

ECM implementation

Trust and communication must be interwoven to realise successful change

Seldom do case studies surface where lessons learned are from failures. In this report, a client is granted anonymity to allow the author freedom to write openly about what went right and what went wrong in an enterprise-wide content-management implementation project.

By Noreen Kelley

An enterprise-wide content management system (CMS) implementation project at a Chicago-based global corporation serves as a case study on the critical role of communication throughout the change process, and the issue of trust as an underlying theme in realising successful change. The stated goal of this project to implement a web-content-management tool was to simplify and expedite the content-publishing process, making it easier to build and manage websites. Ultimately, the project was about changing the way people do their work.

I was brought into the role of communications lead on the project late in the process after credibility problems had surfaced. The program manager was presenting road shows early on in the process, both over-promising and under-delivering when there wasn't a project plan, which led to shifting deadlines, confusion, and irritated and frustrated end users. This user cynicism resulted in a lack of acceptance and buy-in. As a result, the programme communication presented a number of challenges:

- Raising awareness and acceptance of the new CMS;
- Building the project team's credibility;
- Overcoming resistance to the new system as a result of the project's history – for example, project time delays;



- Effectively communicating the content-management tool's capabilities and advantages;
- Informing the community about the migration schedule;
- Communicating more effectively with the web-development community. Ineffective communication resulted in a failure to secure buy-in concerning the value of the centralised system;
- Communicating more effectively with the general population – confusion concerning the tools resulted in an end-user backlash;
- Communicating more effectively with individual site owners. The site owners didn't agree with the direction and took their sites outside the corporate environment.

The project was also a change issue in that business units questioned the value of learning a new tool and pushed back on resources; the newbies had fears and concerns about using the new tool. Experienced technical publishers didn't want to change due to control issues and historical baggage, i.e., 'We've always done it this way', with the view that the tool would

restrict their creativity and tool options.

Trust and social networks

A look at pre-existing trust relationships within informal social networks reveals that the roles of 'hub', 'pulsetaker' and 'gatekeeper' were present in this project. Dr Karen Stephenson, a corporate anthropologist who has been recognised internationally for her pioneering work in human networks within organisations, describes these roles as follows:

The *hub* is an individual so well connected to others that he or she plays an indispensable role in keeping the flow of information going.

Hubs are characterised, Professor Stephenson says, by an extraordinarily high level of trust. People know what to expect from them; their calls are returned; they attend all the key meetings; and, they convey news. Stephenson goes on to say that the hub is the kind of person who becomes a gathering and sharing point for critical information. Hubs show up on network maps like the centres of star clusters, sometimes with dozens of links radiating out from them, and rank high as a connector among people.

Pulsetakers, says Stephenson, carefully cultivate relationships that enable them to monitor the ongoing health and direction of the organisation. They are the first to sense change in the wind and intervene in subtle but powerful ways. It is not always easy to tell who the pulsetakers are.

Stephenson describes the third type of individual as the gatekeeper, who represents information bottlenecks, controlling the flow of contact to a particular part of the organisation, thus making themselves indispensable. Cultural change stalls because of the gatekeepers, so you want to make sure the gatekeepers are aligned with you.

In this project, the corporate communications manager, who managed the intranet and worked

closely with the web project team, met the hub role. A person of great integrity and a veteran employee, she was able to provide a sense of legacy and culture due to her long tenure with the company.

The pulsetaker was the director of IT communication and a skilled marketer. She was very good at cultivating relationships up and down the line, and her peers viewed her as a credible person with integrity. She always knew the direction that the company was going and provided open, honest and sometimes critical feedback to the programme leader and project manager on how the project was being perceived by end users.

The gatekeeper in this project was the web-training instructor, who was very well connected and respected within the organisation. When the plan went south, she recommended that

- Timely, accurate updates;
- Communication of accomplishments, objectives, and goals to help connect the dots;
- Orientation sessions to introduce web publishers, site owners and business sponsors to the content-migration process;
- Ongoing communications to highlight project status, progress and successes.

End-user awareness and education

A critical component of this effort was addressing the many end-user concerns through awareness and education, which clarified questions such as:

- What's the project plan and who owns it?
- What's the process/plan/scope/timeline?
- What content are we migrating?

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individuals or groups avoid migrating their website content using the new tool. She also did not respect the project manager, who lacked honesty and integrity, was passive/aggressive, controlled the information or gave incorrect information, and shared information only when he was ready.

Restoring trust

Communication and education are the most critical areas of a systems implementation roll out, and buy-in is achieved by making users feel they are part of the process. Restoring some degree of employee trust was possible only by delivering on stated promises and executing an ongoing, consistent communications and training effort. Improved communications were achieved through:

- Increased awareness and education of the tool's capabilities and advantages;

- Who's responsible for the migration?
- Why are we doing this – what are the benefits and how/why is it faster?
- When is it happening?
- How do I get started?
- What do I need to do to prepare?
- What does it mean for me, and what is expected of me?
- How will this help me do my job better?
- What do you want me to do differently?
- What's my role in the new system?
- What will the training entail – what tools and support do I need?
- Do I have to rework everything I do?
- How do all the pieces and players fit together?
- What are the commitments that have been made?
- What if I don't have the staff and resources to migrate content? What

are the total costs for migrating my site, training, ongoing web operating costs?

- If we don't migrate our pages, does that mean the site will cease to exist? If so, when?
- What's in it for me? What will the tool do for us as a corporation and for my department, so I can clearly and understandably justify the cost?
- What does success look like? What are the critical success factors in the near and long-term?

Where trust was not operating

Indicators of where trust was not operating included these lessons learned from the front line:

- Be realistic in your goals, commitments and deadlines;
- Deliver on your commitments;
- Don't over promise or under deliver;

- If you have the basics in place, upcoming changes won't be so tough;
- Manage user expectations and perceptions;
- Set expectations at the correct level;
- Project delays create a 'buzz' as to whether this is really going to happen;
- Combat perceptions by focusing on the realness of the deliverables;
- Trust has as much to do with perception as reality;
- Recognise the tool is not the process;
- Tool will not be faster, simpler, more efficiently immediately – it's a process;
- People need to see and understand the process in order for them to embrace it;
- Factor in all issues – resources, time, skills, training, workloads and communication.

- Listen to the needs of your users and bring them along with you – they are part of the process and are probably part of the solution;
- Be aware of existing culture;
- Mandates don't work in this organisation. People don't like to be told what to do and they will find a way around it;
- You have to sell everything you do as individual business units pay for everything;
- Have to barter for people's time;
- Look at change through a knowledge lens;
- No value add to users if tool isn't part of the way people work;
- Communicate, communicate, communicate, early on;
- Be upfront from the start. Avoid spin and invite feedback;
- Target your audiences – what do users need to know about the impact on them versus what do web authors need to do and how should they do it. Plus, what senior managers need to do to budget the necessary time, resources and funds;
- Show everybody your plan and share your timelines – especially if they're moving.

A critical component of this effort was addressing the many end-user questions concerns through awareness and education.

- Acknowledge project timeline delays and explain current situation and revised time frames – don't just ignore the date originally promised;
- Remember, the credibility of the programme leadership team is on the line;
- Take baby steps rather than a giant leap.
- Start small – don't underestimate project complexity;
- Scale back to get some early wins. Take on clearly defined projects one at a time. You don't need to do it all at once;
- Get a plan and stick with it;
- Planning and preparation are key (the 80/20 rule);
- Don't learn as you go. Lack of preparation, process and planning are killers;
- Base project implementation on business needs.
- Project must support business initiatives. Address business units' concerns of staff resources, time and budget early on;
- Recognise and use your community of experts;
- Involve content owners and publishers;
- Merchandise your early wins;
- Highlight initial content-migration successes;
- Impressions are half the battle. Balance any negatives with some clear positives;
- Don't make change a battle;
- If what you're doing is the right thing, infuse it with a sense of excitement and possibility;
- Engage your end-users regarding issues of importance to them;

The experiences and lessons learned from this project clearly demonstrate trust is an issue during a successful change implementation. Trust, communication and leadership are closely linked — once you lose trust, you lose the ability to communicate and lead. Building trust is a fundamental part of creating sustained organisational change. ■

For more information, read Karen Stephenson's Quantum Theory of Trust, by Art Kleiner, strategy + business, 11-10-02.

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