

# The top 10 change issues for communicators

Change affects every organization and every employee at some stage in their careers. Here, two consultants with Hill & Knowlton's Change & Internal Communications practice – David Ferrabee, managing director, and Paul Arnold, senior consultant – list their top ten change issues and tips on overcoming them. And below, Alison Davis, CEO of Davis & Co, points out how to advantageously use knowledge your organization already has when communicating with workers.

There are so many clichés surrounding the whole discussion of change management that it's often hard to figure out if we know anything about it at all. We hear that change is the only thing that we cannot change, that change management can reduce business risk and that employees suffer from change fatigue. But what does it all mean?

Maybe it's good to start by agreeing what change management is. We define it as the process by which you move an organization from point A to point B efficiently and effectively. It isn't necessarily about reducing the impact of change on the business. Sometimes change is all about turning the business upside down.

How you successfully manage change, and move the organization from A to B, depends entirely on how the people in that organization respond. That is where the role of change management lies.

We've broken our tips on change management into two segments: The golden rules of change and the process rules of change. The first set should make the second set easier to understand and carry out.

## The golden rules of change:

### 1. Everyone responds differently

If there should only be one rule, then it's that people make change happen. Think about the faces captured on a

rollercoaster. Some people are laughing, some are screaming, some look totally unfazed; and you never really know how you will react until you get on a rollercoaster. Add that very human element: the different job roles, business cultures and reporting lines and you have exponential possibilities.

### 2. There isn't a right way

Some times and in some situations certain things always work...until they don't. Change management is about managing the variables. Therefore, by definition, change management is about responding to the specific needs in each instance – you cannot bottle solutions and roll them out every time. You need to consider the issues which will affect your audience as a result of the change.

### 3. You may not know when you get there

It's difficult to make an accurate assessment of what the end-point will look and feel like – you can only make calculated assumptions. However, all good change programs should be adaptable and evolve over time (ensuring you stick to the original scope) so that the tactics you use reflect the changes which might occur in the project.

### 4. It's not all about culture

Some of the best change managers in the world are purely process-driven

people. You don't have to be a master of culture mapping and organizational psychology to run a change program. (Although it often helps to know someone who is.)

## The process rules:

### 5. Know where you are going

Commonly called the “change path.” This is the roadmap that helps you understand where you are going and how you can get from A to B. It's here that you will begin to understand the nature of the change required – is it transformation or realignment, evolution or revolution?

Question: Have you clearly articulated a vision of what you're trying to achieve and where you want to finish?

### 6. Know where you are

Also known as the “change start-point,” direction at this point is vital for any successful journey. No one really wants to roll down the proverbial car window and ask “where are we?” And how successful are you at getting to your destination when you don't know where you're going or what you need to do to get there?

Questions: Do you understand why you are making the change in the first place? What factors, such as time, budget, sponsorship and the team's ability, act either as barriers or enablers to change?

### 7. Know how you will manage it

You should have a good sense of whether this change is going to be top-down, collaborative, collegial, consultative, etc. We call this the “change style.” You don't want to ask

people for their opinions, and then say “we were always going to do it this way anyway.”

Questions: Have you designed your change strategy to reflect the situation the organization is in? Do you have the right level of sponsorship and backing? If not, how should your approach reflect that?

### 8. Know what you want

Is your program trying to change attitudes? Change behaviours? Change products or processes? This is called the “change target.”

Questions: Have you thought about what exactly needs to change? For instance, if you’re changing organizational values, that will be completely different from a change in a process.

### 9. Know how you’ll do it

What will you do to make it happen? These are the “change levers.” Are your levers technical, cultural, political or social? They’re generally one of those.

Questions: What part of the organization needs to move in order

for the change to be successful? Deciding which “levers” to use will depend on where the changes are expected to occur.

### 10. Know who’s doing what

What are the “change roles?” They’re a fairly basic part of any project management, but frequently overlooked. Who is responsible for doing what? Do they have the knowledge, the skills and the resources?

Questions: How easy will it be to make the internal team’s role a part of their full-time job? If consultants are involved, how do you get them talking to the right people and who will manage them?

### Conclusion

Good change management is in demand in most organizations. Unfortunately its popularity hasn’t been matched by the emergence of commonly defined processes. Even though we need to do it more and more, it hasn’t got any easier. Given what drives change and people, we can’t expect it to either.

## ▶ CONTACT

DAVID FERRABEE

▶ [David.Ferrabee@hillandknowlton.com](mailto:David.Ferrabee@hillandknowlton.com)

PAUL ARNOLD

▶ [Paul.Arnold@hillandknowlton.com](mailto:Paul.Arnold@hillandknowlton.com)

## ▶ MORE INFORMATION

Make the most of your online subscription with these additional articles from the TBC archive, simply log in at <http://www.melcrum.com/link/tbcarchive.html>

TBC ISSUE 6.6 NOVEMBER 2005

▶ Five Fast Ways To:  
Spread change from the bottom up

TBC ISSUE 4.1 2003

▶ Feature:  
How to build a communication strategy for organizational change

## WHAT MAKES YOUR EMPLOYEES TICK?

Alison Davis, CEO, Davis & Co advises using information readily available from your organization’s databases in order to more successfully target your internal audience and drive change.

### What are demographics?

The means of distinguishing and describing the characteristics of a population. They’ve long been applied to external communication, but only recently used to shape employee communication.

### How should you use the information you discover?

Demographics can shape attitudes – in this case, about communication. People in their mid-40s or older grew up in an era before computers, so if a significant portion of your organization’s workers are 40 or above, it’s wise not to rely solely on electronic communication.

### How much do you know about your workforce?

Communicators’ knowledge should go beyond such commonalities as how many people work for the company. They should know:

- how many locations there are;
- how many employees have been with the company more than 20 years; and
- how many speak English.

### Where can you find the information?

The best source for demographic information within your organization is the HR or payroll department. The more sophisticated the database managed by HR, the more closely you can analyze demographics data. The point is to paint a picture of the people in your organization, so you can develop better strategies for reaching them.

### How to apply demographics

Developing messages that resonate is never easy, but it’s helpful to think about messages in the context of demographics. For example, a communicator at one pharmaceutical company found that 45 percent of scientists in the R&D organization speak English as their second language. She used this to make her case for creating messages that are more straightforward and use less jargon.

## ▶ CONTACT

ALISON DAVIS

▶ [info@davisandco.com](mailto:info@davisandco.com)

▶ [www.davisandco.com](http://www.davisandco.com)

Copyright of Business Communicator is the property of Melcrum Publishing Ltd. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.