



Organizational Change Management:

An Essential Part of the Service Management Journey

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“We bought ITIL, and it didn’t work.”

—Anonymous customer

Quoted by [Kirstie Magowan](#) in the [Back2ITSM](#) Facebook group

Whether shaped by adopting and adapting ITIL, the HDI Support Center Standard, or other frameworks or methodologies, alone or in combination, *service management is not a project*. A project has a definite beginning and end; service management is an essential, ongoing journey. Upgrading your current service management software may be a project. Getting staff trained on the new tool(s) may be a project. But the work of service management—and especially its continual improvement—is an ongoing endeavor without an end date. Once you arrive at this realization, you should begin thinking about organizational change.

Despite the fact that frameworks and methodologies for service management have been around for years, many organizations are still failing to achieve the kinds of improvements these good practices have to offer. Time and again, organizations mistake the tool or the training for the framework, and miss the most important component of the venerable triad: They change the technology and the process, but fail to get the people properly aligned.

Many, if not most, organizations start by training and certifying key people in the framework or methodology they’ve chosen. They then begin the search for—and purchase of—a new tool that is aligned or verified to work with the processes of that framework or methodology. It’s often (mistakenly) thought that the tool will somehow magically fix existing service management problems by forcing the re-engineering of existing processes and/or the introduction of new ones. However, at some point, after the expenditure of large sums of money and hundreds or thousands of hours of time, these organizations come to the realization that they still aren’t providing adequate value to the business; they still aren’t producing real customer satisfaction; and they’re still experiencing the same kinds of failures they were before deciding that service management would help.

To paraphrase our anonymous customer, these organizations bought service management and *it didn’t work*.

Service management isn’t something you buy; it’s something you *do*. If it “didn’t work,” that’s because it didn’t address the existing culture of the organization—that is, the ways in which people act and behave toward one another and toward the work they have to do.¹

This white paper will describe a straightforward, five-part approach to organizational change management for those undertaking a service management journey.² There are some who dispute the value of this approach to change, just as the customer quoted earlier disputed the value of ITIL because “it didn’t work.”³ But keep in mind, the model outlined here *will not do the work for you*—no grid or outline or plan or system will. Change models provide *guidance*; they aren’t a silver bullet, magic formula, or panacea.

The important thing is not that you do organizational change this way, but that you manage organizational change.

¹ Organizational culture is defined as “the shared...values and behaviors” of an organization. ([Wikipedia](#))

² There are many alternative approaches to organizational change management, some of which are described in the appendix.

³ See, for example, Jason Little, “The Change Equation Is Wrong,” Lean Change Management (March 25, 2015), <http://leanchange.org/2015/03/the-change-equation-is-wrong>.

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Overview of the VIRSA Model



There are five key features of the VIRSA model:⁴

- **Missing vision:** People are confused as to the direction of the change and the reasons for it.
- **Missing incentives:** People resist a change that has no clear benefits for them.
- **Missing resources:** People don't have the wherewithal to make the change.
- **Missing skills:** People don't have the abilities they need to be successful during and after the change, or feel that they don't.
- **Missing action plan:** People don't know where to begin or what to do next.

⁴ Adapted from a chapter by Tim Knoster in Jacqueline Thousand and Richard Villa (eds.), *Restructuring for Caring and Effective Education: Piecing the Puzzle Together*, 2nd edition (Paul H. Brookes, 1999), <http://www.amazon.com/Restructuring-Caring-Effective-Education-Together/dp/1557663866>. See also, Davide Casali, "A Framework for Thinking About Systems Change," Intense Minimalism (September 5, 2015), <http://intenseminimalism.com/2015/a-framework-for-thinking-about-systems-change>.

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Why VIRSA?

Grids containing the elements vision, incentives, resources, skills, and action plan(s) are abundant in discussions of organizational change, but most of them are in a different order: vision, skills, incentives, resources, action plan(s). The standard order is modified in the VIRSA model for two reasons, one simple and one complex:

- **The simple reason:** VIRSA (“versa”) is a pronounceable acronym, and therefore much more easily remembered than VSIRA. The point of having a model like this is so that elements of change management aren’t forgotten; easier is better.
- **The complex reason:** Order matters. In putting together a strategy for change, the elements should be given proper weight, and be considered in a sequence that is effective and not wasteful. The reasons for the specific order in VIRSA will be explained further in the section that follows.

VIRSA: The What and the How

Vision

The vision included in organizational change management is fundamental. No change should proceed without a clear vision of the goal and an understanding of the path. Unmanaged change creates chaos; vision is essential to bring order out of that chaos.

Characteristics. Vision, as used here, means *a clearly imagined view of the end state of change*. It should not be confused with an organizational vision statement. As a view of the outcome of the specific organizational change under consideration, it should be general enough that it doesn’t hinge on small details, but specific enough that it doesn’t imply universal applicability.

A vision, with regard to organizational change, should convey two things: where you’re going, and why you’re going there. Consider the following example:

By adopting a thorough set of service management principles based on the framework(s) we have chosen to adopt, the organization will produce increased value for our customers, and will undergo continual improvement.

To recap, your vision should be:

- Attainable with consistent, directed effort
- Realistic but challenging
- Clear and easily communicated
- Shared
- Adaptable to unforeseen conditions which require revision, but strong enough to withstand lesser pressures
- Candid, open, and honest—not positively “spun”⁵

⁵ See Carol Kinsey Gorman, PhD, “The Biggest Mistakes in Managing Change,” *Innovative Leader* 4.12 (December 2000), http://www.winstonbrill.com/bril001/html/article_index/articles/501-550/article506_body.html.

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Creation. The vision for organizational change can begin anywhere in the organization, but to be successful, it must be shared by those capable of driving the change. A frontline analyst may, for example, see the advantage of adopting new or different service management processes, but he/she will likely not be able to develop the vision to the extent needed to begin organizational change. If, however, he/she is able to persuade—either directly or through the management structure—the director of operations or the CIO that the change is worth pursuing, the vision can take shape. In general, the wider the change, the higher in the organization it must be developed and adopted.

Development. Once a person (the change leader) with the appropriate standing within the organization becomes involved, the vision with the characteristics listed above can become fully developed.

The process of development requires steadfastness and commitment on the part of the change leader. One of the biggest threats to a good vision—“goal creep”—is very much akin to the “scope creep” well known to project managers.⁶ Words are added to the vision to include more information than is absolutely required. This clouds the vision, making it harder to communicate. The process of developing the vision should be more one of reduction than of addition.



Lack of vision produces confusion

The Consequences of a Lack of Vision. As illustrated above, failing to have a vision for organizational change results in confusion. Until and unless those affected by and participating in the change have a clear view of where they’re going and why, they’ll be confused and may even begin to make up their own reasons for the change. The answers to the where and the why should be known and included in the vision so that the desired outcome of the organizational change is unequivocal. In the example given on the previous page, the where is “adopting a thorough set of service management principles,” and the why is to “produce increased value for customers” and “undergo continual improvement.”

When any change is announced, the very first question people ask is, “Why?” The change leader needs to have an answer.

Q: How do you carve an elephant?

A: Take a piece of stone and cut away everything that doesn’t look like an elephant.

⁶ Scope creep is defined as any “change in a project’s scope after the project’s work has started.” (Infolific)

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Incentives

In the VIRSA model, incentives occupy the second position, after vision. This is a departure from most standard change models, and it's in this position because, after "Why?" the most common question those affected by change will ask is, "What's in it for me?" It is important to think of incentives in a far broader sense than pizza lunches, gift card giveaways, leaderboards, or even increased pay. Rewards are given for accomplishments; incentives are enticements to accomplish.

The types of incentives required to produce cultural change are those that impact the work itself. If the change is perceived to increase the burden on individuals for an extended period, resistance, frustration, and anxiety will increase. If the change will result in easier, better ways to accomplish work, it's far more likely to be accepted. Making work-life better and easier is the best incentive. Granted, there will likely be a learning curve associated with any change, but ease of use is a huge incentive in and of itself.

In the broadest sense, incentives should spring directly from the vision for the organizational change. Organizations are composed of the individuals who make them up. If a change is needed to move the organization forward, it should also be moving the individuals forward in one way or another.

Change leaders should think about the following questions when it comes to incentives:

- What benefits of the change will be felt by individuals?
- What kinds of incentives do people in this organization respond to?
- What types of incentives can and should be offered in the short-, medium-, and long-term?

Organizational change is essentially cultural change, which demands shifts in behavior and belief: that is, what people believe about the organization and why. Incentives to change must be commensurate with the level of change demanded. While a slice of pizza may generate a good feeling for this week's accomplishments, it will not produce a long-term advocate for deep organizational change.

When thinking about incentives, change leaders should:

- Assess the impacts—negative and positive—on individuals and groups
- Create incentives that will reinforce the positive and counterbalance the negative



Lack of incentives produces resistance to change

Consider the following example:

- *Change:* A new on-call schedule will require two staff members to be available each weekend, but there's no budget for additional salary or wages, so salaried employees must pick up the work.
- *Incentives:* An easy-to-use calendar will enable staff to exchange weekends with others on the team when family or personal events require it. In addition, on-call workers can choose either comp time or training and development in exchange for the extra hours.

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At the individual level, the incentives need to be reasonable, affordable, and commensurate with the desired change. A \$5 gift card will not entice people to make complex and/or difficult changes in the way they work. It's again important to note that incentives are not rewards. Incentives should be designed, selected, and stated early in the organizational change management process; this is one of the reasons why they come second only to vision in the VIRSA model.

The incentives offered must actually benefit those affected by the change in a tangible way. If people neither perceive nor receive any benefits from a change, they'll resist in any way they can. The most damaging form of resistance takes the form of lip service acceptance followed by silent refusal to change. "OK, OK, we'll do it your way," some might say, continuing to work according to ingrained habits and behaviors, and thus undermining the change.

In summary, incentives should be:

- Introduced and marketed early in the change management process
- Tangible
- Commensurate with the amount of change required
- Appropriate to the people involved in the change
- Fiscally prudent

Resources

Resources include everything—and everyone—needed to make the change happen. If teams don't have the tools, money, time, information, and people necessary to accomplish a goal, they'll be frustrated. The symptom of this is the feedback, "I can't do this because I don't have..." Whether you insert time, manpower, budget, or tools, the outcome is the same. Hence, a key question for the change leader to ask is, "What do you need?"



Lack of resources produces frustration

In order to produce the desired change, the necessary inventory of requirements must be tallied, if not provisioned, early in the planning process. (Provisioning can occur on a "just-in-time" basis.) If a change is put into motion without the proper resources, it will be difficult to maintain the momentum required once the change process begins. There must be some flexibility to allow for unforeseen requirements, but an up-front, adequate assessment of needs is required.

It's imperative for the change leader to maintain a clear focus on the vision to avoid the kind of "goal creep" mentioned earlier. Otherwise, the need for resources will continue to grow and frustration will broaden, requiring an increase in incentives and perhaps even modification of the vision. At that point, the change has already failed.

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“Yesterday, I knew how to do my job. Today, I don’t.”

—An HDI member on the impact of change

Skills

In any organizational change there is—by definition—cultural change, and cultural change requires a change in behaviors. People will revert to old behaviors (habits) given the opportunity. One of the key ways to enable people to make a behavioral change is to ensure that they have the skills that will be required to accomplish their work in the new environment.

Providing education and/or training in the required new skills is one way to eliminate a common reaction to change: “I won’t know what to do.” Fear is a key generator of resistance to change, and providing the opportunity to acquire needed skills is a key mitigating factor.⁷



Lack of skills produces anxiety

Fear paralyzes people and makes them unable to move forward precisely when moving forward is what’s need most. Insofar as possible, begin skills training early in the change management process so that the required skills are in place when needed.

At no time should any training convey the message that people have been “doing it wrong.” People have been doing it according to their organization’s shared behaviors; now those behaviors need to be updated. They’ve been doing it right; their new skills will help them keep doing it right, but in new ways. As with resources, the question the change leader should be asking is, “What do you need in order to accomplish this?”

Action Plan

The final element of the VIRSA model is the action plan, which is “a way to make sure your organization’s vision is made concrete.”⁸ It is in developing the action plan that the need for the vision of change to be clear becomes evident. The action is based on specific goals and objectives; without clarity, the action plan will likely miss key requirements of the change.

In the action plan, the vision must be translated into specific, achievable goals and objectives. The plan must spell out how the goals are to be reached, articulate who is responsible, specify the desired results and outcomes, and lay out a timeline for achieving the goals.

⁷ John Edmonds, “Making change happen,” *Training Journal* (April 2011), <https://www.trainingjournal.com>.

⁸ “Section 5: Developing an Action Plan,” Community Tool Box (University of Kansas), <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/structure/strategic-planning/develop-action-plans/main>.

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Lack of an action plan produces false starts

Without a clear action plan, an organizational change will fall prey to false starts: begin, lose direction, begin again, lose direction, and so on. These false starts will cause the change to lose momentum and credibility; in short, the change will fail.

An action plan should include:

- A statement of the goal to be reached
- A strategy for reaching that goal
- An objective (milestone) to reach in pursuit of the goal
- An indication of who's responsible for achieving the objective
- A timeline for achieving the objective

The action plan's statements of goals and objectives must align with the vision in order for the desired change to be accomplished.

Summary

Cultures evolve. Organizational change happens naturally all the time. When there is a specific aim—like the introduction of service management processes—there must be change management to align an organization's culture (i.e., beliefs and ways of behaving).

The VIRSA model provides a solid framework, comprised of components that are easily remembered but no more easily accomplished than any other model. But, bear in mind, no organizational change model is perfect. No one model can guarantee a desired outcome. Only the change leaders in an organization and those who take part in the change can make the outcomes align with the vision that forms the basis for the future state.

Finally, remember that resistance to change is a natural reaction when people are asked to do something they haven't done before, or perhaps even more when they're asked to do something they *have* done before but in a different way. Overcoming that resistance and the attendant symptoms—confusion, frustration, and anxiety—is the aim of good organizational change management, however it's accomplished.

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Appendix: Further Reading

Gib Akin, Richard Dunford, and Ian Palmer, *Managing Organizational Change: A Multiple Perspectives Approach*, 2nd edition (McGraw-Hill, 2009)

Pamela Erskine, *ITIL and Organizational Change* (IT Governance Publishing, 2013)

John Kotter and Holger Rathgeber, *Our Iceberg Is Melting* (St. Martin's Press, 2005)

John Kotter, "The 8-Step Process for Leading Change," Kotter International (n.d.),
<http://www.kotterinternational.com/the-8-step-process-for-leading-change>

Randy A. Steinberg, *Organizing ITSM: Transitioning the IT Organization from Silos to Services with Practical Organizational Change* (Trafford Publishing, 2015)

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About the Author

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About HDI

In 1989, HDI became the first membership association and certification body created for the technical service and support industry. Since then, HDI has remained the source for professional development by offering the resources needed to promote organization-wide success through exceptional customer service. In other words, we help professionals in service management better connect with customers, and that's just good business. We do this by facilitating collaboration and networking, hosting acclaimed conferences and events, producing renowned publications and research, and certifying and training thousands of professionals each year.

Technical service and support professionals love HDI because it provides them with a profound sense of community. At 150,000 people strong, HDI is a community built by industry peers and leaders that gives you the resources, knowledge, and drive to be great at what you do.