



Change is Hard, But Practice Can Help

By Matt Adams, P.E.

For most endeavors in business and personal life, we follow something of a repeatable process to become proficient. For example, in sports we first learn the rules and the basics. This is often followed by lessons or coaching. Then the time comes to try the activity for ourselves, often with other beginners. We practice and learn and then finally when comfortable we engage in a “real” game. If we enjoy the sport we continue to practice, learn, and play—always improving. This is a logical approach to the learned skills of life, and it is universally understood. That said, why wouldn’t we adopt this approach in one of the most important, yet least perfected, skills of our careers: Change Management?

It doesn’t make sense to learn about change for the first time during a “live fire” exercise with real (or at least perceived) winners and losers, not having learned or trained beforehand. It sounds ridiculous, but this is how most of us engage in change management within our institutions.

FROM CONCEPT TO REALITY

APPA supports change from a personal, interpersonal, and organizational perspective in its Leadership Academy. Closely linked to the timeless philosophies of Stephen Covey and other thought leaders, the four tracks of the Academy teach that change within our institutions comes from the bottom up. Unlike old school paradigms

where management dictates and enforces change, the individuals effect change by first changing themselves and how they work with their peers. Management’s role is more subtle, involving, inspiring, clarifying, guiding, encouraging, and enabling change at the individual level.

To many this concept is not new. However, very few can say that it is actually utilized effectively within our industry. What percentage of our peers perceive their success and happiness at work as heavily influenced (or even controlled) by the institution or managers above them? We don’t know the actual percentage, but all would agree it is very high. Maybe too high. This old paradigm is holding back our profession.

As Glenn Smith teaches in the beginning of Track I of the 7 Habits; “Habit # 1 – Be Proactive, I am free to choose and ultimately responsible for my happiness.” This concept is important to change management. Change effectively occurs at the individual level within our departments. This concept must be learned in place of the old top-down approach. Once learned, it needs to be practiced over and over again so that our staff and managers can have a new perspective on change, its execution, and most importantly, its impact on each individual.

APPLYING EXERCISES

These change management exercises come from a hybrid of content from Covey, the Change Management Institute and others. The first exercise is ideal if

discussing and learning about change proactively is new to your organization. This exercise demonstrates that our departments are capable of change, have changed in the past, and will in the future.

Give groups of 4 or less a form with three columns, each titled “Change to,” and labeled as follows:

1. Institution,
2. My Department, and
3. Me as an individual

Provide images of significant events or technologies. Randomly hand out these pictures to each group and ask them to discuss and write down how change occurred and its effect on each recipient in each column. Ask them to discuss how the change was instituted and if it was conducted effectively. If not, why not.

Suggested pictures include the cellphone, 2008 Recession/budget cuts, Personal Digital Assistant, Campus expansion or contraction, changing of Chancellor or Vice Chancellor, outsourcing of a campus service, and others that are relevant to your team.

It is important to share the results and discuss the realities of change that is forced down from the top (such as budget cuts) and those that came from an individual (such as exploitation of cellphone technology.) What is the difference, and why is change from the bottom up always more effective? The point is that we change all the time, and it’s our choice to be proactive and “own”

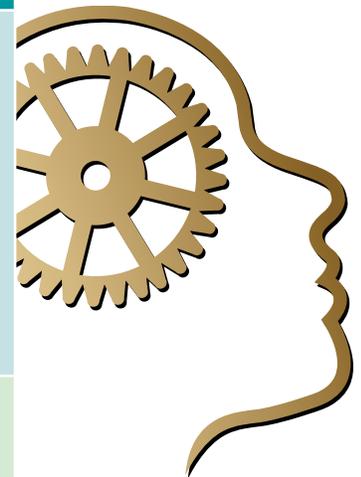
POPCORN DELIVERY SERVICES DEPARTMENT



Current State	Desired State	Transition
85% success rate at production and delivery.	Improvement to 95% success rate with one-time investment of \$100,000 and maintain 95% rate hereafter.	Sequenced steps to change from current to desired state with details of tasks, resources, and timeline.
85% success rate with delivery truck for each delivery person.	Maintain 85% success rate while eliminating gas vehicles.	Sequenced steps to change from current to desired state with details of tasks, resources, and timeline.
85% success rate and addition of 20 new faculty members at satellite campus.	Maintain 85% success rate without any new full-time staff.	Sequenced steps to change from current to desired state with details of tasks, resources, and timeline.

INDIVIDUAL TRANSITION CONNECTION

Transition Tasks	Purpose of Task	Details (resources, time, technology, processes)	Desired or Future state for each employee
Evaluate new technologies to improve production.	Utilize one-time investment funds to find new technology enabling increased production with current staff.	Send two staff members to tradeshows and have vendors make presentation to staff on campus. Cost: \$5000; duration: 3 months. Produce report on recommended technologies.	Delivery and production staff must participate in selection and recommendation of new technologies. They will help define future use of technology and associated training, process changes, and performance metrics.
Procure new technology and implement.	Install and exploit new technology in order to maximize use of one-time investment for increase of performance score to 95%.	Procurement includes process mapping, system configuration, extended training, support, and installation.	Delivery and production staff will each participate in training, process trials, and provide active feedback at each stage of implementation.



the change at the individual level or have it forced upon us.

The next change management exercise is more sophisticated and will allow participants to design change in order to address various scenarios in a proactive manner. So that no person in the exercise feels exposed, we use a fictitious department within the facilities department called "Popcorn Delivery" (PD).

This service center performs all of the services required to produce and deliver popcorn to every faculty member on campus each day. The current department is centrally managed, and each morning popcorn is popped and delivered during the day to the faculty. The department has been given a performance score of 85% effectiveness at achieving its goal with current organizational structure, staff, and resources.

There are two forms or templates required to complete each change scenario.

First is the Change Definition Page. This page has 3 columns titled

1. Current State
2. Desired State, and
3. Transition

For each exercise, the leader of the exercise prepares the current state and desired state beforehand. Despite the fact that this is a fictitious department, we will use real-world scenarios for the exercise.

Notice that the scenarios are not unlike those actually faced by our leaders and staff. This correlation is important. The next phase of the exercise is the completion of the Individual Transition Detail Connection form. This form reinforces the concept that change is best completed from the individual up.

The direct ability for the individual to impact or be impacted by the change must be fully described and discussed. It is important to note that this is an

exercise in which progressive and out-of-the-box thinking is encouraged (see chart on page 63).

PREPARATION AND PARTICIPATION

We use a similar exercise in Track III of the Leadership Academy for a Case Study University that requires a great many changes. This is often difficult for the students, because many have not been given a chance to proactively participate in change.

This proves the original premise that asking for significant organizational change without preparation or practice is impractical. Continued exploration and practice of change management should be a required skill for our current and future facility management teams. 

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