



# The importance of best practice change management in Enterprise Records Management

Business white paper



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Any electronic records management solution that is adopted by an organization can in some way impact the current operating methods for staff at all levels. Records and information are fundamental in the conduct of business, and technologies that affect information now affect every information worker. With a highly digital work environment, everyone is somehow involved with records and information management, requiring a significant shift in individual and organizational views of what records management is about and an understanding of what the new or altered Enterprise Record Management (ERM) system will mean to them and their organization. To increase the benefits of ERM, a best practice change management strategy is required.

Although there is evidence that some organizations are aware of the need to manage change, the magnitude of these changes is often underestimated resulting in a diminished outcomes for the organization. While many of the change management techniques are critical in the initial stages of implementing the new technology they also need to be embedded into “business as usual” to support successful ERM. Implementation of even the very best ERM platform can be at a far greater risk of failure without a well thought-out, resourced, and executed change management approach.

This paper outlines change management best practices, including the importance of clearly defining what an ERM program aims to achieve, and how change management can contribute to better design, and more assured user acceptance.

## What are best practices—why are they important?

Before discussing how organizations should approach change management and ERM, it is important to understand the term “best practices” and why they are important.

Change management industry best practices offer a structured approach to transitioning individuals, teams, and organizations from their current state to a desired future state by addressing the people aspects of ERM programs.

There are two key concepts:

- Change management policy, procedures, and standards are integrated with and communicated to IT and business management functions.
- Roles and responsibilities affecting change management are defined, designated to qualified personnel, communicated to the organization, and enforced throughout the change management process.
- Change is an ongoing process and incorporating change management and post change review processes may provide continuous benefits to staff and business operations alike.

Change management is an ongoing process, from design through implementation and engages many stakeholders to embed changed behaviors in normal daily practice. A best practice approach can help provide a framework to provide the stakeholders a greater return on the investment and better outcome from managing information.

## Understanding and defining what ERM aims to achieve

ERM is powered by several business drivers:

- Increasing business efficiencies and reducing unit costs (management improvements, such as process automation)
- Business planning and the continuity of decision making
- Improving the capacity for internal and external collaboration
- Managing and gaining value from growing volumes of information and content types
- Managing reputational, legal, and financial risks by providing reliable, authentic, and useable records that have integrity

Understanding which of these (or other) drivers are important for the organization’s ERM program is important and this is usually articulated as part of the ERM justification process. It provides the basis for assessing the organization’s return on investment (ROI). Effectively translating these ROI drivers into meaningful reasons for change is a vital way of sharing the passion for the ERM program with the people who are going to be asked to change the way they do their work.

## Steps for successful change management

We are all familiar—directly or otherwise—with the failed IT project. The software may well perform as expected, but the inability of staff to understand the purpose and potential of the software and failures to convert data appropriately have led ultimately to disappointment with the software itself and sometimes abandonment of the project or software. What a waste of time and resources! Because an ERM program is by its very nature transformational and is likely to impact everyone across the organization at some level, an ERM project needs processes for managing change for a successful outcome.

ERM software must be configured to make it easy for knowledge workers to understand and operate. The system's users are expected to understand and ultimately "own" the changes or they may opt out of the process. Effectively communicating with people about changes to the way they do their jobs requires new perspectives and understanding of information and records management practices.

Unfortunately, while most ERM projects may have some commitment to change management, in many cases it is little more than lip service to the idea. Change management is often dealt with only at the training stage, when the ERM is already configured (and it's too late to impact the design). Otherwise change management is technology-centric, a method to expose the new "system" in the form of show-and-tell sessions, more aligned to release management. This approach is often underpinned (unwittingly) by the assumption that the technicians know and deliver what users need—with minimal or token efforts to engage users before the project is implemented in order to discover the impacts of the proposed changes.

Change management must occur at two key stages in an ERM program:

1. During the design stage, understand and articulate the users' requirements and provide a sound design.
2. During the implementation stages, it is essential that after the training and conversion, the changed behavior is embedded and staff members don't return to previous methods of working, or entirely opt out of the ERM implementation process.

Change management often involves a level of "consulting" or "verification and testing" of the ERM software design. Too often, there is little attempt to engage fully with users' ideas and requirements. Consultation processes might be documented (although they frequently aren't) however when the feedback has little impact on the final design, users can feel disenfranchised. That is not to say that every comment or requirement can make the final system implementation as there is a need to balance user's requests to meet their local needs. With the requirement for corporate level consistency and access, users have to feel their contributions have been handled authentically and credibly.

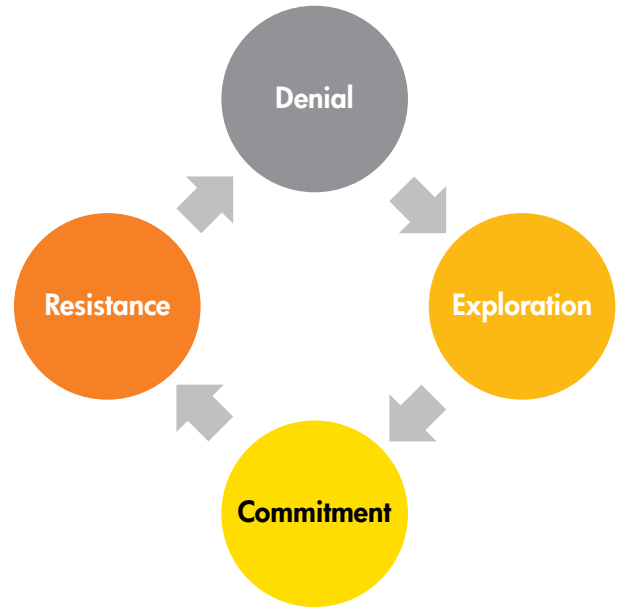
Following these approaches, change management can provide a robust communications and feedback channel and, a rapid and authentic method for issues identification and solutions design validation.

In reality, as Jaffe and Scott's<sup>1</sup> model suggests, knowledge workers who take the tools of their trade seriously need to be engaged on a journey from resistance to commitment. If that journey doesn't start at the beginning of the process, then it will all become much harder at the end.

Each organization and ERM program is different but there are methodologies and approaches that can be adapted, such as Kotter's classic<sup>2</sup> approach to leading change that was based on an analysis of why projects fail.

#### Four stages of transition through change.

Adapted from Jaffe and Scott (1995)

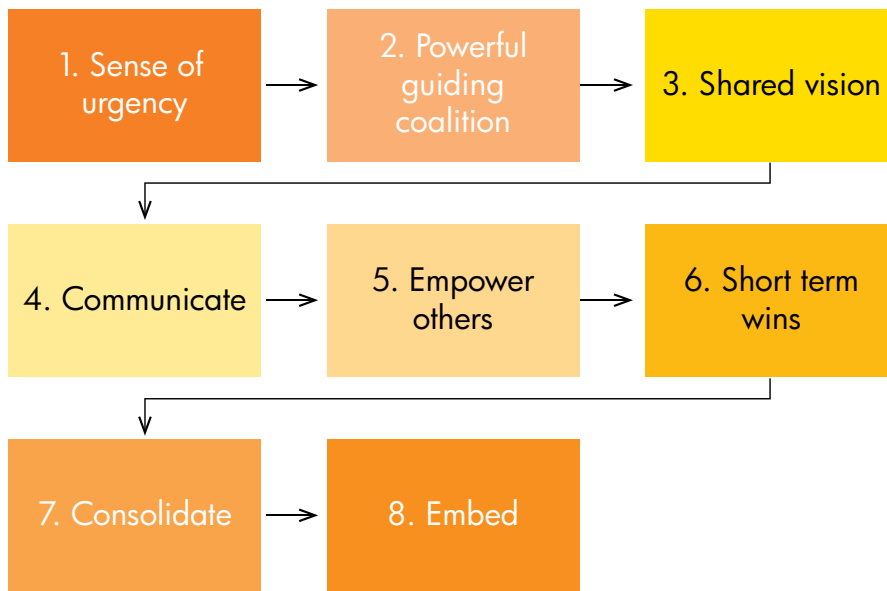


A recent example of an adaptation is illustrated in this set of change management steps for an ERM program:

1. Define the drivers for change and make sure this is communicated clearly to engage people in the process.
2. Identify the right people for consultation and engagement—this may be a mix of the decision makers and the technical experts who have a sound understanding of the business process. Make sure that there is scope for more than one consultation session, when it is needed.
3. Paint the picture of life after the change—the vision is important for engagement: why change and how can change be achieved? How can we know when we get there?
4. Plan the communication process: tell the story, manage the expectations and ensure that there are regular, meaningful progress updates.

<sup>1</sup> Managing change at work: Leading people through organizational transitions. Cynthia D. Scott, Dennis T. Jaffe, (1995), ISBN 1-56052-299-2. Crisp Publications, Inc, Canada

<sup>2</sup> Leading change. John P. Kotter, (1996), ISBN 0-87584-747-1. Harvard Business School Press, USA



5. Understand fully the steps and ensure there are no additional or unexpected barriers for the change to occur by making sure that:
  - Both resources and time are available to make the transition
  - Users have been trained and feel sufficiently empowered to make the needed behavioral changes
  - Conversion strategies are in place
  - Methods have been established for dealing with legacy data
6. Celebrate successes, promote early adopters, prove that it works, keep up the enthusiasm and optimism for success.
7. Make the change the normal way of operating; embed changes so that retreat to the existing method is unappealing.

## The importance of a sound system design

A successful ERM program harnesses people, process, and technology to achieve significant organizational gains through automation of steps, documenting those steps, using knowledge for repeatable processes, and capturing implicit understanding about “how stuff gets done” into workflows. This means understanding the processes so the system design reflects real work practices and delivers user-focused outcomes. It makes sure that people understand and accept changes more readily when they understand where changes may take place in current practice, and what the benefits are for them.

Sound design may go a long way to determining success, but this requires a commitment to engage users in a feedback process that users believe in and where their engagement can influence the outcomes. Poorly planned system design, supported by even the best change management approaches may be negatively judged by stakeholders to the detriment of the whole project.

While business process automation is one of the attractions of ERM, achieving a sound system design around process improvement is not suited to the “one size fits all” approach implicit in many ERM projects. To the people working in organizations, business objectives and goals, functions, and activities are theirs and unique, so the potential organizational gains may be lost using generic designs or steps adapted from other organizations that don’t fit. Be warned, knowledge workers may do all they can to avoid any system that makes them feel they are doing unnecessary “tail wags dog” tasks. Systems have to be well-designed and present in a logical path from current to future state for users to even begin to buy in.

### Case Study: Aligning the ROI message

An organization needed to respond to an adverse audit report by implementing a set of demonstrably fair and ethical procurement processes for government contracts. Project drivers included:

- The need to satisfy external regulators that procurement processes were fully under management control.
- Contact between potential suppliers and procurement staff was documented and transparent.

A process was needed to ensure that records were created and captured, so that each and every contact with potential suppliers was recorded and accountable, including phone conversations and text messaging. The procurement process needed records that were auditable, which required a conscious process from staff so that patterns of contact could be measured, variations could be identified and checked. Staff needed to understand the benefits to them of working in a more controlled and accountable workplace, and how better recordkeeping could protect them in cases of dispute with vendors. For this change to occur, both the system design and training focused on making it easier to create records, as well as how the records might be used for auditing.

The link between the ERM and satisfying the statutory requirements was clear. The people in the business needed to transform procurement processes or would find that part of the organization dismantled and outsourced.

ERM programs operate within an organizational vision defined by business drivers and system design parameters, and are more about matching system capabilities to business need than about defining functionality requirements from a blank page. The opportunity is to gather information about the issues facing the business from the people doing the work right now and to listen—really—to their ideas for improvements.

A sound information gathering process can yield an understanding of the current state of the organization, certify the design reflects users' needs and provide insight into challenges that can provide the link between the current state and future state. Better yet, these "stories" are the ones people may use to understand the changes and communicate to their colleagues.

## Change management as a communications and feedback channel

Communications play a huge role in helping staff members understand the nature of changes associated with an ERM program and the impact this would have for them. Unfortunately, too many projects and programs are conducted with a megaphone, broadcasting a central message rather than an effective multi-lateral communications mix.

Communications need to:

- Be effective, contain the right amount of information, and tailored to the audience
- Convey clearly to the stakeholders that:
  - The process may be collaborative and that interviews and workshops are designed as an opportunity to contribute, not just listen and acquiesce
  - Understanding the rationale and requirements of any timeline is essential
  - Understanding the process, what's required from them and that their level of involvement in the process is important

Communication channels need to be both formal (using different media available within the organization) and also informal. Informal sessions often prove very effective, for example, program team members chatting with stakeholders in the kitchen making a coffee.

It is also too easy to over-simplify the communications element of a change management program into something that might be better defined as audience analysis. While it is important to identify and segment the various stakeholders and to think about the kinds of message that would support the program, this activity on its own is superficial and those messages need to evolve and resonate to reflect real concerns.

Senior management may have set out the goals for moving from the current state to a future vision, but it may be up to many other stakeholders to elaborate on how to fulfil that vision. Workshops to communicate the vision and seek initial inputs are an important way to get the word out and start people thinking. Stakeholders need to have their say in how to achieve the future state:

- What would and wouldn't work
- What kind of support they need
- How to close the gap between the way records are managed currently and how they should be managed in the future
- What to stop, start, or continue doing during the project

Ideally, the information gathering phase of an ERM program can involve consultation across the entire organization. Naturally important can be executives and senior managers with a strong knowledge of the organization, the regulatory environment, and operations. However, it is equally important to understand that they don't always have deep knowledge of processes and information flows. It's also important to get the input of experienced staff with a solid understanding of processes. Each ERM program can have its own characteristics but a change management approach can encourage conversations with, for example, remote staff or external partners collaborating on projects. Again, understanding the business and maintaining contact with the ERM project vision is key, however the information gathering phase is a vital chance to spend time with those likely to be affected by the changes, and so understand and document their stories.

As there may be questions that cannot be fully explored in the interviews, the ERM program team could be left with the risk of making assumptions. It is much better to organize workshops allowing stakeholders to provide answers to questions from those impacted by the change. Verification workshops provide a forum for gaining community acceptance of ideas and the prototype design. There will usually be some people with real or imagined concerns about the project. Listen carefully. Be sure to address issues that are raised and communicate the status to all stakeholders. Understand that the tendency is for the imagined issues to quieten down as the broader group plays a role in educating its members, and hopefully arriving at consensus. These are some characteristics of effective workshops:

- Workshops are collaborative and welcoming
- Stakeholders can see their comments and feedback have been addressed
- Stakeholders are actively involved in the process
- Stakeholders are prompt with feedback and comments—they feel consulted and involved

### Case study: Linking communications, configuration, and training

A large, state-owned enterprise with a strong engineering background needed to redevelop a poorly functioning business classification scheme (BCS). Working in a “command and control” culture, there was little understanding of the change management process. Staff who best knew the selected work process attended verification workshops to review the proposed redevelopment.

The workshops demonstrated approaches and values that can be attributed to change management and were facilitated using a best practice change management approach employing a range of techniques to engage users.

- The layout of the room was changed to create an atmosphere more open and conducive for discussion. Attendees did not all sit around a table but were grouped in a semicircle around the screen and the whiteboard.
- Physical barriers were removed between facilitator and stakeholders to support open discussion.
- Stakeholders were sent images and explanatory notes of areas of the BCS that concerned them well in advance of the session.
- Verification groups were drawn from the different business areas and almost always, there was a crossover of stakeholders from different business units. This stimulated debates over differences and similarities from area to area. It seeded understanding across units that wouldn't normally associate with each other.
- The purpose of the development of the BCS was again reinforced.
- As discussion progressed, the results of the discussion were documented on the whiteboard so everyone could see them and had a sense of progress. As documentation progressed, this prompted further discussion as stakeholders refined their thoughts, saw the conversations evolve and “come to life”.
- Whole levels of the scheme were wiped away, new ones added and sometimes, previous ones returned to the whiteboard. Comments were also added to explain why some terms had been changed so users could see the authority for changes that were being made.
- Unresolved issues were also documented on the whiteboard and these were “flagged” to be addressed in the project management arena, referred to management or to another verification workshop with other users.
- What was finally documented on the whiteboard was printed (records were made of the process) and became the basis of revised versions of the BCS.

Change management needs to be pervasive across the ERM program however the most obvious manifestation of this is in project communications. These communications should inform both the training and the configuration design phases of the project.

There are many ways to reach out to stakeholders on an ERM program and each serves its own purpose. From the executive awareness raising briefings as a “call to action”, to the more conventional engagements such as interviews, workshops, validation sessions, newsletters, visits to operational team meetings, to the more innovative social networking opportunities using project websites, blogs, and other technologies. A well-designed communications strategy may use a mix of media. What is critical is that intelligence gained from each of these methods of communication is fed back into the ERM project either to trigger some sort of communications response or to inform the configuration of the system.

With full management support for change management, budget, and time to conduct workshops to gain user's buy in, a project resource onsite with knowledge of the business, users to co-ordinate groups, and to document in detail the outcomes is essential. The benefits of a best practice approach to linking communications, configuration, and training include:

- The ability to work across functional groups, understanding how one part of the process impacted another
- Frank, robust discussion, creating better engagement, and staff taking ownership of the results
- Engaged users who consider what they do, how their contribution is part of a bigger picture that needs to fit the corporate framework, and so gain better insight into collaborating with people in other business units
- Users who are better able to think outside their information silos

## Conclusion

It is important to not underestimate the impact an enterprise wide ERM implementation can have on most information workers and the requirement for behavioral change. This paper has outlined the steps to embed change and to gain better user acceptance in both the design and post-implementation stages of the new ERM. The consultation process must include a real commitment to engage users, empower them, and show a demonstrated respect for their ideas and input. The need to work within the best practice framework and records standards is essential, but this should be communicated clearly to users, demonstrating how the system can meet the drivers for change.

The change management process should seek opportunities to break down the barriers between the expert/technicians and users, and engage users in an accountable change process, while seeking to move users from resistance to commitment. Having a process to validate the proposed solution against the project brief and objectives is needed—this requires that the process of change management has been included in the project planning and resourcing phases. Having a

clear statement of objectives against which progress can be measured is a key element of promoting their understanding of “why,” in addition to the usual “what to do,” and “who does what.” Beyond the final completion of any ERM implementation project, the engagement of and feedback from users should be used as a method to check periodically whether the ERM continues to meet users’ needs, or identify potential for future improvements, particularly as users gain greater familiarity, and identify potential enhancements.

Change management requires an understanding of how adults learn, what impedes changes to behavior and working to embed changes in new behaviors. It needs sensitivity, good communication, and consultation skills. Communication for the sake of it, with no discernible outcome, carries the risk of backfiring on the project, and causing change fatigue. Consultation and communication needs to be genuine and feedback needs to be responded to, so users can see what and where their feedback has been incorporated. With these best practice techniques employed as an integral part of any ERM project, organizations may see a far greater return on their investment.

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