# Knowledge Worker
Five Keys to Successful Change Management
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The diagram below suggests there are five keys to successful change management. No one of them will unlock a successful change management effort; all five are needed. In this column I will briefly review each of them.

Five Keys to Successful Change Management

Sponsor

Stakeholders

Strategy

System Map

Straw Boss

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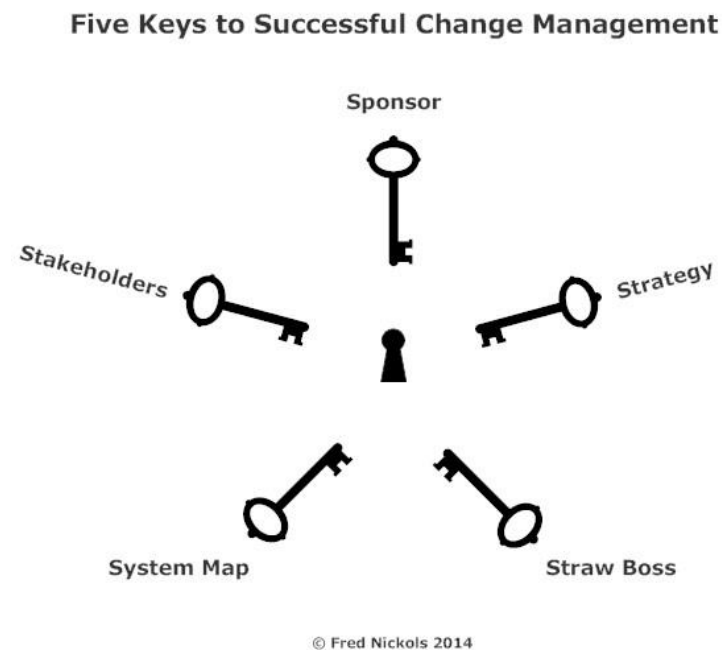
Sponsor. The Sponsor is the person who owns the change. This is the person who wants the change made, who is willing to fund and support it and who has the authority to do so. The Sponsor is often a C-level executive but, in all cases, exercises significant authority over the system to be changed.

Without an appropriately powerful, well-placed Sponsor, any change effort is likely doomed.

Strategy. There are at least four possible change strategies. One relies on persuasion and incentives, it is a *rational-empirical* view of things. Another focuses on changing culture and beliefs, it is a *normative-reeducative* approach. A third resorts to the raw exercise of power, authority and sanctions – a *power-coercive* strategy. A fourth capitalizes on the built-in ability of people to adapt to new circumstances. It is an *environmental-adaptive* strategy.

A successful change management effort will likely use a mix of these four strategies. Whatever strategies are being used, all need to be clear about what they are and why they are being used.

Straw Boss. No one is more essential to a successful change management effort than the "Straw Boss." This is the person who leads the change effort "down in the trenches," so to speak. This is the person who, more than any other, will make it happen. A good Straw Boss won't set out to offend anyone but winning a popularity contest is not a high-priority item. A good Straw Boss won't run roughshod over people but won't let them stand in the way either. This person requires little in the way of formal authority but does need the unequivocal trust, backing and support of the Sponsor.

Without an experienced, savvy Straw Boss, your change effort will likely bog down in minutiae, politics and infighting and not get very far.

System Map. Here, bear with me as I explain what a system map is and why it is needed.

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 in a system 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, *this result* requires *that 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 system 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.

Without a system map – formal and explicit or informal and intuitive – your change effort isn't likely to succeed.

Stakeholders. 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.

Failure to identify, involve and deal with key stakeholders has caused more than one change management effort to derail

There you have it, five keys to successful change management. As I said at the outset, you need all five.

For more about change management in general, see my paper titled "Change Management 101: A Primer" available on the web at http://www.nickols.us/change.pdf.

For more about those four change management strategies, see my paper titled "Four Change Management Strategies" available at http://www.nickols.us/change_strategies.pdf.

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.