

Ten Things to Think About Before Starting Any Tech Change Project

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I've kept this purposefully brief, but I could bang on about this stuff all day if you let me. Get in touch with me at techchanges@soozihl.com or www.tech-changes.com if you want to give me an opportunity to do this...

Everyone loves a checklist, right? Things to tick off as you go along? Well, I've provided exactly that for you. Think of this as a supplement to your project plan, and give yourself a big tick when you meet one of the points.

They're in a logical order, but they don't necessarily follow on from one to the other. Any tech implementation project will have many strands and a complex project plan, but these points should all be covered in it somewhere.

1. Consult with your users

Talk to people. Find out their appetite for what you want to do. Find out their issues with current systems. Find out their most inconvenient business processes and consider how your new tech might help them. Ask them what they want to get out of a new intranet/database/document management system etc.

This is all about documenting your functional requirements and creating your business case. Really, you shouldn't be looking at solutions until you've done all this (although it is tempting and it often happens).

But more importantly, if you've really taken time to listen to people, they'll be starting to feel involved - and this is the first and most important step towards engagement later on.

2. Find your champions

Keep an eye out for suitable champions during your early consultation stage, and you'll be ready when the time comes.

You need champions all over the place. Different roles, different levels of seniority, different levels of competency. These are the people who will support and defend you against the cynics and haters of change. They're usually people who are well connected within your organisation and trusted by their colleagues. Team administrators make great champions, but look at anyone who gets on with other people and who is outspoken yet loyal to their causes.

And you need one big champion - up there in the senior management team. This person is the one who should lead by example and be in a position to sponsor the project. They should have a real vested interest in making the project successful.

3. Give your tech project an identity

Naming your new system is important. All products need a name - it's their brand. When companies sell to customers they sell a named and branded product. Introducing technology is no less of a selling job. Your users are your customers. So whatever it is - a database, an intranet - it needs a name.

Don't be tempted to use the name it comes with. For instance, SharePoint is a product. But it's not your product. It has the identity of Microsoft - you need it to have an identity of your organisation.

And don't just pluck the first thing that comes into your mind. A bad name is as bad as no name. Think of something that fits with the culture of your organisation. A good way to do that is to involve people by opening up a competition for suggestions.

4. Tell people what's going to change

Now is the time to be honest! It is not the time for hedging round the bush or trying to sweeten the blow by not telling people the full story. It's far worse to keep people in the

dark about how much this is going to affect them and then bash them over the head with it when they least expect it.

Take some time to separate people into different audiences depending on what they need to know. Then work out how you're going to address each of the different audiences and what you're going to tell them. This will form the basis of your Communications Plan.

But being honest and telling people what they need to know isn't the same as boring them to death with detail. Make your messages easy to understand and repeat them if necessary.

5. Tell people why they should use it

It's not enough to give people a new piece of technology and expect them to just run with it. Even if you've involved them and communicated etc etc, they still need to understand the *why* of using it.

This really overlaps with the communications plan, but it's important to consider it as a slightly different thing. The *why* is where you explain the benefits of using the new thing. Whether they're benefits to the organisation or to the users personally, they need to understand the *why*, or it'll just feel imposed. And most people don't like things which are imposed on them.

One way to do this is to model the ideal. Use the product yourself - if the implementation team isn't using it, why would anyone else?

6. Set up a governance structure

This is about the 'how' of using your new technology. A governance structure tells everyone where they stand. It tells people what they can or should use it for, and what they shouldn't use it for.

You could make it straightforward with a simple policy document outlining the main points, or you could make it complex (necessary for something with a large and varied user base, like an intranet) with a series of guides, policies and procedures covering all eventualities.

Again, this must suit your organisation. If you're in the kind of place where everything is done in complicated detail, then you'll probably need to keep that up in order to be taken seriously.

7. Provide enough training

The chances are that if you're reading this, then you're involved in the implementations of technologies, and you're probably therefore pretty tech savvy yourself. So you may not always realise just how much training some other people might need. Be realistic. Gauge the needs of your users, and then provide something which exceeds those needs.

It's better to offer more and have people decide they don't need it than to constantly have people requesting more and more that you're not resourced to cover.

And don't underestimate the general need to 'be trained' in something new. Yes, they probably could work it out themselves with colourful and pretty step by step instructions and email support. But people like to learn from people. They like to be able to ask questions and feel the community of learning alongside their colleagues.

8. Offer support

People need to know where to contact for help in the future. Even once they've attended training and have their community around them, there will always be times when they need technical support.

Create a clear point of contact. Set up a generic mailbox or phone number and make it obvious to all your users. Stick a big Help button on every page or whatever, but make it clear.

Then have a process within the team as to who deals with what. Maybe one person will answer all the calls and then dish them out. Or everyone will watch the mailbox and flag the ones they choose to deal with. Whatever you do, trial it before the onslaught of launch day and be prepared to tweak (or completely overhaul) at a moment's notice.

9. Bring people together

It's a good idea to build a community around a new technology implementation. It helps engagement and adoption if people can communicate with their peers about how and why they're using it. Those points I made earlier about what's going to change and why they should be using it are further strengthened by seeing other people doing it.

It also helps with ongoing training. If people are part of a community, then they won't be afraid to ask 'silly questions' of their colleagues. And issues that can be resolved within the user's team means that's one less support email or phone call your team will have to deal with.

10. Listen to feedback

Be open to feedback from everywhere. You can, and probably should, do some sort of formal review like a survey or interviews soon after you launch. This will obviously give you some data to work with. You'll also get direct, but unsolicited, feedback through emails or face to face contact with your users.

Be prepared to see what people aren't telling you. Apathy is the biggest killer of adoption. If people can't care enough to even give you feedback, that doesn't usually mean everything is running smoothly - it means they're not interested! On the other hand, if you're getting constructive criticism (even if it seems a lot) it shows that they have an interest in seeing your product succeed.

Finally, recognise when to ignore the feedback you get. Learn to pick out the useful from the cynical. Some people are negative by nature and will never be satisfied, so don't rush around trying to fix absolutely everything that one person says, only to find out they're the only person who feels that way.

In fact, unless something is broken, don't rush to do anything right away - assess the feedback and get yourself ready for Phase 2....