

# The Human Side of Change Leadership

by **Jim Folaron**

**Y**ou read the books and articles that describe how to change a process. You knew the importance of making the right changes, and you followed the step-by-step instructions. Although you encountered some resistance, both overt and more subtle, you finally put the new

process in place and got people to do things the new way.

Knowing the importance of sustaining the new process, you carefully documented the procedures, provided training for everyone involved and put scorecards in place to monitor the process performance. You met the goal on time and under budget, and you received positive personal and team recognition for leading the improvement effort. Congratulations!

Over the next few months, however, you notice the improvements begin to evaporate. People are going back to the old way of doing things, and morale and productivity are returning to preproject levels. You curse the concept of a process monitoring scorecard and invoke the usual management response: Get rid of the scorecards, and charter a new improvement team. You blame it on sabotage by those who were jealous of your success. You blame it on the methodology used or on management's unrealistic expectations. You blame it on turnover or lack of management support. You blame it on ... people!

What went wrong? Sure, you had some problems getting people to adopt the new ways, but you convinced them change was necessary. The changes worked—the scorecard showed a jump in

## In 50 Words Or Less

- **People may make a necessary change, but they might not stick with it for long.**
- **Look at it from their perspective and realize lack of motivation isn't always the reason.**
- **Identify potential resistance to the planned changes and design motivation into the new process.**

productivity and a drop in complaints—but you missed one crucial element in process change. The human element.

The importance of the human side of change cannot be underestimated. If the human element is neglected or left to chance, the improved process implementation can be prolonged, the change effort can become more frustrating, the resulting benefits can be diminished, and the entire improvement can be short-lived. Two important aspects of human behavior that should be considered when planning a change involve identifying potential resistance to the planned changes and designing motivation into the new process.

### Identifying Potential Resistance

There are different reasons people resist change. Fear of the unknown, comfort with the current ways or exhaustion from the continuous barrage of never ending changes are a few that immediately come to mind. Consider these three aspects when trying to assess the potential reasons for resistance or lack of support: general readiness, emotional readiness and capability vs. desire to change.

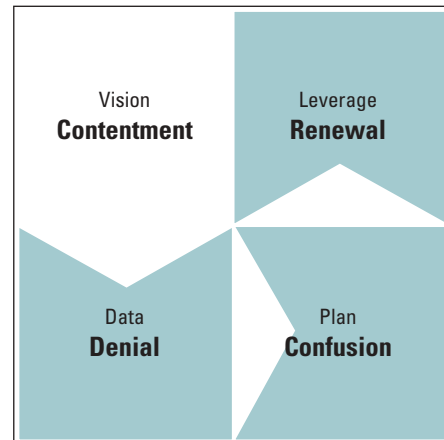
**General readiness:** Readiness to accept new changes may be affected by the personal history of change an individual, team or organization has experienced. Whether change has been rampant or nonexistent is one important consideration; these two extremes may elicit different responses from different people.

Another factor is whether the results of previous changes were positive or negative. Individuals usually progress through the acceptance of change along a specific continuum.<sup>1</sup> The first phase is one of contentment in which people have no apparent incentive or desire to change. They think, “Things are fine,” or, “We just went through significant improvement; we are doing well enough.”

Once the need for change is acknowledged, the level of anxiety increases and the usual reaction becomes one of denial. People think, “I recognize the need to change, but I am not the problem,” or “Why can’t they improve the quality of the stuff they give me?” Change will not be readily embraced by people in one of these first two phases.

The third phase, after an individual accepts the need for change and recognizes the change must involve him or her, is often one of confusion. People

**FIGURE 1** Change Readiness



in this phase think, “All right, we need to change, but how do we do it?” A person will only enter the final stage of renewal, in which change is embraced, once a plan is drawn up or a methodology is employed and the change process is allowed to move forward.

The best response for each phase is listed in Figure 1. To move people from the contentment phase, provide a vision of the future (good or bad). Once they move into denial, use data to promote support. It is also helpful to listen to everyone’s concerns and focus on the process, not the individual, to promote support and cooperation, not blame and defensiveness.

To get people to progress through the confusion phase, have a plan and stick to it. This could be a well-developed project plan, strong personal leadership or the use of an established quality improvement methodology, such as define, measure, analyze, improve and control. Once the people reach the renewal phase, plan to leverage them by further exploiting the improvements or engaging them in other improvement efforts.

**Emotional readiness:** There is also a need to consider the emotional impact of change. William Bridges discusses three phases individuals go through when a significant change occurs: endings, neutral zone and beginnings (see Figure 2).<sup>2</sup> He suggests we often need time to grieve and mourn



the loss of the old ways before embracing and enthusiastically supporting the new ways. Between the two is a period of indifference and cautious optimism, the duration of which is highly variable from person to person and situation to situation.

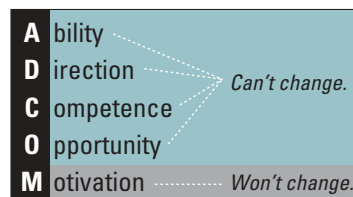
To help individuals move more quickly through these phases, you need to address their emotional needs. Be tolerant and give them time to get on board. I remember when our work team at 3M was told we would be spun off into a new company with no opportunity to remain with the heritage company. We spent a lot of time at the water cooler, living for the next rumors and lamenting the loss of our previous employer. Eventually, as we started to identify with the new company and began to look forward to building a strong new entity, our emotional state improved. The sooner this transition occurs, the faster productivity and morale will return to their former states.

**Capability vs. desire to change:** There are many reasons an individual may not embrace change immediately. Management usually assumes the resistance stems from a lack of desire to change or a lack of motivation. This is not always true, and believing it can compound problems by becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy if the underlying cause is not addressed. The ADCOM (ability, direction, competence, opportunity, motivation) acronym

**FIGURE 2** Emotional Readiness



**FIGURE 3** ADCOM



can help identify potential reasons for resistance (see Figure 3).

Let's say you are asked to make a change. Just as you could use six words that start with "m" (methods, materials, machines, measurements, manpower and mother nature) to spur ideas covering many different angles when trying to identify inputs to a process, you could use the ADCOM acronym to

## Why Such Poor Grades?

**Problem:** Johnny is getting poor grades on his 5th grade homework.

**First assessment:** He is not trying or does not care.

Now, examine other potential reasons using ADCOM:

- **Ability:** cannot read or hear assignment; cannot do task requiring dexterity.
- **Direction:** did not know assignment was due; did not get instructions.
- **Competence:** does not understand content or instructions; cannot use a computer.
- **Opportunity:** does not have time, materials or access to sites or places to do work.
- **Motivation:** does not see value in grades; believes homework is of little value.

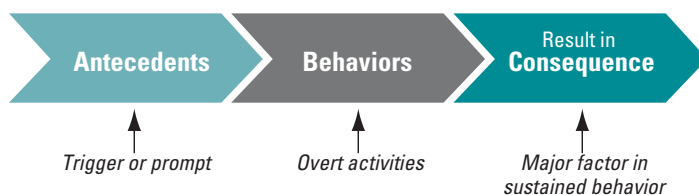
If one of the ADCOM elements is the cause, address it directly and avoid challenging the motivation.

Of course, if it is motivation, address it using the ABCs of behavior in Figure 4 on p. 42. Remember to look at it from Johnny's perspective.

assess your potential resistance from different, although sometimes overlapping, perspectives:

- **Ability:** You may not have the physical capability or ability to perform the tasks required by the change. For example, you may not be able to run a two-minute mile, have concurrent meetings in two locations or climb 40 stairs with heavy equipment and a broken leg.
- **Direction:** You will not perform as expected if you are unaware of the expectations. Confusion

**FIGURE 4** ABC's of Behavior



will also result from unclear directions. For example, you may not draft a report if you didn't know it was expected, or you may not perform as expected if there are three conflicting priorities or unstated interpretations of what it means to do a quality job.

- **Competence:** If the change requires new skills or higher levels of proficiency, you will not be able to successfully satisfy the requirements of the change with your current skill set. You might lack the skills or knowledge required to successfully meet the new demands if, for example, the company switches to a new software application or hardware platform, or if you are asked to lead a project or team or present to a large audience.
- **Opportunity:** You may not have the appropriate time or resources (people, materials or funds), or you may not have the processes, information or authority to adopt the new changes. In this case, perception may be as strong a resistance point as reality.
- **Motivation:** Even if you have the proper ability, direction, competence and opportunity, you still might not accept the changes because you lack

the interest or drive to make the changes work. You wonder, "What's in it for me?" Motivation is the most important of the five characteristics because it can help accommodate deficiencies in any of the other four elements. Highly motivated people will find the time, learn the skills, seek direction and take chances.

Motivation is the main factor that determines whether the change is sustained. If people want to change, it is more likely the changes will endure. If the motivation is not there, if people do not understand what's in it for them, the best the organization can hope for is combative compliance, which will disappear when the process is not closely monitored. A motivated person can accomplish great deeds.

Using the ADCOM model and assessing the potential reasons for resistance can help you reduce the normal tendency to immediately blame the resistance on a lack of motivation. Blaming poor motivation can stifle the cooperation of those who might have legitimate issues preventing them from accepting change and adopting new behaviors.

People listed as being less supportive than required will often acknowledge the gap in support once the reason for the resistance is explained as something other than motivation. This agreement can lead to cooperation in developing a sustainable and mutually beneficial solution.


See the sidebar "Why Such Poor Grades?" (p. 41) for an example of how to use ADCOM, and remember:

- Lack of **direction** results in chaos.
- Lack of **ability** or **competence** results in low quality.
- Lack of **opportunity** results in frustration.
- Lack of **motivation** results in lethargy.

## Design Motivation Into the Process Using the ABCs

When change is planned, the process improvement team primarily focuses on the prompts or triggers that encourage a behavior.<sup>3</sup> Drafting new procedures, providing training and showing management support for the changes are three typical actions designed to prompt a new, desired behavior (see Figure 4).

These prompts, or antecedents, are effective only the first one or two times and usually just when the



change is still being made. What makes the change sustainable is people's desire to continue to do things the new way. This desire is primarily a result of the real or imagined effects or consequences that result from an individual's doing the new task or behavior. (The antecedents, behavior and consequences are known as the ABCs.)

If you are asked to produce a report and you follow through, the likelihood you will produce a report in the future depends on your perception of how worthwhile the report was relative to the amount of effort put into it. That is, you will constantly assess the value of doing something based on what will happen to you if you do or do not do it.

Human nature passes all action decisions through the "What's in it for me?" filter. There are many consequences that result from engaging in a specific behavior, each of which can be positive or negative, immediate or off in the future and certain or uncertain. Some consequences are strong, while others are weak. Each person filters the consequences differently.

When trying to plan for successful and sustainable change, you need to predict how an individual will respond to the changes. To do this, you must examine these consequences through his or her eyes. The consequences of speaking before a large group may be different depending on who is asked to speak. The reality or perception of how immediate, certain or strong these consequences are will also differ from one person to the next.

The role of the change agent is to analyze these potential consequences from the perspective of the person being asked to perform the new behavior and promote the desired behavior through adjustment of these consequences. Adjustment can come from increasing the certainty or uncertainty, increasing the perceived impact or strength or adding new consequences.

Perception is just as important as reality. Why should someone produce a daily report? If he or she thought the potential for recognition or promotion was certain, he or she would be more likely to produce the report. If the potential to move into a higher position or transfer to a different area is a strong motivator, the behavior will be more likely to continue.

Consequences are more powerful drivers of sustained change than antecedents and should be con-

sidered from the perspective of the person being asked to perform the new behavior. Also, the path of least resistance is the one more likely followed. If change is to be sustained, it is often much more effective to focus on how to remove the potential resistance, rather than how to push the changes.

Change is an inevitable reality. Successfully bringing about change is a skill that requires knowledge and practice. There are two things to keep in mind when trying to design and implement sustainable change: Assess potential resistance, and design motivation into the change by addressing the consequences, not just the antecedents.

By addressing the individual's or team's readiness for change, identifying the potential reasons for resistance using ADCOM and building in the right consequences, you can significantly increase the chances for improvements to be sustained. Much of your work could prove fruitless if you do not consider the human side of the equation.

#### REFERENCES

1. Marvin R. Weisbord, *Productive Workplaces: Organizing and Managing for Dignity, Meaning and Community*, Jossey-Bass, 1987.
2. William Bridges, *Managing Transitions, Making the Most of Change*, William Bridges and Associates, 1991.
3. Leslie Wilk Braksick, *Unlock Behavior, Unleash Profits*, McGraw-Hill, 2000.

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