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# Change Management Life Cycle: Phase I - Identify Stage

February 7, 2009 | Author: PM Hut | Filed under: [Change Management](#)

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Change Management Life Cycle: Phase I - Identify Stage (#3 in the series [Change Management Life Cycle](#))  
By [Jonathan B. Gilbert](#)

In the Identify stage, someone within an organization – typically a senior executive – spearheads an initiative to change a current process. A single voice at a very high level is often the first step in establishing the need for change. This need is then presented to the organization with a general description of the current state of affairs, offset by a high-level vision of the desired future state.

While it seems obvious, identifying the change is an absolutely fundamental first step in successful change adoption. It is important that the changed condition be described in a common, consistent language. However, organizations often fail to identify and communicate the need for change in a way that is understood and embraced by people working at all levels of an organization – from the executive suite to the individual workstation. Many leaders do not adequately consider how a proposed change (or even the rumor of one) may be received – at an intellectual, emotional and neurological level – by the people it will impact the most.

To ensure successful change, organizations should introduce a change effort during the Identify stage using the following techniques:

**Get Their Attention:** Since change is disturbing and distracting to human beings, it's important to get their attention about the change. Getting people out of their daily routines – at an off-site location, if possible – helps them create a shared sense of urgency for change and concentrate on the change message, thereby internalizing it more deeply.

**Align Their Disturbances:** Neurologically speaking a disturbance is a conflict between a person's current mental model (the way they think about something) and the mental map needed to operate in a changed state. To align disturbances means to create a common disturbance among the minds of the people in the organization – to create agreement between the gap that people have between their individual current mental model and the mental model needed to operate in a changed state. When these gaps aren't in alignment, everybody will respond to the change differently, and won't be able to agree on the direction and intent of the organizational response needed. An important technique for aligning the potentially broad spectrum of disturbances is for leaders to craft and continually communicate a compelling vision of what the future will look like when the change is implemented.

The best way for leaders to make a compelling case for change is to consider the need for change at every level in the organization, not just at the top tier. The top-level need for change is almost always driven by bottom-line goals, and does not touch the day-to-day work experience of the organization's staff.

For instance, a financially oriented statement, such as "our organization must realize a 20 percent reduction in operating expenses" will likely be met with fear, uncertainty and skepticism in some levels of the organization, and with ambivalence and apathy in other levels. Ultimately, it is imperative to align these varying disturbances with a clarifying vision.

Some additional people-related items to consider when identifying change opportunities include:

- Possible frustrations in performing (new) work
- Clear job definitions
- Job definitions and metrics that match the process
- Understanding of the end-to-end process
- Cultural dynamics within the organization that may inhibit people from moving to a new, changed state

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Jonathan B. Gilbert has more than 30 years of experience as entrepreneur, educator, chief executive officer, construction manager, management consultant, project manager and engineer. In 1975, he began his career as a project engineer and construction manager, designing, building and operating environmental treatment facilities. This experience enabled him to teach value engineering and project management to engineering and construction professionals throughout the United States.

Mr. Gilbert has worked for management consulting firms such as Fails Management Institute, Scott, Madden and Associates and INNOVA Group. In 1997, Mr. Gilbert founded Jonathan Gilbert & Associates, where he provided advice and counsel to clients in the areas of strategy, organization development, executive coaching and project management. Currently, Mr. Gilbert is Director of Client Solutions for ESI International.

Mr. Gilbert earned his B.S. in Civil Engineering from the University of Maryland at College Park, concentrating in project/construction management and environmental engineering. He is certified as a Project Management Professional (PMP®) by the Project Management Institute (PMI®).

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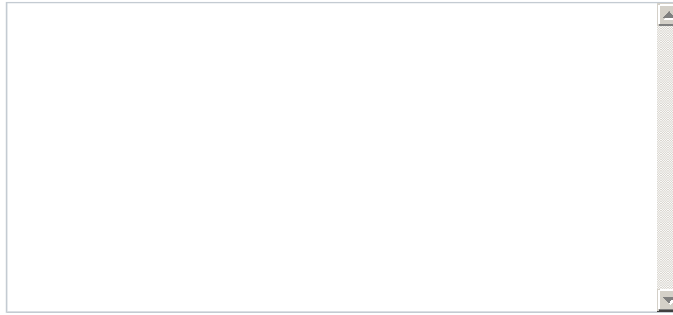
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