

The Importance of Change Management Training



WHY IS CHANGE MANAGEMENT TRAINING IMPORTANT?

By Elaine Beich

Change happens whether we want it to or not. Sometimes we can plan for it but often we can't. Sometimes the best we can do is to make sense of change, make the best choices change offers, and make things happen. People and organizations that are the most successful predict and prepare for change, even creating change that benefits them.

What's Changing? Everything. Even managing change has changed! Today's organizations operate in a volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous (VUCA) world (Robert Johansen 2012). Our organizations face more complex continuous change than ever before. Being adaptable and quickly adjusting to continuous change as well as being an expert at leading through complex change are more important than ever. Change is a way of life, and proficient navigation in its turbulent waters is a strategic imperative. Simply put, managing change is a required skill for all leaders, managers, and employees.

You've heard the statistics. Even though change management has been a recognized discipline for more than half a century, studies continue to report the high failure rates for organizational change projects. *Harvard Business Review* reports that "most studies still show a 60 to 70 percent failure rate" (Ron Ashkenas 2013). Gallup confirms that this statistic has been constant since the 1970s (David Leonard and Claude Coltea 2013). What's going on?

Change Is Changing. Until recently, an organization addressed changes one at a time, using fundamental tools and processes. Change teams had time to follow an eight-step process, gather data, and create a vision for each change project. We continue to implement a change management approach that was designed for single-issue changes. But the VUCA environment allows neither the time nor the ease to rely on a set of basic tools any longer.



Organizations are challenged by the constant bombardment, faster pace, and convoluted complexity of change. Organizations require change-ready employees and change-savvy managers at the ready. And organizations must build a capacity for continuous change. These challenges require a different skill set. Choices and consequences are no longer as clear as they once were.

Change-Savvy Managers Are Critical to Success. Managers have a key role to play to ensure an organization’s future success. Recent research by Accenture shows that business unit managers play the most significant role in effectively implementing change in organizations (Warren Parry 2015). Today’s managers need to understand their expanded roles, practice new management techniques, and demystify the people side of change.



Organizations Must Foster Change-Ready Employees. The Conference Board reported in its 2015 annual survey that “organizations must focus on behavioral change to make change more sustainable and become agile. It is about helping people embrace and adopt change by building personal competencies . . . It is about instilling personal responsibility and accountability for change at every level . . . The focus should be on developing change leaders at all levels, not just reactive change managers” (Charles Mitchell et al. 2015).

Rate Your Change Management Skills

How prepared, knowledgeable, and skilled you are at managing change are predictors of success. A self-assessment can help you focus on the areas you want to improve. Rate the statements below on a one to five scale. Five means you excel at it, and one means you still need to work on it.



Assess the Situation	(1-5)	Attain Implementation Progress	(1-5)
Clarify a change vision and align it to my department and the work we do.	_____	Create opportunities to engage and involve the workforce.	_____
Implement the fundamentals of a change management initiative.	_____	Generate quick gains and long-term improvements throughout the organization.	_____
Define and assess my department and organizational readiness for change.	_____	Foster and develop change-ready employees.	_____
Communicate a sense of urgency to employees.	_____		
Accept Leadership Accountability	(1-5)	Advance to Future Initiatives	(1-5)
Create a communication plan optimized by social media.	_____	Institutionalize long-lasting changes.	_____
Manage relationships and resistance in all areas.	_____	Evaluate the results of change and my role.	_____
Act as a role model for change throughout the organization.	_____	Build capacity for continuous change throughout the department or organization.	_____

What's Next?

The bottom line is that we need to change how we change: how we make choices, how we make things happen, even how we perceive change. Change is neither good nor bad. The most successful organizations are proactive about change. They look for ways to turn obstacles into opportunities. Thus, managing change—its constant barrage, faster pace, and complexity—has become a required skill for leaders, managers, and employees alike.

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Excerpted from [Change Management Training](#) (ATD Press).

CHANGE MANAGEMENT TRAINING

According to ATD's 2022 [Change Management research report](#), 65 percent of organizations predict an increase in change initiatives over the next five years. The report showed that 50 percent of responding organizations offered change management training, and those organizations were more likely to be high performers than the organizations that didn't offer training.



Of the organizations that offered training:

- 67 percent offered training to department or line managers, and 64 percent offered it to senior leaders.
- 81 percent delivered training sessions via instructor-led virtual classrooms.
- 73 percent covered communicating to direct reports about change and how it affects them, while 69 percent covered defining and developing plans for change and analyzing the impact of change.

High Performers

Organizations that offered change management training to individual contributors had better financial performance, customer satisfaction, employee engagement, and growth potential. Training topics particularly associated with high performance included maintaining morale during change and ensuring that change is sustainable. All stakeholders (including individual contributors) should learn how to become involved in organizational change and make ongoing improvements.



ASSEMBLING THE CHANGE MANAGEMENT TEAM

By George Vukotich

Who you choose to join the change management team and how the team members work together will often determine the extent to which your change initiative achieves success.

In putting together a change team, follow these steps:

1. Review the change vision and the goals your organization needs to accomplish as a result.
2. Determine what tasks your organization needs to accomplish to achieve each goal. Some overlap may occur, but it is best to identify tasks for each specific goal, which will give you a way to measure progress. This list of tasks will serve as a guide for team members and as a tool to show the project sponsor and stakeholders the degree of progress toward accomplishing the goals.
3. Examine the tasks that your organization needs to accomplish and consider how they fit together. For example, can they be categorized into tasks related to finance, marketing, engineering, information technology, manufacturing, or other specific areas?
4. Meet with leaders from the functional task areas you just identified and get input on the staff and resources needed to accomplish the identified tasks in the available timeframe. This is also a good point for a reality check: Do leaders in these specific areas believe you have everything covered? Have you identified all tasks that need to be accomplished to achieve the change goals?



Note that organizations sometimes work with external consultants who have expertise in these areas, or with models and guidelines that break down the project into the tasks and staffing resources needed to achieve the goals within a defined period of time.



Based on this input, build the requirements for the number and type of individuals needed on the team. Certain projects will require a core team, whose members stay throughout the project, and a secondary team comprising other individuals with specific expertise who join and leave the team as defined by the timeline and phases identified. A core team starts with a project manager—someone who may have had some involvement in the preliminary analysis to consider the change project for feasibility. From there, based on the identified tasks, your organization can create roles and identify positions for members of the team.

Usually, the core project team consists of the project manager, someone to track finances, and a liaison or liaisons to the various areas affected by the change. As the change project plan is implemented, individuals with other backgrounds and skills may join and leave the team. For example, a thorough needs assessment would be conducted at the beginning of a project and require more project team members with skills in needs analysis and more time of members from the area being affected. At the end of a project, more actual day-to-day end users to test the new product, process, or technology would be needed to make sure all needs have been addressed.

Here’s a list of desirable skills and attributes essential to particular members of the core project team.

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Role	Skills and Attributes Desired	Things to Look For
<p>Project Manager</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ability to manage multiple tasks ▪ Ability to manage a group of diverse individuals ▪ Ability to track and keep on track the change initiative ▪ Ability to quickly build relationships with stakeholders ▪ Ability to motivate and effectively lead a team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Past record ▪ Support from areas affected—Do they support the individual going into the project, and will they be consulted before the project begins? ▪ Skills in the subject matter area to be addressed ▪ Interpersonal skills required to work with a group in a project setting ▪ Previous leadership roles
<p>Financial Analyst</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ability to track expenses to a budgeted amount ▪ Ability to do cost forecasting ▪ Knowledge of project financial reporting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Previous change project work ▪ Experience in project budgeting and forecasting ▪ Contacts in the finance group that can help in the financial analysis area ▪ Previous work in cost analysis finance

<p>Business Unit Liaison</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ability to work with others in the business units ▪ Working knowledge of the functional area to be worked with ▪ Ability to take user requirements and translate them into change project tasks ▪ Need to connect people—those who know information that can affect a project with those who need to know so they can change accordingly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Previous change work experience ▪ Effectiveness of existing relationships within the business units ▪ Functional knowledge of subject areas as well as credibility in those areas ▪ Recommendations by stakeholders
<p>Change Team Members</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Technical skills to get the work done ▪ People skills to get along with others on the team and in groups they need to work in ▪ Knowledge of the organization, its processes, and its functions ▪ Knowledge of how to get things done in the organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Experience on change projects ▪ Reputation within the organization ▪ Motivation and interest in doing what it takes to be part of the project team ▪ Career goals and how they fit with work of the change project

This article is excerpted from [*10 Steps to Successful Change Management*](#), which outlines a step-by-step program for systematically building a change management strategy. The book includes insights, case studies, tools, and techniques to put you ahead of the change curve.

George Vukotich has specialized in change management throughout his career. As a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Air Force for 20 years, he was involved in numerous training and leadership development initiatives. He also has extensive experience in the corporate and consulting fields with IBM, Arthur Andersen, Motorola, and BP, among others. Vukotich holds a doctorate in organizational development and is head of the graduate program in training and development at Roosevelt University in Chicago. He lives with his wife and two children in River Forest, Illinois.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE READINESS ASSESSMENT



Readiness is a key factor when determining if and when to implement change. With such a high rate of failure for enterprise change efforts (75 percent), one of the best planning tools is a readiness assessment.

It is important to assess an organization's change readiness more often than right before a change event. It also is important to measure both the historical success of change efforts as well as the current climate when embarking on change.

Follow these steps to predict with confidence the level of readiness for change at your organization:



Step 1: Do Your Homework

Research past change efforts. Read the project and change management plans, project dashboards, communications, reports, press releases, and past employee surveys. This context will provide you with solid information prior to seeking feedback from current leadership. This will enable you to minimize interview time, which builds trust and energy around a new effort.

Step 2: Prepare Your Interview Questions

Fifteen minutes is the perfect length of time for an executive interview. Have your questions ready in advance and ask the same questions to everyone to compile data consistently and spot potential trends. I have often found that asking two simple questions will provide all the information I need:

- What was the best part about the XX change?
- What was the worst part about XX change?



By asking those two open-ended questions, I can sit back and listen with genuine curiosity—not just to the information shared but to the emotion the information conjures.

Step 3: Assess the Current State

I do this using a stoplight chart based on the level of risk to each indicator. A stoplight chart uses red to highlight definite risk, yellow to note moderate or possible risk, and green to portray little risk or that everything is good.

This assessment can be quickly completed on paper or electronically. I prefer to complete the assessment document myself so that I can gather context for the answer rather than simply sending it out for input. Again, keeping the assessment short can keep the information gathering time to a minimum. This a sample assessment I frequently use:

	Red (Definite Risk)	Yellow (Moderate or Possible Risk)	Green (Little or No Risk)	Notes
Current stress	X			IPO planned for mid-September.
Competing priorities		X		Upgrade to email server.
Client support			X	
Employee support		X		Latest pulse survey shows anxiety toward current IPO initiative.
Budget	X			
Talent		X		Right people, but timing conflict for six more months.
Executive buy-in		X		CFO is not in support due to IPO.

Because this is an internal document for the change team, it doesn't have to be flashy. I can transfer the information to a PowerPoint slide or other presentation tool if necessary to present to a broader audience.

If there are any unresolved reds, I conclude that the organization is not ready for the change at this time.



Source: TD at Work. 2016. *“Breaking the Cycle of Failed Change Management,”* Alexandria, VA. ATD Press