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7 Change Management Trends Project Managers Need to Be Aware Of

Phil Buckley - December 4, 2017



Phil Buckley is senior change management professional with 25 years of experience helping leaders and their teams align mindsets, actions and behaviors to achieve new and challenging goals. He has managed 32 large-scale change projects for national and global organizations based in Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom.

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Topics: Change Management, Ethics and Organizational Culture, Leadership

For most public and private organizations, constant change is the norm. What is new is the increased pace and volume of the changes required to manage their rapidly evolving mandates, stakeholder expectations and operating conditions.

Leaders and their organizations are rethinking how they navigate their volatile and complex environments. New structures, practices and capabilities are being adopted to seize opportunities and defend against threats arising from change.

These new perspectives on change management have significant implications for project managers. Identifying, understanding and aligning with them is the best way to meet stakeholder needs and enable project results delivery.

Here are seven change management trends that will affect how project managers lead their projects...

1. Managing multiple large changes while delivering short-term results is a steady state. The tension between delivering short- and long-term objectives is a reality many leaders don't actively manage. They lead multiple large change projects without addressing the complexity and resource drains that jeopardize delivery of short-term results.

At the same time, short-term performance almost always trumps long-term benefits. Project managers need to expect and mitigate fallout from hasty reprioritization of near-term goals. The best preparation is education on consequences and contingency planning.

Building and presenting potential scenarios of resource reprioritization caused by short-term prioritization can inform leadership and steering teams on the organizational and project costs of mid-project shifts. Doing so in the project planning phase will remove the pressure and tension created by unexpected performance gaps. Developing associated contingency plans can illustrate the strategic and tactical costs of short-term delivery that can help avoid them being triggered.

2. Organizational agility is the "Holy Grail" of managing an unknown future. Organizational agility refers to "the capability to quickly sense and adapt to external and internal changes to deliver relevant results," as defined in PMI's *Achieving Greater Agility* research report, not agile development methodologies like DSDS, Scrum and XP.

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Many leaders are clear on the outputs of organizational agility (such as quick responses to competitive threats and efficient resource reallocation to capture emerging opportunities) but are unclear on the changes necessary to operate a more flexible and nimble organization.

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by Barbee Davis, MA, PHR, PMP, PMI-ACP, PMI-PSB December 11, 2017

Question: I'm sorry, but some days I hate mornings I come into work and have so much to do, but I just can't get myself started. My work is interesting, I have plenty to do and I like my team, it's just that some days I have absolutely no motivation. How embarrassing that I lead others, but many mornings I can't lead myself to get busy with productive work. Thoughts?



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by Andy Jordan December 11, 2017

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by Mike Donoghue December 10, 2017

As much as project managers are pioneers with a skill set that helps them and their teams through each difficult journey, the unexplored territories of government projects can add significant layers of confusion and effort.

It's important for project managers to clarify how leaders intend to create a more flexible organization so they make the required adjustments to their project's governance model. These alterations will put them ahead of the transitional curve and gain the support of leaders who will be looking for early wins for their agility initiative.

3. Leaders are expected to play a greater role in change. Leaders have always been expected to lead change. What is different is how change leadership is defined. On the lower side of the spectrum, the "tell me what to say and I will say it" style of management is no longer common; leaders are expected to be fully engaged and personally committed to the changes they are leading.

The most important capability they are expected to master is the ability to manage the unknown—moving forward when the path isn't clear. This requires them to quickly assess the level of importance of new conditions, develop a fact base to understand implications, tap qualified resources and select appropriate responses given the organization's abilities and culture. Some of these tasks would have been assigned to change managers. With fewer of these resources, leaders are taking on this work.

The expanded change leadership role is important to project managers because their relationship with leaders is changing. Since they are now more involved in change planning, project managers need to toggle between co-management and reporting. Determining when to play each role is a skill that PMs will need to develop.

4. Consistency through centralization. Many organizations are centralizing their strategy setting, decision making and processes in the interest of alignment, consistency and efficiency. When operating models change, so do roles, accountabilities and decision-making authority.

Project governance practices need to align to these changes. Often, the details around operating model changes remain undefined long past their announcement. This is a project risk. Project managers need to be clear about who does what (role accountability) and who makes decisions (power distribution). A common gap is identifying who has the authority to trigger contingency plans. Asking clarifying questions soon after organizational changes will avoid surprises further on the project timeline.

5. Transformation is a culture play. There is a growing realization that large transformations are as much, if not more, about culture change than technological change. People's mindsets, actions and behaviors need to align with required new ways of working.

Changes in organizational culture take a long time to embed. Especially, new behaviors take time to learn and adopt—a requirement that is underestimated by most leaders. Project schedule management must factor in sufficient time for these new behaviors to be learned and practiced in projects. If specific behaviors are not included in project scope management, they often are ignored—which adds risk of failure to adopt new ways of working.

Project managers need to ask the question, "Do the support activities and time estimates allow for the needed culture change to happen?" If not, building in additional support and time can avoid shortfalls in stakeholder expectation and results delivery.

6. Increased measurement of people transitions. The greater focus on culture change as an enabler of transformation has raised the awareness and need for measuring new mindsets and behaviors. Greater investment in the people side of change has increased expectations that it is done effectively. Since what gets measured gets managed and prioritized, it's best to proactively discuss this type of measurement in the planning phase to avoid it being raised during implementation (or worse, after implementation).

Measurement of people-related changes is moving beyond post-training testing and observation. Advances in digital technology have added more science and rigor into people transition measurement. People analytics is increasingly being used for people transition measurement on integrations and reorganizations. This refers to analyzing people data to identify patterns that suggest productivity gains or gaps.

Beyond being aware of these new types of measurement, project managers need to ensure they are clear, scheduled and assigned owners in project schedule management. Data availability also needs to be assessed to ensure timing of measurement is accurate.

7. Internal change capability building is a priority. Many of the other change management trends have increased focus and investment in internal change capabilities. Organizations, both private and public, are increasing internal change muscle to manage their ever-changing environments. Consultants are still present, but are increasingly taking complementary versus lead roles.

An internal change capability initiative provides an excellent opportunity to align stakeholder and project teams. By incorporating related training into project kickoffs, steering committees and project teams align to frameworks and roles required for successful

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results delivery. Also, it establishes a consistent language for stakeholders as they support and make transitions to new ways of working.

As project managers, it also provides a mechanism to manage behaviors that add risk to successful delivery of results. Reminding people what they learned as a group can be an effective way of addressing missed commitments and destructive behaviors.

Being aware of change management trends can help project managers map how their organizations are changing—and align to thinking, processes and behaviors within their projects. It can also build new capabilities required to support the organization and avoid applying old tools to new operating environments. Ultimately, it enables project managers to satisfy stakeholder needs and deliver required results within constantly changing conditions.

Phil will discuss these change management themes during his PMI webinar on December 6th at 2 p.m. EST.

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- **Phil Buckley**
Managing Director,
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Hi Chadi, thank you for your comment. For me, the best part of the definition of organizational agility is the ability "to sense" changes before they occur. Many organizations focus their resources on quickly responding to them after they are in play. The definition points to a higher objective.
Posted: Dec 19, 2017 11:05 PM
- **Chadi Kahwaji**
Managing Director,
AGILA Management
Consulting Inc.
Laval, QUEBEC,
Network:511
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Thank you Phil for this post, very interesting and inspiring. Appreciated your definition of Organizational agility.
Posted: Dec 19, 2017 5:41 PM
- **Phil Buckley**
Managing Director,
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Thank you Masudur.
Posted: Dec 13, 2017 11:09 AM
- **Md. Masudur Rahman**
Project Manager, Pride
Group
Dhaka, Bangladesh
Network:122
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Great post.
Posted: Dec 13, 2017 2:12 AM
- **Phil Buckley**
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Hi Nenad, your comment on leaders is essential. Thank you for sharing the excellent quote by John C. Maxwell.
Posted: Dec 12, 2017 11:20 PM
- **Nenad Pesic**
engineer, Michelin
Gerzat, France
Network:500
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I definitely agree that leaders should play an important role in change. As John C Maxwell said 'A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way'
Posted: Dec 12, 2017 6:08 PM
- **Phil Buckley**
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Hi Suzanne, the PM is definitely a value add role. What I find inspiring is there are more and broader opportunities for PMs to add value (beyond delivering the three variables) in constantly changing operating environments. Acting upon these opportunities is a way to maximize the value created. Thank you for your comments.
Posted: Dec 11, 2017 5:41 PM
- **Phil Buckley**
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Network:55
Hello Rangarajan, I agree, measurement of people transition is critical because they are the ones who decide to what degree they will support a change. Any gaps in mindsets, skills and knowledge need to be managed quickly to mitigate risk of poor adoption. People must be capable of taking on the change. Thank you for your comment.
Posted: Dec 10, 2017 9:42 PM
- **RANGARAJAN MADABHUSHI**
Director, Treستن
Technologies
Hamilton, New Zealand
Network:11
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Its critical to measure People Transition as People as a resource and their attitude towards work comes first before technology. Development in rest of the domains however fast they may be and predictable the overall success depends on People capabilities
Posted: Dec 9, 2017 6:27 AM
- **Phil Buckley**
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Narendhiran, I am delighted my points are of help. Thank you for letting me know.
Posted: Dec 8, 2017 11:14 PM

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- Jack Handey

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