The Critical Role of Management Support in OCM Initiatives - A Tale of Two Projects

Applies to:
OCM - Organizational Change Management, Transformation. For more information, visit the Organizational Change Management homepage.

Summary
While management support for change is best when it is found at all levels of the organization, without highly visible executive and senior level management support, people related project risks increase, the rate of change adoption can slow, the time to change can increase, and worse case, the attempt to change may fail. This article explores the types of management support needed and looks at two change initiatives with very different levels of management involvement.

Author: Caryl M Barclay
Company: SAP
Created on: 28 February 2011

Author Bio
Caryl M. Barclay is an Organizational Change Management Principal with SAP Business Transformation Services. She has over 20 years of experience working in a variety of industries with a focus on Organizational Change, Business and IT Strategy, Business Process Analysis, Project Management, and IT Management. She currently is one of the moderators of the SAP Organizational Change Management BPX forum. She would like to thank her SAP colleague, John Davis for his contributions to the article.
Table of Contents
Why Senior Managers Should be Involved in OCM Initiatives ......................................................... 3
A Tale of Two Projects .......................................................................................................................... 3
How Senior Management Should be Involvement ............................................................................. 4
Summary ............................................................................................................................................... 4
Related Content .................................................................................................................................... 5
Copyright ............................................................................................................................................... 6
**Why Senior Managers Should Be Involved in OCM Initiatives**

Research studies show that people related issues are mentioned 60% to 75% of the time as the major issues impacting the success of initiatives. One of the key critical success factors in implementing and sustaining change is management support. While management support is best when it is found at all levels of the organization, without highly visible executive and senior level management support for change, project risks increase, the rate of change adoption can slow, the time to change can increase, and worse case, the attempt to change may fail. Without successful adoption of the changes envisioned as part of the initiative, ROI will be diminished, will require more time to achieve, and can go negative.

Why do the senior executives need to get involved? Visible support from management is needed to instill a sense of purpose, set expectations, and create a sense of urgency. While it is important that the management team supports the change, it is even more important that the people who are needed to make the change happen see that commitment demonstrated and get onboard. Active, visible participation is demonstrated by management delivering communications, actively taking an interest in the progress of the initiative, recognizing that change is not easy, and providing recognition as their people struggle through the change.

**A Tale of Two Projects**

Not all projects come with a management team that understands that change is not an easy process and that their people need their visible support to effectively and efficiently move through the transition from their current work environment to their new one. Support is needed even if all of the changes are positive for everyone, which is seldom the case. So what does successful and less than successful management involvement look like?

**Project A** had a senior management team that recognized the importance of proactively supporting their people throughout the transition. OCM activities were incorporated into the project plan, with initial efforts starting at the beginning of the project. The executive team project sponsors were available to support the OCM Team throughout the project by providing feedback, delivering communications, and making timely decisions. As their Change Lead, the executive team enlisted one of their C level executives, who supported the project, had good people skills, was respected, knew the organization well, and had a good informal network. In addition to the Change Lead, a Change Champion Team of high level managers was formed. This team communicated with their areas, collected feedback, and provided resources from their areas to participate in design reviews, testing, and support. The Change Champion team met regularly, generally twice a month, to discuss the progress of change readiness, identify issues, and address them.

The project went live with only minor issues. Contributing to the “success” of the implementation were a realistic scope and timeline, an effective project team, and business participation in design, testing, and training. Equally critical were the highly visible, expectation setting communications from the Project Sponsor, who was a member of the executive committee. Multiple messages reinforced the expectation that the project would be successful, go-live on schedule, and require the support of everyone in the organization. These messages were also relayed to their areas by the Change Champions. By go-live, the workforce was informed, knew what was expected, had been trained, knew where to go for support, was primarily positive relative to the changes, and knew their management team strongly supported the initiative and expected them to make it happen.

**By contrast, for Project B,** change management was not a part of the initial plan and was added about a third of the way through phase one of the project. From the beginning of the OCM initiative, it was apparent that a focus on the people side was not a key concern. Not only was contact with project leadership limited, contact with the project team was also limited, with the OCM team being told to delay contact with the project team as they had more important work to do. The OCM team completed the OCM Plan with limited information and the plan was approved. However, just as execution of the plan was started, the OCM piece of the project was put on hold. Fortunately some efforts were being made to inform the people impacted by the changes. High level information was available on the internal web site. Also, some of the area managers were attempting to communicate the changes to their groups. However, there was little to no coordination of these efforts.
How Senior Management Should be Involvement

When is senior management support needed? Management support is needed throughout the project, starting in the planning stages and going through post go-live, where the focus becomes sustainability of the change.

Why should the senior executives deliver the key messages? One of the reasons that senior executive should deliver key communications is that there is a higher probability that people will pay attention. The only group that is generally listened to more is direct supervisors, who should also be included in the communications plan but generally later in the project. Not all project messages should go through the senior executives, just the key ones used to set expectations, champion change, and provide encouragement. Other communication’s drivers and vehicles must also be leveraged.

Management support for communications starts with a senior leader informing the organization of the changes that are coming, emphasizing the benefits of the change, tying the changes to corporate strategy, and addressing at a high level who will feel an impact and how the change will be supported. It is critical that this initial communication come from a respected business leader in the organization to visibly show management support for the initiative. In addition, this initial communication should tell the audience approximately when the next communication will occur and/or where to find additional information on the project.

While most projects do have an initial kickoff communication, many then go quiet for extended periods of time. It is critical that business management control the flow of information. If this does not happen, the informal communications networks, a.k.a. the rumor mill, will take control of the information flow.

Additional communications that can be delivered fairly early in any project include who is involved in the project, additional information on benefits and impact, high level planned timelines (if they are fairly firm), and information on what types of support are planned for the transformation, including training and support strategies.

Care should be taken if the transformation will also involve major changes in the organization, roles, and responsibilities. High level information, such as the move to a shared services organization, can be communicated. More detailed communications on organization and role changes and the impact on specific areas within the company are frequently best delivered by the area managers and immediate supervisors.

Other key communications that should be delivered by senior management include recognition of key milestones of the project and recognition of the people involved in getting to the milestones. Senior management should also actively participate in the mini celebrations of successes that are critical during extended change initiatives.

Senior management communications need to be planned in coordination with the total communications initiative. The OCM Team should create a proposed Communications Plan. The Communications Plan should identify where senior management communications are desired. Senior management can then review the plan and provide feedback on the plan and their involvement.

Summary

Although all change initiatives are somewhat unique, it is critical in all initiatives that the senior management team be seen visibly supporting the change initiative and the people that it will impact. Senior management communications should be part of a coordinated communications strategy with senior management messages repeated by others using a variety of communication’s vehicles.
Related Content

Organizational Change Management: The Behavioral Aspects of Change
Transitioning Through Change
OCM Leadership and Sponsorship

For more information, visit the Organizational Change Management homepage.
The Critical Role of Management Support in OCM Initiatives - A Tale of Two Projects

Copyright
© 2011 SAP AG. All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or for any purpose without the express permission of SAP AG. The information contained herein may be changed without prior notice.

Some software products marketed by SAP AG and its distributors contain proprietary software components of other software vendors. Microsoft, Windows, Outlook, and PowerPoint are registered trademarks of Microsoft Corporation.

IBM, DB2, DB2 Universal Database, OS/2, Parallel Sysplex, MVS/ESA, AIX, S/390, AS/400, OS/390, OS/400, iSeries, pSeries, xSeries, zSeries, System i, System i5, System p5, System x, System z, System z9, z/OS, AFP, Intelligent Miner, WebSphere, Netfinity, Tivoli, Informix, i5/OS, POWER, POWER5, POWER5+, OpenPower and PowerPC are trademarks or registered trademarks of IBM Corporation.

Adobe, the Adobe logo, Acrobat, PostScript, and Reader are either trademarks or registered trademarks of Adobe Systems Incorporated in the United States and/or other countries.

Oracle is a registered trademark of Oracle Corporation.

UNIX, X/Open, OSF/1, and Motif are registered trademarks of the Open Group.

Citrix, ICA, Program Neighborhood, MetaFrame, WinFrame, VideoFrame, and MultiWin are trademarks or registered trademarks of Citrix Systems, Inc.

HTML, XML, XHTML and W3C are trademarks or registered trademarks of W3C®, World Wide Web Consortium, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Java is a registered trademark of Sun Microsystems, Inc.

JavaScript is a registered trademark of Sun Microsystems, Inc., used under license for technology invented and implemented by Netscape.

MaxDB is a trademark of MySQL AB, Sweden.

SAP, R/3, mySAP, mySAP.com, xApps, xApp, SAP NetWeaver, and other SAP products and services mentioned herein as well as their respective logos are trademarks or registered trademarks of SAP AG in Germany and in several other countries all over the world. All other product and service names mentioned are the trademarks of their respective companies. Data contained in this document serves informational purposes only. National product specifications may vary.

These materials are subject to change without notice. These materials are provided by SAP AG and its affiliated companies ("SAP Group") for informational purposes only, without representation or warranty of any kind, and SAP Group shall not be liable for errors or omissions with respect to the materials. The only warranties for SAP Group products and services are those that are set forth in the express warranty statements accompanying such products and services, if any. Nothing herein should be construed as constituting an additional warranty.

These materials are provided “as is” without a warranty of any kind, either express or implied, including but not limited to, the implied warranties of merchantability, fitness for a particular purpose, or non-infringement.

SAP shall not be liable for damages of any kind including without limitation direct, special, indirect, or consequential damages that may result from the use of these materials.

SAP does not warrant the accuracy or completeness of the information, text, graphics, links or other items contained within these materials. SAP has no control over the information that you may access through the use of hot links contained in these materials and does not endorse your use of third party web pages nor provide any warranty whatsoever relating to third party web pages.

Any software coding and/or code lines/strings (“Code”) included in this documentation are only examples and are not intended to be used in a productive system environment. The Code is only intended better explain and visualize the syntax and phrasing rules of certain coding. SAP does not warrant the correctness and completeness of the Code given herein, and SAP shall not be liable for errors or damages caused by the usage of the Code, except if such damages were caused by SAP intentionally or grossly negligent.