IT Change Management
A Practitioner's Guide
GREG SANKER

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Dedicated to my father, who taught me the pursuit of excellence

About this guide

Who's it for?

The short answer is – all change management practitioners. Whether you're new to this field or have been involved with it for years, you'll find this publication helpful in establishing, maturing and optimizing change management in your organization.

What you'll find here aren't random or theoretical thoughts about change management; the content is derived from decades of real-world lessons learned (often the hard way).

If you are a novice, this publication will guide you in how to introduce a very basic change management capability that will help your organization get better control of IT changes happening in your environment. I've addressed the full spectrum of issues you'll face in getting change management established and realizing business value.

For the experienced practitioner whose organization has an existing change management programme and is looking for help in maturing and optimizing, you'll find expert guidance here on how to do it while minimizing cultural resistance.

Why do you need it?

Change management, in theory, is relatively simple. In practice, however, it can be very challenging. This publication is based on the author's in-depth experience in change management, where things are often not as simple as the best-practice training might lead you to believe.

Who's it by?

Greg Sanker

Greg has decades of real-world IT experience, ranging from a global technology giant to a small state government agency. He has been involved with IT change management in various capacities over the years.

Greg is an IT service management practitioner and author who frequently speaks about organizational excellence and change management. He is noted for his practical approach and 'been there, done that' advice.

How is it organized?

This publication is structured to be useful in a wide variety of situations. If your organization is just getting started with formal change management, you'll benefit from a front-to-back reading. If your organization has basic change management, you'll need to pay particular attention to the basic programme outlined in Chapter 3 (phase 1). You may find that you're already meeting all the described criteria, in which case you're ready for the next phase (covered in Chapter 4). Chapter 5 on optimizing change management can be added as a third phase, or included as parts of earlier phases as needed, to meet the challenges you face in your situation.

A summary of the chapters is as follows:

- **Chapter 1** Introduces change management essentials and provides a basic understanding of what is meant by 'change management', what change management seeks to do for the organization and why it is important for organizational success.

- **Chapter 2** Addresses some of the challenges change management presents and describes how various approaches have contributed to change management failures and organizational frustration. It proposes a multiphased approach to adopting and maturing change management, which is then taken up in more detail in the following chapters.

- **Chapter 3** Provides guidance to allow you to identify and put the right controls in place to manage stability and uptime, and be proactive in minimizing any adverse business impact. This chapter focuses on introducing the concept of change control into an organization, with the emphasis on business value and addressing the cultural considerations necessary for success. It then sets the stage for future maturity.

- **Chapter 4** Establishes the idea of proactively managing the end-to-end change lifecycle by introducing a review stage at the end of development/testing to ensure changes introduced both support the objectives of the business and minimize the risk of an unsuccessful implementation. It then introduces the concept of optimization.

- **Chapter 5** Provides strategies for optimizing any change management programme, including standard changes, delegated change authority and change models. The practical guidance here is applicable to any change programme that is struggling to keep pace with the business.

- **Chapter 6** The successful change programme must fit the organization in which it operates. This chapter explores the foundational concepts of adapting and adopting as they apply to change management.

- **Chapter 7** Takes a brief look at what lies ahead for change management. DevOps and related 'iterative' and 'continuous flow' development methodologies challenge the traditional approach to change management.

Foreword

We hear criticisms of IT change management from many angles: it's too bureaucratic, too process-focused, too IT-focused and certainly not responsive enough to survive in a modern business environment in which IT plays an increasingly vital role. How, critics ask, can a change advisory board (CAB) review and evaluate every change, when businesses – increasingly dependent on IT – need to be moving ahead at lightning speed?

Change management, however, is much more than just the installation of a CAB; it is the planned construction of capability that informs and accelerates the maintenance and improvement of IT. Whether you are just beginning IT change management in your organization or are under pressure to make it deliver better outcomes more in sync with your multivendor cloud environment or new DevOps initiative, the insights and recommendations in this publication can help you accomplish your goals.

Yes, in today's businesses, successful changes need to happen more frequently and rapidly than ever, but that presents a challenge to change management, not a negation of it. Too often, service managers and developers think of change management as something that happens once – just before release and deployment. But it is not a last-minute quality check. It is change control as an integral part of every aspect of IT's mission, ensuring compliance and stability, and keeping changes focused on business needs and outcomes.

Change management, approached this way, aligns with multiple frameworks and methodologies. In fact, as Greg points out, IT change management must be done in the context of your organization's culture, regardless of the frameworks you have chosen.

Stability isn't the absence of change …

The definitions of standard, normal and emergency changes can reduce the burden on (and accelerate the function of) the CAB, which ceases to be a barrier and becomes an advisory partner. Maintaining a laser-like focus on quality, stability and compliance requirements throughout the development and/or acquisition of new or changing technology can minimize risk and reduce the frequency and impact of interruptions resulting from changes.

'Out of the box' is not the place to start, especially since technology and tools are secondary to a change management capability that suits the needs and priorities established by your business. Neither is 'by the book' the way to proceed, although Greg states that following best practices doesn't mean you can only achieve the average, or that you are copying other organizations.

Read what Greg's book has to say. Make this your guide to a better IT change management capability during this time of technological disruption and rapid business transformation.

Roy Atkinson
Senior writer/analyst, UBM Americas – HDI

Preface

The most commonly asked question when IT systems fail is, 'What changed?' We instinctively know something must have; otherwise, it would have kept on working.

Change-related failures pose significant risk to business. In response, organizations apply best-practice frameworks such as ITIL® and standards such as ISO 20000. The goal for these efforts: to gain better control of the IT infrastructure and improve operational effectiveness. Unfortunately, despite significant improvements, organizations continue to struggle to effectively manage IT changes.

Worse, much of what has been done under the umbrella of 'change management' is overly complex, too internally focused on IT and doesn't keep pace with business needs.

Some words I frequently hear in connection with a typical change management implementation are:

- Slow
- Bureaucratic
- Complex
- IT-focused
- Broken.

Here I present a practitioner's guide to establishing, maturing and optimizing an effective IT change management capability (or programme). It's intended to answer the question, 'How do I actually do it?' The goal is to help you be successful in your organization.

In contrast to a process-focused approach, my intention is to address the full spectrum of elements necessary for successful implementation, which include:

- Focus on outcomes (not process)
- Realize business value
- Adapt and adopt
- Gain (and maintain) organizational support
- Consider the culture (organizational change management)
- Phase in implementation with incremental improvements.

It's my hope that you will find this publication helpful as a daily guide to managing the challenges the change management practitioner faces.

Acknowledgements

I am deeply indebted to so many people for helping shape this publication – the countless change management practitioners the world over whom I've spoken to in person, at conferences or by email. Each one represents a unique set of challenges and circumstances.

I am grateful for the wealth of knowledge generously shared by Stuart Rance, Kirstie Megowan and Ivor Macfarlane. I am especially thankful for the extensive review and coaching of David Moskowitz, without whom this publication would not have happened.

Lastly, I would be remiss to not mention my long-time friend and mentor, Mark Thomas; without his advice and encouragement, my career in IT service management would not have been possible.

About the reviewers

Roy Atkinson

Roy Atkinson is HDI's senior writer/analyst, acting as in-house subject matter expert and chief writer for blogs, articles and white papers; he is also a member of the HDI International Certification Standards Committee. He co-authored the AXELOS/HDI white paper, 'Synergies between ITIL® and Knowledge-Centered Support'. He has a background in service desk, desktop support and small-business consulting. He studied advanced management strategy at Tulane University's Freeman Graduate School of Business, and holds HDI certificates in support center management (HDI-SCM) and knowledge-centered support (KCS).

Andie Kis

An ITIL, PRINCE2® and Green IT qualified senior consultant specializing in service integration and management, Andie works for Information Services Group (ISG) Ltd. She has a strong practical background in business relationship management, service desks and the people side of IT, having started her IT career in 2002 on a multilingual IT help desk in Budapest, Hungary. In Andie's own words, she is a practitioner of best practices with a chameleon-like ability to adapt to and understand a wide variety of customers and clients. She has worked in different industries in internal and outsourced roles, working with the likes of TCS, EDS, the BBC, Deutsche Bank and Macmillan Cancer Support. She is an active international speaker as well as a contributor to various industry magazines and blogs.

David Moskowitz

David Moskowitz is an IT service management consultant with more than 30 years' experience of working with clients to help them improve outcomes that engage both business and IT. He has written, edited and taught ITIL, PRINCE2 and RESILIA™ courseware and articles. He is a systems thinker and certified as an ITIL Expert.

Peter Saxon

With more than 15 years' professional experience in an IT environment, covering areas such as retail, logistics, NHS and automotive, Peter Saxon has held various roles, including those of computer analyst, service desk manager, operations manager, project and programme manager, and business change manager. Each of these roles has involved a significant amount of IT and business change management.

Introduction

Change is everywhere. Everything is in a constant state of flux.

Businesses used to have one choice when it came to technology – their internal IT staff. But with mobile computing and cloud services infrastructure on demand, we live in a new era where anyone anywhere in the world with a bright idea can make it available to the global marketplace in a few hours. This 'consumerization' of IT services puts enterprise-class IT services at the fingertips of everyone in your company.

All modern enterprises depend on the digital infrastructure for their very lifeblood. The game is no longer simple decision support; entire businesses depend on unprecedented strategic advantages afforded to those who master big data and can move with agility to capitalize on the narrow window of opportunity earned by their advantage.

Likewise, both government and public IT sectors face similar pressures to adapt. Many agencies are still operating with a 1950s mindset, automated by technology in the late 1970s. Meanwhile, a generation of 'digital natives' expect public agencies to provide services and access to information in the same ways they've come to expect from private businesses. They don't understand why it's so difficult, and have no interest in the complexities of legacy IT systems. As organizations struggle to meet demands for modern services with antiquated systems, the news is full of IT project failures and alarming security breaches.

IT systems represent an increasingly complex hybrid of multivendor applications, services and infrastructure. IT organizations face cloud and other forms of 'as a service' delivery models that simply didn't exist when even recently hired staff were in college. The world has never been more connected, enabling instantaneous global collaboration with unprecedented levels of complexity, operational challenges and risks. Hardly a day passes without the discovery of a new security breach, a vulnerability exposed or personal information compromised.

IT organizations are facing increased regulatory and compliance pressures as governments and industry organizations address emerging risks and challenges. The complexity and rate of change can be overwhelming, and there's a temptation to want things to stay the way they are because we understand the current state and are comfortable with it. But such 'stability' is an illusion. Stability isn't the absence of change but rather the deliberate application of the right changes that restore balance and maintain stability.

Wise is the IT organization with a strong and effective change management capability that meets the needs of its customers.

> **Example**
> A US government agency commissioned a major application development effort. The contractor gathered requirements and managed the project through to completion. In line with the agency's usual practice, when the development was complete, the change was brought to the change advisory board (CAB) for sign-off before being released into production.
>
> Much to the surprise of the project team, the change was denied. Highly offended, they demanded to know what right the change manager had to block such an important change. Regretfully, the change manager had to tell the project team they had developed the new application for a platform that the agency didn't have in the production environment.

All change involves risk: risk of breaking something, losing something or not achieving the desired results. IT change management is the art and science of effective and efficient implementation of beneficial changes to IT services at the speed business requires, while minimizing negative impact and managing risk.

Many IT organizations have adopted some form of IT service management (ITSM) best-practice framework, at least to a degree. ITSM training continues to be very popular, with numerous qualification and certification schemas. These are excellent sources of information, and I highly recommend this type of training. However, if it's a change management process you're after, you can have that in a week. On the other hand, if you want an *effective* change management capability, well, that will take a bit more time.

An effective change management capability requires more than just training in best practices and process frameworks, because it is far more than merely implementing a process for managing change. It requires a great deal of knowledge and understanding of the particular organization and its unique challenges. The change management practitioner must understand the organization's culture, challenges and goals.

And it goes even deeper than that. Change management cannot be just the same thing only faster; it must be engineered from the ground up to meet the current and ever-changing needs of business. Best practices, including change management, must be adopted *and* adapted.

The challenges facing the change management practitioner have never been greater, yet there's never been a better time to be a change manager. Successful organizations require highly effective IT change management. So where do we begin?

We start right here – with the end in mind. In this publication you'll find a very straightforward multiphased approach to make change management work in your organization. It is structured in logical steps, or phases, that focus on the success of each individual step while maximizing the likelihood of building a mature change management capability.

What outcomes do our customers need that IT change management can help facilitate? How will our change management capability enable the business to be more successful? These are the kinds of question that should be at the forefront of your mind as a change management practitioner, and this publication willl help you work through the answers.