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Leading Change

12 steps to get your organization from here to there.

News Story by Mary K. Pratt

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(COMPUTERWORLD) - Gail Holmberg has to deliver more than a working system when she deploys a new initiative. "It's not a success for the company if that's all that happens," says Holmberg, CIO at Bally Total Fitness Holding Corp. in Chicago. Workers have to actually *use* the new product to improve how they do their day-to-day jobs.

Sounds simple, but IT executives know that managing change is a challenge. Staffers are usually quite comfortable with the status quo and often initially see change as more disruptive than helpful.

"Even when change is very positive, it's a challenging thing for people to go from how they do things today to what they'll be doing tomorrow," says Mary C. Finlay, deputy CIO at Partners HealthCare System Inc. in Boston.

Such challenges shouldn't stop any organization from going ahead with changes, however. Change can be successfully managed, and the following steps can help you move your business and your people to where they need to be.

1. Have a clear vision of what you want to achieve. "IT leaders often have difficulty ensuring that their visions are clear, specific and framed from multiple perspectives so they can reach all the various people they need to reach," says Sheila J. Smith, a senior consultant at Ouellette & Associates Consulting Inc. in Bedford, N.H.

As a positive example, Smith points to one IT department that, when assessing how it could improve support for users, determined what the support process should look like in the future and how that



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differed from its current setup. Then the department articulated that evolution to everyone who would be affected by the change.

2. Build alliances. Seek out leaders within other departments to champion changes. "If we can get those [business] people on our side, we'll get everything to work," says Angelo Mazzocco, vice president and CIO at The Dispatch Printing Co. in Columbus, Ohio.



Image Credit: John Ueland

Mazzocco, who oversees the IT departments of 14 affiliate companies with more than 2,000 employees, holds monthly meetings with senior IT and business managers so he can notify allies when changes are proposed.

3. Lead by example. That means you have to be an early adapter to change, says William McQuiston, CIO at Truman Medical Centers Inc. in Kansas City, Mo. "So if someone is having problems with the change, I can say, 'Yes, it was a struggle for me, and I did this, and it helped,'" he says.

4. Communicate, and then overcommunicate. Meetings, newsletters, posters, e-mails and informal exchanges help you explain the changes that lie ahead, why they're needed and what they'll mean.

"We need to explain how this positively affects you, how this helps you do your job better," says Johanna Rothman, president of Rothman Consulting Group Inc. in Arlington, Mass.

Remember, too, that "everything you do is communication," Rothman says. Your actions say at least as much as your words.

5. Educate workers about how the change will improve their performance. When Bally rolled out a new system for contact management and guest registration, the pilot program showed that the training taught workers how to use the system but not necessarily how to use it to further sales, Holmberg says. So the IT department partnered with the training department to develop a much richer training program that taught workers the system's full value.

"The assumption is if people know how to manage the [new IT] system, then people will know how to navigate their daily workflow," Holmberg says. But that's not necessarily true. Tailor training programs to teach workers how to use the new technology to do their jobs better.

6. Divide the change into digestible pieces and then take time to implement them. "A key to making a transition is to take very small and deliberate steps," says Douglas Mikaelian, director of IT at Poly-Foam International Inc., a Fremont, Ohio-based manufacturer with 500 employees at 22 sites.

Mikaelian worked with one company whose five-person IT staff went from supporting a couple hundred people to 1,200 in a few months because of organizational changes. To meet the new demands, the IT department identified 16 processes that needed overhauls and then implemented them one by one over two years. The company also added four new IT workers to keep the day-to-day operations going while the larger organizational changes took place, Mikaelian says.

7. Keep it simple. IT leaders tend to add "complexity through too much process," says Scott Richards, CIO at Emergency Medical Associates/Alpha Physicians Resources in Livingston, N.J. He says that he prefers an agile development strategy that puts users and developers together to hammer out new systems and the changes that will go with them.

"Go right to the user. Put the user with the people who can get [the change] into play," Richards says, pointing out that his projects take an average of two to three months from active engagement to deployment.

Richards freely acknowledges that his approach is different than that taken by others. But, he says, "change management can't be imposing. It can't be so structured that people are more concerned about the formalities" than about actually making the transition successfully.

8. Look to past experiences and colleagues for guidance. Examine your previous successes and failures to determine how you can improve change management, Ouellette's Smith says. Ask, "Did we get enough buy-in?" "How well did we communicate?" and "How did we sustain change?"

Mazzocco also recommends tapping colleagues in other industries for advice, which is something he does at a CIO forum he started six years ago. "It's helped us in implementing major initiatives," he says.

9. Sustain change by providing the right tools. When Finlay implemented a new resource and project management tool at Partners HealthCare, she sent staffers to a day of training. Afterward, she had follow-up sessions where workers could ask questions on how to integrate the tool into their day-to-day jobs. She also set up phone and e-mail support for workers who had questions or encountered problems after they started to work on the new system.

10. Solicit feedback. Survey workers who are affected by a change and talk with them directly. "Management shouldn't just say, 'I have an open-door policy.' The reality is most people won't go through that doorway," says Naomi Karten, principal of Karten Associates, a training and consulting firm in Randolph, Mass.

11. Acknowledge progress to keep up momentum. Karten remembers one insurance company whose IT department underwent a major reorganization. Afterward, the IT manager kicked off meetings by having staffers talk about positive interactions with new internal customers, good encounters with new departments or examples of smooth adjustments.

12. Make the necessary commitment. We're all doing more with less these days, but when it comes to change, Mazzocco says it's best to devote the necessary people to the project by freeing them from their day-to-day duties. Holmberg takes that advice one step further: If your organization lacks the commitment and courage to see the change through, she says, don't even begin.

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