

Bridging the Gap: Successful Change Management in a Project Environment

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Project management (PM) and organizational change management (OCM) serve as a bridge between where an organization is today, and where it wants to be in the future. Increasingly, there is recognition of the critical role that OCM plays in a project environment. Human factors affecting the successful implementation of a project include:

- **Speed of adoption:** How quickly people take in the changes resulting from the project.
- **Utilization:** How many of those affected are doing their jobs correctly as a result of the changes.
- **Proficiency:** How many of those affected by the project are performing at the desired levels after the project has wrapped up.

Despite the importance of addressing the human factors that affect the success of a project, Change Managers (CM's) with limited experience working in project environments can feel overwhelmed, sidelined, or under-valued. Project Managers (PM's) who are focused on the project deliverables and technical details of implementation may not truly understand or value the contributions that CM's can make to project success. While successful project implementation depends on an effective working relationship between CM's and PM's, this isn't always the case. So the question is: How do we bridge the gap between these two separate, but inter-connected and overlapping areas of practice?

Drawing on our experience and findings in the research literature, we offer some practical suggestions to help increase the likelihood of successful implementation. Using a case study to illustrate and explore the issues, we hope to provide some guidance to help both PM and CM professionals identify and institute effective organizational change management practices in a project environment.

The Case: Harkness Insurance

Established in 1952, Harkness Insurance is a Canadian insurance company specializing in infrastructure projects like bridges, tunnels, roads, and railways. Confronted with a rapidly changing business environment and a dramatic increase in catastrophic losses due to climate change, the company must innovate and adapt to survive. Senior leaders at Harkness mapped out a five-year plan to develop new business models, invest in new technologies, and simplify current business processes. Six critical projects were identified. The first project, implementation of new technology to support Customer Relationship Management (CRM) was scheduled to be launched in the next fiscal year.

Things had started well for the first few weeks.

Jakub was assigned to the role of Project Manager. With a proven track record of successful implementation of several key projects within the company, senior leaders were confident that his exceptional skills in project management would minimize project risk and ensure timely completion.

To launch this project, Jakub established a solid project management framework and team, and actively participated in the development of the OCM plan. Carla, the executive sponsor, was excited to launch the project at the upcoming 'town hall' with the executive team, all directors, and middle managers across the company.

Despite this solid start, Dominique, the CM, wasn't sure that Jakub really understood OCM. Dominique perceived Jakub as very focused on project deliverables, getting the project completed on time, on budget, and within scope. She found herself wondering whether he really cared about people or was prepared to consider the impacts of the project on company employees. Yesterday, some long-service employees cornered Dominique in the cafeteria and told her stories about the last project roll-out where they had felt steamrolled by the PM team. Downsizing rumours had begun, and employees were worried about job security. Resistance to this first project was brewing.

Jakub, on the other hand, believed that Dominique didn't have a clue about project management. At a meeting with one of the key business owners for the project, Jakub asked pointblank if Dominique 'knew her stuff'.

Dominique began to notice that she and Jakub were bumping into each other when managing relationships with Carla and when engaging key stakeholders. As the PM, Jakub had easy and immediate access to these individuals. She started to worry that her ability to deliver on the change goals was being compromised. Because both Jakub and Dominique were each reaching out separately to Carla and to the stakeholders, there was a real possibility of duplicating efforts and confusion.

Both Dominique and Jakub were trying to impress Carla and prove themselves to senior leaders. Much was riding on the line: Success on this first of six projects could mean a performance bonus and a promotion, in addition to the satisfaction of accomplishing a complex project.

All these tensions came to a head one day in a planning meeting. Dominique and Jakub had a fight over who was responsible for stakeholder engagement. Dominique saw this as her job, while Jakub kept emphasizing that as the PM, he had exclusive access to the stakeholders and senior leaders.

Understanding the two fields of practice: Project Management and Organizational Change Management

Differences in mindset, vocabulary or terminology, and approaches to both defining and solving problems can be a barrier to effective inter-professional collaboration.

Although both project management and organizational change management are used by organizations to manage the delivery of projects, the origins of these two practices are distinctly different. Historically, project management has focused on techniques and methods drawn from systems analysis and systems engineering. Early on, project management was most consistently applied in the aerospace industry. As a result, PM methodologies tend to focus on quantitative techniques to control the schedule for delivery, budget, and quality of the final product (Pollack & Algeo, 2015).

In contrast, OCM evolved from the literature of human relations, communications, strategy, leadership, psychology, and organizational development. OCM focuses on the role of change leaders to align change with the organizational strategy, develop ownership of the change across the organization, develop and communicate a compelling vision, minimize resistance, and train and support people to feel motivated, skilled, and committed to realizing the project vision and goals.

PM's have traditionally focused on project resourcing, deliverables, and close-out. In contrast, CM's have emphasized adoption, stakeholder engagement, and embedding and sustaining the change (Butt & Lawford, 2019).

These historical differences between project management and organizational change management appear to be shifting. In 2017, the PMI (Project Management Institute) made a significant change in its 6th edition of its PMBOK (Project Management Body of Knowledge): Stakeholder management is now included as a key knowledge area for project managers. In addition, project managers are expected to be skilled in managing resistance to change.

While CM and PM roles are typically quite differentiated, some individuals are equally qualified in both project AND organizational change management due to their demonstrated expertise, experience, and certification. Fondly known as "*Slashies*", these individuals may be assigned to projects either as a CM or a PM, depending on the nature of the project (Jakeman, 2020).

Differing Perceptions of Roles and Responsibilities

Two Australian researchers, Pollack & Algeo, conducted a practice-oriented study in 2015 to explore how PM's and CM's viewed their influence over the factors that determine project success. The results identified the success factors that PM's believed were under their influence, those that CM's perceived were under their influence, and a set of factors about which existed significant difference of opinion between the two areas of practice.

The PM's and CM's each believed they were responsible to ensure support from senior management, and to manage client and user support. The CM's perceived that they, not the PM's, were responsible for engagement of the project sponsor and senior stakeholders. This highlights an interesting area of potential conflict when sorting out the responsibility for stakeholder engagement.

PM's and CM's bring complementary skills to a project: When conflict erupts it may likely be due to lack of clarity related to expectations. The PM and the CM need to confirm their roles and responsibilities overall, and in particular, how they will manage the relationship with senior leaders, manage communication, manage conflict, and prepare people across the organization for ownership of the change.

Differing Perceptions of Areas of Influence by Project Managers and Change Managers

1 Ensure adequate budget	PROJECT MANAGEMENT
2 Ensure good performance by suppliers, contractors, consultants	PM
3 Maintain effective and detailed plan is kept up to date	PM
4 Ensure sufficient & well allocated resources	PM
5 Effective monitoring and control	PM
6 Ensure project has realistic schedule	PM
7 Manage level of project complexity	PM
8 Develop a strong business case	PM
9 Manage risk	PM
10 Ensure staff/team are skilled & suitably qualified	PM
11 Plan for close down, review, or acceptance of possible failure	PM

12 Develop clear and realistic objectives	BOTH Project Management AND Change Management
13 Provide good leadership	
14 Ensure involvement of project sponsor/champion	
15 Ensure support from senior management	
16 Learn from past experience	
17 Navigate political issues	
18 Ensure client/user involvement	CHANGE MANAGEMENT
19 Minimize negative impacts of new and/or unfamiliar technology	CM
20 Align with environmental changes	CM
21 Ensure good communication and feedback	CM
22 Appreciate and reconcile different viewpoints	CM
23 Ensure adequate training	CM
24 Facilitate organizational adaptation, cultural & structural alignment	CM

Source: Pollack & Algeo (2006)

The Secret to Success: Establish an Effective Working Alliance

An effective working relationship between the PM and the CM and their respective teams is essential: The PM and the CM must forge a partnership to enable them to collaborate in service of project success.

To be successful in a project environment, CM's need a deep appreciation and understanding of how to work in a project context. Credibility in their role is grounded in demonstrated professional and technical expertise, good process tools, an understanding of the client's business, solid interpersonal skills, and an action orientation (Hiebert, M., and Hiebert, E., 2005). In turn, PM's need to appreciate the impact of the people, process, and technology changes on their projects and what needs to be done to ensure successful adoption and sustainment of these changes after the project wraps up.

Clarity about the respective roles and responsibilities of the PM and CM is essential. Lack of clarity leads to serious communication and operational issues throughout the life of the project, resulting in confusion around tasks and accountability for project outcomes.

Ensure Clarity of Roles and Responsibilities

One of the keys to an effective working relationship between a PM and CM is clarity about their respective roles in a project. As we saw with Jakub and Dominique, each thought they had accountability for managing the relationship with their sponsor, Carla, and for engaging key stakeholders. Dominique wasn't sure that Jakub really understood organizational change management. Jakub believed that Dominique didn't understand project management and had concerns about her competence.

People have expectations of others in terms of *what* is to be done, *when* it should be done, and *how* it is to be done. Whenever the behaviour of one person violates the expectations of another, negative reactions result. Conflict often occurs when there is a violation of expectations as to how the team and team members operate.

Create a Project Charter AND a Team Charter

Developing both a project charter and a team charter, and using tools like a RACI chart, can help the PM, the CM, and the team to better understand the what, the when, and the how of projects, reduce the chances of conflict, and ensure greater accountability for project outcomes.

Level	Action
Project	Develop a Project Charter
Project Team	Develop a Project Team Charter
Project Team Roles	Develop a RACI Chart

At the Project Level: Develop a Project Charter

A project charter defines and documents the objectives, deliverables, milestones, technical requirements, limits, and exclusions of the project. The project charter is the reference document against which the project plan is developed, resourced, and executed.

At the Project Team Level: Develop a Project Team Charter

A project team charter provides a shared understanding for all project team members of:

- The project’s charter
- The mandate of the project team
- How the team’s membership is structured
- Key project stakeholders and expectations
- Norms and expected behaviours of project team members
- Decision-making processes
- Communication and conflict management processes
- Roles and accountabilities of team members.

Although a well-written project charter is the first step to clarifying expectations of what, when, and how the project is developed, resourced, and executed, it does not provide the depth of information and understanding required by the project team members about how they are expected to operate in the project team. All teams must set goals and priorities and allocate the way work is performed. Clarity about team norms, how decisions will be made, and communication processes, helps to keep the team functioning optimally. Periodic conversations that allow team members to reflect on the way they are working together will help address issues before they erupt into conflict.

Investing time in the first project team meeting to clarify expectations fast-tracks the team towards effective performance and contributes to long term success.

Sort out responsibilities and accountabilities: Develop a RACI Chart

RACI charts are a simple and powerful tool for mapping accountabilities for activities and decisions. This tool provides that extra level of “granularity” required by project team members to minimize conflict. RACI is also a good test of the importance of the task assigned. If no one is truly “Accountable” for a task, the item may not be important and should be dropped.

RACI Charting: Responsibility Charting	
R	Responsible to A to do whatever is required to complete the task
A	Accountable for ensuring the task is completed. Can only be one "A".
C	Consulted by A or others for information/knowledge about the task
I	Kept informed of status of the task

As we have seen in our story, Jakub and Dominique experienced conflict even though they had each actively contributed to the development of the project charter. This is because the initial project team RACI chart did not provide the level of clarity for what each was accountable regarding OCM activities in the project. Developing shared agreement on a RACI chart is not

always a smooth process and it may take a number of iterations to achieve agreement and commitment to the accountabilities for activities and decisions in a project team.

Using the 24 success factors identified by Pollack and Algeo (2015) that could be assigned to either the PM or the CM (or shared), Jakub and Dominique decided to develop their own PM/CM RACI. In addition to agreeing on their roles and accountabilities in relation to organizational change management, they identified three areas of shared responsibility:

1. Develop the Business Case: Learn from past experience
2. Communication and Conflict Management: Appreciate and reconcile different viewpoints
3. Prepare the organization for ownership of the change: Ensure client/user involvement

They also agreed to identify the prime/lead for a particular shared activity. For example, they agreed that Dominique would take the lead in developing the action plan for increasing the rates of adoption of the new CRM technology. As a result, she has the “bolded R” for the shared activity of ensuring client/user involvement. To further minimize potential conflict, Jakub and Dominique agreed to meet weekly to keep each other informed and develop approaches to completing these three areas of shared responsibility.

Project Areas	Component	Jakub	Dominique	Agreement
Develop the Business Case	Develop a strong business case for the project/sound basis for the business	A	I	
	Learn from past experience	R	R	Shared
Select and manage the project team	Ensure staff/team are skilled/suitably qualified	A	R	
	Provide good leadership	A	R	
Develop & monitor the project plan	Align the plan with environmental changes	A	C	
	Develop clear & realistic objectives	A	C	
	Ensure the project has a realistic schedule	A	C	
	Keep a strong & detailed plan up to date	A	R	

Project Areas	Component	Jakub	Dominique	Agreement
	Manage the project risks	A	R	
	Plan for close-down/review/acceptance of possible failure	A	R	
Manage project resources	Ensure sufficient/well-allocated resources	A	C	
	Ensure adequate budget	A	I	
	Manage the level of project complexity	A	C	
	Provide effective monitoring and control	A	R	
Manage the relationship with senior leaders	Ensure involvement of project sponsor/champion	A	R	
	Ensure support from senior management	A	R	
	Navigate political issues	R	R	
Communication and conflict management	Appreciate and reconcile different viewpoints	R	R	Shared
	Identify and agree to the mechanisms for dispute resolution	A	R	
Manage External Contractors/Suppliers	Ensure good performance by suppliers/contractors/consultants			
		A	I	
Prepare the organization for ownership of the change	Ensure client/user involvement	R	R	Shared (Dominique bolded R)
	Minimize negative impacts of new/unfamiliar technology	R	A	
	Ensure adequate provision of training	R	A	
	Facilitate organizational adaptation/cultural and structural alignment	R	A	

PM/CM RACI

Back to the Case: Dominique and Jakub Debrief

Dominique: Although we had taken great care in chartering our project team and developing a RACI, we had not clarified in advance how Jakub and I were to approach areas such as user/client involvement,

communication, and feedback. Fortunately, we were able to develop our own PM/CM RACI chart to confirm Jakub's project management domain, my organizational change management domain, and how best to use our respective skills where there was overlap. As we talked, I realized that Jakub had not intentionally tried to limit my access to Carla and key stakeholders. In his mind, he was doing what needed to be done to move the project forward.

In the end, the CRM project was successful. I've learned how critical having those deeper conversations at the beginning of the project is to getting clear agreement on how to address conflicts and how to work together in areas for which we both have strengths.

Jakub: I've realized that I underestimated Dominique's change management expertise, and how she really contributed to successfully getting people onboard with the change. Looking back, I think that a little more awareness on my part might have helped us work together more effectively. I don't like to admit when I'm wrong, but projects won't get better unless we take time to hear some inconvenient truths about what is working or not working, even when that feels like it might slow the project down.

Conclusions

While there is no 'one size fits all' approach to change, and not every change initiative is organized using formal project management methodology, it is helpful to take a planned approach to change. CM's need the maturity and sophistication to understand and work effectively with their PM counterparts. PM's need to recognize and appreciate the contributions that their CM partners can make to the people-side of change: getting people in the organization to successfully adopt the change and sustain the benefits of the project over time.

Trust, generosity, reciprocity, and collaboration are critical to good working relationships. Implementing change is hard work. The pressure to ensure project deliverables on time, on budget, and within scope is immense. Working through the issues and ensuring that a respectful and trusting relationship exists between the PM and the CM can help to navigate the 'pressure cooker' moments that inevitably arise during the lifecycle of any project.

Successful projects can contribute to organizational effectiveness beyond the specific project outcomes. As teams and employees learn about and integrate the skills of project management, it becomes easier to apply these skills to future projects. Similarly, learning about and integrating the fundamental principles of organizational change management can help individuals, teams, and the organization to develop greater capacity for resilience. Change is a team sport: developing the ability to manage both the technical side of projects, and the people side of change is a winning combination.

About the Authors



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Gail Aller-Stead works with organizations to help them move from ideas to results. Her skills in project and organizational change management have contributed to more than 70 successful enterprise-wide IT implementations. Gail holds an MSOD (Master of Science Organization Development) from Pepperdine University. Co-author of *Enterprise-Wide Change: Superior Results through Systems Thinking* (2005), she was recognized as a Distinguished Alumni of the Year by Athabasca University in 2004. Gail holds designations in project management (PMP), management consulting (CMC), strategic management (SMP), and organization development (CSODP) from the Canadian Organizational Development Institute.

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