

Raising Your PM Game With Organizational Change Management

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by *Tim Jaques, PMP*

It happens all the time: Projects sputter and stall because the environment wasn't sufficiently prepared for the new deliverables. Stakeholders are confused and put off by the implementation, and the effort takes a nosedive as the project manager frantically schedules meetings. At the intersection of projects and results lies organizational change management.

The discipline has existed for decades, yet many leaders and managers don't understand the basic precepts of change management, let alone the exciting new research that is emerging on human behavior and motivation. One area where organizational change management can be effectively deployed is in projects, where the new development occurs.

A classic setup for a great change project came in the form of a 2010 Presidential SAVE Award idea:

Thomas Koenning of Littleton, Colorado works in the Mine Safety and Health Administration's Information Technology Center. Currently, mine operators are mailed paper forms in order to report important quarterly data. Koenning suggests requiring mine operators to use online forms to save money on costly form production and postage, reduce input errors, and decrease the time it takes to analyze this data important to MSHA's efforts to protect the safety of America's mine workers.

Transitioning to online submission of data is not new, yet many government agencies treat this transition like it was a trip to the moon. Mr. Koenning's great idea is emblematic of a host of changes that must be made across the government to reduce waste. Yet it brings up some important questions about how public organizations react to change.

Why do some federal agencies run like an efficient business while others stay mired in the bureaucratic dark ages? How can one department achieve high levels of customer satisfaction while another routinely fails at handling customer requests? The simple answer lies in the discipline of organizational change management.

Faced with the same set of imperatives— decreased budgets, heightened demand for services, and increased competition for scarce resources, some federal agencies will rise to the challenge, seeing opportunities for improvement, while others will invariably sink under the weight of inertia. The project environment helps introduce key concepts around change management: improved communication and accountability.

Consider the changes involved in transitioning from paper-based form processing to online forms. The typical project plan would have tasks for systems development, process changes, staff development, requirements gathering and other such tasks. Yet change management is an important consideration. Often, what is missing from the project plan are the tasks that get people to actually want and use the new system.

Here are some guidelines for addressing change in change-averse organizations.

Rule #1: Tell It Like It Is. Nothing changes until the dialog changes. This doesn't mean telling your boss you hate her new haircut. Rather, begin to change the chemistry in an organization by improving the quality of the discussion. Create an environment conducive to brutal honesty.

Strength in Numbers. Often, it is a struggle to describe how an organization will look once all of this "touchy-feely" change management is complete. Numbers give form to what the future might look like. "Today we take 100 calls per hour, but with the new web site we will take 50 calls per day." Or "six out of 10 of our customers do not know our web site exists, but with the new CRM system, all customers will be directed to the site." Measured performance speaks louder than words.

Tell the Story. People remember stories better than stats. With change, stories and analogies can play a powerful role in getting others to embrace new ideas. For example, we can describe the changes we are undertaking in terms of the journey of an ocean liner. The idea resonates, and there are many parallels of a large ship to a large organization—it needs a captain, takes a

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long time to get going, will face storms, etc.

Empathy Rules. Empathy is seeing, feeling, and understanding the situation from another person's perspective. Empathy helps create dialog rather than blame. It generates energy around ideas, rather than sucking energy into defensive positions. Bottom line: Empathy is a key component of trust, and an essential ingredient in making change.

One day all data will be submitted online, and there will be no more paper forms. But until that day, we must see these major changes in terms of the organization.

About the Editors

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