



# BEST-PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR **CHANGE MANAGEMENT**

Sun<sup>SM</sup> Services  
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## Executive summary

Change happens all of the time. Some embrace it while others avoid it. Unfortunately, for businesses, societies, and individuals to advance, changes need to occur. The challenge is managing the risk associated with change. When changes do not go as planned, they can cause problems ranging from simple missed deadlines to significant setbacks to major financial losses.

The IT process of change management is the mechanism that helps organizations manage IT-based changes to ensure that the business organization is exposed to the lowest levels of risk and impact from changes to the IT environment. As a process, change management needs to work closely with the business side of the organization to assess the risk of change in line with business priorities. This paper outlines several best practices designed to help organizations implement and optimize their change management programs.

## What is change management?

For the purpose of this discussion, a change is *the process of intentionally moving from one defined state to another*.<sup>1</sup> What is important in this definition is the movement from one defined state to another. Merely swapping a power supply or updating the virus definitions on a laptop are not changes in state. But exposing your network to a supplier or switching operating systems from Microsoft Windows to the Solaris™ Operating System are changes in state because the supporting systems and processes are fundamentally different. Given this, the goal of a change management program is to ensure that a standard process is followed—for the efficient and timely implementation of change—to minimize the impact of the change on the business.

While the Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL)<sup>2</sup> and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO)<sup>3</sup> have written extensively on best practices for change management, Sun believes that there are three critical best practices:

- **Scope.** Not every minor change in your organization needs to enter a formal change management process. It is very important to select the scope of changes that will be governed by the change management process. The size of your organization, your budget, and the importance of IT systems in your business will help you to properly define this scope.
- **Project management.** Much of change management is simply good project management. It is a very good idea to align your change management process to larger corporately adopted project management approaches from the Project Management Institute or PRINCE2 methodology.

<sup>1</sup> Best Practices of Service Support, ITIL – Office of Government Commerce, The Stationary Office, London, United Kingdom, 2000, page 168.

<sup>2</sup> Best Practices of Service Support, ITIL – Office of Government Commerce, The Stationary Office, London, United Kingdom, 2000, pages 165-202.

<sup>3</sup> Information Technology – Service Management – Part 2: Code of Practice, ISO/IEC 20000 - International Organization for Standardization, Geneva, Switzerland, 2005, pages 28-29.

### Three simple rules for change management:

- **Rule 1** – Change management is a change. Remember, implementing change management for the first time is, in itself, a change. Be ready to meet the same resistance and problems that all changes encounter.
- **Rule 2** – There are standard changes. Many changes in IT environments are very standard and happen all of the time. Avoid having standard changes burdened by the full change management practices required of larger-scale, on-time changes.
- **Rule 3** – Stay the course. People may try to avoid change management processes because they see them as a burden. Be sure to stay the course or you will risk exposing your organization to undue IT risk.

- **Communication.** To many members of the organization, a change management process can seem onerous and look like something to be avoided. It is essential to very clearly and consistently communicate how the change management process works, which projects are affected by it, and why it is important.

## Why is it hard to implement change management?

There is something ironic about implementing change management processes for the first time. The implementation of a change management program is actually a change in itself. You will experience the same resistance to change and other challenges in the implementation stage as you will during all of the changes the program itself is trying to manage.

It is important for those implementing change management programs to be aware of these universal challenges. Here are some simple guidance points for owners of new change management programs to keep in mind:

- **Stay on point.** Be consistent with your message of how important change management is and who the process applies to.
- **Expect resistance.** Change management can be seen as an overhead burden by many, so it will be important to encourage and properly confront non-compliance situations.
- **Focus on the big picture.** Consistently communicate the major reasons for implementing change management. The larger goals should help others understand the need for the program.

It is also important for change managers to share these principles with others who are managing larger IT projects and changes. Doing so will help to ensure that change is managed properly and will encourage compliance with the IT change management process.

## Why is change important?

When it comes right down to it, change is uncomfortable. In our personal lives, moving to a new home, starting a new job, or having children are all changes that create stress. They impact our routines, cause us to do new things that we are unaccustomed to, cost money, and consume our free time. The same is true in business. Getting a new boss, learning a new software application, or having to manage people for the first time is hard. It is just easier to keep doing the same things we have done for years.

Fortunately for society, a few people out there are more optimistic about change. They see change as a way to make things better or more efficient: a way to progress. Without these changes, advances like the Industrial Revolution or the invention of the Internet would not have happened.

Unfortunately, both the optimist and pessimist are right. We do need to change, and change can be hard to deal with. That is why change management as an IT discipline is so important. Fundamentally, businesses need to change to improve their operational efficiency, expand their product offerings, and adapt to evolving world preferences.

But these changes come with risk. When we make mistakes in implementing IT changes or forget about key points, little things can go wrong. And with so much of business being dependent on IT systems, problems with changes to IT systems can cause real business problems. While change is surrounded by risk, organizations can take key steps to manage that risk by implementing processes like IT change management. Change management helps ensure that changes are made efficiently and effectively—without negatively impacting the business.

## Getting started with change management

At Sun, we highly encourage readers to refer to the publications of IT standards bodies like ITIL, ISO, and Control Objectives for Information and related Technology (COBIT) for detailed best practices related to change management. Following are a few initial steps that we believe you should consider in order to get your change management program going:

- **Classification.** Not every change is the same, so they should not all be treated as such. Simple patches and upgrades are dramatically different from major upgrades of hardware and software. Typical classifications assigned to changes include low, medium, high, and emergency; or support, security, infrastructure, and partner. It is essential to define a classification scheme with a unique policy set for each major class of change to effectively manage different types of changes.
- **Learn to deal with emergencies.** Some changes are emergencies, while others are simply changes that people think are emergencies. It is important to learn to differentiate between the two. If everything is treated as an emergency, your change management program will quickly be overrun. But if you do not deal with real emergencies quickly and effectively, your organization may be exposed to prolonged periods of risk.
- **Use technology.** While change management is largely about process and the effective management thereof, some form of technology is needed to help follow the process. Before buying or developing any software to aid change management, take time to define how your program will work and the true needs of your organization. This will help in selecting and implementing the correct technology to support and enable your process.

## Make change management proactive

Hopefully, a basic change management process will help you react to and better manage the changes required in your organization. Once basic processes and policies are in place several steps can be taken to make your change management processes more proactive and business focused. The following points highlight some simple yet powerful steps for becoming proactive in the area of change management:

- **Link to configuration management.** Many people believe that change management and configuration management are intrinsically linked. Most change management programs focus on understanding the impact of change on the organization, and most are accomplished using information on system configurations contained in configuration management processes. If your organization does not have a configuration management process, you may need to consider implementing one to strengthen your change management process. Strong linkages to configuration management will help your process be more effective in analyzing risk and quicker in approving changes.
- **Change advisory board.** A change advisory board is a collection of IT and business personnel that convene to review and approve proposed changes. The key to the board's success will be having good representation from the business side to help assess the business impacts and risks associated with IT changes. Business representation will also aid in understanding business priorities and concerns, thus promoting business/IT alignment. Additionally, the advisory board will be key in helping to define critical policies, such as how to deal with emergencies.
- **Forward schedule of changes.** An ITIL term, a *forward schedule of changes (FSC)* is one of the most proactive things change management can do. The FSC contains details of changes and helps maintain defined downtime windows for the organization. It is extremely useful in enabling the organization to plan for downtime and manage the availability requirements of the business. The schedule allows changes to be made in a defined cadence with the least amount of disruption to the business.

## Conclusion

Change management is a key capability or control to implement in your overall IT environment. A well-implemented process can enable you to proactively manage how change affects your environment and the amount of IT risk introduced into your organization via change. By aligning your change management processes closely with the business, the actions of IT will be linked closer to the needs of the business—ultimately creating more value.

