

# **Strategies for Implementing Change within Information Systems in Municipal Government.**

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## Executive Summary

A Proposed Improved Strategy for Norfolk Information Technology (I.T.) is outlined below:

- 1) Make sure we can do the project and we have time to slot it in to our schedule and assign it to the correct individual with the necessary skills.
- 2) A high-level overview of the goals and objectives for the project internally with information systems.
- 3) Budget checks and making sure the money is available for the project and the ongoing fees associated with the project.
- 4) Have a kick off Meeting with the affected departments to start the project. Stay ahead of “the change curve”<sup>[1]</sup> Know the curve and what to expect as you guide the affected department through the scope of the change or project.
- 5) Prepare and notify all of the departments connected with the project and how it will affect them.
- 6) Work on the project, sticking to the timelines and updating everyone at key times as to progress to the project.
- 7) Learn from past experiences and apply them to the upcoming projects to avoid any pitfalls or shortcomings
- 8) Complete with a group meeting, keeping everyone in the loop as to the project now being completed. Highlight the lows and highs of the project.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Rick Torben, TOP 20+ Change Management Mistakes to Avoid

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## Overview & Background

Change is one of the biggest factors in the world of I.T. It is something that is constantly happening inside the department and outside of the department. It happens across Norfolk County every day. Everyone will experience and perceive change in a different way.

The Corporation of Norfolk County is a single-tier municipality located in Southern-Ontario on the north shore of Lake Erie. The corporation of Norfolk County has an employee base of 750 full and part time staff, as well as 250 volunteer firefighters. These staff are a mix of Non Union staff and 6 unionized employee groups.

The County is made up of 7 Divisions and 25 Departments within them. The Information Technology department is responsible for the support of divisions and departments within the corporate structure. The Information Technology department is comprised of 9 employees. There are 3 Non Union managers which are 1 Director, 1 Manager I.T. Infrastructure, 1 Application and Database Supervisor. There are 6 staff members that are in the union group called Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) These members include 3 Workstation Reps, 1 Help Desk Coordinator, 1 Programmer Analyst, and 1 Security Analyst.

This equates to 9 people, not all members of the same groups within the organization working together and sharing the responsibility of supporting over 800 personal computers, laptops, and tablets. In addition, they support more than 800 phones, 250 cell phones in over 50 separate buildings.

This research paper will examine how to improve change within I.T. as a department and for the entire county. It will outline some of the pitfalls of change, and why some people resist new technology, along with offering some strategies to help I.T. departments succeed and embrace the change.

## Scope and Methodology

The purpose of this paper is to see how we can better implement change within I.T. departments. First we will try to understand change in general, then the types of change within I.T. departments. We will look at why people resist the change and try to show the benefits of change and why we need change. We will also show why it doesn't always work well and some of the common pitfalls to change. After we understand the change and why it sometimes doesn't work, we can determine strategies to negate the issues that prevent technology from moving forward. To conclude, we will give some strategies to improve change within Norfolk County I.T. department.

Research for this paper was done by connecting with other Norfolk County employees from multiple departments and by accessing online resources, and articles.

## Section 1: Understanding Change

### WHAT IS CHANGE?

There are many ways to look at change from within I.T. We will be looking at change in the following ways:

1. Change Management

“...The process, tools and techniques to manage the people-side of change to achieve the required business outcome. Change management incorporates the organizational tools that can be utilized to help individuals make successful personal transitions resulting in the adoption and realization of change.”<sup>1</sup>

2. The change I.T. doesn't see coming

“Regulatory change, security threats, economic events or seismic technological shifts are all examples of areas of change that IT departments need to be aware of but are unlikely to be able to predict. In order to remain prepared, IT departments need to be able to adapt and deliberately build systems and processes that are flexible from the outset. Resilience is also key as more systems, tools, workflows, and therefore people, become dependent on networks.”<sup>2</sup>

3. The change I.T. needs to make

“Then there is change that needs to be made in order to keep the organization functional and cost effective. This is the good housekeeping stuff that keeps us nimble and fit. It's a response to the often repeated phrases 'do more with less' and 'work smarter not harder' – and despite the increasing importance of technology in our personal lives as well as at work, constrained budgets are a reality for most IT departments. Thankfully, there are tools available now that can help. Cloud of course is one, and it means that IT departments can reallocate resources as required or even build their own private clouds in-house. Server virtualization also supports short notice needs to make infrastructure changes, and in a way that can deliver lots of new applications, often at reduced cost.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Creasey, Tim “Defining Change Management”

<sup>2</sup> Ben Rossi, The 3 types of change in IT

#### 4. The change I.T. wants

“Finally there is the most exciting type of change. Strategically conceived, transformational, tangibly beneficial changes that employees, customers and shareholders notice immediately. One of the most popular areas for such change is in communications, particularly where it enables flexible working. Video conferencing, desktop sharing, instant messaging, presence, enterprise mobility and unified communications are all concepts that feed into a common goal – making employees more productive by giving them the most beneficial tools. Although none of these technologies are particularly new, modern IT departments are now increasingly leveraging them in a coordinated and integrated manner. And if delivered through a hosted platform, then they are all the more flexible, easy to deploy and integrate and cost-effective. This type of change is meaning that decision making and workflows are completed faster making organizations more agile and more cost-competitive. Some of the flexible working projects that are possible today have enabled organizations to reduce their physical footprint by no longer having huge offices in city centers. IT departments will always have to be able to adapt to the change that is happening around them. The very nature of technology is that it is always evolving and improving. The vast differences between the workplace ten years ago and today clearly show this. But instead of merely experiencing and reacting to change, IT practitioners need to embrace the speed that the industry is now working to by planning to consciously transform their organizations for the better.”<sup>2</sup>

Change in I.T. at Norfolk County comes from all of the above. The change I.T. doesn't see coming is often a problem we encounter. An example of this would be when the province pushes down an application we are forced to support or hardware breaks and we have to replace it. Sometimes there are the changes I.T. needs to make. We may need to change hardware because it is due to be refreshed. This may cause downtime but it needs to be done. Finally, sometimes but not as often the change I.T. wants. This might be moving something to the cloud to offload stress on I.T. staff or to increase performance on the current hardware. Things like this external staff to the I.T. department may not see the need for.

## WHY DO PEOPLE RESIST CHANGE?

People tend to resist change for a number of reasons. The most common being that it's just normal to resist change and that most people will prefer to have the stability and predictability of something they know. People do not naturally want to change what is currently working for them and they may feel the technology they have is working just fine so why would they want to change it.

“12 common reasons why people resist change in the workplace

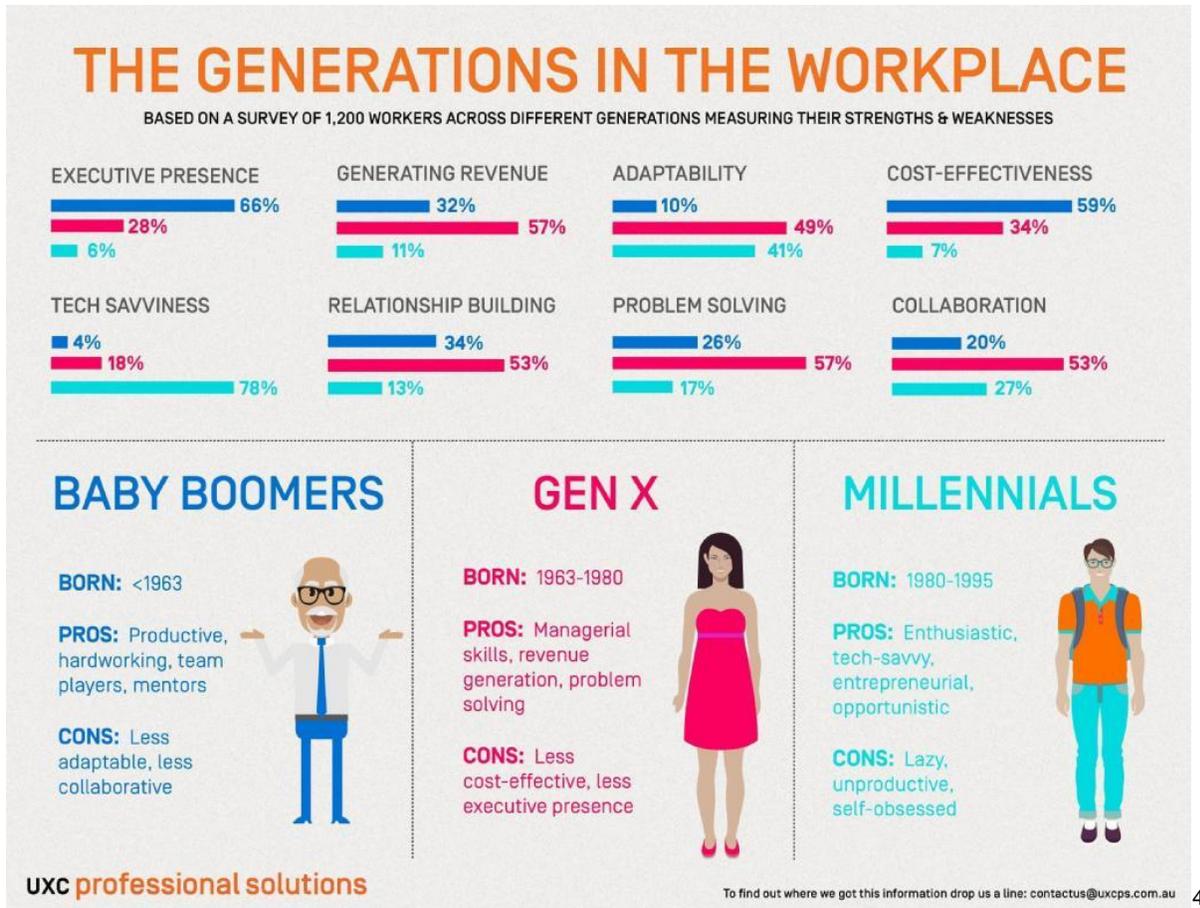
1. Loss of job
2. Bad Communication Strategy
3. Shock and Fear of the Unknown
4. Loss of Control
5. Lack of Competence
6. Poor Timing
7. Lack of Reward
8. Office Politics
9. Loss of Support System
10. Former Change Experience
11. Empathy and Peer Pressure
12. Lack of trust and support”<sup>3</sup>

I.T. staff may feel like the change is being forced on to them, giving them the initial feeling to push back against the change. This will also cause external staff to resist the change. We need to do a better job of educating and informing I.T. staff of the upcoming changes and the reasoning behind the change. This way internal staff is on board with the change/project, ultimately helping the external staff be on board with the change/project. Change/project benefits should be laid out to staff in advance. By making these small changes we can hopefully create buy-in to the change across the board. If we can make our staff feel like they are part of the change, our success rate should increase, giving a better opportunity for an effective change.

Another common resistance to the change is age. The older staff, classified as “baby boomers” tend to resist change but are hard workers. The younger staff, classified as “millennials or X gen” They are more accepting of the change and tend to be more technical in nature. This resistance is seen both internally in the I.T. department and in Norfolk County as a whole. The Chart below shows some of the differences that are seen in the different generations. It is good to know the differences because it will help you better understand the person and how they would tend to see things. It will help you find a happy medium between all the generations.

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<sup>3</sup> Adenle Catherine 12 Reasons why employees resist change in the workplace



### WHY DO WE NEED CHANGE?

Technology is constantly changing, forcing staff and the business to change with it. We need this change to grow the business and maintain public confidence. With the younger population wanting everything accessible via a phone or laptop, there is a need for municipalities to provide that service. This can be done through a website or application for their phone. Almost all documents are now being stored electronically, so we need to adapt to not always having that paper copy. Understanding that it is always available to you from your laptop or mobile device. The need to have information at your fingertips is more prevalent than ever, if we do not keep up with the change the county will fall behind and not look as attractive to people looking to move to the area.

“In order for information to be used effectively, it must flow easily through the organization. Information quickly becomes useless or obsolete, so it’s important to act on information quickly and decisively to get its full value. Both computers and

<sup>4</sup> Anna V. Haotanto Infographic: Generations In The Workplace

communication systems are used to increase the speed and efficiency at which information can be passed. Computers are being used increasingly to connect different departments together and thus automating the passage of the information that they rely upon to do business. More and more management information systems, policy management software, and computer-aided manufacturing systems are being required to establish and maintain a competitive edge. New communication strategies are being designed around the individual, allowing workers and management to conduct business across many miles, electronically, without ever leaving the office. The advent of email, teleconferencing, and now the paperless office makes this possible. The portability of electronic work at the touch of a button, across the internet, has led to decentralization of offices and the movement of work across country borders.”<sup>5</sup>

### WHY DOES CHANGE NOT ALWAYS WORK WELL?

There are many reasons as to why change does not always work well. In our current environment some reasons change does not work well would be:

1. Aging Staff - We have a plentitude of staff who are nearing retirement age or have been doing things the same way for so long that they tend to resist changing from what they know. In I.T. specifically at Norfolk County, staff consists mostly of young staff (Millennials and X Generation) and a two older staff (Baby Boomers). This tends to cause conflict during times of change as the older staff like it the way it is and the younger staff are always seeking change and trying to find better, more efficient ways of doing the job.
2. Software or Hardware is pushed out too fast - In I.T. we don't take the time to test the software or hardware properly before deploying it or putting the change into effect. This may cause problems if staff try to use the product and it does not work correctly or as expected. This will cause staff to lose confidence in the hardware or software right away, causing an uphill battle to win their confidence back.
3. Dealing with provincially mandated applications - In I.T. we have to deal with aging software that in mandated by the province for us to use. This causes problems when the computer hardware or software needs to be updated to newer versions. Sometimes this mandated software will not work correctly running on the software that the rest of the staff in the county is using forcing I.T. to do work arounds, or leave the group of users running on older hardware or software.

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<sup>5</sup> Chris Anderson How is Information Technology Changing Business?

4. Change is pushed from the top down – Lots of times change is pushed on I.T. staff and we have no idea why this change needs to happen. It has been pushed down on us from more senior staff or general managers. This feels forced, sometimes creating a gap between I.T. staff and the upper management. This creates tension and then the I.T. staff is not on board with the project. This might cause the project to not be executed well or even fail.

I.T. in Norfolk have noticed all of the above methods of why change does not work well. They are something we deal with on a daily basis. I.T. can hopefully overcome this struggle by following a change management plan as described later in this essay.

The top 7 reasons why organizational change fails according to Steve Strauss

#### **“1. Lack of Communication**

No, it's not that management fails to communicate what the change is or what it should look like, but rather, they fail to communicate *why* the change is needed. The number one reason why organizational failure occurs is because the case for making a change is not adequately articulated to the troops, and therefore, is never fully embraced. In fact, a recent study found that only 40% of front-line supervisors felt they were “getting the message” about the reasons behind major organizational shake-ups, which leaves at least 60% of employees in the dark *at best*.

The other way that management tends to drop the ball insofar as communication goes is that, even if the *reason* for the change is explained, the actual *process* of communicating the desired change is not done in a way that people can readily comprehend; for instance:

- Corporate mumbo jumbo may be used in place of actual words that mean something.
- Statistics and numbers that folks don't really get are offered instead of clear reasons and a vision.
- Fear is used instead of a compelling, optimistic, positive path.

In this regard, it may help to think about a presidential campaign. It is axiomatic in politics that a clear, positive, uniting vision for the future will almost always trump a campaign based on fear-mongering, alienation, and negativity.

So too your office.

If you articulate a clear, positive vision for the future and explain why that change is necessary, the chances are much higher that your desired change will be embraced.

## 2. Differing Agendas

Poor communication will have many children. One of those will be staff members who resist the change due to ego and self-interest. Without a full understanding of why a change is needed, some employees will be threatened by it and thus will resist it out of perceived self-interest; they need to protect their little fiefdom.

Another bastard child of poor communication are those employees who will feel alienated or excluded. If, for instance, the change is a top-down dictate where the team had no real chance to give their input, the result will likely be people who don't own the change and therefore resist it.

## 3. Insensitivity

What is a business? It is a group of people united to create a desired, profitable result. Who is tasked with implementing a change in that business? Yep, those same people.

Change is not easy for most folks. If you want your team to buy into a change, then you need to be cognizant of that fact and take it into account in two ways:

- First, to the extent possible, understand how important it is to involve, early on, those who will be asked to implement the change. Get their thoughts and feedback.
- Second, be sensitive to the fact that change is challenging and that it will cause individual, personal stress.

## 4. A Lack of Leadership

It is incumbent upon management to create an atmosphere where the troops buy into the new corporate vision. But if employees feel alienated or otherwise don't trust their higher-ups, getting them to buy into any new direction will be quite difficult.

## 5. Poor Planning

Changing the direction of an organization requires forethought. If the change is entered into willy-nilly, or too quickly, or without a proper plan, a likely outcome will be a false start, resistance, and/or eventual failure.

## 6. Lack of Commitment

If you really want to create a change in your organization, there has to be a 100% commitment on the part of the leadership. Once you have that, the same commitment should be expected of everyone in the business. The desired change must be considered a rule, not an option.

## 7. Poor Processes

Finally, success will require that you give your team a means and process for implementing the desired change; otherwise, their natural reaction to resist will persist.”<sup>6</sup>

### SECTION 1 SUMMARY UNDERSTANDING CHANGE

Change in I.T. is an almost daily occurrence. We have learned what change is, the reasons some people resist change, why we need change and some of the common reasons that change will fail. We have outlined some ways change can be spotted and how to deal with it better. Hopefully we can even have people on board with us before the change happens, making chances higher for a successful change. One of the best things we can summarize out of all of this is that change breaks down when people aren't considered or kept in the loop. The change almost always fails because of a poor team, no commitment, bad processes, or management pushing their views or a combination of more than one thing.

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<sup>6</sup> Steve Stauss Top 7 Reasons why organizational Change fails.

## Section 2: Implementing Change within Information Systems

### HOW WE DO IT IN NORFOLK

Currently in Norfolk County, the I.T. department does not have an official procedure for change management. When staff feel the need to implement a change, it is generally discussed at a small team meeting and then mainly involves some testing done in the background by I.T. When the team feels the change is ready for roll out it will then be discussed again at a small team meeting. They then create an email to the affected parties with the particulars of what is going to change. The main problem with this is it does not allow for any staff buy-in, internal or external to the department. This will often result in resistance and little acceptance to the change, and a lot of staff left not knowing what is happening or why the change has happened. We then run into a situation where a lot of questions are being asked from staff after the fact that could have helped us properly implement the change before any changes were made.

The end result is often a job done only half as good as it could have been done, and a lot of staff left not knowing what has been done or why it was needed to be done. This causes a lot of questions after the change/project. It will also cause staff to not want another change/project implemented, even if it would benefit them only because they do not want the same issue to reoccur again.

### HOW WE CAN IMPROVE

I.T. can improve by implementing a change management procedure which would have a proper procedure we could follow before making a change. It would contain best practices and all testing procedures to be done before the change is made. It would also contain a workflow to have the proper people informed and kept up to date on the change which is about to be made.

Here is an example of what change management could look like in the Norfolk County I.T. Department:

1. Update a change management form in SharePoint with the change that staff are requesting to make
2. Workflow to a manager to approve the process start on testing the change
3. Have a kickoff meeting within the department
4. Have another meeting with the project lead and the department(s) it will be affecting
5. Test the change with a group of pilot users
6. Once the tests are completed, note any pitfalls or problems in the SharePoint site

7. Work through improvements if needed, and test again
8. Once tests are completed properly, move to the manager level for approval on the SharePoint site
9. Have another meeting with the affected department to update on the test process and gain feedback from it.
10. Once approval has been obtained to move forward with the change, set a date for the change to happen.
11. Inform Staff of the change
12. Make the change and once completed successfully close the change management job on the SharePoint site.
13. Have a final wrap up meeting discussing the highs and lows of the change/project and ways to improve for the next time.

#### CHANGE WITHIN INFORMATION SYSTEMS IN NORFOLK

First we can look at the age differences in staff and the mixed personalities. How can they work well together? Staff is changing all the time because of retirements and new hires. The technology now moves faster than staff can keep up with the changes. The more on board the I.T. department is, the more on board other staff across the County will be.

As the I.T. staff in Norfolk ranging from 28 to 63 years of age, we have to find unique ways to deal with the change. The younger staff want to change all the time, they feel the need to try and improve hardware and software to make things quicker and/or faster all the time. On the other hand, the older staff just want it to stay the way it has always been and is working for them. This causes a lot of issues with trying to get the two different age groups to work well as a team and meet on middle ground with something they can both live with and is also good for the project or change that is happening.

One way to deal with the change is to try and get everyone on board in a meeting. Convey all of the good parts and even highlight some of the lows so that everyone can see the good and bad. This should then allow the whole team to be on board with a process because it has been talked about up front. Any questions can be asked and answered at this point, therefore allowing everyone in the department to feel involved in the process. Once we have the I.T. team on board we can move on to some strategies to implement change, which hopefully can get external staff on board before the process starts.

## STRATEGIES TO IMPLEMENT CHANGE

There are many strategies that can be used to implement change. Here are some of the basic strategies you can use to implement change.

“There are different models that help executives construct an IT strategy, yet most contain certain key elements including:

- A high-level overview of the IT department that covers its mission, core values, objectives and approaches to accomplishing its goals.
- Current budgets and [spending forecasts](#) for a multiyear timeline.
- An outline of current and future IT projects and initiatives with timelines and milestones.
- A catalog of existing enterprise architecture; IT department capabilities and capacities; and future needs and requirements with details about infrastructure, staffing and other necessary resources.
- An analysis of IT's [strengths and weaknesses](#).
- A list of the internal and external forces (such as market and industry trends) that shape current [technology requirements](#) and innovations as well as the future forces expected to shape IT.
- A prediction of the potential opportunities and vulnerabilities that will necessitate technology responses to best position the organization for success.”<sup>7</sup>

Norfolk I.T. department does some of these strategies well, but may also benefit from improving on some of them. The I.T. department appears to maintain a high-level overview but doesn't necessarily look at the core values or mission, due in part to budget constraints. I.T. staff take into account the ongoing projects, but we may not always have the best person assigned to the project. Some reasons for this are we do not have enough full time employees or we may have budget constraints. Staff may not

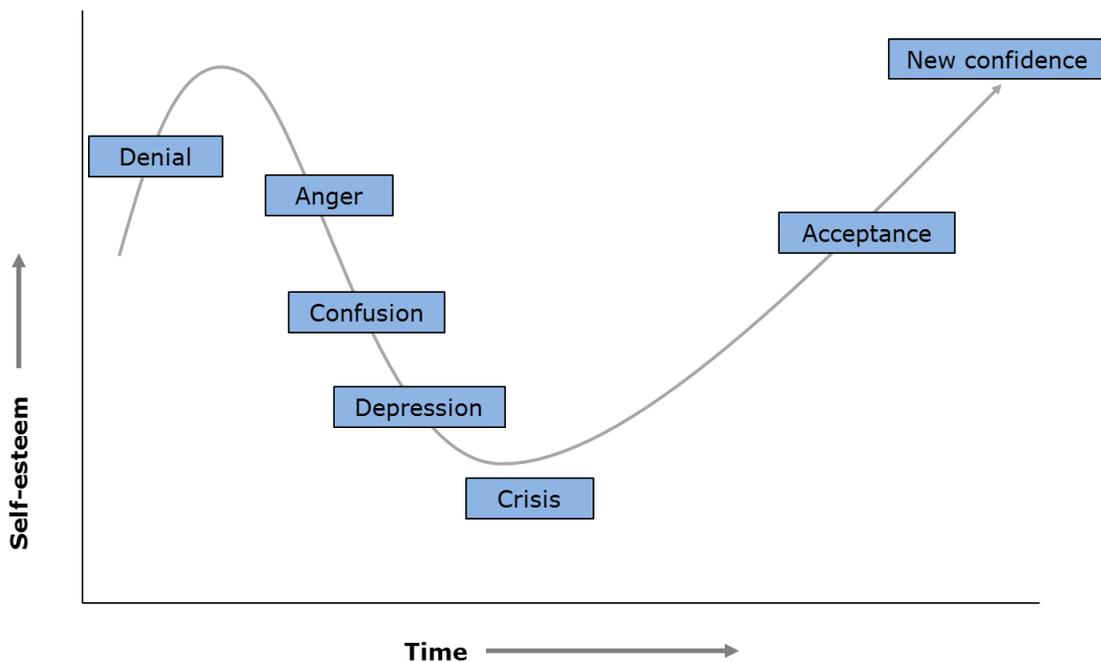
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<sup>7</sup> Margaret Rouse, IT strategy (information technology strategy)

even have the proper training for this, but have to implement it anyways as we do not have any other staff to assign the task to.

A Proposed Improved Strategy for Norfolk Information Technology is outlined below:

- 1) Make sure we can do the project and we have time to slot it in to our schedule and assign it to the correct individual with the necessary skills.
- 2) A high-level overview of the goals and objectives for the project internally with I.T.
- 3) Budget checks and making sure the money is available for the project and the ongoing fees associated with the project.
- 4) Have a kick off Meeting with the affected departments to start the project. Stay ahead of “the change curve”<sup>8</sup> know the curve and what to expect as you guide the affected department through the scope of the change or project.



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- 5) Prepare and notify all of the departments connected with the project and how it will affect them.
- 6) Work on the project sticking to the timelines and updating everyone at key times as to progress to the project.
- 7) Learn from past experiences and apply them to the upcoming projects to avoid any pitfalls or shortcomings
- 8) Complete with a group meeting keeping everyone in the loop as to the project now being completed. Highlight the lows and highs of the project.

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<sup>8</sup> Rick Torben, TOP 20+ Change Management Mistakes to Avoid

## POSSIBLE PITFALLS

Some of the possible pitfalls that could come up with change are:

- 1) Something drives the budget over the allotted amount
- 2) Time and available staff for the project. An example would be the project runs long and now the qualified staff are not available for the project any more.
- 3) Provincially mandated project that staff does not want therefore making it hard for management to get buy in from internal and external staff.
- 4) Not staying ahead of the resistance to change. Be prepared and ready for the resistance and have a solution before you get resistance.
- 5) Falling into the same old habits, and doing things the same way you always have. This may lead you down a path you have been down and did not succeed on.
- 6) Change/project is pushed on you from the top down. This is not something you want to do and is being forced on you from upper management or senior leaders who want this change implemented.

## SECTION 2: SUMMARY

Norfolk County I.T. department needs to improve the way it handles change. By making simple alterations, like following a change management procedure, and applying strategies to projects to make sure change is followed correctly. Staff can achieve more buy-in and a better chance to for a successful project by making sure simple points are followed while implementing the change. This will help keep the company goals in mind and hopefully we can have the properly skilled person on the project. Ultimately this should help us have a successful change and better success in the future.

## Section 3: Conclusion

For I.T. to successfully implement change, we first need to accept the change we are given. At that point, we can formulate a solid plan and get internal and external staff on board with the project before it begins. Next, a strategy should be implemented that works for I.T. staff by making sure tasks are assigned to the correct staff for the project, as well as making sure the project is aligned with the corporate values and mission. If I.T. can follow a change management plan along with the strategies to implement change, while keeping in mind all the possible pitfalls, the end result should be a successful project. All staff, internal and external to the department, should be successful as everyone was kept in tune with the projects objectives and progress. Now that all departments and the correct staff have been involved from the start and have been kept informed of the status of the change/project the whole time, the end result should be a good change for the whole corporation.

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