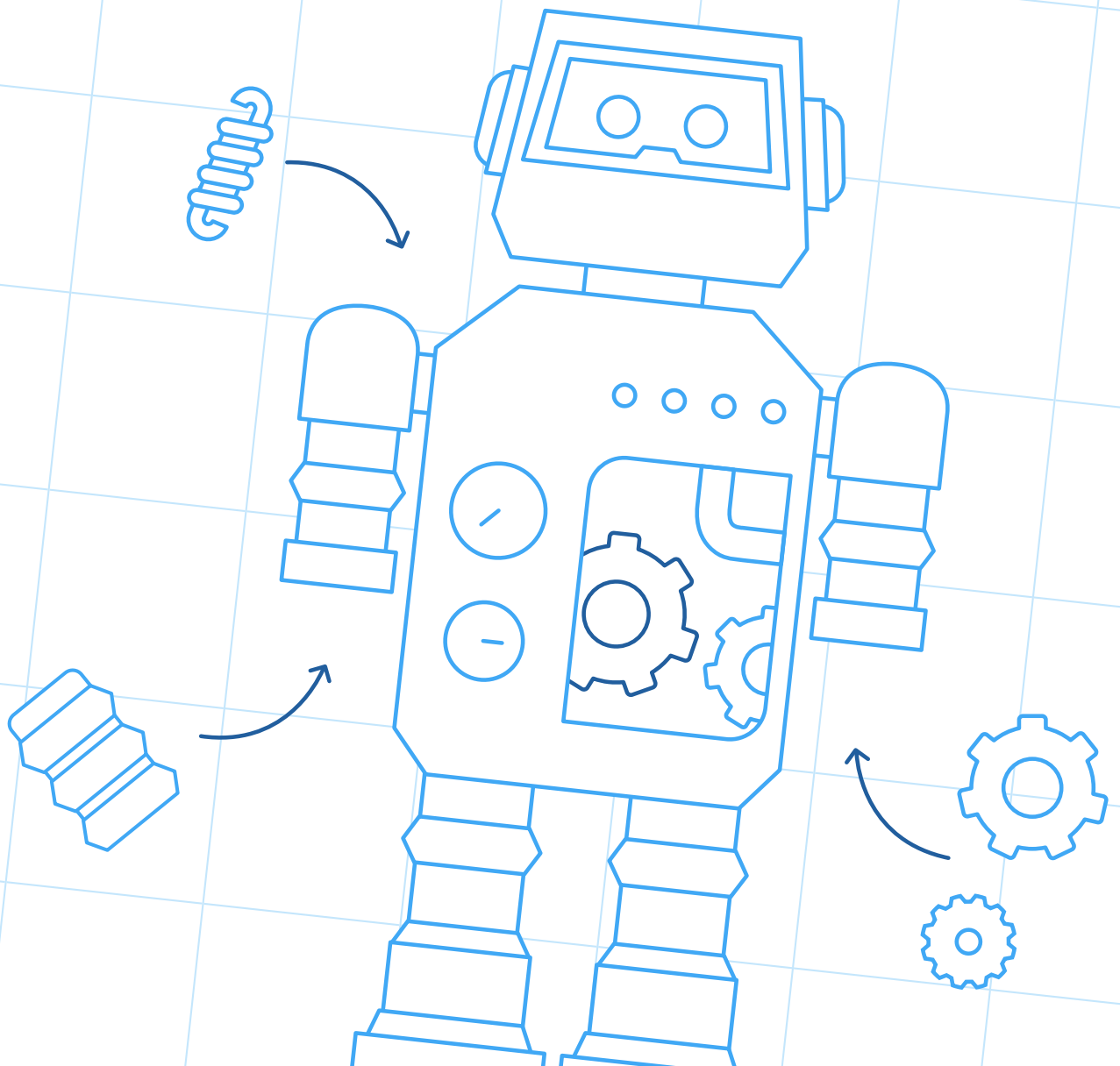
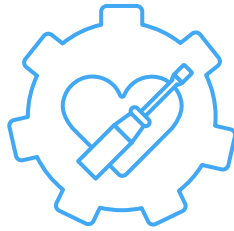




Never Underestimate the Importance of
CHANGE MANAGEMENT

By Ivor Macfarlane



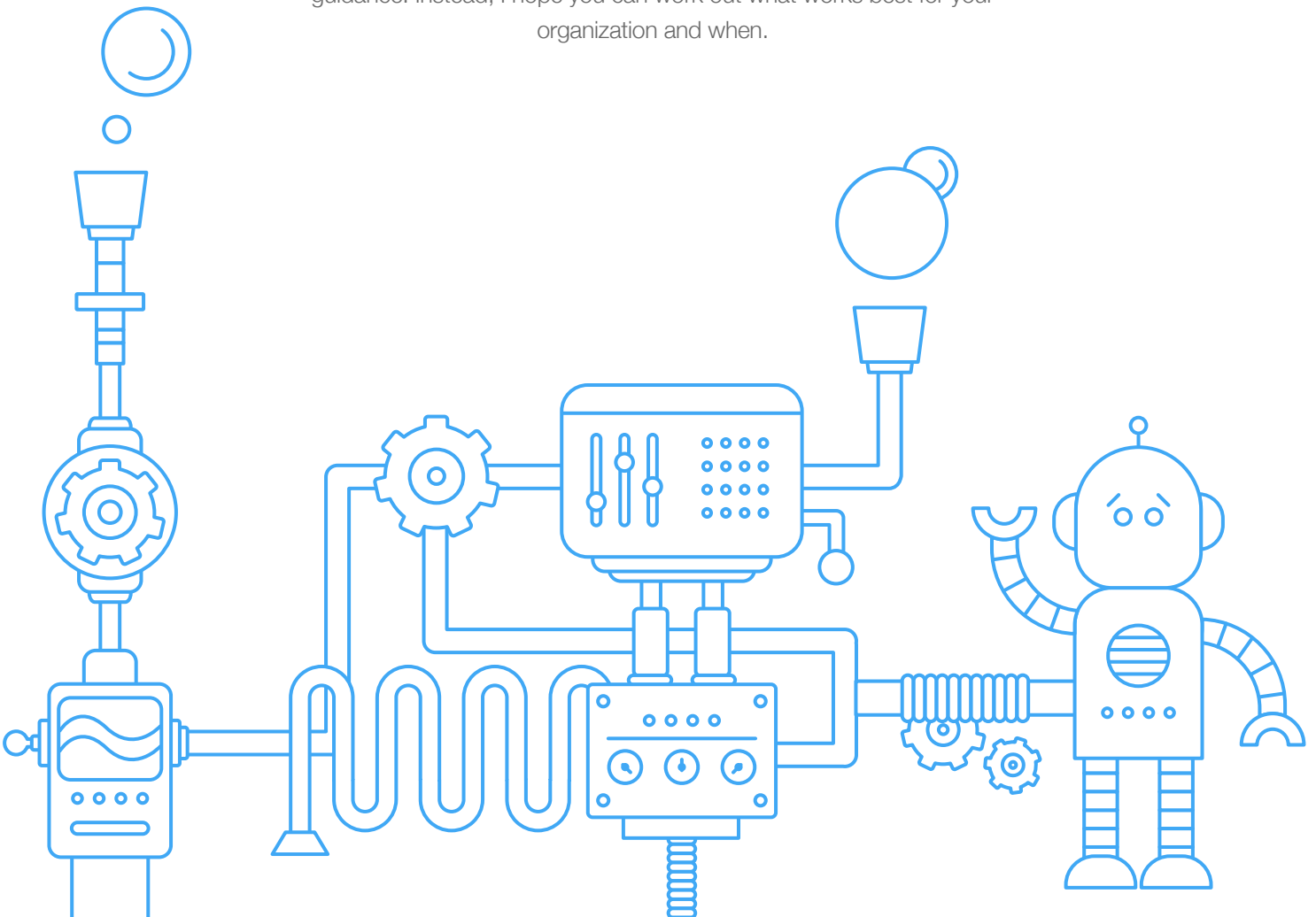


Effective change management is at the heart of successful service management, but it can be difficult to focus the resources available into getting the best return on the undoubted effort that change management requires. This white paper looks at some potential approaches to focusing that effort where it will deliver the best return.

Specifically, it looks at accepting inevitable change without debate and empowering staff as much as possible via the use of increased standard changes.

It also covers the concept of change success, which needs to be clearly understood and verified that it's based upon delivered business value.

The intention is to get you, the reader, thinking, and doing, more than simply lifting a one-size-fits-all change management process from best-practice guidance. Instead, I hope you can work out what works best for your organization and when.





Change Management: Picket Fences and Living in the Community

For many in the IT industry, the introduction to formal change management often starts with ITSM – through work experience of change advisory boards (CABs) or request for change (RFC) procedures, or via an ITIL, COBIT, ISO2000, or similar ITSM training course. Change management is certainly an important part of, and a powerful tool for, ITSM. But changes within IT also affect every other area of an organization, i.e. outside of IT. And conversely, in these days of pervasive IT, all changes initiated and agreed on without IT's participation will no doubt also have IT consequences and aspects.

It's the siloed mentality that we often talk of within IT, and it's perhaps a major reason for the perceived lack of benefits from change management – where IT has traditionally tried to *fence out* the rest of the organization, and to *fence in* consideration of the change to within IT, or even to within IT operations. Or, perhaps the issue is that IT thinks that it can build an impermeable fence, when in fact the fence they manage is more like the picket fence we might erect at the edge of our residential property. It's useful to define where ownership and responsibility for maintenance start and end, but we know that the picket fence will not stop the outside world's influence on the things inside it. It lets in balls, cats, garbage, and more – and what constitutes “acceptable behavior” is largely set outside of the fence too, by our neighbors and society.

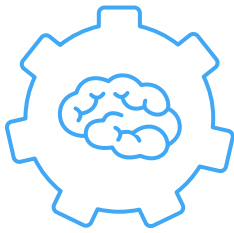
So in this change management analogy, there is a need to combine local detailed expertise with fitting into neighborhood constraints and influencing factors. We can summarize this as follows:

- There are defined areas of influence and control. How you do things, i.e. change management, is your business but the output has to be acceptable to the outside world. And anyways, in the modern, technology-reliant world what you need to do or achieve is probably driven from outside of IT much of the time. So you must know who makes the decisions, who you have to satisfy, and the constraints that you are working under.
- You can rarely deliver the required change by only doing things inside the fence. Additional work will most likely need to be done outside the fence to actually deliver value from the change.

- Effective change for the wider organizational picture can only be done efficiently if there is collaboration across the fence or fences. This means talking, helping, and understanding the views of those inside and outside the IT fence.
- You just have to accept that you do not have total control of the change and change environment. Your home may be your castle, but modern-day castles require planning and permission for significant changes. And you don't have to be happy about it but you do have to accept it.

All of this really comes down to remembering who the IT services are being created, changed, and delivered for, and recognizing all the legitimate stakeholders involved. It should also be about recognizing that other people, and teams, have fence borders too. So any IT initiated changes shouldn't dictate how others behave within their own picket fences. Instead, the change should set out the required inputs and outputs (not how others might achieve them).

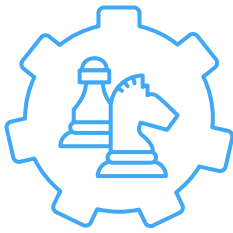
This effectively echoes the hybrid change management approach evolving in many organizations. These organizations take value from 21st century initiatives like DevOps – that preach broader organization-wide collaboration, uniting towards a common goal – along with retained value from earlier frameworks like ITIL that deliver the degree of rigor and control necessary in many elements of the wider organization.



Embracing Pragmatism and Avoiding Bureaucracy

A large part of the issue, and a commonly-raised reason for rejecting formal change management procedures is that they generate bottlenecks without benefit, locking down change progress and speed in unnecessary bureaucracy. Much of that complaint, for many organizations, over the last 20 years has been justified.

However, this over-control of change procedures and a need to examine every aspect of every change was never mandated nor even desirable. Instead, a good change management process should have a range of features designed to prevent bureaucracy, and to ensure that detailed, expensive, and time-consuming focus is not given to any changes that do not justify it.



Practical Change Management: Don't Fight the Unbeatable

Once we see that change management needs to take a broad perspective coupled with local concentration, it's clear that many proposed changes are not actually "requests" but instructions, or are effectively inevitable for other reasons. Such reasons might include changes to the external environment such as new laws, technologies, political circumstances, or culture. This idea can, in part at least, be related to the concept – introduced in the ITIL 2011 Service Transition book – of a *change proposal*. Seeing at least some change proposals from senior management levels as inevitable, and being pragmatic about them, can reduce wasted time and effort. More importantly, it can free resources to focus on assessing and questioning those changes where an informed decision is required.

Therefore, a flow chart's steps for that kind of change might look something like this:

Step 1: Is it inevitable that this change will happen?

For example:

- Has the board already approved it, and its funding?
- Is it a legal requirement, or mandated by a policy the organization is committed to?
- Does someone sufficiently above your pay grade want it enough?

None of this, of course, means that it's necessarily a sensible request (see later steps for that) but just about any one of these reasons means that you will be wasting your time considering the change in terms of "desirability." In short, you are not being invited to assess the change or to give approval; you are being told to do it. Accept this and move on to the next steps.

Step 2: Does the change make it clear what the required outcome is?

Perhaps the change only talks about how things are to be done – such as "buy a particular software package," "increase network capacity," "duplicate system in a new location," or "double the number of staff on the service desk." If it's about a new service, does it tell you what the business service being supported is, and what that business service's success measures are?

If the answer is no, then politely ask why the change is happening, because you're allowed to suggest alternative ways of delivering what's wanted. Even when the idea comes from the top, it's constructive for change management to realize that there are better – and especially cheaper – ways to deliver what the requester wants.

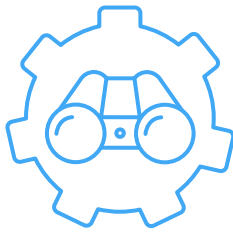
However, if you do that and it's still being mandated by someone who you know you cannot win an argument with, you can be resentful but don't waste more efforts trying to beat it.

But do ask if it's feasible and legal. As the expert "inside the fence" you're allowed to point out that what is suggested cannot be done, or would break rules that the organization generally adheres to. This includes company policy as well as the law of the land.

Also, if the skills or capacity to do the change aren't available, then you need to say so. Others may not listen to you but you should document the question and answer. If you do not raise the issue as it happens, then you will be blamed for later failures.

Step 3: Now make it happen.

If you've established the outcome required, this should allow you to work with other parts of the organization – and suppliers, partners, etc. – outside the fence. In fact, it should make it essential.



Don't Sweat the Small Stuff

At the other end of the change spectrum, the most valuable change tool in the ITIL box is *standard change*. This term was first used in the 1990s¹ and adopted into the development of ITIL V2.

Standard changes are usually described as pre-approved changes of low impact changes that do not need to be debated and considered as to whether they should be accepted and implemented. What this means is that no time is spent on assessing them. The more changes that an organization can deal with as standard changes, then the more resources and time the organization will have to consider the changes that do need to be carefully thought through.

If standard change really is the key to success, what are the ways to expand its use? Some relevant tips and approaches include:

- **Having an ongoing mechanism for creating standard changes.**

Just about all standard changes didn't start out that way. The first time that a particular kind of change is requested, it will need examination and assessment. It's only when it becomes frequent that it becomes a candidate for the routine and is moved over to become a standard change.

- **Looking for more candidates for standard-change treatment.**

Actively research through recent changes; look for trends and for the kinds of change that (just about) always get approved. These should not be going through the normal change routes, tying up resources and creating change backlogs and bottlenecks, when the standard change route could be used.

- **Not getting hung up on homogeneity** – your organization is almost certainly not uniform. There will be kinds of change that you could delegate to be standard changes in some parts of your organization, but might be considered risky in others. So do that. Nothing in the ITSM best practice guidance suggests that a standard change has to apply to every part of the organization, nor at all times. Perhaps at peak business times you need to block some standard changes, and perhaps encourage them when you can be less risk-averse. This attitude might also effectively move change to safer times too.

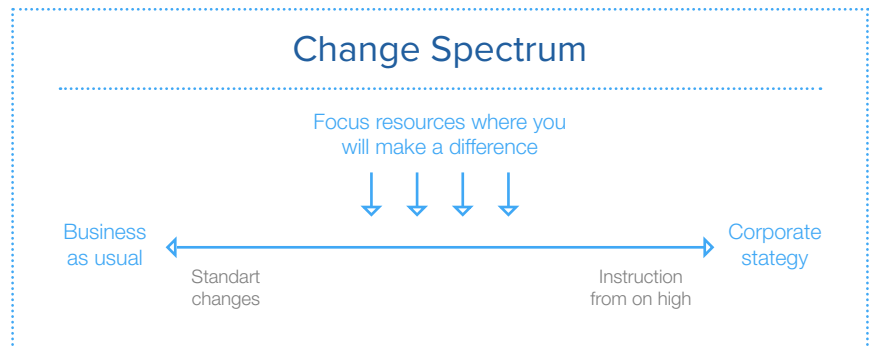
- **Understanding and maintaining your standard changes using the same process, tools, and publicity as you might for services and service requests** (which is what standard changes effectively become). Maybe formalize this as a *standard change catalog*² to match (or to be part of) your service catalog.

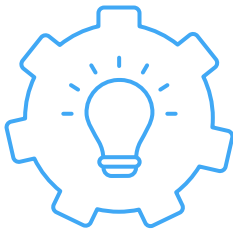
¹ First used by Alexander Kist in the 1990s.

² A term I first heard used by Jenn Ostrom, in 2015.

In fact, as with most management decisions, good use of standard changes is based on simple risk management, which means taking the right level of risk on purpose. There may be risks attributable to failed standard changes, but they are likely to be outweighed by the benefits to the organization – benefits that come from faster and less expensive implementation using standard change procedures.

The combination of accepting inevitable changes, and encouraging standard changes, allows available resources to focus on considering those changes where a skilled and informed decision is required – as shown in the diagram below.





Understanding Change Success

One common change management question, and one that I've been asked many times, is "What success rate should we be aiming for in our organization?" However, not once in seeking clarification from the askers did I get a meaningful answer to my question back to them: "What constitutes success for changes?"

When there is something measured it almost always seems related to "Did we do the change as we were told to?", or maybe even "as we decided to?" If we go back to thinking outside of our fences again, there should be better questions to ask if we are to establish the success or failure of change.

Maybe questions such as:

- Is what we have done useful?
- Are we delivering any of the requested outcomes?
- What did it cost, and how long did it take?
- What else – good or bad – happened because of what we have done?

And there's also an issue around when the success of a change can be established. Is it when:

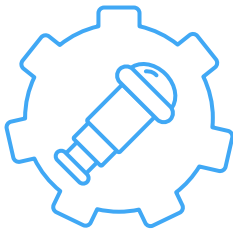
- The new hardware, software, etc. is installed and working (technological success only)?
- People can use it (feasibility)?
- People actually do use it (acceptance)?
- It is perceived as normal practice (incorporation)?

As we go down the list, it's clear that success will need to involve looking outside the fences. For significant changes – something that will affect the way people work in the organization – really measuring success relies on taking the time to find out about the business value delivered.

And then, how good does it have to be for us to call a change successful? For example:

- Does it have to deliver everything required, just the important things (agreed beforehand of course), or maybe it just needs most things (51%, 80% say) to be considered worthwhile?
- How much damage is acceptable? Is the change a success if it does everything it was meant to, but now other things don't work so well?
- Does it have to work for everyone, or is making it right for the most important people enough?

Clearly, there isn't one universal measure of success. But there doesn't have to be just one measure of success in an organization either. Each change can – and arguably should – be assessed beforehand for what would constitute success. As with standard change, if your organization isn't homogeneous then neither should your change management success parameters.



Change Evaluation – Looking at What Actually Happened

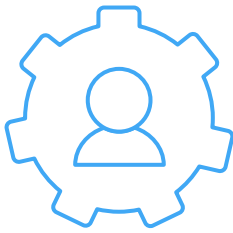
Evaluating a change involves looking at what's actually happened as opposed to focusing on whether you've done what you set out to do.

It is rare for any change to deliver only exactly what was intended. Most will exhibit some side effects, and many will deliver only some of the desired outputs. Assessment of final success depends on looking at what the changed service actually does, ideally without being diverted too much by knowing what was meant.

While this degree of total evaluation is only really appropriate for significant changes affecting the organization, some of the concepts do have wider application. Real success measures for a change cannot be done immediately; there needs to be time allowed for things to go wrong before claiming success. But as well as the links into incident and problem management to establish what might have gone wrong, an organization can (usefully) also try to track what has gone unexpectedly right after a change. Of course it's not always easy, but evidence can come from service desk, service review meetings, business relationship management, account management, and more. Clues may also come through network and capacity management activity identifying unexpected usage of services.

An analogy as an example of evaluation

Imagine that you have booked a beach holiday. You are planning to relax, sunbathe, swim, and drink cocktails. Just before you leave, due to political turmoil at your intended destination, the tour operator cancels. Nothing similar is possible and they offer you a holiday in a mountain region instead. You spend two weeks walking, exploring the villages and local restaurants, and sampling a wide range of local wines. Assessing the success of the holiday against your intended results shows it as a failure even though you had a great time. Final evaluation should show the holiday as a success, albeit an accidental success.



Evaluating Change Success – Customer Perception is Key

Most people don't consider themselves recovered from illness just because the doctor tells them that they're cured. They decide that by themselves. Similarly, the customer, not the supplier, decides change success. So, ultimately, change management needs to be viewed from the perspective of the service customer. Therefore, getting the change right – and accepting or rejecting the right changes – logically relies on a customer perspective.

IT and business people often have different attitudes, focuses, and priorities. This is especially so with IT services that support non-technical aspects of an organization. This makes it very hard for IT staff to really develop full appreciation of the customer perspective, and so successful change assessment and implementation require a significant degree of active involvement from the business staff.



Allow for the Evolution of Changes and Services

Earlier we discussed the need for delay between the implementation of a change and the final assessment of its success because we must allow enough time for any slow-to-surface issues to be noticed. In part, this is also required because of the ongoing evolution of services and work practices. As with Darwinian evolution, services evolve through trial and error (known as the Deming Cycle if it's being actively driven by improvement programs); and acceptance/rejection can be influenced by external factors as well as internal innovation.

The most perfect execution of change can appear as a failure in practical terms if other factors affecting the service change. For example, say you have what seems like a good improvement to a financial management service. Following a change to financial regulations down the road, the "improvement" might actually become inappropriate, despite how well it was implemented originally.



Summary

For success in change management, an organization needs to be concerned with the broad perspective and with the detailed examination and delivery of all the aspects of a change. One of those aspects will be IT. So IT needs to apply internal expertise and also to work with other service providers and with customers/users.

Knowing that efforts are successful is essential but complicated, and again requires broad involvement to be meaningful.

There are good techniques within the available best-practice guidance to reduce the bureaucracy of change management. That, in turn, allows IT departments to focus their limited resources on where the best return will come from. Organizations will then be able to get on with most change unencumbered by bureaucracy, taking advantage of modern approaches to change, innovation, and rapid deployment.

Most importantly, successful change management is not a cut-and-paste of what works at other organizations. Instead, you need to find out what works best in your organization.

Want to learn how SysAid can help you improve your change management?
[TALK TO US.](#)