Change Management: Reactions, Tools, and Strategies

Margaret F. Henderson and Obed Pasha

CONTENTS

What Is Organizational Change?

Local governments in North Carolina went through extraordinary change due to the COVID-19 pandemic, altering the way they provide services to citizens and how (and where) their employees perform their duties. Municipalities had to renegotiate waste-collection contracts due to a sudden increase in household waste from stay-at-home workers. County child protective agencies had to find ways to reach vulnerable children in our communities amid a drastic decline in abuse reports resulting from the lockdown. As a society, we will likely be discovering and dealing with the ripple effects of the pandemic for years.

Margaret F. Henderson is a lecturer at the School of Government. She facilitates public meetings, provides training about human trafficking for local government audiences, and focuses on cross-organizational problem-solving efforts in the public sector.

   Obed Pasha is an assistant professor of public management at the School of Government. He specializes in performance management and strategic planning.

Managing change is never easy, especially when that change is transformational. The goals of this bulletin are to help local public managers make sense of the change process, to teach them to reflect on what they have learned, and to recommend strategies to assist these managers—and others—in dealing with the shared human reactions to transitions of any kind.

Transactional vs. Transformational Change

In general, change within organizations can be placed into two broad categories: transactional and transformative. *Transactional change* refers to small or incremental changes that are made over time that do not fundamentally alter an organization's structure or process. Transactional change usually occurs from an interaction between politics, power relationships, and organizational culture. With this kind of change, no stakeholder can unilaterally sway the system one way or the other. Public managers might identify piecemeal tweaks in their systems or updated decisions based on clarifying information as transactional changes. *Transformational changes* have been described as sudden shifts in the system that cause fundamental departures from the past in organizational services and processes.[1] Broadly speaking, external forces and drastic changes in an organization's environment drive transformational changes. Events such as a breakdown in political consensus, power shifts toward a group previously considered an outlier, or public mobilization in support of or against an organization can bring about such drastic change. The Flint, Michigan, water crisis, for example, brought sudden and overwhelming attention to that system failure, forcing local and state governments in Michigan to make transformative changes. Similarly, Black Lives Matter protests in the summer of 2020 and the COVID pandemic have caused local governments to re-think and redesign their services and strategies. Other recent examples of unprecedented circumstances generating transformative change include the Australian wildfires of 2020 and the freezing weather that caused the Texas power grid to fail in 2021.

Table 1 notes a few examples of transactional and transformational changes.

Table 1. Examples of Transactional and Transformational Changes

Transactional Change	Transformational Change
A municipality reroutes downtown traffic flow and redesigns parking options.	A municipality redesigns two primary downtown blocks as pedestrian-only and creates new options for public transit into the area.
A county sets aside a certain amount of money every year to fund the work of community nonprofits. The intention is to support community organizations that provide an array of important services.	A county creates an RFP process that seeks proposals that support its strategic goals. The intention is to contract with any service provider that can generate the targeted outcomes.
A municipality's recreation department alters the activities provided at key facilities.	A municipality's recreation, public health, and planning departments partner to reconsider how and where residents might best engage in healthy recreational activities, both individually and in groups.

Transactional and transformational changes represent two extremes on a scale. Only rarely can changes be placed into both the transactional and transformational categories.

---

1. Frank R. Baumgartner, Bryan D. Jones, and Peter B. Mortensen, "Punctuated Equilibrium Theory: Explaining Stability and Change in Public Policymaking," *Theories of the Policy Process* 8 (2014): 59–103.

Management Reactions to Change

Reactions to Change at the Individual Level

When initiating a change process, leaders who know their teams well can probably anticipate who will be excited about, resistant to, or cautiously supportive of the effort. We are more likely to embrace changes we create ourselves rather than changes that are imposed on us by others. Let us put the issue of the origin or content of a change aside for a moment and consider how—through either natural tendencies or learned behaviors—we as individuals might be hard-wired to respond to change.

One helpful tool for assessing our aptitude for managing change is the Change Style Indicator developed by Christopher Musselwhite and Robyn Ingram (see Figure 1). This assessment presents a continuum of reaction to change, categorized by three profiles: The Conserver, the Pragmatist, and the Originator. (Refer to Table 2 for a comparison of the contributions and leadership traits associated with each profile type.).

Figure 1. Change Style Indicator

Conserver	Pragmatist	Originator
66 56 42 28 13	7 7	13 28 42 56 66
25 PERCENT	**50 PERCENT**	**25 PERCENT**
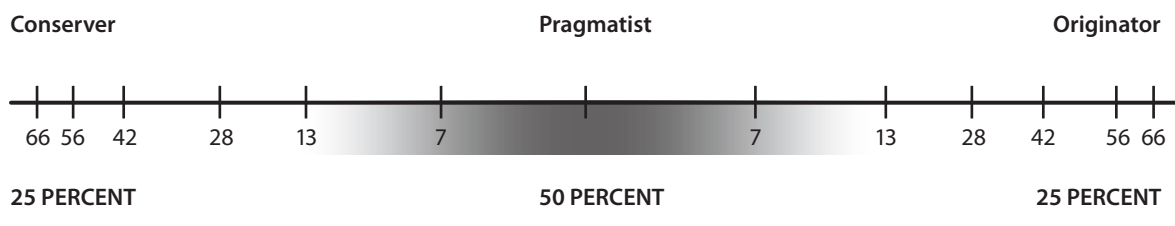
Source: Christopher W. Musselwhite and Robyn D. Ingraham, 2003.

No one of these change profiles is "better" than the other. Each has unique characteristics to bring to the change process. In a worst-case scenario, they annoy or counteract each other. However, an ideal change-management team includes all these profiles and knows how to make the most of each one's strengths.

Managers need to honestly assess their proactive and reactive planning capacity, then build a team with complementary skills. Change-style indicators not only inform how a public manager responds to change, but they can also inform how a manager anticipates and prepares for change. Not surprisingly, *Originators* are the profile type most likely to take a long-term view and enthusiastically engage in transformative change. *Pragmatists* will ensure that the team considers multiple perspectives and the functionality of changes. They are in positions to identify any emerging need for change because they are sensitive to both how people interact with others and to the content of their work. *Conservers* will ensure that the team considers the complete inventory of existing resources and processes. While they are adept at considering how the historical context applies to current conditions, they might find it challenging to incorporate truly transformational concepts into their thinking.

Table 2. Change-Style Indicators, by Profile Type

	Conservers *Accept* the paradigm and prefer incremental change	Pragmatists *Explore* the paradigm and prefer functional change	Originators *Challenge* the paradigm and prefer expansive change
Contribute by:	• Getting things done on schedule • Working within the structure • Following through and managing day-to-day routines • Respecting rules and authority	• Addressing issues as they arise • Getting stuff done in spite of the structure • Organizing people around a purpose • Using practical approaches • Having a short- and long-term view	• Understanding complex problems • Focusing on the system as a whole • Supporting and encouraging risk-taking • Providing future-oriented insights and vision • Serving as catalysts for change
Lead by:	• Modeling stable and consistent behavior • Rewarding others for getting the job done • Expecting agreements and rules to be followed • Attending to practical organizational needs	• Facilitating problem-solving among people • Using experience to solve current problems • Building cooperation rather than expecting it • Working cooperatively • Encouraging congruence between values and actions	• Providing long-range vision and taking on unique roles • Conceptualizing and building new models • Creating energy and enthusiasm at the start • Managing more than one task at once • Catalyzing systemic changes
Characteristics when facing change:	• Generally appear deliberate, disciplined, and organized • Prefer change that maintains current structure • Enjoy predictability and may operate from conventional assumptions • May appear cautious and inflexible • May focus on details and the routine • Honor tradition and established practice	• May appear practical, agreeable, and flexible • Prefer change that emphasizes workable outcomes • Are more focused on results than structure • Operate as mediators and catalysts for understanding • Are open to both sides of an argument • May take more of a middle-of-the-road approach and appear more team-oriented	• May appear unorganized, undisciplined, unconventional, and spontaneous • Prefer change that challenges current structure • Will likely challenge accepted assumptions • Enjoy risk and uncertainty • May be impractical and miss important details • May appear as visionary and systemic in their thinking • Can treat accepted policies and procedures with little regard

Source: Christopher W. Musselwhite.

As an example of using self-awareness to inform change-management processes, Mary Furtado, Deputy County Manager of Catawba County, NC, describes her tendencies and leadership strategies this way:

> I'm a change junkie. I get an adrenaline rush from trying something new, mixing up the status quo, thinking outside the box. I've had to learn that not everyone is wired like me, though. The most impactful lesson I've learned about managing change is that it's important to "honor the past" (or what came before us) as part of the pathway to moving forward towards a change. In trying something new, be careful not to make everything that came beforehand wrong—acknowledge its importance as foundational for setting the table to move forward. Failing to honor the past naturally creates lots of detractors.

Feeling overlooked can generate a negative reaction from any of us. Furtado's strategy bears witness to and respects the effort that provided the foundation from which the current change

process is launched and, hopefully, increases the likelihood that reactions will focus on the substance of the forward movement.

Strategies to Consider

First, at a minimum, assess where you land on the continuum set out in the Change Style Indicator so that you can assess which skills you might need to develop in yourself and which you may have to find in others. If you are interested in having your team take the Change Style Indicator assessment and want to have a facilitated conversation about the results and implications, contact Lydian Altman at the School of Government Center for Public Leadership. Second, if you prefer to consider your collective tendencies informally, consider having your team read one or more of the many available articles or books about change-style indicators.

Reactions to Change at the Relationship Level

Imagine that a county government plans to build a new facility that will co-house several departments that are currently scattered in separate places around the community. There will be reactions to the change process that are purely personal, such as *How will this change affect my commute? How will it affect my office?* However, other reactions might originate within work teams or departments, generating competition for resources or dominant values.

The "Eight Causes of Conflict" cited by psychologists Art Bell and Brett Hart can help name these causes of workplace tension.[2] We will use the scenario of county departments being consolidated into a new facility to illustrate each source of conflict.

- **Conflicting Resources.** All county departments will need access to certain resources, such as office supplies and meeting rooms, to do their work well. Conflict might arise if more than one workgroup needs access to a particular resource at the same time or if one workgroup wants that resource to be designed in a way that would not serve the interests of another.
- **Conflicting Styles.** Staff members work differently, according to their individual needs, personalities, and professional cultures. When working styles clash, conflict can often occur. Note that these styles are identified by the Change Style Indicator model discussed earlier.
- **Conflicting Perceptions.** Staff members view the world differently, based partly on the purposes and functions of their work. Different departments might hold justifiably different opinions about critical issues such as public access and security, for example. Not everyone in an organization possesses the same information, and a staff member in one department might be uninformed about critical concerns held by those in other departments.
- **Conflicting Goals.** Again, county departments might share some collective goals but also have different individual goals. Attempting to reconcile the differences can generate agreement, such as by working through the tensions that arise between the competing interests of providing consistent responses across the organization versus allowing flexibility based on circumstances.
- **Conflicting Pressures.** No matter the type of change process underway, we often must depend on the contributions of our colleagues to accomplish our collective work goals. The workflow for many co-workers can be negatively affected if one person is unable to meet deadlines. Conflicting pressures can involve the timing or quality of task completion.

---

2. Art Bell, *Six Ways to Resolve Workplace Conflicts* (San Francisco: University of San Francisco, 2002); Brett Hart, *Conflict in the Workplace* (Behavioral Consultants, P.C., 2009).

- **Conflicting Roles.** Roles within an organization that overlap or intersect benefit from advance clarification. In this newly consolidated county building, who is responsible for fixing the jammed copiers on each floor? Which department takes priority when reserving the facility's meeting rooms? Conflict can arise as the county tries to consolidate support services that were formerly siloed. When one steps into someone else's "territory," conflict and power struggles can occur.
- **Different Personal Values.** Decisions related to behaviors (the manner in which confidential information is stored or shared in an organization, for instance) and indirect decisions related to physical space can involve nuanced, ethical decision making. In the new county building, decisions related to the design of workspaces, for example, might bring competing values to the surface, generating competition among departments and/or staff members.
- **Unpredictable Policies.** If rules and policies affecting the process for or content of change are not communicated clearly and upheld consistently, confusion and conflict can occur. Any disparity in treatment can also become a source of friction.

Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal provide another helpful tool for diagnosing reactions to change processes in an exhibit in their book *Reframing Organizations* that they title "Sources of Ambiguity."[3] The authors offer statements describing different dilemmas and then list the conditions that led to the statements. While some of Bolman's and Deal's points parallel points made in the Bell and Hart model discussed above, a slight variance in the way they frame the issues might lighten the discussion by shifting away from "conflict" and toward "ambiguity."

- **We are not sure what the problem is.** Definitions of the problem are vague or competing, and any given problem is intertwined with other messy problems.
- **We are not sure what is really happening.** Information is incomplete, ambiguous, and unreliable, and people disagree when interpreting the available information.
- **We are not sure what we want.** There are multiple goals that are unclear or conflicting. Different people want different things, leading to political and emotional conflict.
- **We do not have the resources we need.** Shortages of time, attention, or money make a demanding situation even more chaotic.
- **We are not sure who is supposed to do what.** Roles are unclear, there is disagreement about who is responsible for what, and things keep shifting as players come and go.
- **We are not sure how to get what we want.** Even if individuals agree on what they want, they are not sure (or they disagree) about how to make it happen.
- **We are not sure how to determine if we have succeeded.** Individuals are unsure what criteria to use to evaluate success. Or, if they do know the criteria, they are not sure how to measure them.

Eric Peterson, Town Manager of Hillsborough, NC, sums up his philosophy of managing change:

> It's hard to go wrong with the mantra of "slower is faster" when it comes to considering any type of change within an organization, even adjustments that appear to be relatively minor. Taking the extra time to get feedback and

---

3. Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 27 (Exhibit 2.1, "Sources of Ambiguity").

engage with stakeholders allows those most affected by an issue to influence the outcome. Adding more experiences and vantage points to the problem-solving process increases the probability of designing a better solution and avoiding unforeseen pitfalls. Most importantly, buy-in, understanding, and flexibility naturally occur since the team becomes part of the response. It seems that each time I try to shortcut the "slower is faster" approach it creates more work, stress, and confusion that inevitability takes more time to correct. Going slower by using an inclusive process allows the sources of ambiguity or causes of conflict to surface.

Strategies to Consider

First, at a minimum, use one of the models discussed above to identify the challenges that you think are present in the situation at hand. Frame your language to express the challenges neutrally, rather than employing phrases that employees might receive as stereotypical or dismissive based on personality or profession.

Another strategy would be to use one of these models as the framework for small-group discussions, asking questions such as.

- Which concerns appear to be present in this situation?
- What information can we clarify or share now to address these concerns?
- What should we do to address any remaining concerns?

Assessing Perceptions about the Change

Stephen Covey trained the modern world to manage time by using the metaphor of filling a jar with rocks of varied sizes.[4] The bigger rocks symbolized more time-consuming tasks. Covey demonstrated that by putting the biggest rocks in the jar first, followed by the smaller rocks, he eventually put a greater number of rocks in the jar. In other words, he used his time strategically to achieve a greater number of tasks.

We can use a concept similar to Covey's to identify decisions that are likely to require additional or different attention from organizational leaders. These "big rock" decisions might warrant more specialized expertise, expanded staff input, extensive financial resources, or multidisciplinary planning, for example. They also might generate more negative reactions should the leader underestimate the reactions the change might generate.

What elevates an issue to "big rock" status?[5] Chances are that in answering this question experienced decision makers will be able to think of countless examples and have many stories to tell of underestimating a seemingly "simple" decision that ultimately polarized their organizations or generated adverse reactions.

---

4. For a YouTube video of Stephen Covey demonstrating this time-management strategy, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zV3gMTOEWt8.

5. The material in this section is drawn from a School of Government blog post. See Margaret Henderson, "Making 'Big Rock' Decisions," *Public Leadership Blog* (Feb. 15, 2015), https://leadership.sog.unc.edu/making-big-rock-decisions/.

A "big rock" issue has one or more of the seven features listed below. Next to each we have provided an organizational example.

- **It impacts many people** (most decisions related to payroll and human resource processes).
- **It involves a significant investment of financial resources** (how to prioritize and sequence the proactive replacement of aging infrastructure across departments).
- **It is a "fork-in-the-road" decision** (whether to consolidate county human service departments).
- **It impacts a small number of people, but in a big way** (whether to strategically eliminate a few staff positions or programs to balance the budget instead of asking all departments to make cuts of the same percentage).
- **It involves functions that support the community** (whether to redefine the success of programs in terms of community impact rather than service outputs).
- **It involves behaviors/things we can influence** (whether to encourage life-long learning, exercise, and wellness through new human resource benefits).
- **It is highly visible or symbolic** (whether to remove a Confederate statue from a public setting).

Terra Greene, City Manager of Lexington, NC, led her city through the process of removing a Confederate statue, which generated different reactions among city staff as well as within the community. She relied on "healthy pre-established deposits of mutual respect, trust, and relationship building" when that polarizing issue "required withdrawals (perceived or otherwise) from that bank of trust." Greene notes that both staff and community members deserve equal facetime from leadership to enable informed decisions and ensure forward momentum despite an encumbered pathway. "Take note staff was listed first, as they are the dedicated public servants [who] need a solid leadership connection to remain committed and motivated." Greene did not attempt to change political views. Instead, she reinforced a mutual respect for all co-workers and community members and emphasized her support for staff members who were directly involved with the change process. "Genuine servant leadership attributes are critical during change-management crises . . . . [A]fter a polarizing event, a leader should not underestimate the length of time required to rebuild deposits of mutual respect, trust, and relationships and [must] be willing to accept that some will be lost forever."[6]

Finally, Green advises managers to maintain consistent and detailed documentation of the change process, particularly if legal action could be initiated later.

The "big rock" features list above serves as a guide as to when decision makers might want to exercise greater caution as they act strategically to minimize or, hopefully, avoid surprises and adverse community reactions.

"Big rock" issues can generate diverse opinions about the right way for an organization to move forward. Mary Furtado, Deputy County Manager in Catawba County, NC, provides this advice about surfacing the full range of concerns that exist around a given change:

> Any change worth pursuing is going to be met with a wide range of attitudes and reactions. When I put one on the table for consideration within my team, I have a few hard and fast rules I adhere to. First, I tell them what's non-negotiable or fixed, as a way of managing everyone's expectations and not wasting energy

---

6. All quotations from Greene are from an email exchange she had with the authors on June 5, 2021.

on parts of the plan that aren't up for debate. Next, I solicit the problems people see with the proposed change, and I thank them for mapping out the landmines and associated recovery and mitigation plans we might encounter as we move to implement the change. Third, I let the team know that smart people make changes if something isn't working. This takes the form of, "We're moving forward with our best-planned approach to implementing this change. If it doesn't work perfectly, we will adapt. This isn't our only chance to get it right."

> **"[S]mart people make changes if something isn't working."**
>   — **Mary Furtado,** Deputy County Manager, Catawba County

Strategies to Consider
If a decision before you involves a "big rock," slow down the process for receiving, considering, and sharing information. Expand the communication strategies for practicing transparency. Create unique opportunities for informing all stakeholders within your organization about the proposed change and for receiving input in return. Collect and consider the hard data while still respecting the personal stories attached to the decision. Proactively identifying and respecting the demands of "big rock" decisions can offer strategic benefits, even if doing so requires more time and/or effort in the short run.

Mitigating Employee Resistance toward Change

We now turn our attention to the matter of employee resistance, which can be a challenge for public managers faced with implementing change. Such resistance could take the form of cynicism, which is a harmful and destructive feeling toward change characterized by frustration and disillusionment.[7] Cynicism toward change occurs from a "real loss of faith in the leaders of change and is a response to a history of change attempts that are not entirely or clearly successful."[8] Unlike skeptics, cynics are not willing to be convinced about the success of a proposed reform and may even dispute the motives behind change efforts. They are mistrustful of the reform and unwilling to take any risk toward its implementation.[9]

In some cases, cynicism occurs when change is symbolic or is imposed by external stakeholders and/or higher levels of government without consideration of employee opinions. This type of behavior leads to a compliance mentality, as affected employees see the change as

---

7. Lynne M. Andersson, "Employee Cynicism: An Examination Using a Contract Violation Framework," *Human Relations* 49(11) (1996): 1398.

8. Arnon E. Reichers, John P. Wanous, and James T. Austin, "Understanding and Managing Cynicism about Organizational Change," *The Academy of Management Executive* 11(1) (1997): 48.

9. David J. Stanley, John P. Meyer, and Laryssa Topolnytsky, "Employee Cynicism and Resistance to Organizational Change," *Journal of Business and Psychology* 19(4) (2005): 429–59.

a public relations feat rather than a tool to bring real change to the organization.[10] Change that increases the responsibility placed on employees while maintaining (or decreasing) resources also causes cynicism to grow in an organization.[11] Cynicism toward change in public employees is often exacerbated by the fact that change efforts in local governments run in a cyclical process (centralization versus deregulation) and seldom show clear and complete success.[12] In such cases, cynicism could become a self-fulfilling prophecy when cynical employees do not exert effort in implementing change, leading to a failure of the effort, which begets more cynicism toward future reforms.[13]

For practical advice from Angel Wright-Lanier, Assistant County Manager in Cumberland County, NC, about engaging employees in change processes, see Appendix A.

The next section of this bulletin sets out various strategies that public managers can apply to reduce resistance to change within their organizations. These strategies are based on the work of Alexander Kroll and Obed Pasha.[14]

- **Adequate Resources.** The first strategy for dealing with employee resistance is to ensure that the change effort is backed by the resources necessary to bring about the desired transition. Showing that sufficient resources are available will encourage understanding regarding the importance of the change effort, even among the most cynical employees. Employees will also be more likely to trust the change effort and less likely to consider it burdensome when they know resources will not be limited.
- **Political Commitment.** Support from elected officials is an essential factor in gaining trust among public employees. Employees understand that the political leadership of their local government controls the budget and oversees accountability and that, as a result, doing well on a change effort backed by elected officials could result in better professional payoffs. Political support toward change could also ensure administrative continuity and the autonomy of the change process.
- **Champions of the Change Process.** Change-management literature underscores the role of individuals within an organization who are willing to lead the change process. The most effective change champions get personally involved in change efforts, take ownership of the process and its impacts, and provide enthusiastic support for the process. These champions play a vital role in engaging with employees daily to develop a critical mass in support of the change. They may select the right people to work on the change process, share success stories from other organizations, and convince employees about the urgency and benefits of the reform.
- **Familiarity and Experience with the Change.** Exposure to change is essential to convert employee resistance to change into commitment. Employees with greater information

10. Beryl Radin and Joshua Chanin, *Federal Government Reorganization: A Policy and Management Perspective* (Boston: Jones and Bartlett Publishers, 2009).

11. Montgomery Van Wart, "Administrative Leadership Theory: A Reassessment After 10 Years," *Public Administration* 91(3) (2013): 521–43.

12. Larry R. Jones and Donald F. Kettl, "Assessing Public Management Reform in an International Context," *International Public Management Review* 4(1) (2003): 1–19.

13. John P. Wanous, Arnon E. Reichers, and James T. Austin, "Cynicism about Organizational Change Measurement, Antecedents, and Correlates," *Group & Organization Management* 25(2) (2000): 132–53.

14. See Alexander Kroll and Obed Pasha, "Managing Change and Mitigating Reform Cynicism," *Public Money & Management* (2019): 1–9.

about processes, goals, and expectations regarding change are more likely to support it. Such employees are also more likely to develop a realistic understanding regarding what the change effort might achieve, thereby reducing the perceived threats and anxiety due to incomplete and speculative information.

- **Open Informational Meetings.** Managers should schedule open meetings to discuss and examine available information pertaining to the proposed change and should then formulate subsequent actions collectively, not in isolation.[15] Such forums should be formalized, occur regularly, encourage dialogue between key actors, include data, and focus on improving the organization. If not thoughtfully designed, however, these forums could also serve to intensify negative employee experiences and frustration, particularly if they are used to amplify directives instead of to listen to employees or if the meetings are allowed to proceed without direction.

Strategies to Consider

To mitigate reform cynicism among middle managers—who will need to play an essential role in implementing organizational change—we suggest the following. First, allocate resources wisely. The most cost-effective way to spend scarce resources is to invest in reform-specific capacities, such as by creating support units that help managers and employees develop new skills for the upcoming change. Second, seek out political support. This type of support is vital to getting middle managers to buy in—it has signalling and trickle-down effects that help create commitment. Third, recognize that while information-sharing and knowledge creation around the proposed reform is necessary, learning forums (and related reflection routines) may reinforce cynicism if they are focused only on talk and not on action.

Concluding Remarks

Change management is one of the most important and valuable skills for public managers. Every day, local governments in North Carolina cope with changing demographics, public values, and turnover in elected leadership. Extraordinary events such as the Great Recession, Black Lives Matter movement protests, and the COVID pandemic further exacerbate the need to bring transformational changes to organizations.

We recommend that managers not respond passively to proposed reforms by allowing their organizations to drift into the future without a clear direction during change. Some managers might be inherently reactive, preferring to make decisions as needed in response to current events rather than to plan proactively to deal with foundational challenges. Passive reactors, however, might become paralyzed in the face of change, unable to carry out strategic decision-making. One example of a passive reaction involves rescuing people in the aftermath of heavy rain. In such a scenario, a reactive manager would repeatedly rescue people from affected homes and close off flooded streets near the local river. The transformational change required in this situation is to redesign infrastructure to better manage a high volume of rain. A manager reacting proactively would handle the crisis by considering the foundational changes necessary to prevent the flooding from happening in the first place.

---

15. Donald P. Moynihan and Noel Landuyt, "How Do Public Organizations Learn? Bridging Cultural and Structural Perspectives," *Public Administration Review* 69(6) (2009): 1097–1105.

A different kind of passive reaction might happen when a manager fails to address the need for change in an organization. External stakeholders or political leadership might step in to make decisions for the organization, and the organizational leadership would have to comply with the external directive. A poorly performing school that gets taken over by the state exemplifies the results of this type of passive reaction.

Government leaders are facing increasing pressure to deliver more and better services with fewer resources while at the same time experiencing changing public expectations and technological advancements, compelling these leaders to consider internal and external changes to their organizations to better serve citizens. We hope managers will find the strategies we have laid out in this bulletin helpful when dealing with change.

We conclude our discussion on managing change with the following expert advice from Angel Wright-Lanier, Assistant County Manager, Cumberland County, NC.

1. Announce the change initiative.
2. Invite stakeholders (both supporters and naysayers) to the table.
3. Keep stakeholders updated regularly throughout the change process.
4. Listen to ALL feedback—it will help your process in the end.
5. When rolling out your new change, always hold training sessions, especially if you're changing a policy. There is nothing worse than assuming people will read something. I have always believed it was my responsibility to explain the change.

Other References

Bolman, Lee G., and Terrence E. Deal. 1984. *Modern Approaches to Understanding and Managing Organizations*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Covey, Stephen R. 2013. *The 8th Habit: From Effectiveness to Greatness*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Musselwhite, W. Christopher, and Robyn D. Ingram. 1998. *Change Style Indicator: Facilitator's Guide*. Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer.

Appendix A. Engaging Employees in Change Processes: Advice from a Local Government Professional

Generally, people like to be heard, especially as it relates to a possible change to how they handle things in the office. When starting a change process, I was taught to identify the key stakeholders for the project/change. Next, I invite those stakeholders to the table early, particularly those that have the power, or the influence, to derail or impact the project. Keeping all stakeholders updated on a regular basis is key, especially folks struggling with the change. Some of the[ir] suggestions or concerns regarding the change may prove valuable in the end. One of the things you don't want to do is to ignore dissenting voices and end up with a change that negatively impacts the group, the software, or whatever the product is.

Many years ago, we were upgrading the utility billing software that our customer service agents used every single day. No one took the time to seek . . . input from the call center representatives, the people that do the work every day. The IT Department interviewed a supervisor two levels above the call center agents. The supervisor's understanding of the process was flawed, so the software was designed incorrectly.

For the past sixteen years, I've worked with cities and counties to improve their grants management processes. I've found that when people understand what you're doing up front, they tend to get onboard a lot quicker. When I've gone into new localities and find that they don't have a grants management infrastructure, I happily reach out to the grants professionals in the organization to tell them what I have in mind. Every single time, most people have been extremely helpful with creating or updating the policies. I've found that I have a much better compliance rate when implementing a grants management process when people were given the opportunity to share their input. In fact, today I had a meeting to start this process here in Cumberland County. I advised my grant manager to reach out to the folks that do this work in the community so we can schedule an initial meeting with them.

Angel Wright-Lanier, Ed.D., ICMA-CM
Assistant County Manager
General Government and Stewardship
Cumberland County, NC
May 2021