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Change Management Life Cycle: Phase II - Engage the People

February 14, 2009 | Author: PM Hut | Filed under: [Change Management](#), [People Issues](#)

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Change Management Life Cycle: Phase II - Engage the People (#4 in the series [Change Management Life Cycle](#))
By [Jonathan B. Gilbert](#)

Once the need for change has been identified and communicated, the next critical step is to engage people in planning for the organization's response to the change.

Successive levels of the organization must be included in a dialogue to help design an implementation plan. People within an organization must be allowed an opportunity for intellectual, emotional and psychological reaction to the desired change. Providing this opportunity enables people to become accustomed to the idea of change and to align their thinking in ways that will help both identify potential problem areas and contribute substantively to process improvement.

Consider this example: In a recent process change effort, an external consultant developed a new process, down to a very detailed level (with little input from the organization, and many requirements from executives), and proudly handed over the process design and documentation to the team responsible for implementing the new process.

The results were not surprising. The user team passively accepted the process, then aggressively refused to implement it. The user team had no energy or enthusiasm to implement something in which it had no emotional buy-in. In fact, team members told executives in the project post-mortem that they actively sabotaged the new process because "the consultants developed the process, even though we are the experts."

General George Patton of the U.S. Army is quoted as saying, "Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do and they will surprise you with their ingenuity." Wise leaders know that successful change adoption depends on engaging the hearts and minds, as well as the bodies, of the people facing a changed condition. Organizational leaders need to engage the energy and enthusiasm that comes from people having their own insights, for this is where true commitment to change comes from, and where the ownership of results are truly developed (Koch).

One technique to encourage people's adoption of a change is to conduct organization-wide response/adoption alignment workshops. When practiced effectively, these sessions allow people to contribute their own ideas about how a deliverable should be used within the organization. Once these contributions are aligned—through multi-party conversations (where much thrashing may occur!)—an aligned approach for managing and adapting to the change will emerge.

When reactions have been aligned and individuals within an organization are asked to be involved in responding to change, typical human behavior moves to addressing the problem—creating a desired direction to facilitate change.

The implementation strategy for responding to the change is then developed at a high level. The people who will be executing the strategy, as well as the people who will be impacted by the strategy, should be included in the strategy development. This high-level strategy is important for aligning and clarifying the intent of the change, as well as for establishing a direction that the change implementation will take. The strategy needs to be seen by all as a flexible plan so that the organization can adapt to changing conditions once implementation of the strategy is initiated.

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Jonathan B. Gilbert has more than 30 years of experience as entrepreneur. educator. chief

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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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First, I would like to extend my gratitude for all contributors to this body of knowledge. I have been accessing to your web site grequentling for preparing lecture notes to my students on project management. I am not able to get the full reference of the authors so that to properly cite them in my note, for example, Jonathan B. Gilbert's article. I need to know where to get their complete references.

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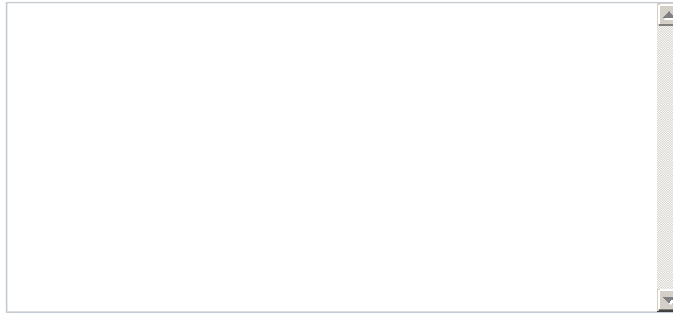
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