QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY IRC

Key Success Factors of Planned Change Projects

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"When you're finished changing, you're finished." – Benjamin Franklin

"After you've done a thing the same way for two years, look it over carefully. After five years, look at it with suspicion. And after ten years, throw it away and start over."
– Alfred Edward Perlman

Dismal Statistics About the Implementation of Change

For decades now, business writers from all walks of life have been bemoaning the large failure rate of change projects. For example, one study reported that 70 percent of critical change efforts fail to achieve their intended results.[1] Additionally, more executives are fired for mismanaging change than other reasons, such as ignoring customers.[2] The Gartner Group, reporting on IT change projects, stated that 28 percent were abandoned before completion, 46 percent were behind schedule or over budget, and 80 percent were not used in the way they were intended—or at all—six months after installation.[3] Too often change projects fail not because the ideas themselves were poor but because the implementations were flawed. Take the following case study as an example of the pitfalls that can doom the implementation of a new policy.

Procedure Changes at Tasty Foods[4]

Tasty Foods is a medium-sized distribution company with over three thousand employees and gross sales of over $400 million. The company purchases and distributes salty snack foods to independent retail stores throughout Canada. Salty snack foods include corn chips, potato chips, cheese curls, tortilla chips, peanuts and so forth. The company divides itself into six Canadian regions, each with its own central warehouse, salespeople, finance department and purchasing department. The head office encourages each region to be largely autonomous because of local tastes and practices.

Early in 2009, Tasty began using a financial reporting system that compared sales, costs and profits across regions. Management was surprised to learn that profits varied widely. By 2011, the differences were so great that management decided some standardization was necessary. They believed that highly profitable regions were sometimes using lower quality items to boost profit margins and that this practice could hurt Tasty's image. Other regions were facing intense price competition in order to hold market share.

As these problems accumulated, Mr. Bullock, president of Tasty, decided to create a new position to monitor pricing and purchasing practices. Janice Scott was hired from the finance department of a competing organization. Her new title was director of pricing and purchasing, and she reported to the vice president of finance, Mr. Maher. Bullock and Maher gave Scott great latitude in organizing her job and encouraged her to establish whatever rules and procedures were necessary. She was also encouraged to gather information from the regional offices, each of which were notified of her appointment by an official memo sent to the regional managers. A copy of the memo was posted on warehouse bulletin boards as well, and the announcement was also made in the company newspaper.

[1] Kennedy, C., & Harvey, D. (1997). *Managing and sustaining radical change*. London, UK: Business Intelligence.
[2] Murphy, M. (2005). Why CEOs get fired, *Leadership* Excellence, 22(9), 14.
[3] Booth, R. (2000, November 15). IT project failures costly, TechRepublic/Gartner study finds. *TechRepublic*. Retrieved from http://www.techrepublic.com/article/it-project-failures-costly-techrepublic-gartner-study-finds/
[4] Based on a case study (Sunflower Incorporated) in: Cummings, T., & Worley, C. (2001). *Organization development and change* (7th ed.) (pp. 200-201). Cincinnati, OH: South-Western College Publishing.

After three weeks on the job, Scott decided that pricing and purchasing decisions should be standardized across regions. As a first step, she had the financial executives in each region notify her of any change in local prices of more than 3 percent.

She also decided that all new contracts for local purchases of more than fifteen thousand dollars would be cleared through her office. (Approximately 60 percent of items distributed in the regions were purchased in large quantities and supplied from the home office. The other 40 percent were purchased and distributed within the region.) Scott believed that the only way to standardize operations was for each region to notify the home office in advance of any change in prices or purchases. Scott discussed the proposed policy with Maher. He agreed, so they submitted a formal proposal to the president and the board of directors, who approved the plan. Tasty was moving into the peak holiday season, so Scott wanted to implement the new procedures right away. She decided to send an email to the financial and purchasing executives in each region notifying them of the new procedures. The change would be inserted in all policy and procedures manuals throughout Tasty within four months.

Scott showed a draft of the email to Maher and invited his comments. Maher said the email was an excellent idea but wondered if it was sufficient. The regions handled hundreds of items and were used to decentralized decision-making. Maher suggested that Scott visit the regions and discuss purchasing and pricing policies with the executives.

Scott declined, saying that the trips would be expensive and time-consuming. She had so many things to do at headquarters that a trip was impossible. Maher also suggested waiting to implement the procedures until after the annual company meeting in three months. Scott replied that this would take too long because the procedures would not take effect until after the peak sales season. She believed that the procedures were needed now. The email went out the next day.

During the next few days, replies came in from most of the regions. The executives stated they were in agreement with the email and said they would be happy to cooperate.

Eight weeks later, Scott had not received notices from any regions about local price or purchase changes. Other executives who had visited regional warehouses indicated to her that the regions were busy as usual. Regional executives seemed to be ignoring the new policies and following usual procedures for that time of year. Although the executives gave lip service to the new policy, they were not following it. Passive resistance, one of the toughest forms to identify and handle, had raised its ugly head.

Change is Difficult

The Tasty Foods case study shows only too well the difficulty of implementing a major change into an established organizational culture, and it serves as just one example of the woefully limited success rate of organizational change initiatives. Experts, gurus and academics have been writing about change management for over fifty years, but despite the large number of books (over eighty-three thousand on Amazon) and academic articles (over nine and a half million identified by a search of the Queen's University library system) written on the topic, the results are still dismal. The estimated failure rate of change projects has stayed constant since the 1970s, and many change experts have concluded that up to 70 percent of change initiatives fail and that failure rates have not improved over the decades the topic has been studied.[5]

Furthermore, the importance of managing organizational change has stayed high on the list of key managerial challenges over the last decade. For example, a Blanchard corporate survey reported that the top management

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[5] Kotter (1990); Hammer & Champy (1993); Higgs & Rowland (2000); Balogun & Hope Hailey (2004).

challenge for 2011 was an increased need to manage change.[6] The need to manage change successfully has remained near the top every year this survey was taken.

Why is the Failure Rate So High?

If failure rates are so high, and if managing change is so important, why do organizations seem unable to improve their results? I believe that competence in managing change remains rare among organizational leaders despite the numerous books, articles and training initiatives that aim to develop the requisite knowledge and skills. Change projects are still taking longer to implement than they should. Executives regularly report that the intended benefits are realized only in limited areas or not at all. Leaders' credibility is undermined as they over promise and under deliver. Unanticipated problems and obstacles are still surfacing with depressing regularity. Implementation is still largely disjointed and haphazard. Employees, often already overwhelmed with their workload, are becoming more cynical about the likelihood of any new changes being successful, and resistance is still getting in the way of success.

Indeed, while there is broad agreement that managing change competently is important, unless it becomes a core managerial competency, don't expect those dismal statistics to change for at least another fifty years. I hope to help you beat the statistics. In the following sections, I will report the results of my multi-year investigation into the key success factors of planned change initiatives and illustrate them with examples and case studies.

Change Theory

Let's start by reviewing change theory, which begins with Kurt Lewin, widely acknowledged as "the intellectual father of contemporary theories of applied behavioural science." As described by Bernard Burnes, Lewin's approach to change integrated four elements: field theory, group dynamics, action research and the three-step model of change.[7]

Field theory explains complex group behaviour during change by mapping out the "field" or context in which it takes place.[8] The status quo is maintained when the forces for a change and the forces arrayed against it are in equilibrium. Small or large changes in those forces, however, can cause a disruption in this equilibrium and hence lead to a new status quo. Lewin believed that this field is in a continuous state of adaptation.

Lewin was the first psychologist to write about group dynamics and the importance of the group in shaping the behaviour of its members.[9] Therefore, in his view, group behaviour, not individual behaviour, should be the main focus of change. Lewin maintained that it is futile to concentrate on changing the behaviour of individuals because the individual in isolation is inhibited by group pressures to conform.[10]

Finally, action research is an iterative process in which research is followed by action, then evaluation and then further action. Lewin believed the understanding and learning produced by this process could be more important than any resulting change from it.

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[6] 2011 corporate issues survey (2011). Retrieved from http://www.kenblanchard.com/getattachment/Leading-Research/Research/2011-Corporate-Issues-Survey/Blanchard_2011_Corporate_Issues_Survey.pdf

[7] Burnes, B. (2004). Kurt Lewin and complexity theories: Back to the future? *Journal of Change Management, 4*(4), 309-325.

[8] Lewin, K. (1947a). Frontiers in group dynamics. In (1952) D. Cartwright (Ed.), *Field theory in social science*. London, UK: Social Science Paperbacks.

[9] Lewin, K. (1939). When facing danger. In (1948) G.W. Lewin (Ed.), *Resolving social conflict*. London, UK: Harper & Row.

[10] Lewin, K. (1947b). Group decisions and social change. In (1959) T.M. Newcomb and E.L. Hartley (Eds.), *Reading in social psychology*. New York, NY: Henry Holt.

Lewin also worried that a change in group performance could frequently be short lived and that behaviour would soon return to the previous level.[11] His three-step model of change addresses this common phenomenon. The first step in the model is called "unfreezing." Before people can abandon old behaviour and learn new behaviour, the stable state needs to be "unfrozen." This unfreezing requires different approaches and solutions depending on the context. Unfreezing creates motivation to learn but cannot predict the direction of the change, so the next step is "moving," where force field theory and action research are applied to identify all the forces at work and discover and evaluate the available options. In the last step, "refreezing," a new quasi-stationary equilibrium is reached where people's behaviours are relatively safe from falling back into old patterns.

Getting People to Eat Their Liver[i]

Kurt Lewin formulated and tested much of his thinking while working with anthropologist Margaret Mead in the years just before and after the U.S. involvement in World War Two. Much domestic meat was being shipped overseas to feed soldiers and allies at this time, and the government was concerned that a lengthy war would leave the United States population starved of protein. The potential solution to this protein shortage was variety or organ meats, such as hearts, kidneys, brains, stomachs, intestines and even the feet, ears and heads of cows, hogs, sheep and chickens. The challenge was getting people to incorporate these into their diets. To accomplish this, the department of defense enlisted Margaret Mead, Kurt Lewin and dozens of psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, food scientists, dieticians and home economists to determine how dietary change could be accomplished. These scientists formed the Committee on Food Habits.

First they identified the most influential people or "gatekeepers" in the everyday food choices made by U.S. families. It was typically believed that the man of the house determined what was eaten on the basis of his preferences, but Lewin postulated that the real gatekeeper was the woman of the house because she was the one who shopped for and prepared the family's meals. This was confirmed in a national survey that indicated husbands and children frequently ate what was prepared for them and voiced only strong opposition when the meals became too novel or different. So initial efforts were aimed at the gatekeeper—the cook, who selected, purchased, prepared and served the food.

Initially, most efforts to change eating habits focused exclusively on increasing consumption incentives ("eat nutritiously" and "be patriotic"), but Lewin believed that the focus instead needed to be on systematically determining what barriers prevented someone from eating organ meats in the first place. That is, before giving people the nutritional or patriotic reasons why they should eat liver, it was first important to remove the reasons why they would not eat it. By helping reduce the barriers that discouraged the consumption of organ meats, Lewin believed that the preparation and serving habits of the gatekeeping cook could be changed. Here we clearly see the underpinnings of Lewin's force field analysis.

Research discovered that women didn't buy organ meats because they didn't think it was appropriate for them, didn't think it would taste good and didn't know how to introduce it into meals. These three areas were addressed in research that focused on restructuring social norms, changing perceptions of taste and increasing the assimilation of unfamiliar foods. For example, some people perceived organ meats as useless parts of livestock to be discarded, and others perceived them as appropriate only for rural families or for lower socioeconomic groups.

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[11] Lewin, K., 1947a, 228.

Getting People to Eat Their Liver (Continued)

Changing those perceptions meant changing social norms. The strongest norm at the dinner table was found to be the example set by role models. That is, people's food choices were influenced to a greater degree by the foods eaten by people in their primary reference groups (i.e., groups to which the person has strong emotional ties and frequent personal interactions) than by subordinate reference groups. For example, food habits are set to a great degree during childhood, so to induce future generations to eat organ meats, parents had to be motivated to serve those meats.

Also, foods became more of a social norm when they were aligned with the patriotic obligation to "do one's part for the war effort." As such, organ meats soon became foods that patriots ate, not necessarily foods that poor people ate. The war effort helped make organ meats more socially acceptable. Consuming organ meats was one way of showing support for the war effort on the home front.

All of these efforts to reduce the barriers to trying organ meats and increase the incentives to do so illustrate force field theory in a real setting. But in terms of Lewin's unfreezing, moving and refreezing model, they just temporarily "unfreeze" habits. Next, people had to "move" by actually trying organ meats.

To encourage actual consumption, similar preparation and serving methods to those of regular meats were publicized. Organ meats were made to look familiar through their cuts, shapes and packaging, which also influenced perceptions of taste. Also, as the availability of restricted meats (beef, pork and lamb) decreased at the butcher shop, the availability of organ meats increased. This increased the willingness of gatekeepers to experiment with them. Finally, when first learning how to prepare organ meats, housewives were encouraged to prepare and serve them as they would more familiar meats. Another important insight was that gradually introducing unfamiliar foods helped make them more acceptable because they were then viewed as something novel, not as long-term substitutes.

Furthermore, Lewin believed that if these gatekeepers participated in the decision to try organ meats, they would be more likely to change their behaviours. So he set up a controlled experiment with several groups of housewives. A nutrition expert lectured some groups on the facts as well as the benefits of cooking and consuming organ meats. In other groups, women were given the facts and asked to discuss and create their own meal plans. While 3 percent of the lecture group decided to serve the organ meats, 32 percent of the "discuss and decide ourselves" group prepared the meats for their families.

Fortunately, the war ended before protein shortages became serious. By 1946, most rationing in the United States had been lifted and soldiers were returning home. As a result, the refreezing stage of Lewin's model was not tested, and many of the findings of this effort were shelved as prosperity returned to the United States.

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[i] Based largely on: Wansink, B. (2002). Changing eating habits on the home front: Lost lessons from World War II research. *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing, 21*(1), 90-99.

Lewin's seminal model has been refined over time by many authors. In most of these subsequent models, the three basic stages are present but they are described in different ways and may be divided into more steps. Moreover, they all concur that there is a departing point where the need for change is recognized, a period of complex transformation, and a final stage where the desired outcomes of change are consolidated. Lewin's work has been criticized as simplistic or linear in recent years.[12] Nevertheless, as Chris Hendry commented: "Scratch any account of creating and managing change and the idea that change is a three-stage process which necessarily begins with a process of unfreezing will not be far below the surface."[13]

Elaborations of Lewin's Three-Stage Model of Planned Change

Building on Lewin's work, William Bridges developed a three-stage individual transition process. Stage one is called "ending," in which one gives up one's former situation and identity. The second stage, or "neutral zone," is a difficult journey through ambiguity and dissension as people discover new roles and functions. Finally, individuals reach the last stage, "new beginning," once they have accepted that the change is beneficial.[14]

Another example of Lewin's influence is seen in John Kotter's eight-step approach. He suggests that the first step in a successful change process is establishing a sense of urgency; this is reminiscent of unfreezing. Moving activities follow in his next five steps: creating the guiding coalition; developing a vision and strategy; communicating the change vision; empowering broad-based action; and generating short-term wins. The final two steps are quite similar to refreezing: consolidate gains and produce more change, and anchor new approaches in the organizational culture. A key assumption underlying Kotter's model is that leadership is critical to successful change management and that the leader must champion the initiative by displaying the necessary behaviours to guide and motivate.[15]

Table 1 maps Bridges's and Kotter's approaches plus two others onto Lewin's three-stage model. It shows that although change models have developed with more detail over two decades, they have not contradicted Lewin's work.

Three Approaches to Change and their Applicability[16]

The above approaches fall into the category of planned change initiatives and concentrate on identifying the stages of adaptation to change as well as activities to pursue in each stage. But there are other models, too. For example, Kenneth Kerber and Anthony Buono describe three types of change approaches: command and control (or directed); emergent (or guided); and planned.[17] The command and control approach, while popular with many senior managers, has proven successful only in a limited number of change contexts.[18] Emergent change models are currently in fashion among academic circles because of the high level of participation they entail, but I believe they do not apply well to most change initiatives, and they are not used extensively in most organizational change contexts. Planned change approaches are flexible enough to permit a high degree of consultation and participation from all levels of the organization, and they are widely used and researched.

[12] Kanter, R.M., Stein, B., & Jick, T. (1992). *The challenge of organizational change*. New York, NY: Free Press.

[13] Hendry, C. (1996). Understanding and creating whole organizational change through learning theory. *Human Relations, 48*(5), 621-641.

[14] Bridges, W. (1992). *Managing transitions: Making the most of change*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

[15] Kotter, J. (1996). *Leading change*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

[16] Kerber, K., & Buono, A. (2005). Rethinking organizational change. *Organizational Development Journal, 23*(3), 23-38.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Higgs & Rowland (2005); Beer & Eisenstadt (2000).

Table 1: Lewin's three-stage model mapped onto other change models

Lewin	Bridges (1992)	Kotter (1996)	Kanter, Stein and Jick (1992)	Leucke (2003)
Unfreezing	▪ Ending (separating from the past)	▪ Establishing a sense of urgency	▪ Analyzing the organization and its need for change ▪ Creating a sense of urgency ▪ Separating from the past	▪ Mobilizing energy and commitment through joint identification of business problems and their solutions
Moving	▪ Neutral zone	▪ Creating the guiding coalition ▪ Developing a vision and strategy ▪ Communicating the change vision ▪ Empowering broad-based action ▪ Generating short-term wins	▪ Creating a vision and a common direction ▪ Supporting a strong leader role ▪ Lining up political sponsorship ▪ Crafting an implementation plan ▪ Developing enabling structures ▪ Communicating, involving people and being honest	▪ Developing a shared vision of how to organize and manage for competitiveness ▪ Identifying the leadership ▪ Starting the change at the periphery, then letting it spread to other units without pushing it from the top ▪ Focusing on results, not activities
Refreezing	▪ New beginning	▪ Consolidating gains and producing more change ▪ Anchoring new approaches in the culture	▪ Reinforcing and institutionalizing change	▪ Institutionalizing success through formal policies, systems and structures ▪ Monitoring and adjusting strategies in response to problems in the change process

Command and Control

The command and control approach is driven from the top, relies on authority and compliance, and focuses on coping with people's emotional reactions to change. Leaders plan and announce the change and try to persuade stakeholders to accept it based on business necessity, logical arguments and emotional appeals. This

approach can be quick and decisive, but because change is imposed from the top, it can provoke intense resistance if used inappropriately. When the change involves well-understood actions, when stakeholders agree with and accept the change, or when there is an organizational crisis and swift action is necessary, then this approach can work well. The problem is that managers try to use this approach too often and in the wrong contexts. They also tend to overestimate their persuasiveness and underestimate the amount of resistance they will face, as illustrated in the following case study.

Doomed to Fail[19]

Avinor is an airport management and air navigation services provider delivering a wide range of services to Norwegian airports. It was created after the privatization of a government agency (Luftfartverket). The goal of the privatization was to make services more efficient without disrupting services and without negatively impacting safety.

Avinor quickly faced serious economic problems because its income was too low to cover its costs. Raising prices was not an option, so it embarked upon a change initiative to reduce expenses. The leadership described the situation as dire, and initially the need for change was widely accepted within the company. In March 2003, there was an official kick-off of the change, which was called "Take-Off 05."

The Avinor leadership decided to involve employees directly in the planning process, and brainstorming sessions were held to identify potential cost savings that would be put into a comprehensive implementation plan after an extensive quality control and risk analysis process.

But the consensus for the change process was short-lived, and it was essentially destroyed when the final implementation plan was made public in November 2003. The final version of the Take-Off 05 plan called for a reduction of seven hundred and twenty-five man years over a six-year period, with six hundred and fifty-five redundancies identified within the first two years of the implementation process. This represented over 25 percent of the workforce. The leadership justified the magnitude of the cuts in the report, but the magnitude and speed of the changes did not match expectations, particularly since employees participated in every aspect of the planning process. Most employees expressed a feeling of shock caused by the unexpected depth and breadth of the cuts and changes contained in the final version of Take-Off 05. As one participating employee put it:

> I was totally shocked by the final Take-Off 05 plan as it was presented by the leadership, as it did not truthfully reflect the expectations of the employee members that participated in the planning phase. The leadership simply took all of the potential savings ideas and combined them into one plan that was not integrated as expected and was not sufficiently analyzed for quality or potential risk to safety. In addition, we (employee members of working groups) were looked upon by our colleagues as being personally responsible for the contents of the plan, and this made life very difficult. I regret that I had anything to do with the Take-Off 05 process, and I will never volunteer for anything again within this organization.

The realization that the participative process was not as participative as believed and that cost-cutting in the form of downsizing was the real focus of the change led to a loss of trust in the leadership. This was also followed by an unexpected change in the leadership's approach to implementation—from a participative approach, as formally communicated, to a purely top-down, command and control approach. The loss of trust in the leadership led to resistance, and this was particularly noticeable in Avinor's most powerful subculture—

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[19] Lofquist, E.A. (2011). Doomed to fail: A case study of change implementation collapse in the Norwegian civil aviation industry. *Journal of Change Management, 11*(2), 223-243.

the air traffic controllers, who challenged the cuts on the grounds that there would be too few air traffic controllers to carry out operations. The union also requested that implementation of the plan be delayed pending an investigation of the data supporting the decisions.

The leadership rejected this challenge outright and moved forward with the implementation phase of Take-Off 05. This led to the union sending a letter of no confidence in the CEO to the Avinor board of directors in June 2004, six months into the implementation process. Although the letter was sent by the air traffic controller union, it was supported and signed by all seven trade union representatives at Avinor.

Another important factor in this case was that Avinor leadership enjoyed the full support of the ruling government for its plan even when there were obvious signs that the company's system was under excessive stress. However, this situation changed suddenly when a new labour-friendly government took power in October 2005.

The incoming transport minister was seriously concerned about reports that safety in the aviation industry was deteriorating, and she ordered an independent evaluation of both the Take-Off 05 project and the performance of the Avinor leadership. This resulted in the immediate resignation of the director of air navigation services, closely followed by the unexpected forced departure of the CEO in December 2005. With the replacement of the Avinor chairman of the board in early spring 2006, the Take-Off 05 project was officially terminated.

The Avinor leadership raised employee expectations when they consulted and listened to them but broke trust when they failed to go through all of the planning steps they had promised to employees—namely, an extensive quality control and risk analysis process which would generate a comprehensive implementation plan. Then they abruptly turned to a command and control approach at the first sign of resistance—a recipe for disaster. The lessons: don't promise a participative process if you can't follow it through to the end; don't consult employees if you're not going to listen them; and don't revert to command and control when you encounter resistance.

Emergent

This is an iterative process that begins with an interpretation of the environment followed by the design of the change. Next come implementation and improvisation, learning from the change effort, sharing what was learned across the organization, and redesigning the change to incorporate what was learned. Finally, the organization goes through the change cycle again.

Instead of telling people what to do and how to do it, this approach tries to inspire people to get excited by the possibilities. This approach is consistent with the appreciative inquiry cycle of discovery, dream, design and deliver. Emergent change can generate innovative changes and solutions, but it can also contribute to chaos because continuous changes frustrate and confuse stakeholders and lead to the perception that change will never end. However, if used judiciously with the wide involvement of stakeholders, this approach can generate truly novel ideas that will contribute to competitive advantage.

Planned Change

This is a change process roughly based on project management techniques. It creates the conditions for people to become more involved in both the form and the implementation of the change. Nevertheless, the burden for initiating and sustaining the change still rests with the change planners and implementers, who must achieve a balance between participation and action. This approach has wide applicability; however, if not used skillfully and in the right conditions, it can overwhelm people with its complexity. And if participation is limited, it can alienate key stakeholders, thereby diminishing the ability of the organization to reach its goals. This book is based on the planned change approach and outlines many ways of handling its complexity.

Effective change programs are therefore interactive and iterative. They do not initially define the destination in too much detail and they don't prescribe exactly how change is to be achieved.

Planned Change and Change Success Factors

The planned change model makes intuitive sense. Indeed, Kotter's eight-step approach has gained wide acceptance and application even though it was not originally supported by empirical research. Other authors have filled some of this research gap by studying the relationships between some of the characteristics or activities of the planned change models and change success.

Table 2 details my meta-review of the literature that identifies some of the most frequently reported change success factors of the planned change approach. The studies cited below are all either empirical (both quantitative and qualitative) or meta-analyses of empirical research. This review does not purport to be a complete overview but a good representative selection from the academic research literature. If you want to delve more deeply into any of these success factors, a good starting point would be to read some or all of these studies.

Table 2: Most frequently reported success factors of the planned change approach in empirical studies and meta-analyses

Success Factor	Authors
Creating the need for change and a sense of urgency	Higgs & Rowland (2001); Gebhardt, Carpenter, & Sherry (2006); Pettigrew (1987); Armenakis et al. (1993); Armenakis et al. (1999); Jansen (2004); Holt et al. (2003)
Formulating a clear vision for the change	Beer et al. (1990); Wren & Dulewicz (2005); Cole et al. (2006); Choi (2007)
Communicating about the change	Larkin & Larkin (1996); Holt et al. (2003); Nerina et al. (2007); Wren & Dulewicz (2005); Jorritsma & Wilderom (2012); Gilley et al. (2009); Nelissen & Van Selm (2008); Nerina et al. (2007); Frahm & Brown (2007)
Having a clear change strategy/ implementation plan	Dover (2003); Bruch, Gerber & Maier (2005); Wren & Dulewicz (2005); Rafferty & Griffin (2006); Cole et al. (2006); Bhasin (2012); Washington et al. (2005); Knodel (2004); Bossidy & Charan (2002)
Training and education programs	Jorritsma & Wilderom (2012); Pollitt (2010)
Creating small wins	Wren & Dulewicz (2005)
Aligning systems and policies	Middleton & Harper (2004)
Managing resistance	Washington & Hacker (2005); Strebel (1996); Lozano (2013)
Involvement of key people:	
a) Change agent or champion	Schon (1963); Beatty (1992); Want (1995); Venkateswarlu & Nilakant (2005); Howell & Higgins (1990); Caldwell (2003)
b) Senior management sponsor	Beatty (1992); Want (1995); Caldwell (2003)
c) Steering committee and/or implementation teams	Beatty (1992); Knodel (2004); Cunningham & Kempling (2009)
d) Employee involvement in general	Kim et al. (2011); Higgs & Rowland (2005); Cereste et al. (2003)

The Research

The goal of my research was to investigate the association between successful planned change initiatives and these potential success factors. As we observe in Table 2, there are ample studies of some of the change success factors, but for others empirical research is scarce. In particular, no empirical studies were found to support the importance of two of Kotter's stages: consolidate gains and anchor changes in the culture. As these factors are vaguely defined, poorly supported and difficult to measure, I decided not to include them in my research.

I originally embarked upon this research after some of my students remarked: "But what you're saying is all common sense!" I had to agree that the planned change model is common sense, but that raised two questions. First, if it was all common sense (and the students believed they had common sense), then why were so many change projects unsuccessful? Either people do not apply common sense when they're in the thick of a change initiative, or there were more subtle things happening that common sense could not predict. Second, were some of the recommended activities of planned change models very important and others less so or not at all? My research could help clear up these questions. Thus began a multi-year research effort in which we surveyed over four hundred professionals who were involved in change projects. They came from both public and private sectors, from a wide range of industries in organizations of various sizes, and from almost all provinces across Canada.

The Survey

After a pilot test, we refined a research questionnaire to include a broad set of questions from the planned change literature. This questionnaire was administered to a convenience sample of seminar participants at the Queen's University Industrial Relations Centre. It had two versions—one for successful change projects and one for unsuccessful change projects, both containing the same questions. Respondents were asked to select either the most or least successful change project they had been involved with and to fill out the questionnaire with that project in mind. The research design intentionally weeded out change projects that were neither successful nor unsuccessful—those "stuck in the middle," so to speak. To ensure the projects were at the ends of the success spectrum, we also asked how satisfied the organization was with the results of the change project. We then discarded the "unsuccessful" surveys for which the respondent reported the organization was satisfied because this is obviously a contradiction. Similarly, we discarded the "successful" surveys of projects for which the respondent rated organizational satisfaction as low. Data from the completed surveys were directly entered into a database, and data analysis was performed by our team of professionals.[20]

The database was then examined and data was removed for those respondents who did not fill out at least 70 percent of the questionnaire. This reduced the number of cases down to four hundred and thirty-two. Roughly 15 percent of the projects in the database were classified by the respondents as "unsuccessful" and "very unsatisfied" with the results of the change. Twenty-one percent of the projects were classified as "unsuccessful" and "somewhat unsatisfied" with the results of the change. Thirty-two percent were classified as "successful" and "somewhat satisfied," while the remaining 30 percent were deemed "successful" and "very satisfied."

We were concerned that respondents seemed more reluctant to fill out the questionnaire about unsuccessful projects than successful ones, but we believed that data analysis would not be unduly jeopardized by this fact. Obviously a more balanced ratio would have been preferable. Nevertheless, we performed a correlation analysis to identify which factors were most closely associated with change success (see Table 3).

Table 3: Correlations between the variables investigated and change success

Variable	Correlation[i]
1. Transition structure—the "who" of change:	
Skilled change champion	0.588
Skilled executive sponsor	0.468
Skilled steering committee	0.494
Skilled implementation teams	0.486
2. Change process steps/stages:	
Felt need for change/urgency	0.492
Clear vision for the change	0.458
Having a clear implementation plan/strategy/roadmap	0.568
3. Components of the implementation plan:	
Management of resistance	0.558
Clear change strategy/plan	0.512
Communication	0.567
Pilot projects	0.205
Site visits	0.258
Celebration of small wins	0.458
Alignment of systems with the change	0.332
Training	0.398
4. Pattern of support at beginning of project:	
Strong supporters	0.360
Resistors	-0.311
Bystanders	-0.054

[i] All of the correlations were significant at the .01 level except the percentage of bystanders at the beginning of the project.

The correlation analysis supports the success factors identified in the literature review in Table 2. Of particular note is the magnitude of the relationship between change success and the implementation plan, a skilled change champion, a skilled steering committee and having strong supporters at the beginning of the change project. Because we included many factors in the original implementation plan category, we broke this broad category down into smaller scales. Of these smaller scales, managing resistance, having a clear and shared change strategy or roadmap, and communication about the change were most associated with success.

Change Implementation is Tough

You may recall that this research tried to determine the essential steps to take to increase the success of planned change initiatives. As it turns out, many steps and actions are important, and this may be one of the reasons change implementation is so tough. A haphazard approach rarely works, if ever. Managers must pay attention to many factors, not forget any essential activities and undertake them in an order that will make sense to stakeholders. I hope this research will help you navigate the labyrinth of change and find the path to success.

About the Author

Carol Beatty is former Director of the Industrial Relations Centre at Queen's University at Kingston, Ontario, and an Associate Professor with Queen's School of Business, where she has taught in undergraduate, graduate and executive education programs.

An acknowledged expert on change management, strategy development, high performance teams and facilitation, Dr. Beatty focuses her consulting on human and organizational issues in modern organizations. She has studied the implementation of change for over 25 years, including technological change, strategic change, mergers and acquisitions, structural change, and employee buyouts.

An active researcher, she is currently completing a multi-faceted study on the key success factors of change management, comprised of a large-scale survey and several detailed case studies. She is also well-known for her major study of high-performance teams in which she isolated the three skill sets teams need to develop to be effective. Dr. Beatty's publications have appeared in such journals as the *Sloan Management Review, Human Relations,* the *California Management Review* and the *Business Quarterly*. She completed her MBA and PhD at the Ivey School of Business at the University of Western Ontario.

Carol is a sought-after consultant and speaker who has helped many private and public sector organizations become more effective. She is a trained facilitator in Future Search (Weisbord and Janoff) and Whole System Change (Dannemiller Tyson).

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