

A Communicator's Guide to Successful Change Management

edited and published by Craig Pearce

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Welcome

A Communicator's Guide to Successful Change Management explores, and provides practical strategic and tactical advice on, how communication contributes to effective change management. It is intended to be of use to change, change communication and internal communication professionals, while senior leaders who have change/transformation in their job description should also find it of use.

Research consistently informs us that the quality, nature and consistency of communication plays a leading role – if not *the* leading role – in change becoming embedded within organisations. This underlines the importance of exploring what constitutes effective communication in the context of change management, enabling us to better understand the role it plays and harness its power.

It manifests itself in many different ways. Like change management, the process, and the change 'product' it delivers, communication is, and must be, a malleable and adaptive entity.

Communication is embedded in – and/or influences – all the different phases of change. It carries particular resonance for organisational leadership – in any of its executive sponsorship, line management and informal influencer manifestations – as it is here where the greatest possibilities for change communication impact occur.

“ **Leadership, communication and culture are the triumvirate bedrock for change**

Leadership, communication and culture are the triumvirate bedrock for change – be it good or bad, effective or ineffective.

They are enablers or they are blockers. Each are addressed in this guide.

A Communicator's Guide to Successful Change Management synthesises thinking from a range of sources – practical experience from change and change communication professionals, academic discussions and management consulting resources. It is not a set of academic papers; it is intended to be of practical use – yet I am sure its content will pique the interest of academics.

A Communicator's Guide to Successful Change Management generally looks at change from a big picture, whole-of-organisation, *transformational* perspective (though its thinking and resources can be adapted to single, contained change programs, too).

“For the C-suite, transformational change is indistinguishable from business strategy,” writes Jonathan Champ in this guide, a point which, I think, underlines just how significant the field of change management is to contemporary business. It pulses through the veins of every part of the organisational body – brain, organs, limbs, torso and...soul.

You'll find many of the pieces, especially those written by myself, look at change primarily through the lens of Prosci's ADKAR change management model.

There are other models of change – such as the influential and much cited one of Kotter's, the Four Rooms methodology and Lewin's *Unfreeze-Change-Refreeze* model – that contributors such as Angela Scaffidi, Rachael Bibby, Jonathan Champ and Scott Guthrie discuss and put in a communication context.

Though they take different paths to achieve the same end-goal, each model enriches the thinking behind change and adds rigour to the process.

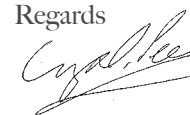
“ **Such is the prodigiousness and prevalence of change in contemporary business, organisations have no choice but to make change management a built-in and embedded capability**

More important than the model of change applied is that such is the prodigiousness and prevalence of change in contemporary business, as cogently argued by Scott Guthrie in this guide, that organisations have no choice but to make change management a built-in and embedded capability, rather than one which is procured on an ad hoc bolt-on basis. Acceptance of this view, especially when applied in a transformational sense, means there will be more demands on, and *for*, change communicators .

A Communicator's Guide to Successful Change Management is an attempt to focus greater attention on the subtleties of change management communication, providing value to the increasing number of professionals involved in the field. It is also intended to foment further discussion on the topic and enrich the professional knowledge and capability of all those involved in change management communication.

I hope you enjoy the guide and find its content enriching. Thank you for your interest.

Regards



Craig Pearce

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ABOUT CRAIG PEARCE

The truth about communication and public relations is that it takes short-term pain to achieve long-term gain. It hurts a little at first but, for ROI impact, it's the only way.

Anyone can 'spin' but, for sustained good relations with stakeholders, mutual change for mutual benefit is necessary.

Craig Pearce - a strategic communication and change management communication professional with 20 years experience - combines pragmatism; creativity; and academic, best practice, evidence-based rigour to help achieve this.

The result? Business outcomes that impact positively on reputation and the bottom line.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Underpinning the content contained in *A Communicator's Guide to Successful Change Management* is thoughtfulness and reflection. I bear witness to the rigour of its gestation and the many hours of labour its contributors invested into it.

I am indebted to each of my contributors for their insights and efforts. Each of them has expanded my own knowledge and added rigour to my own approaches and thinking as a professional communicator. They are all highly experienced and qualified in their field. If you, the reader, examine only a few articles contained in this guide, it is with these six highly experienced professionals I urge you to begin.

Thank you Andy, Angela, Jackie, Jonathan, Rachael and Scott.

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Angela Scaffidi co-founded SenateSHJ in 2002 and is the firm's head of change. She manages complex change programs across the public and private sectors. She works with leaders who are driving change at a system, organisation, team and/or individual level. Angela is accredited in The Four Rooms of Change®. She previously worked at McKinsey & Company.



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Jackie Le Fèvre (@MagmaEffect) is a values specialist. After 15 years in environmental conservation, including as Head of PR for an international wildlife charity, followed by senior organisational development roles, Jackie set up her company Magma Effect in 2005. Jackie is a Fellow of the Chartered Management Institute (CMI) and a member of the CMI Subject Matter Experts Group with a remit for culture and values. Jackie believes people have access to all the resources necessary to do what needs to be done: creating insight that leads to meaning and motivation is the key to unlocking that resourcefulness.



ABOUT JONATHAN CHAMP

Jonathan Champ founded Meaning Business — www.meaningbusiness.com.au — in 2010 after 15 years in-house communication and change experience at NRMA, IAG, Westpac and QBE. He helps organisations (and their communicators) communicate and change better with practical training, tools and techniques. He created The Shorter COMMS Plan and Melorum's Introduction to Internal Communication course and is IABC NSW's Co-chair of Professional Development. He tweets #comms stuff and occasional lolcats as @meaningbusiness.



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Rachael Bibby is a change professional with experience in both private and public sector. She believes in driving simplicity from complexity to help positively affect organisational and behavioural change. Rachael works with leaders from Executive level to employee in helping to drive positive outcomes.



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Scott Guthrie (@sabguthrie) is a management consultant specialising in progressive public relations. He has more than twenty years' experience advising leaders within the business intelligence and financial services industries and believes placing purpose at the heart of business is the only sure-fire way to thrive in business. Scott writes regularly about communications, creativity + change at www.sabguthrie.info

Kotter in context: is the classic change model damaging your mid-size change?

■ by Jonathan Champ

When applied to change that is not whole-of-organisation – *transformational* – the eight steps of Kotter’s classic change model can complicate and undermine effective change management and implementation. Using this process for operational/project-level change runs the risk of using a steamroller to crack a walnut, or creating unnecessary internal competition for urgent attention.

The levers the eight steps address are at the whole-of-enterprise level, providing a strategic transformation blueprint. In other words, Kotter is perfect for CEOs who are leading ‘the biggest change in the room’.

In 1995, Harvard Business Review published *Leading Change: Why transformation efforts fail*, by leadership, strategy, and change expert Dr John P. Kotter.

In the article, Kotter identified eight errors of strategy that led to failure for businesses attempting to transform in response to external market forces.

Often reproduced and republished, it is an essential part of change management literature. It forms a comprehensive introduction to the ideas Kotter expands upon in his subsequent books, including *Leading Change: An action plan from the world’s foremost expert on business leadership*.

In establishing the context for his eight focus areas, Kotter is very clear. He describes the range of cases where organisations have been forced to adapt – to *transform* – in order to survive or thrive.

Kotter said of these organisations, “the basic goal has been the same: to make fundamental changes in how business is conducted in order to help cope with a new, more challenging market environment” (*Kotter, 1996*).

It is important to consider Kotter’s audience. He was addressing CEOs and presidents, managing directors and board members. He is describing a challenge of *strategy*, not just of ‘change’.

Today, the eight-step Kotter framework is an essential part of the change practitioner’s toolkit. While Kotter himself updated the model to reflect evolutions in the business environment in his 2014 work *Accelerate*, it is the original model that remains predominant in many of the toolkits applied to mid-level change.

The accompanying context for both versions – that this framework applies to enterprise level change – is often absent from their reproduction in change management plans and templates, or their application to medium scale change initiatives.

NOT ALL CHANGE IS CREATED EQUAL

Change within organisations takes a number of forms. Understanding the scale of change to be managed provides a guide to the appropriate application of Kotter’s model.

A common view of scales of change across three levels is the Prosci Model. This outlines three scales of change at play within organisations.

- *Enterprise level*, creating transformation at a whole-of-organisation level
- *Project level*, applying benefit realisation to individual initiatives

- *Individual level*, the human engagement with change (Prosci)

There is another level of change, sometimes driven by the project-level, but sometimes driven by the basic operations of the organisation.

This ‘*operational*’ level is a significant part of the employee’s experience of change: not every transformational initiative will have an immediate impact on every employee in every part of the business, but a small change to process, policy or product can have a significant impact on daily ordinary work.

Redefining the levels of organisational change this way helps determine the appropriate application of the eight-step model.

- Transformational – Use Kotter for *change-as-business-strategy*
- Program/project – Apply caution and consider the context before applying Kotter to multiple mid-size change
- Operational – Beware of creating noise and undermining strategy by applying Kotter to operational change without creating links to transformation.

The ‘individual’ or human aspect of change (Prosci’s third level) remains a factor for *all* these levels of change. It is the role of change practitioners to be able to provide the link between the operational change and the transformational, as it is the role of leaders and managers at all levels of the organisation to provide the context and the detail of the impacts of any change.

THE RIGHT ENTERPRISE SCALE FOR KOTTER

For the C-suite, transformational change is indistinguishable from business strategy. External forces and internal realities need to be aligned in order for the organisation to deliver on – or even amend – its purpose. It aligns with Kotter's model of transformation by shifting strategic levers including:

- Leadership
- Strategy
- Culture
- Symbolic work – the showcase processes that provide positive models for change
- Embedded systems – the support mechanisms for change and culture such as performance management, reward, prioritisation mechanisms and communication infrastructure that reinforce and embed change

Transformational change may require rethinking vision, values, culture and operating models in order to address the triggers for change.

“ **For the C-suite, transformational change is indistinguishable from business strategy**

When the transformational agenda is clear, and when an organisation has effective program and project management capability, clear prioritisation and conflict management, Kotter has provided an effective blueprint.

Only a portion of change is, however, in Kotter's words, 'heroically prescient and leader-instigated'. The reality of 'transformation' in many organisations is as follows:

Some aspects of a 'Ready for 2025' transformation program are underway, and have been for 18 months. Leadership of the programs is variable. Support for some of the structural changes required of the change is being argued – and resisted – by members of the executive team. Meanwhile, the CIO is prosecuting an agenda of technological consistency based on targets for reduced enterprise-level license packages driven by the promise of software as a service. The CFO is pressuring the CIO to complete the rollout before the transformation agenda reaches the IT organisation (and end of financial year). The sales organisation has a customer service initiative based on the last round of analytics and HR is trying to build line manager capability to lead change prior to the next-level restructures that are driven by the C-suite succession plans.

This is an amalgam of several real scenarios where disjointed project-level change efforts were undermining the delivery of the transformation agenda. It is reasonably easy to see how the aspiration of transformation has got lost in the forest of implementation and the quicksand of organisational culture.

This is the change context where Kotter's model provides clarity for leadership.

HOW THE EIGHT-STEP PROCESS CREATES A DISCONNECT FOR MID-SIZE CHANGE

Applying the eight-step model indiscriminately to project-level initiatives and operational change leads to challenges.

1. *Generating a sense of urgency for mid-level changes creates unnecessary competition for share of mind.*

In a typical large organisation undergoing transformation, there are likely to be dozens of project-level initiatives and concurrent operational change.

There is a paradox. Urgency at an organisational, strategic level provides momentum for the projects and initiatives that are necessary at the deeper levels of the structure. However, at an operational level, the sense of urgency translates into confusion and an inability to absorb the change impacts.

The underlying need for change at the project or operational level needs to be rolled up to the overall strategic imperative. Creating urgency around the *detail* of the change creates noise. This manifests itself as an increased request for project branding, change-specific communication channels.

Solutions include:

- Ensure that the narrative of urgency remains at the enterprise level
 - ‘Bundle’ change impacts across programs
 - Implement at an operational or individual level *as rapidly as possible based on the capacity for change*
2. *The guiding coalition is not sufficiently close to the change outcomes.*

New structures for consultation and sponsorship are emerging in organisations. The rise of collaborative processes and structures means there are new opportunities for change to be ‘owned’ by those closest to it.

“**Effective change is a combination of leadership, role modelling, input and experimentation from multiple layers and levels within an organisation. Membership of the guiding coalition is no longer limited to leadership, but requires broader perspectives and inclusion of a more representative range of roles**

In their 10th Change and Communication ROI Report, Towers Watson highlighted the shift from top-down change to participative approaches. The shift from ‘leader led’ to ‘manager facilitated’ execution for change initiatives has seen an increase in the role of change training (Towers Watson, 2014).

Effective change is a combination of leadership, role modelling, input and experimentation from multiple layers and levels within an organisation. Membership of the guiding coalition is no longer limited to leadership, but requires broader perspectives and inclusion of a more representative range of roles.

3. *Institute change by designing for action*

Consider the broader world beyond organisational life. As citizens and consumers, we conduct all kinds of complex behaviours and transactions ‘online’. The online environment changes constantly. Yet there is no change management plan for ‘the internet.’ Methodologies such as UX and User-Centered Design ensure that (successful) apps or sites or technologies are intuitive and based on making action easy to complete.

These disciplines do not apply only to online and technological change. The ability to design the ‘pointy end’ of change within organisations in a way that enables action at the right time *without requiring substantial training or commitment* becomes an opportunity for making continual concurrent change something that is easy to digest.

As Bill Quirke writes in *Making the Connections*, “Organisations are short changing themselves by not seeing communication through to the end – converting awareness into action. The real value of internal communication is to help business ends by enabling employees to turn strategy into action” (Quirke, 2008).

4. *Sustaining acceleration requires better models for managing complexity*

Being responsive to markets requires agility. Product evolution, sales and marketing activity, technical changes all produce operational activity – change – that needs to be absorbed and incorporated into the day-to-day work within organisations. Unrealistically estimating the impact of small change leads to errors in calculating the overall capacity for larger scale change.

Shifting from a sense of urgency to *creating momentum* creates sustainable drive for the change agenda. Gregory LeStage, President of Kotter International Centre for Leaders, wrote in Forbes on the 19th anniversary of the eight-step model:

“Comparing today’s business environment to 20 years ago, it strikes me that wins – and an intentional approach to producing them – have only increased in importance as the fuel of large-scale sustainable change. The energy they produce can overpower the effects of speed, distraction, and dilution that conspire against change efforts. They can help break down change-blocking silos” (LeStage, 2015).

MANAGING MULTIPLE CHANGE PROJECTS IN CHANGING CONTEXTS

Writing in *Accelerate* (2014), Kotter recognised complexity and the shifts in organisational structure and networks, and the need for agile methods of mobilising people within the organisation.

In reality, change at the project level has three qualities that can complicate the effective management and delivery of benefits or the desired outcomes.

- Concurrent – there are seldom single projects underway in an organisation. Depending on the degree of internal organisation and prioritisation, these initiatives may or may not be coordinated.

- Continuous – while individual projects come to an end (and ideally deliver their targeted benefits), there are typically a sequence of projects being rolled out. There is no fixed future state, only a series of iterations. The idea of ‘versions’ of the future state is a powerful metaphor for this: change version X.X.
- Compound – change impacts from one initiative have flow-on implications for other initiatives. When delivered top-down, the aggregate compound impact of change can be miscalculated. This can be an overestimation of the ability to absorb change at an individual level, or it can be a failure to calculate capacity for the impacts of accumulated incremental change.

In the most effective organisations there is coordination of impacts across the range of concurrent projects (Towers Watson, 2014). There is strategic value in effective governance that provides alignment of the intention of transformation with the operational reality of the ‘current state’ organisation.

APPROACHING CHANGE AS A PROBLEM OF CONTEXT

One critic of the vision-led approach to big change is Dave Snowden, founder of Cognitive Edge and an expert in the field of organisational complexity, user experience (UX) and lean change.

“Oversimplification is the enemy. Face the complexity. Change impacts from one initiative have cumulative implications for other initiatives

In his keynote to LEANUX14, Snowden explains how organisations – as complex systems – naturally resist and defy the attempt to change them in a linear way and points to why so many change and communication efforts fail abjectly. He provides some cautions in terms of how designers, Lean and UX practitioners approach change.

- “Stop mandating idealistic and ideological future state models.” Creating a substantial gap between the current state and the future state undermines the sense-making process. This increases the disconnect between the narrative (story of change, vision) and the experience of the change targets.



- “Don’t try to replicate without taking into account context.” Adopting a ‘cookie cutter’ approach to change models, change plans and tactics fail to identify the specifics of the organisation *and its constituents*.
- “Over-simplification is the enemy, face the complexity.” Build the organisational ‘complexity’ muscle. New skills such as collaboration and co-creation, along with new structures for working, are required in to navigate the ‘all change, all the time’ environment.
- “Pragmatic compromise should not lapse into prostitution.” By this, Snowden means that as we attempt to create ‘fit for purpose’ and ‘just in time solutions’, principles still apply. Being agile, nimble, networked and flexible means understanding what are the immovables: what are the principles underpinning the *purpose* of the change, what are the cultural non-negotiables that need to be navigated in the delivery of a pragmatic solution?
- “Compromising excessively is as bad as not compromising at all.” Snowden is not advocating for abandoning the vision of the future state. He advocates for understanding the dimensions of a change that need to be retained in the effort to deliver a better experience, a new operating model, a transformation.

- “Don’t replicate the how, unless you know the why.” Understanding why a change is successful is as important for the ongoing practice of change as the transformation and benefit realisation (Snowden in Evans, 2014).

Applying these new principles to our deconstruction of the eight-step model, we can see that it is necessary for the change practitioner – whether change manager, project manager, leader, line manager, communicator – to step beyond ideal processes and to adapt to the realities of the specific change in the specific environment. Snowden sets an important challenge, at odds with urgency and strategic visions.

It is worth change practitioners spending the time to explore disruptive views and challenges to the traditional models and practices of change to see organisations as they are, rather than how we want them to be.

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