

# Knowledge Worker

## Change Management in A Nutshell

(November 2014)

Knowledge workers figure out what to do and then get it done. “Getting it done,” whatever that might be, involves changing things. Managing change, then, is an integral part of a knowledge worker’s job.

Change is indirect. Whatever your ultimate change target might be, the chances are you don’t (or can’t) change *it* directly; instead, you change something else and *it* changes as a result. You can’t, for example, directly manipulate profit or ROI or error rates or retention rates. The same is true of human behavior and performance. You don’t (or can’t) change it directly. You have to change something “over here” in order to realize a result “over there.” *Over here* and *over there* can be close by or far removed in space and time. In either case, *over here* and *over there* are parts of or places in the same structure, the structure of the system in which you are intervening.

To *intervene* is to change things with one or more outcomes in mind. The places where you can change things directly – where the effects of your actions are direct and immediate – are usefully thought of as “Points of Intervention.” Those places in the system where you will assess the achievement of the outcome(s) you seek are usefully thought of as “Points of Evaluation.”

To manage change responsibly requires us to say that *this action* will produce *that result* or, conversely, that *that result* requires *this action*. In both cases we must be able to show how the Points of Intervention and the Points of Evaluation are connected. To do this we must already know or be able to map the structure of the system in which we are intervening and show where in that structure the Points of Intervention and the Points of Evaluation are located and how they are connected. Only then can we trace the paths connecting the two and show how changes made at the Points of Intervention will “ripple through” the structure of the system, leading to the desired effects at the Points of Evaluation.

Figuring out what to change and how to change it is only half the puzzle. The other half is concerned with actually making and managing the change. Far from being a keenly analytical activity, change management is often a hotly political one. The stakes can be high and among the stakeholders there can be winners and losers, many of whom will support the change and many of whom will oppose it. Winners and losers, gains and losses, supporters and naysayers – all must be identified and dealt with. Gains must clearly outweigh losses and outweigh them by enough to make the costs of the change worthwhile. (By the way, the costs aren’t all financial.) Supporters must be leveraged and the opposition must be brought on board, neutralized or removed.

Then, too, there are issues related to the *change strategy*. Will it rely on persuasion and incentives, a *rational-empirical* view of things? Will it instead focus on changing culture and beliefs, a *normative-reeducative* approach? Might it resort to the raw exercise of power, authority and sanctions – a *power-coercive* maneuver? Or might it use the built-in ability of people to adapt to new circumstances, an *environmental-adaptive* move? Or, as is most likely the case, will it use a mix of these four strategies?

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Finally, for now, three change management roles are critical: Sponsor, Champion and Straw Boss. The Sponsor is the person who owns the change. This is the person who wants the change made, who is willing to fund and support it and who has the authority to do so. The Champion is the person who will oversee the change, be the “front man” for it and who will step in if necessary. This person, too, requires authority and the backing of the Sponsor. The “Straw Boss” is the person who will lead the change effort “down in the trenches,” so to speak. This is the person who, more than any other, will make it happen. This person requires little in the way of formal authority but does need the unequivocal trust, backing and support of the Champion and the Sponsor.

There you have it: change management in a nutshell. For more about all this, see [Change Management 101: A Primer](#). Also see [Four Change Management Strategies](#).

### About the Author

Fred Nickols, CPT, is a knowledge worker, writer, consultant, and former executive who spent 20 years in the U.S. Navy, retiring as a decorated chief petty officer. In the private sector, he worked as a consultant and then held executive positions with two former clients. Currently, Fred is the manager partner of [Distance Consulting LLC](#). His website is home to the award-winning [Knowledge Worker's Tool Room](#) and more than 200 free articles, book chapters, and papers. Fred is a longtime member of ISPI and writes this monthly column for *PerformanceXpress*. A complete listing of all Knowledge Worker columns and access to them is available [here](#).