



How to improve your Organizational Change Management approach in your IT Project

Large and complex IT Projects typically include changes in business processes, ways of working and availability of information to people. As consequence people will be faced with changes in:

- their job content,
- how they cope with rules and procedures and
- how formal and informal power is distributed throughout the organization.

The natural reaction of many people in such a situation is that they resist such changes and thus jeopardize the success of the project. In many cases the approach the project takes to handle resistance and manage change fails. Here is 4 ways to improve your Organizational Change Management (OCM) approach in your IT Project: what you should do and what you should not do.

1. Do not mistake “Communication” for “Organizational Change Management”

In many projects a separate group is created that focuses on “Communication” towards the people affected by the project. The communication focuses on objectives of the project, the planning and the benefits. Intranet-sites, town hall meetings and info letters are all part of the communication strategy. Communication is a key element in any Organizational Change Management approach, but it is only a part of that approach and not the whole thing.

2. Do not mistake “Disagreement” for “Resistance to Change”

With “Resistance to Change” we mean that people have concealed concerns about their vulnerability and possible loss of control. These concerns are not shared openly because people are afraid sharing them might jeopardize their position or leave them vulnerable. So, although they might openly commit to the project, their actions are actually driven by their hidden agenda and are often counterproductive to the result of the project. This “resistance behavior” is not to be confused with “Disagreement”. Disagreement is having a truly different opinion about the project and very openly voicing this without conceal. In fact, there is nothing wrong with disagreement. It helps to reach better decisions, as long as disagreement at some point turns into commitment to a joint decision (or leave the ship).

3. Do not place Organizational Change Management outside your Project

Organizational Change Management must be at the heart of your Project and cannot be delegated to some expert group outside of the project. This means that your core project managers must be capable to design and actively execute Change Management strategies.

4. Provide a basic Organizational Change Management Training to each Project staff member

We already stated that OCM capabilities must be present at the heart of your Project Management organization. Next to that we would advise to conduct a boot camp type of training on OCM with each team member at the start of your IT Project. Such a training only needs to take 1 or 2 days and it will enable project team members to understand and recognize resistance, to understand the need for change management, to understand possible intervention strategies and to know where to turn to for help.