QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY IRC

The Who of Change

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Ideally, everyone in the organization should be working to make the change happen, but if that is not feasible, get as many involved as possible.

The Work of Change Planners: Easy, Hard and Tough

Both planners and implementers are essential players in change. Obviously, organizational change initiatives are planned in advance before they are implemented, usually by a more senior group than the implementers. Normally they do the easy parts first, which consist of deciding on a needed change, defining the project that will result in the desired outcomes, creating a business case, and deciding which stakeholders will be impacted by the change.

Then comes the hard work. It includes gathering the information needed to prove there is actually a need for this change, creating a vision of the desired future, deciding on how much involvement other levels of the organization will have during the change process, and setting up a transition structure to manage the change project through to completion.

What is often neglected is the tough work. The tough work involves coming up with the right change, one that will really move the organization forward to success. Imitating other organizations' strategies and ideas is not tough work and often leads to management fads so vehemently scorned by employees as more "flavours of the month."

Creative and strategic thinking is tough work. So is prioritizing changes and concentrating on the really important ones instead of setting up twenty change projects and expecting the organization to implement them all. And tough work also includes convincing a sufficient number of stakeholders to buy into the change being proposed—stakeholders who could include political masters, stock market analysts, the executive team, the board of directors, senior managers and union leaders. My research shows that beginning a change project without strong support from the outset makes it much more difficult to reach the desired outcomes. And just because planners may have the "right" change, does not automatically mean that others will agree. Convincing them is tough but necessary work.

Furthermore, the senior level planners often work in isolation from the rest of the organization, so when they hand off the ball for implementation, they may fail to understand that their change plan is not detailed enough for implementers to carry out. I call this the "iron curtain between planning and implementation." This iron curtain effect is exacerbated if the planners arrogantly assume that they are the smart people who develop plans for employees lower down to execute. Then, if things go awry, the blame is often placed squarely at the feet of the implementers, who somehow couldn't implement a "perfectly sound plan." The tough work for planners includes admitting that change will not implement itself, convincing people of the need for the change, staying focused, and staying involved right through to the end—not moving on to the next bright idea.

Change formulation and implementation are separate processes, but they are interdependent, and successful outcomes are best achieved when those responsible for implementation are also part of the planning. The greater the interaction between planners and implementers, and the greater the overlap of the two processes, the higher the probability of a successful implementation. Furthermore, planners should be thinking about implementation even as they are putting together their plans. This is why I recommend the person or persons responsible for implementation are part of the planning team or are brought in early to help answer the following questions brought up during the planning phase:

1. **Why do we need this change?**
   a. What is the rationale for this change? What proof do we have that the change is necessary? What data and information do we have to prove the need for change to the rest of the organization? What other information do we need to gather? Have we produced a sound business case?
   b. What are the internal and external drivers of the change? What are the implications of these drivers? How are we doing in comparison to our competitors and/or other model organizations?
   c. What is working well and why? What is not working well and why?
   d. How are we doing in key performance areas such as quality, client service, time to market, costs, revenues, profits, market share, innovation, employee perceptions, and so forth? How do we measure up with respect to key measures (e.g., quality, client service, time to market, costs, revenues, profits, market share, innovation, employees)?
   e. Does the proposed change respond to an imperative from above? Is it problem focused or opportunity focused?
   f. How urgent is the change? How fast must we move and why?
   g. What will likely happen if we do not introduce this change?
   h. What type of change is involved? Will it be a change in organization structure? In clients or markets served? In general strategy? In organizational culture?
   i. How big will this change be? Will it involve a large part of the organization or just a small area? Will it change everything about the way we work or just a small proportion? Will it require a lot of new skills or just some retraining?
   j. What outcomes do we hope to achieve with this change? What measures of success can we establish upfront?

2. **What is our vision?**
   a. What is our vision of the future for the organization after this change is implemented?
   b. How much will stakeholders be involved in creating, testing and modifying the vision?
   c. Is it a motivating vision? Is it clear, well-communicated, desirable to those who must implement it and live with it, focused, vivid and inspirational?

3. **How will we implement the change?**
   a. What type of change approach should we use? Command and control? Emergent? Planned? A combination?
   b. What transition structure should we establish? How will we coordinate the work of various groups and individuals?
   c. Who are the key stakeholders and how will they react to the change? What can we do to get them on board early?

If these questions are addressed in detail and shared with the rest of the organization, the answers should provide solid ground for the implementers to accomplish their work. If they are not dealt with adequately, the initiative may be off to a shaky start. However, let's now assume that the planners have done their job well and turn our attention to the transition structure for change, namely those individuals and groups responsible for implementation.

The Work of Change Implementers

Until implementation begins, the change initiative is only an idea. And of the two groups, planners and implementers, the implementers have the more difficult work. Whereas planning may take months, implementation usually takes much longer, involves a lot more people and demands more work, especially the tough work.

Implementers are often overwhelmed by the tasks confronting them, so an important place to start is reviewing and completing the transition structure for implementation, which is made up of the individuals and groups that will guide the change initiative all the way to the desired outcomes. This transition structure may be partially set up already by the planners but if not, it should be the first task of implementation. It is extremely important to the success of the change, as shown in the highlighted research below.

Research Evidence on the Impact of Transition Structure on Change Success

My first investigation into the impact of transition structures on change success was in 1992, when I studied the implementation of factory automation systems over three years.[i] There were ten factory automation projects examined in this study; five of them were successful and five were not. The strongest finding: all of the successful projects had a skilled change champion, and all but one of the unsuccessful projects lacked such a person. (All had an assigned manager, but they didn't all have what I defined as a skilled champion.) Furthermore, the study also highlighted the importance of having an executive sponsor and implementation teams working alongside the champion.

Because this was a small sample study, I decided to do a larger study using a survey methodology to confirm or disprove these findings and to investigate other areas that may also be keys to successful change. Over the period of approximately five years, my colleagues at the Queen's Industrial Relations Centre and I collected survey data about successful and unsuccessful change initiatives. The survey database now contains over four hundred and thirty different change projects. Respondents were asked a consistent set of questions about the details of a change project in their organization, and they were also asked to rate the project's success in terms of meeting goals and overall satisfaction with the outcomes. Using correlation analysis we determined to what extent change success was associated with having a skilled change champion, executive sponsor, steering committee and implementation teams (among other factors). Table 1 presents the results of this analysis.

Table 1: Correlations between transition structure and change success

Change factor	Correlation with change success	
	Entire sample [a]	Public sector [b]
Skilled change champion	0.59	0.62
Skilled executive sponsor	0.47	0.40
Skilled steering committee	0.49	0.45
Skilled implementation teams	0.49	0.48

[a] N = 432

[b] N = 164

A Model Transition Structure

Figure 1 (see page 5) presents a model transition structure that has proven to be robust in many contexts. The size of the transition structure should fit the size of the initiative, so if the initiative is small or limited to one department, the transition structure may not need to be as complete as the model described below. The model is scalable in that you can add to it or take parts away from it depending on the size of the change initiative. However, the essentials are the change champion, the executive sponsor and the steering committee. Obviously it will not be difficult to decide on the overall responsibility structure for your change, but it will be harder deciding which organizational members should be invited or assigned to work on the change. In my experience, it takes careful thought and quite a bit of time to make these decisions. Don't gloss over this work. If you get the right people, they will fulfill their change tasks with more skill and enthusiasm than those who aren't right for the job. And the reverse is also true.

Note that any number of implementation teams and sub-teams can be added to the structure as well as other bodies, such as an advisory group, that report to the steering committee. The champion should be part of the steering committee, whereas the executive sponsor need not be and most often is not.

To ensure maximum coordination among all parts of the transition structure, people should be cross-appointed or designated as liaisons between the levels. For example, one member of the steering committee should sit on an implementation team either as leader, member or liaison. Furthermore, meetings among team and group leaders ought to be held regularly to keep the whole project moving forward in a concerted manner. The question often arises of whether the champion should be the leader or the chair of the steering committee. This choice could be different for each change project depending on the circumstances, so there is no hard-and-fast answer. Another question is whether the executive sponsor and champion roles can be filled by a single individual. The short answer is yes. Sometimes a senior leader involved in planning a change wants to lead the implementation phase, and this can work out very well indeed. But whether the executive sponsor also serves as the change champion often depends on the magnitude of the risks and rewards of the project. In smaller, more limited challenges implementation is often given to a champion at a lower level than the executive sponsor.
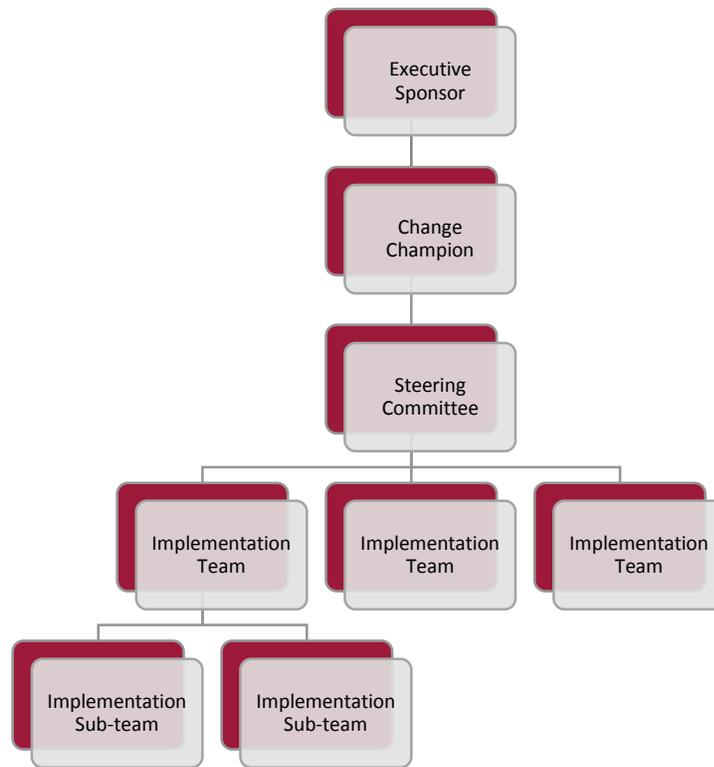
Figure 1: A model transition structure.

Setting up a transition structure is relatively easy. The hard work is in coordinating this core network of individuals, teams and resources to promote extensive information sharing and ensuring continuing support of the change initiative. An effective transition structure requires each of its independent parts to come together and operate as one. Much like walking, the success of the transition structure will depend on the extent to which each of its parts are coordinated to move the organization towards its final destination.

The Work of the Executive Sponsor: Easy, Hard and Tough

The ideal transition structure has an executive sponsor. Some organizations call this person by another title but the role remains the same. Both executive sponsors and champions play leadership roles. The roles differ, although there is some overlap. In my observation, many executive sponsors become less involved and enthusiastic about a change project as the implementation proceeds and perhaps drags on. This can be a big pitfall. Getting and maintaining the involvement and commitment from the right executive sponsor is important to helping the champion and steering committee through the tough work of implementation.

The executive sponsor is usually not involved in the day-to-day management of the change project. This person is typically more senior to the change champion and preferably has played a part in planning the change project. The ideal executive sponsor offers strong support for the change and should share a common change vision with the champion.

In their enthusiasm, change champions can sometimes expand beyond their mandate, so the sponsor can play a helpful role in keeping the project within the agreed upon scope and boundaries. But if the change champion does take unauthorized risks—and that is certainly necessary at times—the sponsor can give permission or at

least forgiveness after the fact. Furthermore, an important role of the sponsor is to help the champion when he or she is discouraged. Usually the sponsor has been through difficult organizational change before and can offer good advice. The change champion will probably bump up against resource constraints that were not anticipated in the planning phase as well, so the sponsor can help by securing the time, people and budget necessary to see the change project through to a successful outcome.

The tough work of the executive sponsor also entails protecting both the project and its champion. Powerful people who are enemies of the change may try to destroy the change champion's credibility in order to stop the change from gaining momentum. The executive sponsor should be on the lookout for these forces and neutralize them. This is tough work and demands political acumen, courage and risk taking.

So, in summary, an ideal executive sponsor works closely with the champion and offers:

1. A shared vision of the change
2. Scope and boundaries
3. Permission or forgiveness
4. Advice and mentoring
5. Resources
6. Protection of the champion

If you have taken on the role of executive sponsor, ask yourself if you are ready, willing and able to do the work described above. If not, implementation may proceed slowly or may stall completely. If you are the change champion, ask yourself if you have an executive sponsor able to fulfill the role well. If not, you may want to find one or more sponsors. Otherwise the project may be tough slogging.

The Work of the Change Champion

Although not the entire story, I believe much of change failure begins with the lack of a skilled and committed change champion, or what the late great management guru Peter Drucker called "a monomaniac with a mission."[1] It is extremely important that the organization choose this person carefully. Do not, under any circumstances, assign this role to someone who is about to be "put out to pasture" and so has time to fill. That is a recipe for failure. Also be careful about giving the crucial task of leading the implementation to a project manager unless this person has the skills we describe below. And please do not hire an external consultant to fill this role. Although a consultant may be able to give expert advice, he or she is no substitute for a skilled internal change champion and should be confined to an advisory role.

The next question, then, is what skills and attributes does the change champion need? After studying a large number of change leaders, I believe that the following attributes and skills are essential to their success. I call these the "Five Ps."

Passion and Vision

The champion should be passionate about both the organization and the type of change being planned. Passion is contagious and pulls people in the direction of the change. A vision of what the organization can achieve and become after the change is implemented helps to create commitment, inspiration and motivation by connecting and aligning people intellectually and emotionally to the organization.

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[1] Drucker, P. (1979). *Adventures of a bystander* (1st ed.). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

Persuasion

Leading change is largely about convincing people to buy into the future direction, so the champion must be persuasive and realize the role requires selling the change throughout the organization. The champion must sell, explain, motivate, educate and network—all the time.

Partnership

No change leader operates alone. Support from the senior executive team is critical, so the first and most important group to get on board is the senior leadership group. Furthermore, the champion needs a cadre of "missionaries" and "disciples" deeper down in the organization, including supervisors, managers, employees and even union leaders. The ability to form alliances with individuals and groups—and to convert them into supporters of the change—is essential.

Planning

A change leader must also create a detailed plan to reach the desired outcomes. Thinking about the why, what and how of the project; filling in the details; planning the sequencing; and so forth are all part of change implementation planning. If the champion doesn't have these skills or is not detail oriented, a project manager can be a big help. And remember that initial plans will likely need revising along the way. Flexibility is important.

Perseverance

Many companies make it through the initial stages of change but falter when things revert back to the way things were. That's when perseverance is especially required. One of the most difficult things for a passionate champion to do is persist until the rest of the organization catches up. Change always takes longer than people estimate, and so perseverance pays off.

If the champion does not possess all of these skills and attributes, his or her subordinates, other members of the steering committee, external consultants, or secondments may help make up for this lack. For example, a champion who is not well versed in corporate communications may benefit from a communications expert seconded to the steering committee. If you are the change champion, think about your potential shortcomings and obtain the help you need. If you are the executive sponsor, use the Five Ps to guide your selection of a change champion, and offset any skill gaps by complementary appointments to the steering committee. The following stories of two champions illustrates what can happen when you have a skilled champion versus one who does not possess all of the Five Ps.

The Work of the Steering Committee: Easy, Hard and Tough

The steering committee owns the change process (as opposed to the content) and makes sure that everyone stays on track. They must integrate all of the micro changes that make up the overall initiative and ensure they make sense for all areas of the organization. The steering committee is also responsible for overseeing and managing the change from start to finish.

Many organizations have what they call a "steering committee" that is really an executive committee which may or may not be very involved in the change initiative. A real steering committee remains very engaged throughout implementation, preferably right to the end, and this body is important to implementation success because, as we see from the following list, it has a lot of work to do.

Two Stories, Two Outcomes

During one of my first research investigations[i], I met quite a few technology advocates. These individuals were trying to implement a CAD/CAM system, a technology that integrates the design and manufacturing of products through the use of computers. Although CAD/CAM is a widely accepted technology today, it was a relatively new concept when I first interviewed these individuals. Two of those individuals were Mark and Roy (not their real names). The contrast between them shows how the concepts of passion, planning, persuasion, partnership and perseverance affect the adoption of CAD/CAM, but their stories apply equally to any organization trying to introduce new technology.

Mark

Mark was a believer. His passionate opinion was that an integrated CAD/CAM system was vital to his company's health and that, in his words, "no one is going to be able to stop the introduction of CAD/CAM, just slow the tide." Articulate and convincing, Mark used various strategies to convert the non-believers in his telecommunications equipment firm. For example, he invited the vice president of operations and the vice president of research and development to accompany him to a design automation conference to help convince them that the new technology would help them and the company. His goal was to make at least one good "conversion" per year. By this he meant somebody placed highly enough to effect change in their area.

Mark had both a technology plan and a conversion plan. He became the resident CAD/CAM guru, and what he lacked in knowledge of computers and programming he made up for by hiring a subordinate with these skills. Even more importantly, he educated himself in all facets of manufacturing the product and was able to offer assistance in such micro matters as using CAD/CAM to aid in board assembly on the shop floor.

He also had a conscious plan to convert different parts of the company, targeting one unit at a time and showing members how the technology could help them. After conversion, they helped him convince other units. This worked so well that in the end they almost believed it had been their idea in the first place. Realizing the research and development and manufacturing teams had differing perspectives, Mark spoke to each in terms and benefits they could relate to. He also sat on or chaired a number of committees working on technology issues and used every opportunity to sell his vision of CAD/CAM.

But Mark needed perseverance as well. It took him six years from the time he started advocating for the new technology until his business plan was finally approved, and it took him another two years to get manufacturing on board. To some extent, this delay could be blamed on factors beyond his control—a turbulent period in the company's history complete with frequent restructurings, a major downsizing, and the takeover of the company by a large international firm. He also lacked an executive sponsor. Nonetheless, Mark finally saw the project through to completion ten years after he first conceived the idea. As he summed up his experience, "You've gotta have faith."

Roy

Roy was also a strong believer in CAD/CAM, but in contrast to Mark he was doomed to frustration. The initial driving force for the new technology came from the president of the company and a senior level steering committee—a good prognosis for success. Once a system was chosen, however, the

steering committee was disbanded. Roy was elevated to the position of manager of engineering support and made responsible for implementation. That was a bad prognosis for success; the champion needs help and support, and a steering committee can offer both. Twelve terminals were purchased and allocated to two company sites.

Roy's strength was in planning. He did all of the implementation planning for the new system and issued monthly reports for over a year. These reports contained productivity information and covered all aspects of the rollout: facilities, training, operating procedures, standards, schedules and so forth. But because he was working alone, with no steering committee or implementation teams to help, and because he had virtually no contact with manufacturing, he made few converts. Perhaps that was also because he did not see it as his task to sell the new technology. This he left to the president. But when the latter was fired, support for the new technology left with him.

Roy neglected to develop alliances with other potential supporters of CAD/CAM, such as the new director of management information services, who believed it was "an ideal tool for this company and this industry." And so, no critical mass of converts emerged. The implementation efforts began to stumble a year after purchase of the terminals, and plans for phase two were put on hold, where they remained. And so Roy became a disappointed man, saddened that the technology was viewed by top management as a toy, little more than an electronic drafting pencil.

Table 2: Contrasting skills and attributes of the two technology advocates

Champion skills and attributes	Mark	Roy
Passion and vision	yes	somewhat
Persuasion	yes	no
Partnership	yes	no
Planning	yes	yes
Perseverance	yes	no

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[i] Beatty, C., & Gordon, J. (1991). Preaching the Gospel: The Evangelists of New Technology. *California Management Review, 33,* 73-94.

To be effective, the steering committee should fulfill these vital tasks:

- Coming together and putting effort into becoming a real team with a common understanding of their superordinate goals, mandate, deliverables and strategies for achieving the desired outcomes.
- Helping plan the details of implementation and filling in the gaps that the change champion and executive sponsor may not have thought about.
- Managing relationships with stakeholder groups, often because members are part of those groups.
- Chartering and managing implementation teams (sub-groups reporting to the steering committee) that are created to assist with special tasks during the change effort.
- Regularly reviewing the progress of the change project and of all the groups involved. If some aspects of the change plan are not working out as anticipated, the steering committee helps decide on course corrections.

- Thinking of ways to build involvement, and therefore acceptance, among important stakeholder groups.

Implementation teams are usually necessary in a large change effort; perhaps even a couple of levels of such teams are needed. Implementation teams do specialized tasks that the steering committee may not have the time or skill sets to perform. For example, during a merger of two companies, an implementation team could be set up to make recommendations about which IT system to adopt or how to harmonize HR systems. These teams may also delegate work to sub-teams, and then they will be responsible for monitoring progress on the delegated tasks.

It is up to the steering committee to decide what implementation teams are necessary. These teams should be chartered by the steering committee and given a clear mandate to ensure the quality of their work remains high. We recommend that in any major change initiative, one of the important implementation teams should be a communications team. Good communication is a key success factor in change, so a team with either resident or outside expertise—or both—can help with this vital task.

Another common task often given to an implementation team is researching trends, problems and opportunities that are occurring outside the organization but which may have implications for it. Others tasks could include internal researching, or working on supporting administrative and logistical teams, compensation revision teams, organizational alignment or monitoring teams. Still others: focusing on customers, advising unions and management, and supporting technology and departmental implementation teams. Each change initiative will need a different constellation of implementation teams, and they should be added as needed. Don't be afraid to delegate, as long as you build in coordination and progress review mechanisms. The more people are involved, the more likely they will become change supporters.

It still might be somewhat difficult for the reader to see how the transition structure can be applied in an organization. So, in the next highlight we follow the story of the Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health (CADTH) as it grapples with transition structure.

The structure itself is important, but even more important are the skills and commitment of the people in it. As Jim Collins wrote in *Good to Great*, you must have the right people focused on a transformation effort. "The main point is to first get the right people on the bus (and the wrong people off the bus) before you figure out where to drive it."[2] In other words, recruit the right people first, then plan the implementation, not the other way around. Given the right people, they will create a good change implementation plan.

Highlight: Transition Structure at CADTH

The Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health (CADTH) is an Ottawa-based agency serving the needs of provincial health ministries. It evaluates drugs and technologies to help these ministries make adoption and funding decisions. In 2010, it was facing a major challenge. After a report was published that highlighted problems in the organization related to client satisfaction, CADTH realized that a major change effort would be needed to put it back on track for continued success. Competitors were springing up and picking off parts of its business, especially in areas where clients wanted speedy, as compared to thorough, evaluations.

The organization was trying to address some of these concerns, but the effort needed more coordination. When I was contracted to advise the change effort, we decided to hold a senior level change planning meeting, and one of the first things we did after coming to an agreement on a new vision for the change was set up a sound transition structure.

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[2] Collins, J. (2001). *Good to great: Why some companies make the leap--and others don't*. New York, NY: Harper Business.

The first, and most important, decision was the selection of a champion or leader for the change initiative. All agreed that the new president of this small organization was the right person for the job. He was deeply committed to CADTH, had comprehensive planning skills from his previous role in the military, was articulate and persuasive, and was able to collaborate with stakeholders within and outside the organization. Because he was the senior leader, he may not have needed an executive sponsor, but he recruited the chair of the board to act in this capacity. It was an astute move because she was an influential member of the client group that needed to support the new direction and could potentially sell it to other clients.

Next, we decided who would be part of a steering committee for the project. The organization had been trying to achieve change without a proper steering committee, but the group attending the change planning meeting immediately recognized the advantages of this committee, and it was decided that the champion should be its leader. It did not take long to think through whom could best help with the tasks of the steering committee, and members were chosen to represent both a cross-functional and a diagonal slice (i.e. various levels) of the organization. In addition, a member from both the communications department and the project management office were added to this committee.

The change vision encompassed two big goals: exceeding client expectations and reorganizing the departments to better serve the clients. Thus, two implementation teams were created to focus on each of these goals. The teams were led by two senior level employees, each of whom also sat on the steering committee. Next, we thought through the appropriate membership for each of these teams, and members were appointed to each. Then we examined the mandates of the various committees that were already working on some aspect of organizational improvement and found that most of them were involved with some component of the major goal, and so they were reorganized to report to the two implementation teams. The organization had also set up a "guiding coalition," a group of roughly thirty mid-level managers. It was originally thought that this group might act as the steering committee, but it was too large and not suited to some of the tasks. So it became an advisory community, and a very useful one. The steering committee ran many of its ideas by the advisory community before implementation and found their feedback and advice to be invaluable.

Finally, we coordinated the efforts of all of the groups by doing several things. We made sure that leaders of each of the various committees and teams met together regularly to report on progress and to keep everyone moving in a consistent direction. Also, each committee was structured to ensure overlapping membership. For example, two members of the steering committee led the implementation teams, and members of these implementation teams were appointed to each of the sub-committees of these two teams. As the project progressed, everyone also realized that more coordination was needed in the areas of communications and project management. Therefore a communications expert and a project manager were appointed to each of the implementation teams. These individuals met regularly with their counterparts on the steering committee to ensure consistency of efforts and messaging.

The change was off to a great start. There is more to tell about this successful change, but getting the transition structure right was an essential first step in CADTH's change journey.

The Tough Work of the Steering Committee

As is evident from the list of tasks that the steering committee should perform, it is important that the committee functions well. That means it must come to a consensus about its mandate before trying to perform its work. Forcing the members to grapple with the mandate and build their team into a high-performing one is tough but necessary work. In my experience, steering committee members want to skip over this work and just jump to action. The problem with this is that all members will probably have different ideas about what their purpose is. Clarifying the mandate in advance puts all members on the same page, and the time spent up front doing this will mean the committee doesn't get bogged down in conflict and confusion later on. The change champion (or "change leader," as some prefer to call this person), along with the executive sponsor are in the best position to insist on this vital work, and engaging the services of a consultant or team facilitator will make it go faster. Beware: either build the steering committee as a team right away, or suffer the consequences later.

Here are the important discussion questions we recommend asking to build the steering committee's mandate:

1. What is our purpose? What are our deliverables? What is our timeframe?
2. Who do we report to?
3. What is the scope of our authority?
4. Who reports to us and how will we monitor their progress?
5. Who are our stakeholders?
6. How will we work together?
7. What are our ground rules?
8. How often will we meet?
9. What meeting guidelines should we adopt?

With regard to stakeholders, the steering committee should think through who the stakeholders for the change initiative are and what relationships it needs to have with them. For instance, what sort of decision power does the steering committee have in relationship to senior management? How often should it meet with stakeholders and implementation teams to keep the project on track? A question also often arises regarding the size of the steering committee. It should not be large. If for political considerations you are forced to have a large steering committee—in other words, over twelve people—our advice is to have a smaller executive steering committee to make most decisions and a committee of the whole to vet them.

The next case study shows how one public sector organization created a complete transition structure and then used it expertly to support an important organizational transformation.

Case Study: The Sackerton District Catholic School Board [i]

In November 2005, the Sackerton District Catholic School Board's (SDCSB)[ii] director of education wrote a memo to the board of trustees to draw attention to some pressing issues: two well-respected and experienced superintendents of education would be retiring within approximately one year of each other, while the director of education was expected to retire by 2008. Suitable replacements existed within the board, but the director was hesitant to name replacements. He believed that the current organization structure might be impeding, rather than helping achieve, excellence in education. The board of trustees and the director of education agreed that the anticipated retirements provided a unique opportunity to conduct a system-level review of how the school board could better serve its constituents—the thirteen thousand students; their parents; and over fourteen hundred teachers, principals and support staff. They set a twelve-month deadline for recommendations to the board of trustees.

Case Study: The Sackerton District Catholic School Board (continued)

Establishing a Transition Structure for the Project

Change will not manage itself, so a transition structure was set up immediately after the project started. The director, a change champion selected by the director, and a team of external consultants from Queen's University met to consider an optimal transition structure. The change champion, Laura (not her real name), was a curriculum and staff development coordinator who reported to a superintendent of education. Because her schedule was relatively flexible, because she had excellent relationships with most central and school staff, and because she was well informed on many issues facing schools across the system, she was a good choice. While she was somewhat versed in change management theory and process, this was her first time leading a major change initiative, and she would need to call upon the external consultants for guidance frequently throughout the project.

Many initial planning meetings were conducted between Laura and the consultants before a change steering committee was formed. This group was called the "Project Management Team" (PMT), and its job would be to oversee the review and recommend changes to the board of trustees. Laura presented a potential list of steering committee members that the director had proposed for consideration prior to meetings with the consultants. Individual team members were carefully selected for their skills and for a broad representation of the system. When the committee membership was finalized, it included two principals, the curriculum and professional development coordinator (Laura), the most senior superintendent, the finance superintendent, the accounting manager, the chairman of the board of trustees of education, the director of the Queen's Industrial Relations Centre, a Queen's facilitator and project lead, and the director of education. As well, the director of education was identified as the executive sponsor. Although he planned to retire in the next couple of years, he committed to seeing the change in the organizational structure through to its full implementation. As it turned out, this was a very important element in the success of the project, because a change of leadership during such a project often stops it cold.

One of the first tasks of the PMT was to clarify the purpose of the initiative and to identify the stakeholders. Effective change requires some level of involvement from everyone impacted by the change; in the case of the SDCSB, the PMT realized it had to create opportunities for participation by all stakeholders without unduly stalling the process. The PMT set a formidable challenge: to create a transparent and democratic process. A second and more important challenge was to make members of the entire stakeholder community feel like they were heard and listened to, all within the project's aggressive timeframe.

The PMT began by deciding on some important principles to guide the change process. Believing that the people within the system had important perspectives to offer, they decided to involve the many stakeholders, including the leadership team, teachers, parents, students and staff groups. The appreciative inquiry[1] approach was chosen as the best way to elicit their ideas. Secondly, they took a whole systems approach, where people are brought together from across many boundaries so that they can see the entire system from many points of views. Finally, it was agreed that every decision made throughout the system should be based on the question, "What will serve students best?" The PMT's conclusion was that their purpose would be to guide the initiative in creating a school board structure that supports achievement and development for all students.

Case Study: The Sackerton District Catholic School Board (continued)

In addition to the PMT, an advisory community was established to offer input, feedback and advice throughout the initiative. It was composed of approximately sixty members, including principals, teachers, students, staff, trustees, parents and representatives from the ministry of education, unions and the local Catholic diocese. As a representative community of all stakeholders, the membership was an important go-to body for input and feedback throughout the process. This community was invited to give its views on four occasions, and it served as a "rudder," holding the PMT on a course that most accurately reflected the wants, needs and hopes of the system.

The PMT held over fifteen appreciative inquiry meetings with various stakeholders in their education community to engage them in the initiative. Findings from these meetings were summarized in a document that was used as the foundation for further inquiry and research. This process helped to identify the priorities for the change initiative, and from it ten design criteria were agreed upon to guide future decisions about structural changes to the system.

At the same time, an external research sub-team of the PMT investigated best practices and ideas inspired by other school boards across North America. A literature review and benchmarking study were used to identify the design elements of exemplary high-performing school systems. Prior to developing and sharing structural models with stakeholders, the PMT discussed their ideas for major functional structures[iv] using the information collected through the internal and external research. Then these functional structures were shared with stakeholders to elicit more feedback, and questions for clarification were asked, such as, "What skills would be required within this department?" and "Who would the department report to?"

Next, three models representing alternative school board structures were presented to the advisory community. During this session, members of the advisory community had the opportunity to listen to a PMT member explain the rationale for each model. The advisory community members were invited to share their thoughts on each model's benefits and disadvantages and were invited to indicate their preference through multi-voting. The PMT took into consideration both the voting and the verbal and written feedback provided by advisory community members, and they used this information as the primary guideline for their final design proposal. Happily, the process showed a clear convergence on one structural design.

The final model was presented to school leaders and the advisory community as one last opportunity to make suggestions for fine tuning. Finally, the proposed changes were presented to the board of trustees before the deadline, and they were passed unanimously.

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[i] Beatty, C.A. (2005) Unpublished case study (contact author for copy).

[ii] Not the real name of the school board.

[iii] For a brief overview of appreciative inquiry methodology, please refer to: Cooperrider, D., Whitney, D., & Stavros., J. (2008). *Appreciative inquiry handbook for leaders of change* (2nd ed.). Brunswick, OH: Crown Custom Publishing.

[iv] In a functional organizational structure, an organization's reporting relationships are grouped based on specialty or functional area.

Parting Thoughts

Change is difficult, and success rates have remained stubbornly low. I believe that part of the reason for this is an over-emphasis on high-level change planning and an under-emphasis on implementation. Many great ideas fail at implementation. Avoid failure by planning the implementation phase of a change carefully and in detail. The first thing to get right is the setup and membership of the transition structure, but even the best transition structure will not be sufficient to ensure success. The next steps are to plan out the implementation in detail by answering a set of questions under the broad categories of "Why," "What" and "How." Answer these questions and you will dramatically increase the chances of your change initiative succeeding.

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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