listen to staff and their concerns! Don't interrupt or try and defend, take notes, and summarize what they have said. Empathize does not mean you agree, it means you understand they are upset. Say so!
- Know that trust between management and staff will be low for a while but will return

##### **Part Two**

- After you have sensed staff are moving past anger, move to the next step. This always takes longer than you think, so be patient.

- Start getting them involved by asking implementation questions. You can determine what needs to be done, when, and why – let them determine the how! You can define objectives, constraints and expectations but let them figure out the how part. The Golden Rule in times of change: Let THEM determine how the change gets implemented!
- Build on their ideas.
- Work with them to determine reasonable implementation plans, which would should include achievable tasks and timelines.

## 5. Become a “Change Promoter”

Global Knowledge’s Change Management Implementation Survey found that employees were still confused about the new requirements and unprepared to handle them.

*“This end-user confusion and training avoidance demonstrates that managing change for employees is something that is still not fully understood.”<sup>5</sup>*

Managing in today’s organizations means one must constantly identify when and where change is needed. Managers need to be able to advocate for these transitions to their superiors, their stakeholders, and their staff. In other words, change has to be communicated up, down, and out. This requires a set of skills that may be new to many managers – namely, skills related to planning and managing corporate communications. If a manager sees a way for change to improve business, he or she needs to be able to present a briefing to superiors. This briefing must include the effects on employees in the cost/benefit analysis. Good managers will know this because they have already discussed the change idea with their staff and heard their professional input and personal concerns. If their change initiative is accepted, they will need to work with other affected managers to develop a project plan, including a plan for regular communications to staff to inform them of the changes, to explain the rationale, and to ensure buy-in (i.e., ease resistance).

Is such a communication plan really necessary? According to change experts:

*Success can be enhanced if managers play an active role in both planning and delivering messages about change initiatives...<sup>6</sup>*

## Summary

These same experts also note that managers probably require specific training to become truly effective change communicators. So, what type of training do today’s successful “proactive” managers require? Training that provides skills and knowledge to help managers prepare for and communicate change initiatives to staff and stakeholders on a continuous basis. Examples of this type of training are included in Global Knowledge’s *Successful Workplace Communication* course:

- Learn how to communicate with tact and courtesy so that even negative messages are heard and difficult situations are managed diplomatically.
- Assess and adapt your message to others so they hear the right message and respond in the desired manner.
- Use tactics to communicate up, down, and across your organization and understand that different techniques work for different levels of employees.
- See the value of planned alliances that will help you overcome obstacles to communication, performance, and ideas.

## Learn More

Learn more about how you can improve productivity, enhance efficiency, and sharpen your competitive edge. Check out the following Global Knowledge courses:

[Management and Leadership Skills for New Managers](#)  
[Communication and Negotiation Skills](#)  
[Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, and Decision Making](#)  
[People Skills for Project Managers](#)

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## About the Author

Steve Lemmex is a certified Project Management Professional (PMP) with 19 years of experience as a Management Trainer and Project Management consultant. He was owner and manager of Lemmex & Associates Limited, a consulting firm that offered more than 60 management, business, and interpersonal skills courses to both the private sector and government. He authored Global Knowledge's *Management and Leadership Skills for New Managers*, *Advanced Management and Leadership Skills*, and *Negotiation and Communication Skills* courses. Steve has taught more than 2,500 custom and public courses for thousands of participants in North and South America.

## References

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3. <http://www.ispi.org/pdf/smith.pdf>
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