
The Mathis Group's Messenger

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Changing Your Project Without Headaches

Last month we looked at how change influences every organization. This month we focus on how changes will impact projects. With every project you do, it is inevitable that at least one change will happen--oftentimes it will be multiple changes in a single project. However, not all changes are negative. There are times when change is necessary to successfully complete the project. Once you are in a project, you may find that there is a new way to improve the project deliverable that wasn't available at the project's inception. There could also be a recognition of a potential failure in the planned approach or a gap in the plan which should be included that you may not have been aware of in earlier stages of the project.

You will hear a variety of reasons as to why people are hesitant to embrace change. A few are:

- Lack of time
- Unclear description of the change
- No penalties for making unrealistic demands and changes
- No sponsor or upper management support
- Little or no skills for implementation
- Limited resources
- No buy-in by employees
- Lack of planning
- Fear of unknown



While these are very real issues, they shouldn't stop the change from happening. Designing a strategy to handle

changes will help everyone be more comfortable with the process and know the exact steps that need to be taken. Use change requests as a means of initiating the change. A change request is a written "means to examine and track the details of proposed project changes and ensure review and approval by the appropriate authorities before further action is taken." (PMBOK®) When writing your change request, make sure that it is clear and detailed. Have a description of the change, reasons for the change, importance of the change, implications of not making the change, timing and urgency of the change, and objectives, scope and constraints all listed as plainly as possible. Your change request should also include priority and urgency ratings. Priority ratings have three categories: high--must be done, medium--ought to be done, and low--nice to do. Urgency rating's three indicators are: high--immediately, medium--as soon as possible, and low--when time permits. Using these ratings help the project team know when each change should be accomplished.

When you are preparing to carry out the project change, determine whether it will be a minor or major change. A minor change may vary with each organization. It can be determined by a certain level in the change in hours

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*I do not believe you can do today's job
with yesterday's methods and be in
business tomorrow.
Nelson Jackson*

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or dollar amount. For example, a minor change could be considered anything that will require less than 25 hours or \$3,000 to complete. On the other hand, a major change is everything above the designated baseline. Major changes usually require more evaluation and authorization from upper management or project stakeholders.

An organization may want to use a change agent to help evaluate all changes. A change agent is someone who envisions the need for change, looks at changes from the customer's point of view, creates step by step actions, and is open to innovation. This person(s) will assist the change process in running more smoothly.

When dealing with change, you must learn to be resilient. Resilience is the ability to absorb high levels of disruptive change while displaying minimal dysfunctional behavior. There are five characteristics of resilience.

1. Quickly regain equilibrium after expectations are disrupted
2. Maintain a high level of productivity during a period of ambiguity
3. Remain physically and emotionally healthy while struggling with uncertainty
4. Avoid dysfunctional behaviors that impede the success of a project
5. Rebound from the demands of change even stronger than before

(Project Change Management,
Harrington, H., Conner D., Horney, N., p. 30)

When we are resilient, we can motivate other team members to react with the same attitude. Encouraging others to not be distracted by change will allow everyone to be more productive.

Once the change has been approved, implementing will take place. The implementation team will develop a change implementation plan that will focus on tasks and

activities to be changed, examine issues and concerns which will arise due to the change, and discuss how to handle risk analysis on the new change.

After the change has been implemented, you ought to measure its success. Detail the goals and measurements which will be used to show the change is working. Decide how the measurements will be collected and analyzed. Determine the baseline which is the minimum amount of change to determine success. Establish a test group or small pilot to verify baselines. Implement the tracking system for tracking success. Document who and how the data will be archived for historical information.

When done in a structured format, change can be beneficial to your project. Knowing the proper steps and guidelines to follow will ensure that your project is successful while minimizing the headaches that you face.



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