



Five Insights to Foster Change on Your Large Projects or Initiatives

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Change is inevitable – especially when implementing large-scale institution-wide projects or initiatives. Change occurs during and resulting from these efforts. People are often asked to take on roles that are new to them. They may have to change how they do business or how they do their jobs. So how do you help people manage through large-scale change when most people naturally resist change? In this article, we present five insights to help you effectively manage change resulting from your large projects or initiatives.

Insight #1: People Resist “Being Changed”

People don’t resist change as much as they resist “being” changed. When implementing change either through a project or other initiative, the challenge is to create an environment or conditions where individuals want change. People will be more amenable to change if they are personally involved and affected by the change. Individuals can develop a personal stake in a change initiative if they are involved in some of the decision making, if they see the change as a reflection of their ideas, and if they stand to benefit from the change.

People are also more willing to change if they understand the reasons behind the change. For example, a new software system may not be a welcome change, but if the old one is no longer supported or effective in meeting the institution’s needs, people will be more supportive of implementing a new system.

Do not surprise people with change. Surprises generate immediate resistance even if the change should be a welcome one. This relates back to the fact that people are more willing to change if they are involved in the change. Also, change is less threatening if it is gradual rather than abrupt. Gradual change requires less effort or inconvenience and establishes a more conducive environment. Engaging people throughout the planning and implementation of a project helps create an environment where they feel more in control of the changes that are occurring.

Insight #2: Effective Change Requires the Right Conditions

Change can be overwhelming if individuals do not have the skill set or knowledge to “do what has to be done,” and they will resist “being changed.” Following are four conditions that help people accept and more readily adapt to change.

1. People must have a strong awareness of the need for change, the impact the change will have on them, and the impact of their own behavior during the change process.
2. People must desire the change. They must be willing to do what it takes to make the change.
3. People need the knowledge or skills that enable them to make the change.
4. People need a support system that provides feedback, encouragement, and otherwise reinforces the change.

With clear communications, education, training, and skill development, people will develop an understanding and belief in the change that often results from a large project or initiative.

Insight #3: Leadership Drives Change

Change in an organization begins with change in individuals, and leaders play a key role in encouraging and reinforcing change. A culture that supports change usually has effective leaders who are willing and able to share strategic information to educate their organizations. They share information in ways that makes sense to people, and they share information frequently and in a timely manner.



A successful leader will let people know how they can effect change and how they will be affected by change. Employees need to know their role and how this role supports the institution’s goals. For example, financial aid staff members may not deal directly with students when packaging financial aid, but their work does affect the students – the focus of any institution. If they have an understanding of how their work affects recruiting and retaining students and how it contributes to the success of the institution, the financial aid staff are more likely to

embrace changes that support more efficiency in financial aid operations.

Effective leaders communicate with the people involved in making the change and those impacted by the change. They are constantly talking about the need for the changes, why they are happening, how they will happen, who will be involved, the parts individuals will play, and how the changes will benefit the institution.

Effective leaders also reinforce the change by staying involved and showing continuing interest. They stay involved with the project until it is complete. Communicating a vision and setting an environment that is conducive for change requires continual reinforcement.

Leaders who enable change create a climate where new ideas are encouraged and all ideas are considered. Rejecting ideas without consideration often creates a culture where workers are afraid to present new ideas.

Encouragement of new ideas, whether or not they are adopted, creates a culture that supports development of more new ideas. In this way, change becomes a part of the culture.

Often leadership comes down to communication – communicating vision, listening to new ideas, providing feedback to teams and individuals. Communication is rarely overdone.

Insight #4: Success Can Motivate

Studies of motivation show that success is intrinsically motivating. When people are successful at making changes and they see the benefits, they will continue to change and adapt more readily to the changes around them. Leaders can celebrate milestone accomplishments to reinforce the behavioral changes that they want to see.

If success supports the changes you want to see, how do you help people experience success? Leaders plan their projects to create early small successes that reinforce the larger goals. Pilot programs can provide quick successes and reinforce the vision of the larger project. The proverbial “low hanging fruit” that is easily finished early in a project supports an environment of change and reinforces changed behavior. Unfortunately, change can be hampered by lack of resources. Providing the necessary resources early in a project creates the conditions for early successes and sets the tone for the larger project.



Insight #5: Feedback Motivates and Sustains Change

Feedback is also a great motivator and facilitator of change. Feedback plays a major part in all of the other insights. It demonstrates interest, continually communicates the vision of the change, and helps individuals address issues and challenges faced during the change. As a successful leader, you should provide feedback to the teams and the individuals that are involved in the project or initiative that is changing your organization.

Leading Change – An Example

Recently, the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (UTC), successfully implemented a new administrative software system. After registering several hundred students without incident, we sat down and reviewed the [CPS Managing Change Checklist](#)¹ as part of our “lessons learned” activity. This tool provides institutions with a quick checklist of the ingredients necessary to ensure a successful change implementation. As this project was a success and completed on time, it was not surprising that they were able to answer “yes” to all of the questions on this checklist.

UTC was successful for many reasons. Their project communications were critical to everyday operations. The campus was told about the plans for new software well in advance of the implementation using a variety of

¹ A copy of the CPS Managing Checklist can be found in the Tools and Resources tab on the Collegiate Project Services website (www.collegiateproject.com/toolofthemonth.asp).

methods including, email, group meetings, and a project website. The core leadership team developed and implemented a systematic communication plan so UTC could strategically disseminate information at the right time.

UTC's communications emphasized the reasons for and benefits of changing the administrative software system. Even when the message was not positive, the leadership gave straightforward answers without justifications. The project team members knew what was expected of them and what was to be gained from the implementation.

Decision-making at UTC involved all of the staff members who were affected by the new system. People from the lowest levels to the highest levels were involved in decision-making and this involvement was communicated widely.

UTC's leadership was demonstrated at many levels. Resources were made available when they were needed. Training was provided and team members were supported in this long, intense process. Management lived up to their commitments, displayed a positive attitude, and modeled the change for others. Successes were celebrated and team members rewarded for successful work.

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