

**Implementing Positive Organizational Change**  
**A Strategic Project Management Approach**  
**By Gina Abudi, MBA**  
**(A book review by R. Max Wideman, FPMT)**

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### ***Introduction***

Before we get going, first let us allay the confusion, or rather sloppy use, of the word "*change*" in different combinations. First there is "*Change Management*" that is best defined as: "The formal process through which changes to the project plan are approved and introduced."<sup>1</sup> That is to say the administration of formal approved changes to the scope of the project, and consequential changes to the time and/or cost of the project including document version control.

Then there is the "*Management of Change*" best defined as: "The means by which the people issues surrounding business process reengineering are managed. This often involves a cultural shift in attitudes, expectations, opportunities, training and future prospects, along with the reorganization of people."<sup>2</sup>

Author Gina Abudi uses an even better label: "Organizational Change" that, these days, is clearly an essential by product of almost all<sup>3</sup> business associated projects. That is, if the "product" of the original project is to be implemented successfully for the long term, and intended benefits realized, it is necessary to change the "culture" of the people.<sup>4</sup>

It's like adding another phase to the classic four-phase project life span. It's what many project managers feel what is at the end of his or her responsibility:<sup>5</sup> "OK, the product is done and delivered, it's up to someone else to use it or put it into practice. So where do we go from here?" Answer: Gina's book is a very thorough exposition of what should take place either as a part of, or at least in parallel with, or follow on for any serious business remodeling project.

At the heart of the book is the author's desire to see continuous, focused and positive communication throughout the process of ***Implementing Positive Organizational Change***. The goal of this communication strategy is to ensure that those affected will not see the change as something negative to worry about and resist, but rather a valuable opportunity to embrace for the future. Thus the book is intended for all those in the hierarchy from supervisors and managers up to senior leaders and executives in the C-suite. Somewhere in this scale are also project and program managers together with human resource professionals, business process improvement professionals and their respective consultants.

The Key Features of this book include:<sup>6</sup>

- The challenges and negative perceptions of organizational change
- Continuous communication best practices for engaging employees, and others most impacted in pursuit of product success
- The value of using cross-cultural and cross-generational teams to engage people in the change
- A project management approach that includes how to plan for change during the original project to beyond deployment, to ensure that the intended benefits are actually achieved.
- A large number of mini case examples illustrating the associated texts in the book.

The book is also supported by an extensive range of practical templates, surveys/questionnaires, assessment tools, and check lists. These tools and templates are available for download on line by purchasers of the book.

### ***About the author***

Gina Abudi, MBA, has over 25 years of experience in organizational change management, project and process management, leadership development, and human resources management. She is President of Abudi Consulting Group, LLC, a management consulting firm serving mid-size to large global organizations. Her work includes efforts such as helping global organizations kick off large, complex change initiatives, setting up communication plans for change initiatives, helping to create and launch Change Management Centers of Excellence, and working with leadership to engage employees in change. At the time of writing, she is working with the Project Management Institute's non-profit Educational Foundation as a Community Engagement Member.

### **Book Structure**

The content of this book is set out in ten chapters as follows:

1. Introduction to Leading Organizational Change
2. Understanding About Change
3. Looking at Change from a Positive Perspective
4. Building Change Capability Within the Organization
5. The Value of Focusing on the People
6. Leading Change Across Cultural and Generational Boundaries
7. The Change Project
8. Continuous Communication and Engagement in Change
9. Continuous – But Not Chaotic – Change
10. Getting Started

The book is well written in a clear and understandable style. The text is supported by a large number of detailed tables and simple figures to help in not only understanding the content, but also for practical application by the reader. From our own somewhat limited experience of organizational change efforts, we see this book as sound advice and a valuable addition to any project management practitioner's library. The book has a total of 318 pages but does not include a Glossary of Terms.

### **What we liked, Part 1**

Author Gina Abudi's book is clearly focused on significant "change" in a medium to large private sector organization. In that context, she observes that: "More frequently, organizations talk of going through a *transformation* as opposed to going through a *change*."<sup>7</sup> She then quotes Merriam Webster as defining change as:

"Change: to make or become different; to give a different course or direction to."

Whereas:

"Transformation: [is] a complete or major change; an act of transforming or being transformed."

From this we see that while "change" can be "small and incremental",<sup>8</sup> "transformation" is a much more extensive form of change, and indeed she goes on to observe:<sup>9</sup>

"Transformation is a dramatic shift in the culture of an organization. It impacts the strategy of the organization – all of its processes, procedures, and vision. It is a change in how the organization does business and addresses the needs of its customers. It is a change in the *beliefs* and *core values* of the organization . . . Transformation requires significant planning. It is always a large and complex initiative."

[However,] "Either effort requires a strategic project management approach to allow the change to be sustained."

Gina explains that:<sup>10</sup>

"Change is an emotional experience. It is no longer acceptable for leadership to demand that employees change. Rather, employees must be engaged in change for it to be successful . . . If employees of the organization are not engaged in the change, change cannot be sustained over the long term."

Clearly, effective and truthful communication within the organization regarding any organizational change initiative is an essential prerequisite to achieving a successful outcome. So we were pleased to see a section on *Communication Best Practices* later in the book in which Gina advocates for regular and consistent communications that share the organization's evolving communication strategy and plan.<sup>11</sup> And the communication must be two-way through such well-known techniques as:<sup>12</sup>

- Focus group meetings
- Departmental meetings
- All-staff meetings
- Directly with the leadership team
- An internal interactive web site supporting the change, and
- Periodic online surveys designed to solicit feedback

Of course, all of this presupposes that management has a reasonably clear vision of what the organization will look like when the change is completed – and is prepared to share that vision up front with those impacted through conversations and involvement.<sup>13</sup> For example, is the organization really ready for the proposed change?<sup>14</sup>

## What we liked, Part 2

There is an interesting section that follows titled "Effects of change on individual employees."<sup>15</sup> In our experience, soliciting input gives rise to a chicken and egg situation. If you ask participants what the change might look like they will respond: "Well, what do you want it to look like?" If you answer that honestly and fully, they will want to know why they had not been consulted earlier! Yet another problem is that a significant percentage will take no interest until one day down the line they wake up to discover how extensively they are being affected. Gina goes to great length to show how to foresee, forestall or otherwise avoid such situations.

Later, in a discussion of the Value of Organizational Change, Gina makes the point that "People and culture are linked and any change initiative must consider both of these elements."<sup>16</sup> That is, the existing culture of the organization as a whole must be taken into account. Especially must it be addressed specifically, if it is different from what needs to be in place for the new change vision to be successful. For example, is the existing culture of the organization one in which *everyone* embraces and welcomes change?<sup>17</sup>

The chances are – probably not. So Gina introduces the idea of creating and sustaining a Change

Management Center of Excellence (CM CoE).<sup>18</sup> She goes on to explain the benefits, the components in its charter and how it must get along (coordinate) with the corresponding Project Management Office.

In Chapter 7 – The Change Project, Gina Abudi explains that:<sup>19</sup>

"The focus of this chapter is not to provide the reader with a step-by-step plan on how to manage their projects, but rather to provide the basics and best practices for managing change projects in particular. The focus is on how to approach projects managing change initiatives from a strategic viewpoint."

"Every change initiative must be managed as a project. This is because *all* change within the organization happens through projects. However, managing change projects is a challenge! It is much easier to manage tasks than it is to manage people. And that is what change is about – managing people."

And later:<sup>20</sup>

"Unfortunately, too often in organizations, changes are launched by the leadership team without considering:

- It is a project . . .
- It requires significant planning . . .
- It requires engaging employees . . .
- The project needs a change manager who understands that:
  - Change is a process
  - Every individual experiences change differently
  - Change management tasks must be focused on where individuals currently are in their perceptions about change
  - People are the most important component of ensuring change initiative success."

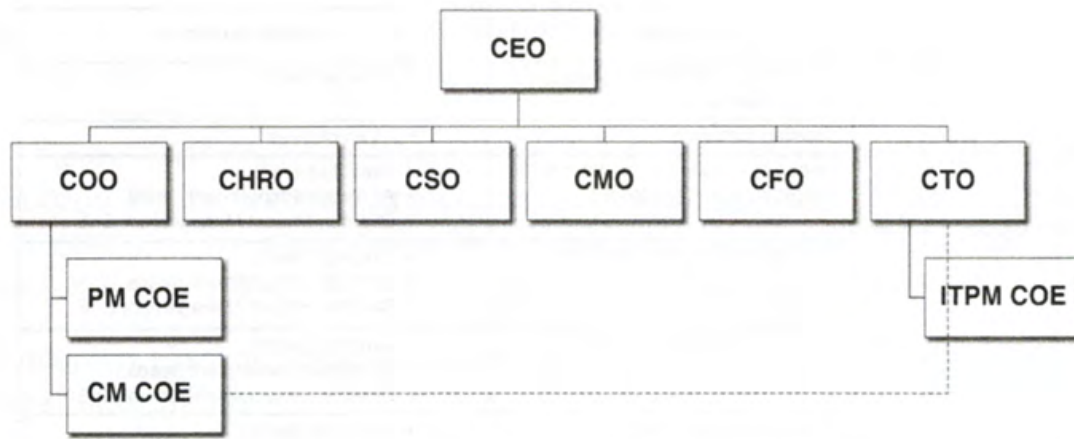
Concluding that:<sup>21</sup>

"The project manager managing a change project should be able, and willing, to work collaboratively with a change manager in order to accomplish the tasks of the initiative . . . while driving people toward adopting the change."

That is to say, getting the work of the project done while getting the work adopted when done. That sounds easier said than done

## **Downside**

Earlier in the book, having worked our way up the proverbial organizational ladder so to speak, we now come to the top level of the organization where things get really complicated. Figure 1 shows what our author Gina Abudi has in mind and the text gets rather confusing if you don't remember what all of these acronyms stand for.<sup>22</sup> Anyway, the boxes of interest here are the PM COE and the CM COE under the COO.<sup>23</sup> According to Gina, "the Director of the CM CoE reports directly up to the SVP of Research and Development (R&D), which is where, in this organization, most changes originate."<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately, this Figure 1 does not include the office of the SVP, R&D.<sup>25</sup>



**Figure 1: Potential Organizational Structure<sup>2627</sup>**

Given the highly politicized environments that inevitable exist at the top levels of large organizations where successful leaders are attempting to protect their own turf, any serious efforts to redirect such culture has to be tackled with extreme caution. But one suspects that the organization displayed in Figure 1 is more than ripe for a significant reorganization and downsizing. Why, for example, shouldn't the CM COE not be embedded in the PM COE?

As shown in the listing of chapters, other aspects of cultural change, such as *The Value of Focusing on the People* and *Leading Change Across Cultural and Generational Boundaries* then follow in the book in great detail. However, it is not until Chapter 7 that we get to a discussion and advice on the need for project management as described in the previous section of this paper.<sup>28</sup>

## Summary

In today's increasingly competitive global market place, organizations that do not regularly undertake successful change initiatives will find it difficult, if not impossible, to continue to be successful long term. That is generally because of a negative impact in a number of areas such as:<sup>29</sup>

- Reduced productivity due to reduce employee engagement
- Negative gossip
- Lack of trust between employees and leadership, and
- The potential for the organization to lose top talent.

This book explains how to develop a continuous improvement culture of change that will be perceived by employees as a valuable opportunity instead of something negative to worry about and resist. It outlines a strategic project management approach for ensuring successful implementation and desired results, and includes mini case studies, tips, and practical examples.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, upon finishing this book, the reader will have a better understanding of the value of careful preparation and planning for organizational change, and the need for ensuring engagement of impacted stakeholders and others affected by significant change initiatives. He or she will also have increased confidence and comfort in leading or participating in such initiatives from the simple to the most complex.<sup>31</sup>

On a personal note, we sincerely hope that Gina Abudi will be encouraged to write a parallel book on

the same topic, *Implementing Positive Organizational Change*, but focused on the public sector. That's because in many cases that sector desperately needs it, but is driven by an entirely different set of goals and consequent type of culture.

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<sup>1</sup> See [http://www.maxwideman.com/pmglossary/PMG\\_C02.htm#Change%20Management](http://www.maxwideman.com/pmglossary/PMG_C02.htm#Change%20Management) definition #[D04398]. This is an essential part of the project management process.

<sup>2</sup> See [http://www.maxwideman.com/pmglossary/PMG\\_M00.htm#Management%20Reserve](http://www.maxwideman.com/pmglossary/PMG_M00.htm#Management%20Reserve) definition #[D04940].

<sup>3</sup> Indeed, if not "all"!

<sup>4</sup> To a greater or lesser degree.

<sup>5</sup> Unless specifically included in their job responsibility description.

<sup>6</sup> Abudi, Gina MBA, *Implementing Organizational Change*, J.Ross Publishing, Florida, USA, 2017, observations abstracted from back cover.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p2

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p3

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p4

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, pp 60 through 77

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p10

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p27

<sup>14</sup> A partial listing of questions at this point is provided in the book. A more complete listing of questions can be found as a downloadable file from the book's associated resource file. See p32.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p38

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p89

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p95

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p101

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p184 and 182

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. Abstracted from original text.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p185

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p108

<sup>23</sup> Translation: "the *Project Management Center of Excellence* and the *Change Management Center of Excellence* under the *Chief Operating Officer*. For those transfixed by acronyms, other boxes include: CEO – Chief Executive Officer; CHRO – Chief Human Resources Officer; CFO – Chief Financial Officer; CTO – Chief Technology Officer; and ITPM COE – Information Technology Project Management Centre of Excellence. Other boxes are not identified.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p104

<sup>25</sup> For those transfixed by acronyms, the following are also included in Figure 1:

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p108

<sup>27</sup> As is our practice, before publishing a draft of our review was sent to the author for validation and checking for errors of fact on our part. In response, Gina emailed this response: "Please share my 'thank you' to Max for his very thorough and detailed review of the book and his comments. In particular – tell him nice catch on my graphic error. We will fix that on the next printing by the way...."

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, *The Change Project*, Chapter 7, p181 – see previous section.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p306-7

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, abstracted from the back cover.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, Preface p ix