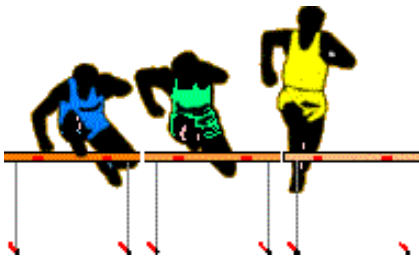


Implementing Change

By Paul Thornton



Leaders don't just talk about change, they implement change. When implementing any major change, it is important to understand the following roles:

- **Sponsor**— is the senior leader who wants the change to occur. The sponsor is usually the president, vice president or other senior leader. The sponsor provides legitimacy for the change and the needed resources to make it happen.
- **Project Manager**— works with the implementation team to create and implement a detailed project plan. The project plan identifies the people, timeframes, resources, and action steps needed to successfully implement the change.
- **Target Group**— is the employees who must change in some way. For example, the target group might be first line managers, customer service reps, or the entire organization. It's important to pinpoint exactly what changes are needed and how members of the target group need to behave in the future.
- **Secondary Group**— is the people who must change to support the changes being made by the target group. The secondary group is usually the managers of the employees in the target group. In general, the secondary group needs to encourage, support, and guide the changes being made by the target group. In addition, they should reward and recognize employees as they learn and implement new behaviors.
- **Implementation Team**—is chartered by the sponsor or project manager. The implementation team should include employees from both the target and secondary groups as well as other knowledgeable and influential employees. The size of the Implementation Team will depend on the size of the change being implemented.

Applying the Concept

Corey Labor is a project manager for Systems and Software (S & S) which is a division of Harris Corporation. S&S designs, sells, and implements software systems for the utility industry. Corey has been involved in four implementations over the past two years.

Corey states, "In my case the sponsor is either the general manager of the utility or the director of IT. The target group is the customer service reps who we want to be proficient at using all features of the new software. The secondary group includes the senior management team and the managers of the customer service reps. The smallest implementation team I've been involved with had 6 people...it typically is driven by the size of the utility, the larger the utility the larger the implementation team (typically not larger than 12)."

Project Plan

The project manager working with the Implementation Team creates a detailed project plan. Corey states, "I typically create a draft, then review it with the S&S implementation team members for their input. Next, I review it with the implementation team members from the Utility. I make changes as needed. The goal is to get full buy in/agreement of the plan." But plans do change. Things don't always go as planned. You need to be flexible and make adjustments to the plan as needed.

Project plans generally include the following items:

1. **Long-term and Short-term Goals**—as Stephen Covey said in his book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, start with the end in mind. Establish what the end goal is and then work backwards. Identify all the steps and actions needed to achieve the desired change. Corey states, "Our project plan includes dates to start and complete process analysis, setup, training, data conversion, testing, and a 'go-live' date." The "go-live" is the date when the change (new technology, new system, new work procedure etc.) will officially begin.
2. **Incentivize**—what helps motivate employees to change? Incentives. Money works—the more, the better. If there is no budget for financial rewards try other incentives such as time off or a group celebration event. Select incentives that are appealing to members of the target group.

In addition, it is important to plan for the recognition of target group members when they achieve short-term wins. That builds momentum and keeps employees motivated. The sponsor should formally recognize employees when key milestones are accomplished. It is also important to recognize the effort and long hours various people may be working. Corey states, "When the sponsor takes the time to just simply recognize a team's effort it keeps them motivated and driven to achieve the project goals. I've worked with sponsors to bring in lunch and ice cream to celebrate a major achievement. These gestures make employees feel valued and appreciated."

3. **Kick-off Event** —like a politician announcing his or her candidacy, the kick-off event needs to be planned and scheduled. It is the opportunity for the sponsor to announce the change and explain why it is being implemented. Always include—WIIFT—what’s in it for them. It may be the appropriate time to announce the incentives for making the change. The sponsor or project manager should provide a high-level overview of the implementation plan, including key milestones.

The kick-off event needs to be festive, exciting, and uplifting. Some kick-off events include giving away hats, t-shirts, and other mementos that relate to the change initiative. Corey states, “In previous implementations we haven’t held a formal kick-off event. But in retrospect I think it’s a good thing to do.”

4. **Training** —change requires the target group and secondary group to think and behave in new ways. This requires training. The first question to answer is—what specific knowledge and skills does the target group and secondary group need going forward. Some of the issues related to training include:

- Who should do the training
- When should it be conducted
- After training what follow-up support is needed

Corey states, “Just-in-time training works best. Train on Wednesday and use the new knowledge and skills on the job on Thursday.”

5. **Remove Obstacles**—obstacles can be both structural and psychological. Structural obstacles include things such as the organizational structure, job descriptions, performance appraisal system, and the compensation system. Company policies, procedures, and systems need to be aligned with the new ways of working.

Sometimes the obstacles are in people’s heads. They lack confidence. The sponsor and project manager must find ways to provide psychological support and encouragement to help employees learn, grow, and change.

Handling Resisters— it’s important to determine who supports the change and who opposes the change. Of course opposition can run the gamut from mild to very strong. You need a plan to deal with resisters. I suggest the following: listen to them. They may identify problems and obstacles you overlooked. Ask them to stay open and give the change a try.

When implementing change, things often get worse before they get better. When productivity goes down and new problems occur, resisters are quick to say, “I told you this wouldn’t work.” Leaders need to be prepared and respond appropriately to the early problems and setbacks. Try to create some early success for the change initiative—that builds momentum.

6. **Measure Results**—the project manager needs to plan what he will measure and how often. It’s worth noting that what you measure tells people what’s important. Project managers need to measure both the hard data and the soft data. The hard data—the numbers—tells you what’s being accomplished. The soft data—employee’s attitudes and motivation. What’s their energy level? What are their frustrations? Interventions to boost morale and adjust the plan are often required.

7. **Communicate**—when implementing major change employees need regular updates on how things are going. The sponsor needs to plan how he will keep the senior management team updated on both successes and setbacks. In addition the sponsor needs to periodically communicate updates to the entire organization. The sponsor must decide what communication channels—company newsletters, group meetings, memos, e-mail, videos, speeches, and one-on-one informal conversations—will be used.

The project manager needs to keep the target group, secondary group and implementation team updated on what’s happening. Corey states, “The quickest way to alienate a group responsible for completing key project tasks is to not keep them up to date on the project decisions, set-backs, progress, challenges, etc. I’ve had internal teams become uncooperative when they felt they were not being ‘kept in the loop.’”

Each of these seven aspects of the project plan is very important. The project manager and implementation team need to discuss and plan the steps needed to carry out each of these items. Implementing change is messy and full of surprises. The project manager needs to be flexible and make course corrections as things evolve.

Summary

Implementation is where the rubber meets the road. Implementing change requires strong leadership and perseverance to make it happen. The first step is determining who needs to change and what specific changes are needed. Organizational change requires a senior leader to sponsor the change, a talented project manager, and a competent implementation team. Not all change initiatives turn out exactly as planned. Leaders need to acknowledge this and encourage everyone involved in the change process to learn and adjust as they go forward.

About the author:

Paul B. Thornton is a speaker, author, and trainer. He is president, Be The Leader Associates www.betheleader.com
Paul has designed and conducted management/leadership programs for many companies. He is a professor-business at Springfield Technical Community College and an associate professor-at-large for the Thierry Graduate School of Leadership located in Brussels, Belgium. Paul is the author of numerous articles and 13 books on management and leadership. His latest books include:

- * ***Best Leadership Advice I Ever Got***
- * ***The Big Three Management Styles***
- * ***Big Leadership Ideas***

All of his books are also available at amazon.com and bn.com. Paul can be reached at PThornton@stcc.edu

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