



## Integrating the Human Side of Technology Changes

*Bob is feeling squeezed. He is a project manager, implementing a major software upgrade for his company. He and his team chose the best software product on the market, and have met all of the project cost and schedule commitments. But there is a problem. It seems that everyone involved with the project is angry. The end users hate the new software -- it is complicated and difficult to use. They never wanted the new system and want their old system back. Bob's company leadership isn't happy. They aren't seeing the productivity and speed results that the new software was supposed to deliver. They were banking on this project to help the company make badly needed cost cuts. Bob, and his team, are very angry. They did their best technical work and now it is being thrown back at them from all sides. Bob is afraid that he will lose several members of his team, and similarly, he isn't sure he ever wants to work on another software rollout project.*

Technology implementations today are more complicated than ever. In the interest of speed and productivity, many companies believe that simply automating a work process, or adding the latest and 'best' software, will make good results appear. In reality, many software changes mess with the way that people in the company do their daily work.

There are times when really big changes happen in an organization. In those times when for instance a site is closing, workers are laid off, or a new facility is being built, it's easy to recognize that there are some big changes going on. Then there are times when the changes occurring in an organization are smaller or more subtle. However, the changes inside the minds of the organization's members, as a reaction to those small organizational changes, may be big.

Take, for instance, a large company that is relocating one of its small departments from one site to another site. The small department that is moving between two very large sites won't cause a site closure or lay-off. The move won't even hit the radar screen of on-looking analysts evaluating the company's strength for Wall Street investors. *However, inside the company where the move is happening, the change is HUGE!* Suddenly workers across the large site are wondering if their department is the next to move. These workers wonder if this is the first step to closing their plant's doors, laying them off, putting their family on welfare, and making it impossible to send their kids to a good four-year college. People have a way of creating 'Stephen King - like' scenarios of what might happen. They often base these scenarios on very little data. You'd think that if people were going to "make up stuff", they'd make up "good stuff". It's all made up anyway. The truth is people make up a nightmare in their minds that would put most horror novelists to shame.

When a change like this happens, people immediately have an emotional reaction. For many people today, speed and productivity improvements are just code for layoffs after the project. Given this, why wouldn't the people have an emotional reaction! Consequently, no matter how logical and beneficial the technology change may be for the company, people will not handle the change well unless they get over their flood of emotion. To close this gap, the human side of the technology change must be respected and effort toward the human side must be integrated into the basic project.

*Neglecting the human side will produce some results, but they won't be good results. These 'less than' results are reflected by projects that take longer to start up, cost more to implement, and that never achieve the original productivity and speed objectives.*

To integrate the Human Side, people must be given skills so that new behaviors can be demonstrated. The company and project leadership must demonstrate telling the truth about the impact of the change and not put a spin on the truth. They must also develop the principles by which the change will be managed. The project team must learn how to demonstrate their commitment, and gain the commitment of the users and stakeholders of the technology change. Additionally, the project team must be given the skills to communicate at a deeper level than ever before. They must role model true listening, conflict resolution, and acknowledgment of others. Finally, all people affected by the project must be given the skills to manage the change so that they can complete their emotional reaction and see the possibilities.

As these skills are gained, and the new behaviors demonstrated, people will open up with concerns, feedback, suggestions, and requests. People will feel like a part of the project, instead of feeling like the project is being done to them. They can then reclaim their commitment. They can use their abilities to effectively problem solve, work well on teams, and make the project successful. By doing these steps, you, and your organization, will gain the speed and productivity results intended from the project. And, you will be around, with sanity intact, to make the next technology change successful.



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*Focusing only on the technical side of a project and not the human side is like having great music and lousy speakers – the music never sounds as good as it could have.*