Tips for Effective Technology Change Agents

Roy Tennant
Outline

• The Nature of Change
• The Nature of Technology
• Being an Effective Change Agent
• Keeping Current
• Learning Strategies
• Creating Agile Organizations
• Final Thoughts
The Nature of Change
The Nature of Change

- change: To be or cause to become different; alter*
- Can be caused by you or happen to you
- Sometimes slow, sometimes fast
- Sometimes loved, sometimes hated
- Those affected can be few or many

*American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language
Organizations and Change

- Organizations can foster or hinder change
- Organizations by their nature *tend to hinder change* (and there are good reasons for it)
- Organizations want to change at their own pace, despite environmental influences
Categories of Innovativeness

Innovators (2.5%)
Early Adopters (13.5%)
Early Majority (34%)
"Sweet Spot"
Late Majority (34%)
Laggards (16%)

Individuals and Change

- Individuals can welcome or oppose change
- Some thrive on it, others are openly hostile
- Know your personal tendency and work with it
- Know that others may approach change differently
- When working with someone you don’t know, it is safer to assume they are uncomfortable with change
The Nature of Technology
• With technology, innovation drives the market — everyone is after the latest and greatest

• We have now reached the era of disposable electronics (product lifespans of 3 years is not uncommon, many are completely dead by 5)
• Technological change is rapid and constant
• You will make decisions you will regret
• The “right” technology is one that helps you fulfill your mission for a reasonable period of time
• All you can ask for is to:
  – Be right for a time (Making the Right Decision)
  – Know when to move on (Cutting Your Losses)
  – Manage change well (Create and Facilitate Change)
Making the Right Decision

- Keep an ear to the ground and your eyes on the horizon
- Hold new technologies up to the light of your mission and priorities
- Get good advice
- Consider the learning curve
- Neither an early adopter nor a latecomer be
- Know your source of support
- Know your exit strategy
Cutting Your Losses

• Wake up and smell the coffee
• Take the time to review what was learned from the experience
• Consider what you should carry forward
• Prepare for, plan, and manage the transition
• Prepare for the inevitable
• Change is created by change agents — people, ideas, inventions — that form a fulcrum upon which the previous state of affairs pivots into a new state
• Organizations must become good at facilitating change
• Individuals must become change agents
Being an Effective Change Agent
QuickTime™ and a TIFF (LZW) decompressor are needed to see this picture.
Seven Common Characteristics

- Commitment to a better way
- Courage to challenge existing power bases and norms
- Personal initiative to go beyond defined boundaries
- Motivation of themselves and others
- Caring about how people are treated and enabled to perform
- Staying undercover
- A sense of humor about themselves and their situations
Characteristics of Effective Change Agents

- The ability to think cautiously and critically about technologies
- The ability to listen and to empathize
- The ability to communicate simply and well
- The propensity to work to find solutions to valid objections
- “The serenity to accept the things you cannot change, the courage to change the things you can, and the wisdom to know the difference.” - paraphrased from Reinhold Neibuhr
- A sense of humor
Experimenting can give you important early experience with a technology that can reveal:
- What it might be good for
- What it may not be good for
- Problems you may not have considered

Prototype: a primitive but functional experiment

If a picture is worth a thousand words, a prototype is worth a million
Roy Tennant's Prototyping Site

This is where I test things out, explore, learn, and make mistakes. Unless otherwise noted, everything available here is a working prototype and therefore is made available for testing purposes only, with no guarantees whatsoever.

- Peer-Reviewed Journals Search
- Analysis of the Usage of the 856 MARC Field at UC
- Analysis of CDL MODS Records
- ONIX Records for Libraries

Contact Roy Tennant with any questions or comments.
Build Communication Skills

- Ability to simplify technical topics
- Skill in summarizing
- Writing simply and well
- Creating diagrams
- Facility with programs like Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Photoshop
Responding to “No”

• Asking for something new may result in “No”
• When the answer is “No”:
  – Consider whether it’s worth fighting for (choose your battles)
  – If it is, marshall your forces (more information and supportive evidence, allies, etc.)
  – Suggest a test period or prototype
Coping Strategies

• Find colleagues at other institutions to:
  – Compare notes with
  – Commiserate with

• Strive to know when to fight and when not

• Cultivate patience for when the answer really must be “No”

• Get good at rolling with the punches

• Enjoy every victory
Individuals as Organizational Change Agents

- Being *knowledgeable* and *connected* is essential
- Knowing which changes are important and which are not is key (not all changes are created equal)
- Build strategic partnerships
- Be opportunistic (exploit opportunities) and entrepreneurial (create opportunities)
- Help the organization to:
  - Understand the need to change
  - Reformulate organizational structures
Keeping Current
Keeping Current: Strategies

- Learn as you breathe
- Make strategic learning decisions
- Use filters
- Ask trusted colleagues
- Learn by doing
- Take responsibility
- Take time
- Be responsible for your own learning
Keeping Current Methods

- Professional Journals
- Magazines
- Current Awareness Newsletters
- Electronic discussions
- Blogs and RSS
- Conferences and Workshops
- Site Visits
- Personal Contacts
- Chat Rooms
Strategic Learning: Surf & Skim

• Learn to *surf*: hit a web site and quickly assess what it offers…

• …and *skim*: get the gist of what you’re reading

• That’s often all you need

• And if it isn’t, you’ll know where you need to spend more time
Strategic Learning: SIFT

• Change is the only constant, therefore…
• Scan (surf and skim)
• Investigate
• Filter
• Target
• Develop strategic learning techniques
Strategic Learning

• Learn only enough to get by  
  – never learn today what you can put off until tomorrow, AKA the law of conservation of energy
• Learn when you have a problem to solve  
  – “just in time”, NOT “just in case”; if it isn’t going to save your tail you probably don’t need it
• Find and use a good reference book or web site
• Find someone more experienced to show you only three important things
• Use what you learn, write it down, or kiss it goodbye
• There are many ways to keep current.
• This can and should change over time.
• Try to find and hang out with those you respect and who are interested in the same things.
• You must determine what works for you (YMMV):
  – Writing styles
  – Venues
  – Software (clients)
  – Channels (delivery methods)
Creating Agile Organizations
Creating Agile Organizations

- Use standing committees for communication
- Create task forces to accomplish work
- Use the best people for the job
- Reward innovation
- Punish loitering
- Take risks
- Invest in infrastructure
- Invest in your staff
Final Thoughts

• Being an agent for change is not easy
• It requires more tact and patience than it does passion for change
• But it can be very rewarding to help your organization and the profession move forward
• Lastly: have fun and don’t take yourself too seriously!