Collaborative Change Management: A Systematic Approach

Mitch Javidi

North Carolina State University

From our first words and steps to the beginnings of our formal education, our journey through grade school, high school and beyond, we face each new change with considerable trepidation. While at each stage of our life, the acceptance of changes great and small are the currency by which we pay for experience and knowledge, the one constant seems always to be that we are ill-prepared for, antagonistic towards and uncomfortable with change when it comes.

This is true of organizations and social systems as well. External forces -- from governments and economies to social changes -- mold and affect organizations and the people in those organizations. As the large lumbering dinosaurs of old, organizations most often face transformation in a plodding, combative and stubborn manner. Or as one observer phrased it, "the brain is dead for a good while before the legs and tail get the message."

As public relations professionals, it is incumbent upon us to understand not only how to communicate the approach and impact of these forces and changes, but also how to provide the tools and strategies that can help manage and control those changes. The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview and understanding of the concept of "change management" to those who are confronting widespread transformation for the first time.

But What Is It?

Discussing "change management" can be a confusing semantic journey because change management can be thought of as a "process," "a business specialty" (note the proliferation of "change managers") and a "body of knowledge." For our purpose the management of change is, quite simply, a process or series of tasks …*the doing of it* … if you will. This definition is the one most likely to resonate with PR professionals.

The Task

The notion of managing change as a process or task can be likened to using a double-edged sword. The first edge is applied to internal change in a **planned and managed** or systematic fashion within an ongoing organization. The goal is to more effectively implement new methods and systems controlled by the organization. However, interior changes may have been triggered by events originating in the environment outside the organization. So the second edge of the "change management "sword is applied to changes over which the organization exercises little or no control (e.g., legislation, social and political upheaval, the actions of competitors, shifting economic realities).

Change as a System

Modern public relations professionals may find it helpful to think of change in a "systems" context. A systems approach provides two important foundations. First, it establishes that no single thing can change without influencing every part of the system to which it belongs. Second, change in any single part of a system impacts every other part.[1] Exhibit 1 on the next page outlines the interdependent relationships between business and environmental systems. It illustrates how important it is for all of the internal elements of an organization to be aligned to assure the optimum organizational performance.[2] It also shows the effects of external environmental influences and their interrelation to internal elements.[3]

Open and Closed Systems

Systems can be described as either open or closed. Closed systems are not highly responsive to environmental impacts.[1] In sharp contrast, open systems are often highly influenced by the external environment. There may be no totally closed systems, but the degree to which a system is open or closed determines the extent to which changes can be controlled and the extent to which efforts to change systems are subject to forces outside the organization's control. Exhibit 2 below shows examples of open and closed systems.[1]

When working to change complex, open systems, we must appreciate that there are forces outside our control. No matter how well a PR counsel prepares every phase of the client's press conference plan and coordinates every part of the system from training of speakers to preparing materials and graphics, if there's a prison riot an hour before and all the media head that way, the press conference will not be ranked a success. It is not the client's fault nor is it the public relations professional's fault…it's just reality. The impact of unforeseen circumstances and outside forces assures that planned change management is
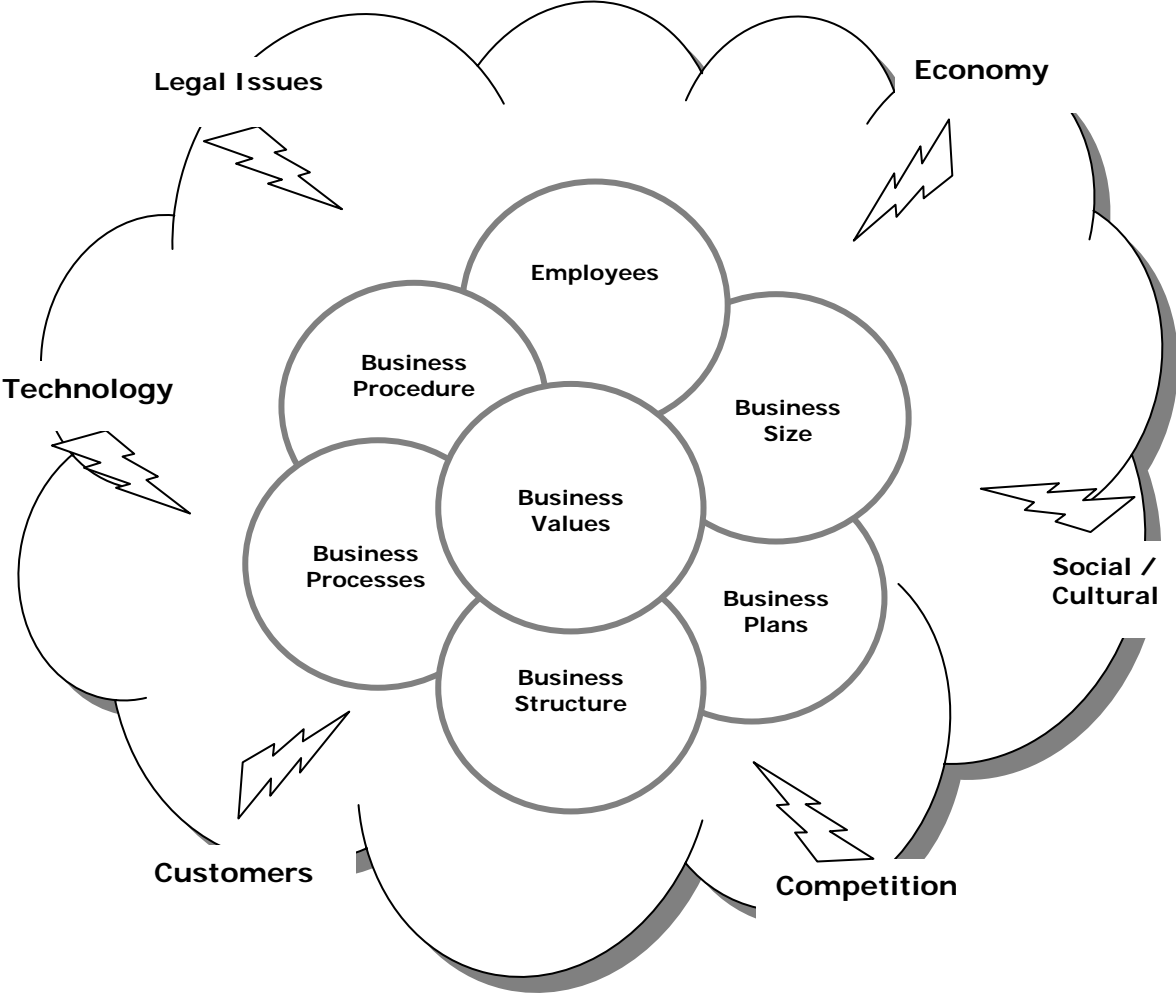
Legal Issues

Economy

Technology

Employees

Business
Procedure

Business
Size

Business
Values

Business
Processes

Business
Plans

Social /
Cultural

Business
Structure

Customers

Competition

3

**Exhibit 2: Open and Closed
Systems**

Closed Systems			Open Systems
An Amish Community Tight unit within, with no outside needs	**A Monastery** Ready, self-sufficient, but does business outside	**The Military** Tight unit within, but needs outside support / funding	**Manufacturing Facility** Influenced by economy, competition, suppliers, etc.

never an exact science. The systems we are forced to work within include individuals, organizations and circumstances that are too complex to control or fully anticipate and, therefore, "control" is largely a perception, not a reality.[1]

The Change Problem

At the heart of change management lies the ***change problem***.[4] The change problem can be large or small in scope and scale, and it may focus on individuals or groups. It may include one or more divisions or departments, the entire organization, or one or more aspects of the organization's environment. Simply stated, the change problem is a definition of the various elements affecting change and the development of solutions to achieve change goals.[4] The foundation of the process requires at a minimum answers to change questions.[5] It can actually be likened to the 5 "W"'s and the "H" of the traditional journalism approach to writing a good story…*who, what, why, where* and *when…*then *how.*

The number and depth of questions in each of the categories will depend on the circumstances of the particular change management project. The following are examples that can be used to formulate questions more specific to your particular project:

"Who" questions:
- o   Who from the organization needs to be involved in the change?
- o   Who is likely to be affected most by the change?
- o   Who is likely to try to obstruct the change?

- o   Who has the most invested in the status quo?
- o   Who are the most likely champions of change?

"What" questions:
- o   What practices need to be changed?
- o   What services must be communicated to our stakeholders?
- o   What behaviors do we need to change?
- o   What resources will we need?
- o   What are we trying to accomplish?

"Why" questions:
- o   Why do we need to change our practices?
- o   Why do we need to communicate new services to our stakeholders?
- o   Why do we need to change our treatment of our employees?

"Where" questions:
- o   Where are changes most needed?
- o   Where do we have support for the changes?
- o   Where does management stand with regard to the need for change?
- o   Where will the capital come from to implement the changes?

"When" questions:
- o   When will management consider implementation?
- o   When should we communicate to the employees?
- o   When should we communicate with other stakeholders?

"How" questions:
- o   How do we change our operational practices for better?
- o   How do we change the way we treat and communicate with our employees?
- o   How should we communicate the organization's services to its other stakeholders?
- o   How do we get this business from point A to Point B?

In summary, change problems may be formulated in terms of "who, what, why, where, when and how" questions. Where you are within the organizational structure and what your job responsibilities are will, most often, determine the kinds of questions you ask in order to define the change problem.[4]

1. People in operations can usually be expected to ask "How" questions.
2. People in the upper management are most likely to ask "who, what, why, where and when" questions.
3. "Why, when and how" questions are typically the responsibility of top management.
4. People in public relations and marketing usually must have answers to all the questions.
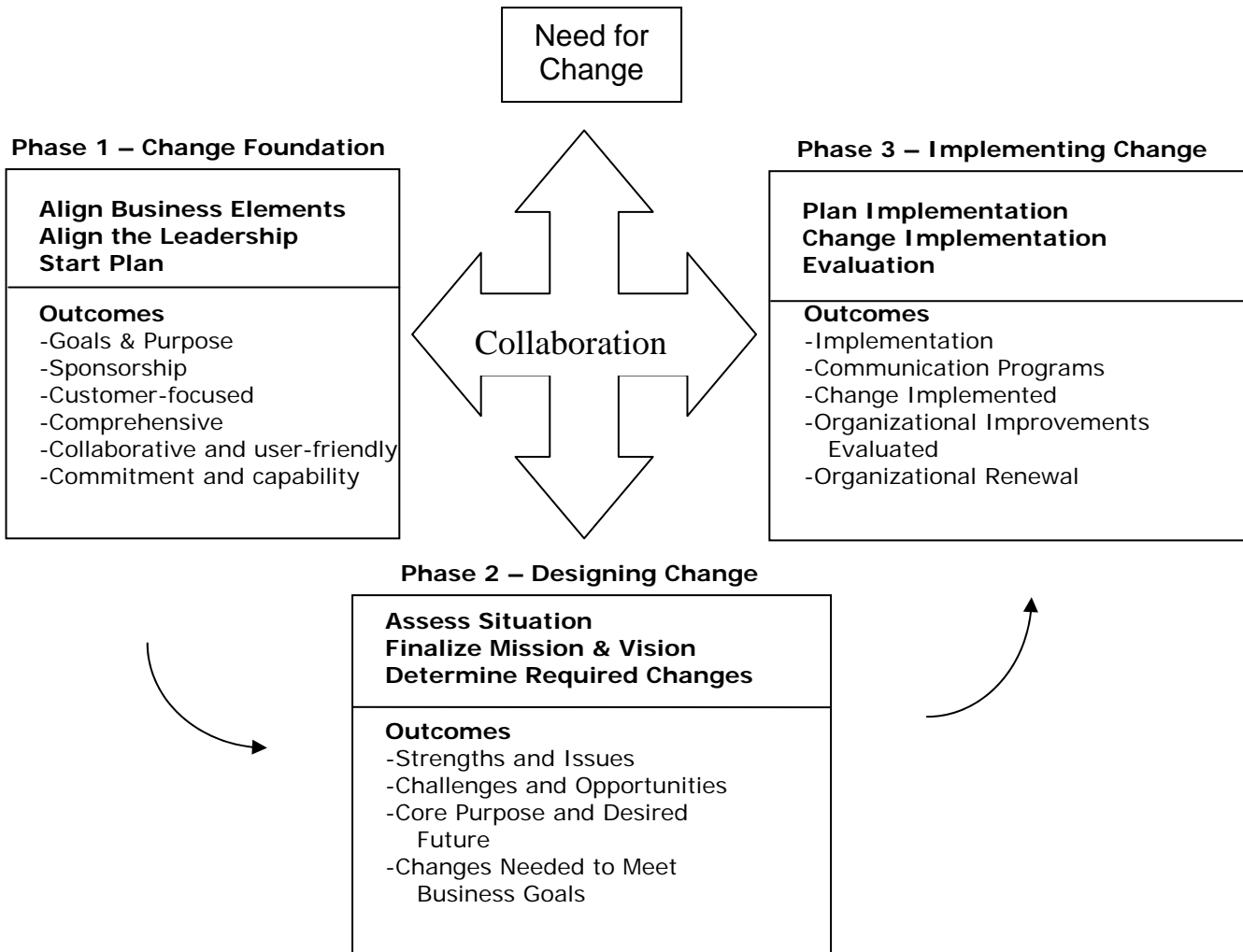
Change Management Strategy and Process

There is no single change strategy. It is possible to adopt a general "grand strategy" but, for any given initiative, change managers are usually best served by incorporating a mix of strategies. Determining which strategies are likely to be most effective and in what combination is a decision affected by a number of factors not the least of which are environmental impacts. Regardless of the strategies ultimately chosen, the core element of any successful change management process is **collaboration**.[2] Collaboration combined with the *change purpose statement*, *sponsorship*, *business commitment* and *customer focus* will most always lead to success.[2] Exhibit 3 on the next
 page illustrates a collaborative model that has proven useful for communication and public relations experts.[2]

The process model is structured in three phases: creation, design and implementation.

- o   Phase 1 – creating the change foundation – focuses on aligning business elements and leadership through the setting of new customer-focused goals, establishing sponsorships and securing commitment and capabilities.
- o   Phase 2 – designing the change plan – focuses on aligning corporate mission with change plan and determining challenges.
- o   Phase 3 – implementing the change plan – focuses on deploying change through an effective communication program and stakeholder management.

Exhibit 3: Change Program Phases

Need for
Change

Phase 1 – Change Foundation

Align Business Elements
Align the Leadership
Start Plan

Outcomes
-Goals & Purpose
-Sponsorship
-Customer-focused
-Comprehensive
-Collaborative and user-friendly
-Commitment and capability

Collaboration

Phase 3 – Implementing Change

Plan Implementation
Change Implementation
Evaluation

Outcomes
-Implementation
-Communication Programs
-Change Implemented
-Organizational Improvements
  Evaluated
-Organizational Renewal

Phase 2 – Designing Change

Assess Situation
Finalize Mission & Vision
Determine Required Changes

Outcomes
-Strengths and Issues
-Challenges and Opportunities
-Core Purpose and Desired
  Future
-Changes Needed to Meet
  Business Goals

Change Management Requires Shared Vision

Successful change programs require the establishment of a shared vision of organizational development that combines effective communication with tactics

7

that move people, in a step-wise process toward agreed-upon goals.[6] Every stage of the process must build the listening capacity of the top leaders and stakeholders and expand the leadership capacities of the entire organization, so that everyone is moving together toward the next stage of change and adoption.

A stakeholder, for our purposes, is defined as anyone involved with or affected by the change program. Stakeholders may be internal (employees, stockholders) or external (e.g., suppliers, customers, etc). Working with stakeholders requires a solid strategy directed at various interest groups which we'll describe as: *Champions, agents, sponsors and targets.*[7]

> **Champions** are those individuals or groups who want the change and attempt to obtain commitment and resources to effect it, but lack the authority to make the change.
>
> **Agents** are those who are responsible for actually making the change. They help change behavior, emotions, provide knowledge, etc.
> **Sponsors** are the individuals or groups who can authorize, legitimize and demonstrate ownership of the change.
> **Targets** are the individuals or groups who are required to change.

Building a Shared Vision with stakeholders requires "Stakeholder Management Plan." A Stakeholder Management Plan records activities, sets dates for completion and defines responsibilities relating to the Stakeholder Management Strategy.

In order to develop a Stakeholder Management Plan, it is important to understand each of the stakeholders (whether individual or group). This is most easily done through an audience analysis, which is then used to develop and execute an effective communication strategy.[7] The analysis provides a profile of each stakeholder's knowledge and identifies his/her:

- level of influence on the change program
- current perception of the change program
- current level of engagement in the change program
- desired level of engagement in the change program

And perhaps the most important question for the stakeholder analysis is whether the change program will personally affect the stakeholder and to what degree.

A Stakeholder Rating Template can be developed to assist in this process. The template records for each of the Stakeholders, the tactics and strategies to be used with him/her to ensure his/her involvement and commitment. Tactics and strategies should take into consideration those who influence the stakeholders and the direct benefits that accrue from the change. Once the tactics and

strategies are recorded on the template, an individual should be assigned to each of the stakeholder groups or individuals to ensure that these tactics and strategies are implemented and that their effectiveness is continually monitored.[7] Exhibit 4 provides a template that can be used for rating stakeholders.

Exhibit 4 Stakeholder Rating Template

Stakeholder	Categorization (Champion, Sponsor, Target or Agent)	Current Level of Commitment (Scale L, M, H)	Desired Level of Commitment (Scale L, M, H)	Strategies and Tactics to Increase Commitment
				Strategy:
				Tactics:
				Strategy:
				Tactics:

People providing input into the Stakeholder Rating Template must understand why this activity is being done, how it will be done, the benefits accruing to them and how the information will be used.

Communication Processes and Strategies

Communication plays an integral role at the strategic, tactical and personal levels in creating change. Communication is necessary to:

- Align individual and organizational performance with business objectives;
- Ensure that sponsorship is lined up within the organization;
- Enable stakeholders to understand and embrace change through education and persuasion;
- Deliver specific messages of the change (who, what, when, where, why and how);
- Ensure stakeholder behaviors support change objectives;
- Support feedback and interaction to ensure ownership and success;

- Motivate to action; and
- Engage through a strong "what's in it for me" approach.

The communication strategy must be fully integrated with the overall change approach and is used to guide the entire communications effort.[7] It supports the change program by delivering meaningful messages to stakeholders, thereby helping to achieve change objectives within the desired time frame.[2]

To be effective, a change management team should include at least one communication expert who is then supported by a team of communication specialists.[7] The responsibilities of the change communication team include:

- Identification of issues that impact each segment affected by the change. Each audience should understand why the change is taking place and how it affects their individual jobs, the department and the company.
- Determination of the mix of communication tools needed.
- Assuring that appropriate feedback mechanisms exist.
- Creation of effective measurement to assess communication effectiveness.

Working closely with the change leader and change management team, a series of questions should be asked prior to developing the change communications program:

- Why are we changing? What demonstrates the need for change?
- What happens if we don't change?
- What is the current environment and history?
- What are the business objectives for the change?
- How will we know if we are successful? What measures will be used to assess successful completion of our objectives?
- Beyond communication, what else will support the desired outcome (systems, processes, management availability, reward programs, etc.)?
- Who is affected by this change (directly and indirectly)?
- How will communication help reach objectives and reduce possible negative outcomes?

Final Recommendations

Following is a "to-do" list of tactics that can be deployed in managing change.

1. Do not fear change. Change is inevitable; it's how we manage and control it that results in a positive rather than negative outcome for organizations or individuals.
2. Remember: The task of change management is to bring order to a chaotic and messy situation, not to pretend that it's already well-organized and disciplined.[4]

3. Develop a clear sense of mission by asking the "who," "what," "why," "where," "when" and "how" questions of change.
4. Ask for volunteers.[4]
5. Build a team of people with relevant skills and high energy levels. That is the only way to successfully accomplish change.[4]
6. Give the team members whatever they ask for — except authority.[4]
7. Set flexible priorities.[4]
8. Set attainable goals.
9. Identify and secure your sponsors early.
10. Identify your internal and external influencers.
11. Determine the organizational readiness and the stress level.
12. Map your stakeholders and track their progress in the program using the Stakeholder Rating Template.
13. Develop your stakeholder management plan and follow it carefully.[7]
14. Establish and maintain a level of involvement by your stakeholders.[7]
15. Update your stakeholders on a regular basis.
16. Start and maintain an issues logbook.
17. Focus on communication processes and deploy accordingly.
18. Track communications and measure effectiveness throughout the program.
19. Treat everything as a temporary measure.[4]

References

1. *Planning for Change: A Systems Model for Communities and Organizations.* William R. Carmack. CSAP: 2000.

2. *Collaborative Change.* Mary V. Gelinas & Roger G. James. Jossy-Bass Pfeiffer: San Francisco, California: 1998.

3. Organizations in Action. James D. Thompson. McGraw-Hill, New York: 1967.

4. Change Management 101: A Primer. Fred Nickols. Occasional Paper. Educational Testing Service: Princeton, New Jersey: 1993.

5. Human Problem Solving. Allen Newell and Herbert A. Simon. Prentice-
      Hall, Englewood Cliffs: 1972.

6. The Planning of Change (2nd Edition). Warren G. Bennis, Kenneth D.
      Benne, and Robert Chin (Eds). Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York:
      1969.

7. "Accelerating Change Methodology", Implementation Management
      Associates, Inc., 1996.