

# **The Case for Change at Humber College: The HRMS Innovation Project – Part 1**

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## Introduction

Organizational change is a constant challenge today and plays a significant role for organizational leadership in institutions of higher education. On a daily basis organizations are challenged to improve their business performance, and take on new and exciting projects, often as a result of a change in strategy or to increase business effectiveness. With change management becoming an increasingly important part of what leaders do, current organizational change literature is suggesting that senior management commitment is critical to the success of organizational change efforts (Herold and Fedor, 2008; Herzig & Jimmieson, 2006; Karp & Helgo, 2008; Raes, Glunk, Heijltjes & Roe, 2007).

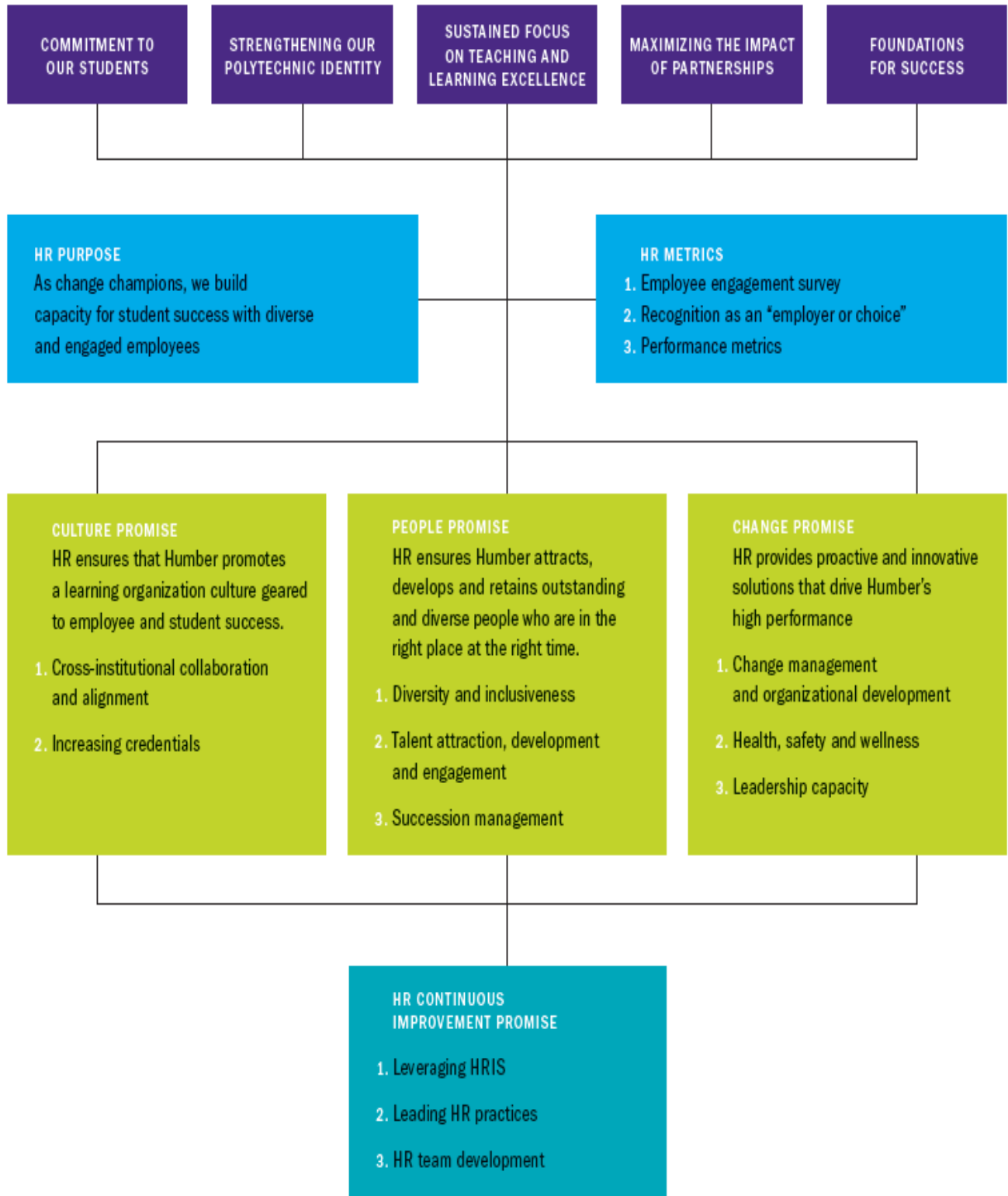
## Project Rationale - The Case for Change

Humber College Institute of Technology & Advanced Learning located in Toronto, Ontario, Canada is a founding member of Polytechnics Canada and one of the nation's leading educational institutions. Humber has three campuses: North (Finch and 427); Lakeshore (Kipling and Lake Shore); and Orangeville, offering more than 170 full-time programs including 21 degree programs across 40 fields of study; more than 40 online programs and more than 500 online courses. Our campuses are home to more than 27,000 full-time students, 56,000 continuing education registrants, more than 2,000 apprentices, and more than 3,000 students in Humber's own four-year degree programs. As one of Ontario's 24 colleges, Humber's mission is to provide learners of all kinds with access to and opportunity for postsecondary education within Ontario's publicly funded higher education system.

On an annual basis, more Ontario students enroll in college than in university. In fall 2013, 58 percent of new applicants to postsecondary education in Ontario enrolled in a public college. The gap between the number of workers available and employers seeking qualified employees is widening. The aging population, global competition and continuing technological changes in the workplace are resulting in an increased demand for workers with specialized knowledge and skills. According to a report by Skills Development Canada (2013) nearly 550,000 Canadian workers will not have the skills needed to fill available jobs in 2016; another 1.5 million skilled jobs will be unfilled due to shortages of trained workers. Humber is excited about the opportunity this provides to educate and develop highly skilled and adaptable graduates who will be critical to the future of our Province.

Over the past two years Humber College has undergone significant change towards being strategically positioned as the leader in Polytechnic education in Ontario. In September 2013 Humber launched a revitalized brand to support student success. Humber values innovation and is committed to the spirit of continuous improvement.

**HR Strategic Framework – in support of Humber College Strategy 2013 – 2018**



In supporting Humber's value of innovation, Human Resources Services (HRS) over the next year and a half, will undertake a transformational change initiative to our HR systems most notably with the design and implementation of a new Human Resources Management System (HRMS) technology business platform for managing our HR processes. We are committed to a renewed HR brand through innovation, and the HRMS Innovation Project is directly tied to our HR promise of "continuous improvement" as detailed in our strategic plan. Further, we are responding to the demands and needs of our client groups for enhanced service delivery, and the College's strategic plan.

Our vision for the new HRMS extends far beyond payroll, personnel, time and contract management to a broader solution including total compensation, employee and contract management, self-service, workforce planning, labour relations, talent management/data analytics capabilities which include succession planning, performance management, recruiting, and support for professional learning management. The HRMS Innovation Project will manage the development and implementation of the "ideal" fully integrated Human Resources Management System.

Humber HR is committed to establishing and executing a deliberate set of activities that facilitate and support the success of both individual and organizational changes and building employee capacity towards student success.

Effective change leadership ensures the design of flexible change management efforts, based on the unique characteristics of the change and the culture of the organization experiencing change (Herold & Fedor, 2008; Karp & Helgo, 2008). There are a growing number of change management and project management models (Cooke-Davies, 2008; Legris & Collerette, 2006; Shenhar & Dvir, 2007) adopted by businesses today that assist with the integration and management of the tremendous amount of change these projects bring to an organization. As Humber undergoes a period of change to its business operations, employees are being introduced to a host of transformational projects and initiatives. The college will benefit from a consistent and optimized approach to managing change to ensure that impacted employees are supported before, during and after the many changes underway and as the future unfolds at Humber. The HRMS Innovation Project will continue to benefit from the on-going support and direction provided by the executive leadership at Humber.

More recent studies of organizational change focus exclusively on the leadership of senior managers (Appelbaum, Berke, Taylor & Vazquez, 2008; Herold & Fedor, 2008; Herzig & Jimmieson, 2006; Raes, Glunk, Heijltjes & Roe, 2007). Recognition of the sponsorship role in improving the success rates of projects indicates a key theme has emerged around the pivotal role the sponsor performs in influencing the success or failure of the project (Crawford, Cooke-Davies, Hobbs, Labuschagne, Remington & Chen, 2008). This endorsement and active involvement in the change process

demonstrates to others in the organization that the change is meaningful. Change leadership infers that leaders have a responsibility (Ackerman-Anderson & Anderson, 2001; Weick & Quinn, 1999) to guide an organization through a course of change by providing direction and support throughout the process. Leaders are encouraged to exemplify change leadership behaviours (Karp & Helgo, 2008), set a vision, and communicate effectively in a way that their organization understands and will want to follow the new direction of change. Changing the attitudes and values of staff, selling the vision, implementing the change and sustaining it were concepts added to new change models (Kotter, 1996; Lacroix, 2001; Mento, Jones & Dirndorfer, 2002).

To manage a change successfully, both the anticipated changes brought about by project initiatives and unexpected changes, the type of change and the dimensions associated with the change have to be clearly defined (Gareis, 2009). HR Services will tailor change management methodologies, tools and approaches to address Humber's unique situations and culture.

The new HRMS technology business platform and the associated maintenance of tools, business processes and new skills will become part of our ongoing operations, along with change management efforts. The focus for this next year will be to help staff effectively prepare for and design the use of the systems, assisting staff to embrace new processes and technology.

The recommended strategy for leading transformational change is comprised of several plans to address the change barriers potentially impacting the college. This requires initiatives in communication, training, business strategy and readiness, organizational development, and leadership sponsorship.

Current HR activities at Humber (both core process and strategic) entail manual documentation and effort, multiple data sources, multiple systems, and siloed activities which challenge our ability to provide efficient and timely service to our employees and stakeholders.

The introduction of an HRM system is considered transformational and will provide innovative possibilities for HRS and Humber employees.

There is strong evidence that implementing a systematic approach to change (Appelbaum, Berke, Taylor, & Vazquez, 2008; Griffith-Cooper & King, 2007), greater accountability through expectations, building competencies for taking responsibility for change (Bass, 1990; Hollander, 1978; Rost; 1993), and creating open dialogue (Barrett, Thomas & Hocevar, 1995) all contribute to creating the right climate for facilitating and sustaining change.

Organizational change today, aligned with the overall strategy, requires an organizational model and organizational leadership that is dynamic and responsive. Griffith-Cooper & King (2007)

suggests the connection between project management and change management is simply that most projects cause change and in order for the project to be successful the changes caused by the project need to be proactively managed (Harrington, Conner & Horney, 2002) to minimize the impact. Factors that can negatively impact technology project implementation include unsatisfactory change management and control, incomplete goal specifications and lack of communication, and underestimation of project complexity. Our approach, therefore, will be to develop an evidence-based framework on which the phases of the project will be measured. We are inspired by the research in change management and project implementation, and the HRMS Innovation Project will be informed by these best practices towards successful implementation.

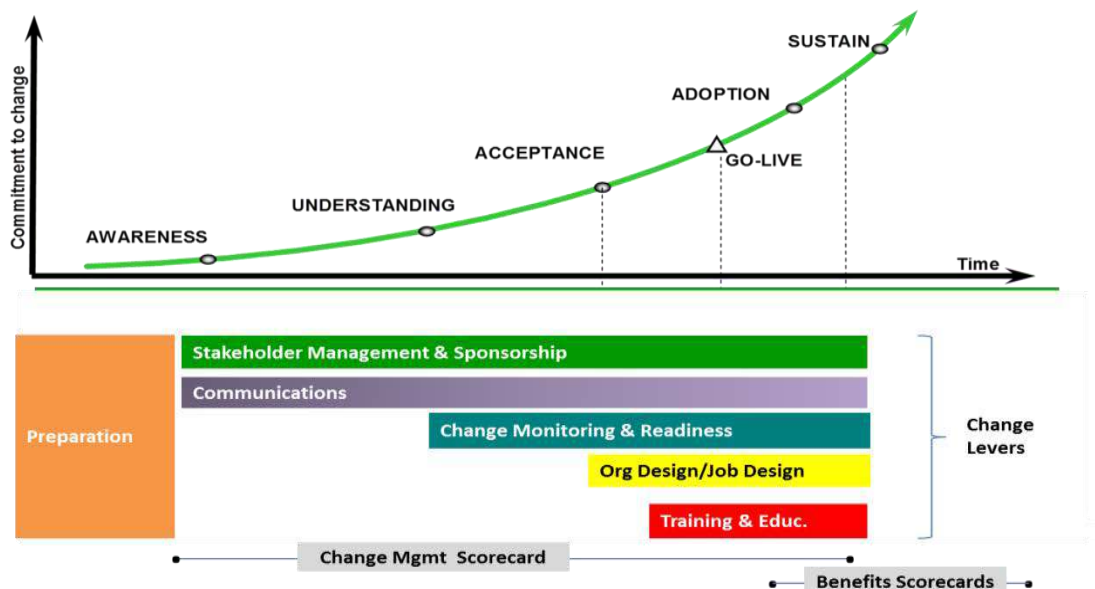
**Framework: Change Management Integration with Project Management**

**TECHNICAL Perspective: Project Management**



**PEOPLE Perspective: Change Management**

**The Change Commitment Curve – Overview**



Throughout the life of the HRMS Innovation Project we will document and share our experiences, and this installment will provide insights into the strategic and operational planning phase (initiation and preparation) and lessons learned from other technology implementation at Humber.

The innovation was officially launched in July 2014 with an all-day working session that produced a work plan for the initiation and procurement phase with an aggressive timeline July – December 2014. The key deliverable being the development of a Request For proposal (RFP) for a System Integrator (SI) to implement a new HR software solution. To successfully support this initiative we identified the following critical success factors:

- The solution must be able to be integrated with key systems already at Humber.
- The solution must be user friendly for all HR users and Humber stakeholders.
- The preferred solution will meet our needs with little or no customization required.

### **Early Communication Framework:**

Communication is critical to the success of this initiative and an early communication protocol for the project team involved in this phase of the project was developed to manage communication – who says what and when.

The early communications strategy and plan outlines communications principles and guidelines for supporting engagement across impacted stakeholder groups during the procurement stage.

- A high level early communications strategy and plan is critical during the procurement phase to set the stage for stakeholder engagement around the new HRMS.
- As implementation approaches, principles and guidelines (from step I) will be incorporated into the development of a more robust and comprehensive communication plan, according to project timelines and impact to specific stakeholders groups (as per the key steps below):



Our key stakeholders at all levels across the college have been kept informed in “real time” of the progress of the project.

### **Stakeholder Consultations:**

The initial consultations involved key stakeholders from across the college that produce and use human resources information and included Human Resources, the Academic Schools; Financial Services & Planning; Strategic, Planning and Institutional Analysis; Planning & Government Relations; Advising & Student Academic Support; Facilities Business Intelligence; Information Technology Services.

The timing of the initiation of the project had its own challenges – taking place over the summer months when most employees had planned vacation. Respecting the college’s schedule and competing priorities, we developed a robust stakeholder consultation framework which would allow us to engage as many of the stakeholders across the college community as well as in HR. It also required us to develop creative ways of reaching out to those who would not otherwise participate due to their holiday schedule. It is worthy to note that as word got out about the project, other stakeholders from across the college also reached out to be included in the initial consultations.

## **Employee Readiness and Change Management**

Prior to the official announcement of the project the HR leadership was proactive and initiated the upskilling of managers across the college and our HR team in preparation for the HR innovation through initiatives such as:

- Leading Change Workshops - *for managers across the college including those in HR.*
- Driving for Innovation Workshops – *a series of workshops for HR leaders facilitated by an external consultant specializing in innovation, leadership and human resources.*
- Wellness Sessions – *a series of sessions for all HR employees facilitated by consultant from our EAP provider.*
- HR leadership and team meetings – *opportunity for team members to be educated about the progress of the project and to share ideas/concerns/questions.*

These initiatives will be of great support to those who are expected to be change agents in their work teams, as we begin to trickle messages of change to individual teams. As well, assuring employees that while the change ahead is considered to be transformational, we will provide the support needed for ongoing skill development, transitions and change.

With the variety of models, frameworks and theoretical perspectives available and encompassing the nature of organizational change, there is a consensus that organizational transformations involving



large scale, strategic change require a planned approach – a roadmap for providing direction on how to arrive at your desired state.

We have a unique perspective on the people challenges and opportunities at the college, and this also has informed our approach to change management initiatives during the procurement phase and those to be developed for the project implementation. As well, we will leverage the information from the initial stakeholder consultations to gauge the attitudes of employees towards this change initiative.

Our communications about the change will be based on:

- Articulating the Purpose – *giving employees reasons to move away from the status quo*
- Sharing the big picture – *articulating the long term vision that is anticipated as part of the new system*
- Describing how employees will be affected: *what roles they will play, and how they will be supported*
- Present the plan: *how to move from the current state to the future state*

#### **Lessons learned from our back yard:**

An understanding of how previous projects have been undertaken at Humber will be important to the success of our initiative. Therefore, prior to the initiation phase of the project we consulted with leaders of recent technology implementation for their insights on the lessons they learned from software implementation. Some of these are highlighted below:

- **Communication:** Invest resources in an effective communication model for the project (sometimes too busy implementing and not communicating in “real time”). When communicating the impact of the changes for individual jobs, reinforce the message that the changes can also result in new opportunities.
- **Project Resources:** Project team members should be assigned full time on the project. Identify/invite employees who “want” to be on the project team, not necessarily those considered to be the best skilled; this will ensure commitment to the project.
- **Software Testing:** When selecting individuals to work in the test environment also include those who might not be as technically strong to test the system as they can bring to the fore some issues that might not otherwise surface. When developing the testing schedule, be mindful of the college’s calendar as well as vacation schedules and organize accordingly.
- **Change Management Program:** In-house development and delivery of the change management program will ensure relevance and effectiveness.

- **On Boarding - Project Team and Consultants:** Develop protocol for on-boarding and off-boarding of project team members.
- **Knowledge Transfer:** Develop framework to ensure knowledge transfer from System Integration (SI) Consultants to Humber employees.
- **Employee Empowerment/Support:** Encourage employees' creativity and risk taking – towards commitment and reduce the fear of failure. Reinforce the organization's support for employees while they are on the project.

After more than 30 hours of stakeholder consultations, weekly project update meetings, a two-day Vendor Information Session and approval from Humber's executive stakeholders on the RFP content, we have gone to market with a RFP for the new HRMS. The timeline for RFP process is set for September – December 2014 with a project initiation and kick off planned for January 2015.

We are committed to the development of a strong foundation on which to build this innovation through a comprehensive, engaging, compelling and impactful change framework; we will continue to engage our stakeholders over the next couple of months in preparation for the project kick off.

This paper represents the first in a conversation series of white papers that will follow this case study throughout its project lifecycle and describe the College's journey in implementing a major change initiative. In our next paper, we will share our experiences on early employee adoption to a changing work environment, communication and stakeholder relations, change monitoring and readiness, training, technology management and quality assurance.

## About the Authors



**Kathy Cowan Sahadath** is the Director of Human Resources at Humber College Institute of Technology & Advanced Learning in Toronto Ontario Canada. She leads the HR Services team in providing HR support and consulting services to employees and oversees the "people systems," including organizational/individual performance systems, project/change management, human resource planning, staffing, labour/employee relations, benefits and compensation programs, and aligning business objectives with human resource programs. Kathy has more than 30 years of business experience in the electricity sector. Prior to joining Humber in 2013, Kathy held several senior Human Resource positions and was a Change Leader at Hydro One in Toronto, Ontario Canada. Kathy's professional education includes an undergraduate degree from the University of Waterloo in Psychology, an MBA in Project Management from Athabasca University, a Masters of Arts degree in Human and Organizational Development from Fielding Graduate University, and a PhD in Human and Organizational Systems specializing in the area of organizational change and leadership also from Fielding Graduate University, in Santa Barbara California.



**Althea L Gordon** is the Human Resources Manager, HRMS Business Solutions at Humber College and has more than 17 years of professional Human Resources experience in various strategic roles in corporate, government and educational sectors. Prior to joining Humber in 2014, Althea held the position of Associate Director, Faculty Affairs at York University where she lead a strategic mandate to operationalize the strategic planning priorities accountable for establishing a cohesive and effective HR system in the area of Faculty Experience including academic hiring, career and succession planning, labour relations, compensation, grievance administration, dispute resolution, coaching and mentoring. She also helps the next generation of HR professionals hone their skills through a part-time faculty position at York University in the School of Human Resources Management. Althea's academic background includes a B.Sc. (Hon) in Management Studies at the University of the West Indies (Mona) and a Masters in Human Resources Management (MHRM) from York University.

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