

Article-1: How to Implement a Common Change Methodology to Increase Your Organization's Change Results and Skill



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By Linda Ackerman Anderson and Dean Anderson

Increasingly, change leaders understand the critical need for a common change methodology when they are engaged in enterprise-wide transformation. Many leaders have experienced the unwieldy consequences of hiring numerous consultants for various projects, each espousing their own approach to change, and inadvertently wreaking havoc on the organization. Other leaders have seen the costs and burden of change skyrocket as numerous initiatives duplicate activities, compete for resources, or create overwhelm and fear in the organization.

With a vision of greater capability and speed for change, many organizations have tried to introduce a common approach to change through communication events or in mandatory one-day workshops, with minimal results. While more change leaders see the need for a common approach to change, few are successfully implementing one. Why?

In this article, we will outline a seven-step process that will enable your organization to actually implement a common approach to change and maximize your return on this key investment. The benefits your organization will realize by developing a common change methodology are significant:

- Increase the speed of your change efforts
- Enable change project integration, which will significantly reduce each initiative's capital costs by removing redundancies and maximizing resource sharing
- Increase your organization's change readiness and skill by establishing common best practices and change tools that clarify critical action
- Improve the knowledge transfer between change initiatives, among change leaders, and throughout the ranks of your organization
- Reduce resistance and other human costs associated with change by enabling everyone to understand how change occurs in your organization and what everyone needs to do to support its success

Here is the process you can use to succeed in selecting and implementing a common change methodology:

Step 1: Secure the Commitment of Senior Leaders and Your Key Change Project Leads

Many organizational leaders approve of the “idea” that a common change methodology is a good thing. However, there is a make-or-break difference between “approving of the idea” and being truly committed to selecting, tailoring, establishing, and using a sound change methodology across the organization that delivers results in a timely way.

Senior leaders must be involved in selecting the methodology. Why? Because they must personally commit to supporting and modeling its use in the organization. Furthermore, the key change project leaders and senior internal change consultants—the people who will be most actively involved in applying and evolving the change methodology—must also be included in the process of selecting the change methodology. Otherwise, their commitment will waver, and they will end up using their own various approaches, thus negating the potential benefits of unifying your approach to change.

Select a top-level sponsor to coordinate this selection process. As a group, openly discuss the pros and cons of implementing a common approach. Explore the benefits, rollout process, resource requirements, and

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impacts of aligning all major change initiatives to one common approach. This is the time to invite the skeptics to voice their opinions. Work the issues until you get group commitment, and don't proceed until you have a contract with the group to follow through and implement your chosen common approach

Step 2: Select and Tailor the Best Change Methodology for Your Organization

The most important ingredient in your selection process is the involvement of the right people—those who will have the greatest stake in the approach and its success. Beyond your change sponsors, change project leads, and internal consultants, involve others who might have significant for–or–against positions. Be sure to include mid-managers, union members, and line workers who are either key influencers or change agents themselves.

Given the vast number of available change models on the market, having clear selection criteria is key. First of all, decide if you are going to take the time to build your own approach, or license a ready-made one. If you license an existing model, such as Being First's nine-phase Change Process Model, make sure that it accounts for the following:

- It provides adequate guidance for pragmatic application to any magnitude and type of change effort, particularly enterprise-wide transformational change.
- It accounts for and integrates both technical/organizational change as well as human/cultural change.
- It is a true change process model—one that provides a roadmap for how to proceed—and is not just a framework of discreet and non-sequential actions or issues. It must address the requirements of project start-up, design, and implementation, in that order. (For an in-depth discussion of the differences between change process models and change frameworks, see *Beyond Change Management: Advanced Strategies for Today's Transformational Leaders*, Anderson and Ackerman Anderson, 2001, Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer, pages 161-170.)
- It deals with both the design of the change solution as well as its implementation (not just one or the other).
- It comes in user-friendly and application-supportive media, including paper and electronic platforms.
- It offers a full range of pragmatic application tools.
- It can be tailored to fit the culture, language, and level of change skill in your organization.

Once you have selected your preferred change methodology, make sure it fits all of your needs. If you license a methodology, make sure you can tailor its content, language, tools, or media so that it truly fits your organization's needs, culture, and application.

Step 3: Design Your Rollout Strategy

Here is where the rubber meets the road. We have seen countless examples where a team has identified a sound change model, yet was unable to get it implemented effectively throughout the organization. Before proceeding, be sure to correct any of the following “failure factors”: (1) lack of senior leadership commitment, (2) executives who believe that traditional project or change management will be adequate to the job, (3) an already overwhelmed organization with no tolerance for one more thing to learn or use, (4) a change model that is incomplete or too conceptual, or (5) external consultants with an established power-base in the organization who are competing with each other and you to get their own change model used.

Next, identify the scope of your rollout. Will you introduce the entire organization to the methodology at one time, or will you apply it to specific change initiatives or parts of the organization first? Once you know who you will be targeting, your rollout strategy must then include plans for initial and ongoing communications, training that uses as much live case application as possible, and follow-up learning to improve its use and identify best practices. Identify a realistic timetable and secure the necessary resources for your rollout strategy.

Step 4: Set the Expectation and the Requirements for Success in the Organization

From the workforce to the top executives, you must communicate and establish the expectation for learning

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and using your new change methodology. Enroll all of the people who helped select the change methodology in this task. Promoting your organization's new approach will help each of them deepen their own commitment to it.

Your communication of expectations must account for the level of readiness, the workload, and the urgency for making your current change efforts successful. If your organization has a bad track record at change, or historically introduces new management practices poorly, you must acknowledge this fact and why this has occurred in the past. Do not pretend that this effort will be different just because you want it to be. You might also consider securing tangible rewards for people who support and succeed in the use of this new approach to change. Remember the power of having your senior leaders visibly model the successful use of your change methodology throughout your organization.

Step 5: Execute Your Training Plan

Training is most powerful when it requires participants to do real work as they learn. Use your organization's live change initiatives wherever possible in teaching the new change methodology, and adapt your cases to fit your various audiences. Tailor your trainings to fit the needs and application of these target groups:

- Senior change leaders who must sponsor and model new changes
- Key change project leaders who must design actual integrated change strategies
- Internal change consultants who must develop the deepest understanding and mastery of the new approach, especially if they directly support the key change project leaders on primary change initiatives. (Consultants: for more guidance, checkout the “Just–In–Time Change Consulting Strategy,” found in *The Change Leader's Roadmap*, by Ackerman Anderson and Anderson, pages 253-258)
- Managers who will input to change efforts, implement them, or support their people to deal effectively—mentally, physically, and emotionally—with change
- Employees who must support the new behaviors and work practices to help change succeed
- Customers or vendors impacted by the way change is designed and implemented in your organization
- All external consultants whose work will be affected by your new change methodology. (Remember: It does not matter if your highly paid consultants pitch you to use their own change models. As the client, your chosen methodology is the one that counts!)

Step 6: Implement Your Organization's Current Change Initiatives Using Your New Change Methodology

Once your trainings have introduced the change methodology, the real work of using it begins. Support the change project leaders to use the new approach in real time. They may feel overwhelmed with having to learn while they work. The “just–in–time” strategy mentioned above, as well as partnering your key project leaders with experienced internal change consultants, can be very effective at creating early successes on live change efforts. Stick with it!

Step 7: Learn in Real-Time to Consciously Evolve Your Methodology and Build your Organization's Change

Leadership Competency

Use your live change efforts, as they unfold over time, to sustain your organization's learning and ultimate mastery of its new change methodology:

1. Course correct how your change teams are using the methodology on real projects so that they can improve and increase their results.
2. Identify best change practices that can be celebrated and established throughout your organization.
3. Take what you have learned so far and continue to evolve the change methodology to better fit your organization's needs and application.

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Consider: (1) holding quarterly learning clinics with multiple project teams to discuss their use of the methodology and newly identified best practices, (2) delivering regular enterprise-wide communications about key applications and learnings, and (3) showcasing your organization's successes and inviting other companies to benchmark your approaches. Be sure to publicly celebrate all the good work your change leaders and change agents are doing.

Reap a Significant Return on Your Investment!

Does an organization overwhelmed with multiple changes have the time and resources to design and implement a common change methodology? On the surface, you might think not. Successfully implementing a common change methodology takes a very real investment. More than a good idea, it takes a lot of work. The selection and design process, the trainings, the actual application, and the ongoing learning process all require time and resources.

However, the return on your investment is substantial. Your current change efforts will all become more successful, AND, your organization will radically improve its change capacity and skill, making all your future change efforts run smoother with less capital and human cost. By increasing your organization's mastery of change, you will ensure your ability to remain at the forefront of your marketplace. And that is a smart dollar spent.