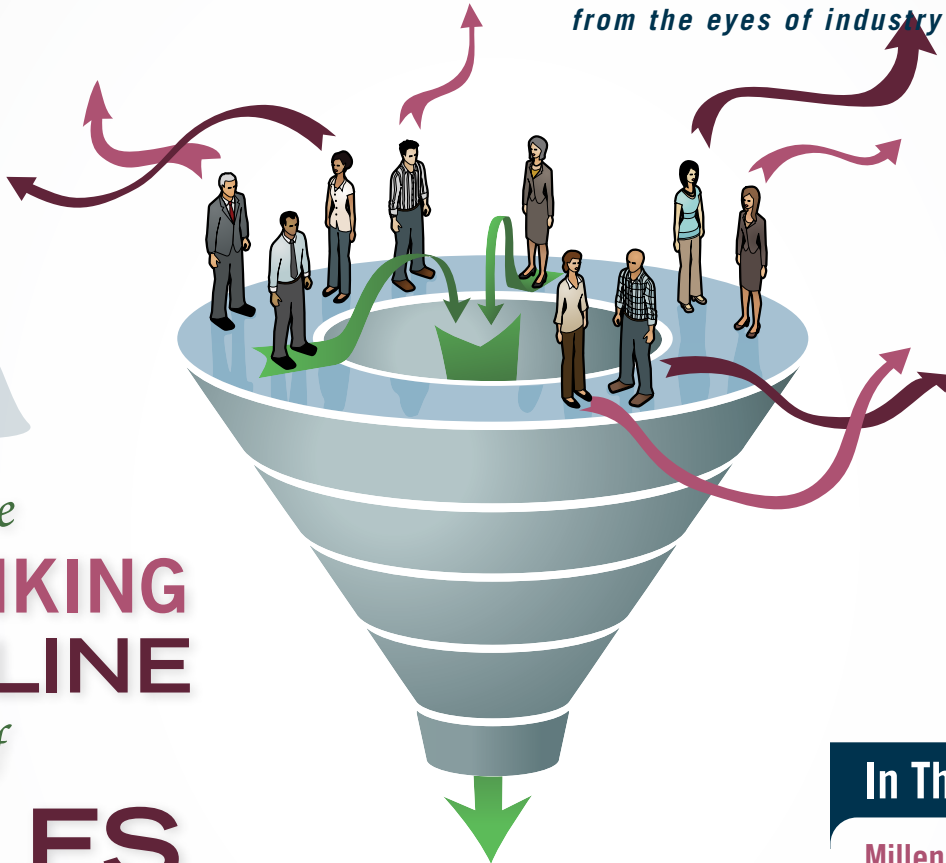


HR EDITION

# INSIGHTS & MAY/JUNE 2012 STRATEGIES

*from the eyes of industry leaders*



*the*  
**SHRINKING  
PIPELINE**  
*of*  
**SALES  
PROFESSIONALS**



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IF YOU WANT  
TO MAKE  
ENEMIES,  
TRY TO CHANGE  
SOMETHING.

— WOODROW WILSON

*World's Salesmanship Congress, Detroit (10 July 1916)<sup>1</sup>*

# THE CHANGE IMPERATIVE

BY VALERIE GRUBB

Those are haunting words in today's corporate climate, where change joins death and taxes as the only real constants in life. Unfortunately, statistics have proven former President Wilson correct; according to the global management consulting firm McKinsey & Company ([www.mckinsey.com](http://www.mckinsey.com)), almost 70% of organizational change initiatives fail. That's a staggering statistic—and as an HR executive, you know how much a failed initiative can cost in terms of employee morale and wasted time and effort.

#### **WHY IS CHANGE SO DIFFICULT?**

First and foremost, it's uncomfortable. Change means letting go of old habits and thinking and acting in a different way—and that's not easy for even the most open minded among us. Furthermore, if your company has a history of failed initiatives, resistance to change is natural. Employees adopt a “wait and see” attitude, hoping that if they ignore you long enough, you'll go away and they can continue as usual.

Unfortunately, studies indicate that change is neither going away nor slowing down. A. J. Scheepbouwer, the CEO of Royal KPN in the Netherlands (and voted one of the best-performing CEOs by *Harvard Business Review* in January 2010) observes, “We have seen more change in the last 10 years than in the previous 90.”<sup>2</sup>

#### **WHY DO PEOPLE RESIST CHANGE?**

Fear is certainly the biggest driver: fear of the unknown, fear of losing control or power, fear of failure, fear of breaking up established (and trusted) cliques. These fears are all byproducts of the overarching anxiety of “efficiency” gained at the expense of an employee's position.

And in today's economy, who can blame an employee for worrying about losing his or her job? As Rick Maurer, author of *Beyond the Wall of Resistance* ([www.rickmaurer.com](http://www.rickmaurer.com)), points out, “fear makes change intensely personal.”

## WHY IS MANAGING CHANGE

### SO CRITICAL FOR THE HR EXECUTIVE?

As an HR professional, you're keenly aware that change is not someone else's problem; it sits squarely in your lap (whether or not your other company executives admit it). After all, it is the HR executive who has to deal with the challenging consequences of improperly managed change, including:

- *valued personnel leaving because of confusion and lack of leadership;*
- *productivity and morale declining in the wake of yet another "failed change initiative";*
- *critical projects being delayed, thus negatively affecting customers; and*
- *employees' continued unproductivity, which can result in layoffs.*

Common sense tells us that HR is the critical link to successful organizational change. After all, HR is in the unique position of straddling all departments within an organization and can therefore provide leadership, insight, and guidance on how to communicate change in a manner that actually resonates with employees. However, the reality is that many HR executives rarely go beyond addressing compliance issues and benefits. Mastering the art of leading change could be what garners HR a seat at the table of an organization's decision makers.

## WHAT STRATEGIES CAN REDUCE

### RESISTANCE TO CHANGE?

HR executives wear many hats in their day-to-day lives. By embracing the role of chief change agent, you can establish the framework for conducting change at every level of the organization. By identifying and establishing workable change management processes, you can anticipate and reduce resistance to change through:

- *providing consistency of purpose;*
- *actively seeking participation from all in developing the new processes;*
- *communicating the "why" around change (i.e., the benefits of the change)*
- *minimizing surprises;*
- *building a trusting and open climate;*
- *tracking, measuring, and rewarding the new behaviors;*
- *celebrating your successes; and*
- *empathizing with employees as they adapt individually to the new way of doing things.*

Your job as change agent is to show determined leadership and to persevere under the most stressful resistance. Don't create more resistance than actually exists by attempting to fight or control every aspect of change, and don't take any resistance personally. Realize that the laws of the jungle are in operation and you can't fight human nature.

## HOW CAN YOU LEAD CHANGE INITIATIVES?<sup>3</sup>

The Change Acceleration Process Model chart depicts how to lead change effectively, thus ensuring the future sustainability of your change initiative. Successful change initiatives begin by defining the need for change and shaping the vision for the future state of the company, then translate the initiative into a clear, understandable message that resonates with employees and garners their commitment to the change.

According to Suzanne Vucurovic, EDMS Change Manager at the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority (APRA), the most successful change communications plan should address the following critical questions:<sup>4</sup>

## 1. WHY IS THE CHANGE NECESSARY?

Employees are often left in the dark when it comes to the business reasons behind major change. Showing employees where the business is heading will help them understand the value in the plan. The vision should be expressed in a way that allows all employees to understand, relate to, and see their role in achieving it. Be prepared for the following questions:

- *Why should we change the process when the current process works just fine?*
- *Why should I care if the change doesn't affect me?*

## 2. WHAT IS THE PRECISE SCOPE OF THE CHANGE?

Get straight to the point and don't sugarcoat your message. Communicating the precise scope of your project will end speculation and rumors up front. Show your employees what the organization will look like following the implementation of this change (such as any changes in departments or individual roles). Anticipate the following questions:

- *Is it true that my department will be downsized because of this project?*
- *Isn't "efficiency" just a fancy word for "downsizing"?*
- *How many employees will be hired to create the new department?*

## 3. WHEN WILL THE CHANGE BE ROLLED OUT?

Official start dates, end dates, key milestones, and consequences for not meeting deadlines should be communicated early and continuously. Be clear, whether the dates are "best guess goals" or hard deadlines. Good communication will help your employees anticipate when change will happen to them. You may hear the following questions:

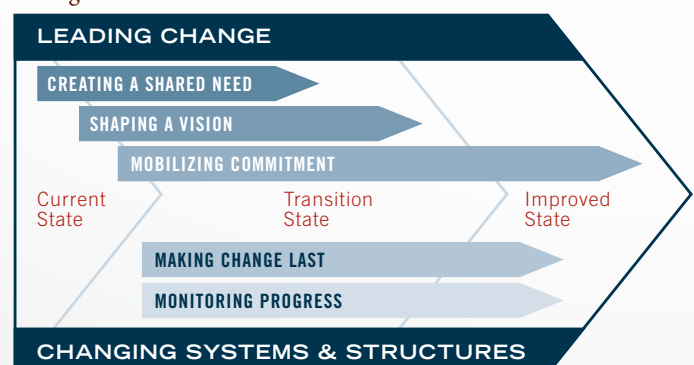
- *What should we do if our department can't commit to meeting your deadline?*
- *What is the penalty for missing deadlines?*

## 4. WHO WILL BE INVOLVED AND IN WHAT CAPACITY?

Identify what responsibilities will be delegated to those directly and indirectly involved with the project, including senior executives and team members championing the project. Employees will know whom to contact when questions arise later, such as:

- *Why should I care if I'm not directly involved?*
- *If I'm on the team, how much time will this work take in my schedule?*

## Change Acceleration Process Model<sup>5</sup>





## 5. HOW WILL THE CHANGE AFFECT HOW EMPLOYEES CURRENTLY WORK?

Expect employees to be immediately concerned with how the change affects their day-to-day work and longer-term circumstances. Alleviate employee fear by explaining how you expect the change to affect them. Then, listen up: employees may have concerns that you haven't addressed, such as:

- *How can I take on extra work when I'm already overwhelmed with my regular duties?*
- *How quickly will my responsibilities change over time?*

## 6. HOW WILL THIS CHANGE INITIATIVE DIFFER FROM PREVIOUS ONES WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION?

Every organization has faced an initiative that didn't get off the ground. Recognize this and show employees how your initiative differs by linking it to previous successes. Consider how perceptions of previous initiatives will affect the attitude toward your change initiative and be prepared to answer the following questions:

- *What were the results of the successful project? How do you know?*
- *How will this differ from the project we worked on last year?*

## 7. WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF NOT IMPLEMENTING THIS CHANGE?

Explain why the risks of standing still are greater than those of moving forward. Don't require employees to blindly embrace your plan; rather, justify why the change was initiated in the first place. Communicate what alternatives were discussed and why they were rejected. Anticipate questions such as these:

- *Would our company survive without the change?*
- *Shouldn't our company maintain the status quo while the market is bad?*

Having all the answers to these questions will help you shape the change plan—as well as garner support from your employees! The goal is for all employees to understand the value of what the change brings to each of them and the organization at large. Think WIIFM: “What's in It for Me?”

As illustrated in the change acceleration process model, properly mobilizing commitment will help push an initiative from its current state, through the transition state, and into the improved state. The more consistency and constancy you provide, the better your employees' commitment—and the better chance the initiative will create lasting change. Putting in systems to monitor and celebrate progress will also help ensure the project's sustainability.

In his 2004 book, *Great Motivation Secrets of Great Leaders*, John Baldoni recommends using the four I's to get buy-in on initiatives:

1. **Inform:** Explain the project in terms that are both general (e.g., the context) and specific (e.g., expectations).
2. **Involve:** Think of the project from the WIIFM perspective and show what people will gain by supporting your initiative.
3. **Invite:** Once employees understand what is expected of them, ask for their support. Never assume employees will follow you until you ask them.
4. **Ignite:** It is when you invoke, as Churchill did many years ago, the commitment of individuals to pull together for the cause greater than themselves. This step doesn't always succeed, but when it does it separates extraordinary initiatives from ordinary ones.

### WHAT'S NEXT?

Taking on the role of change agent within your organization can have far reaching effects on your company, your employees, and your career. John Quincy Adams once wrote, “If your actions inspire others to learn more, do more, and become more, you are a leader.” Now go out there and become a change leader! ■

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Valerie Grubb of Val Grubb & Associates, Ltd. ([www.valgrubbandassociates.com](http://www.valgrubbandassociates.com)) is an innovative and visionary operations leader with an exceptional ability to zero in on the systems, processes, and personnel issues that can hamper a company's growth. Grubb regularly consults for mid-range companies seeking to expand and larger companies seeking efficiencies in back-office operations. Her expertise and vibrant style are also in constant demand for corporate training classes and seminars. [VGRUBB@valgrubbandassociates.com](mailto:VGRUBB@valgrubbandassociates.com)

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