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# Making the Case for Integrating Communications and Change Management Into DME Projects

**AN ENTERPRISE IT MODERNIZATION**

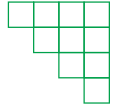
**PROJECT AUTOPSY**

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# Introduction



On December 30, 2022, CNN reported that Southwest Airlines had canceled approximately 15,750 flights since winter weather began disrupting air travel on December 22. Although other airlines experienced weather-related hiccups over the 2022 holiday season, Southwest took a massive hit. And it wasn't the first time. According to The New York Times, the airline has experienced its share of service meltdowns in the past.

Organizations such as Southwest Airlines, a multi-million-dollar company, and the Internal Revenue Service, a federal government agency, are saddled with antiquated information technologies that are struggling to meet ever-increasing user demand.

Thanks to the seamless online experiences that private sector banking, shopping, and entertainment companies provide, now more than ever, users in both the private and public sectors have high expectations for efficient user experiences and reliable workplace productivity.

And yet Federal agencies have relied on a patchwork approach to their systems and data, cobbling together numerous decades-old, disconnected systems that are difficult to maintain and pose security risks to the agencies and the people they serve. To address these concerns, organizations are engaging software development and integration companies to launch development, modernization, and enhancement (DME) initiatives.

Acquisition.gov defines DME as "the portion of an IT investment/project which deals with developing and implementing new or enhanced technology in support of an agency's mission." Together, these companies and organizations are working to build robust systems that are scalable, easier to maintain, and secure.

These efforts are in addition to the ongoing operations and maintenance (O&M) required to keep existing legacy systems afloat until they can be decommissioned.

For companies assisting an organization to move from a failing legacy system to a modernized, streamlined system, their sole focus is on developing the required technology and ensuring it works as anticipated. Rarely, if ever, do these companies consider the people who will use this technology after deployment and beyond. In fact, how people will be affected is often an afterthought.



*“As a company assisting an organization with a DME effort, it’s critical that we focus on the people side of change—change management—as much as we manage the development of the technology itself. Just because users are mandated to adopt a new system does not mean they will do so automatically.”*

**But people will be impacted by this new technology:**

- Do they find the legacy system frustrating? Possibly. But do they know about this new system the agency is developing and how it will change their day-to-day processes?
- Do they know why the organization is embarking on this DME initiative?
- Do they even want this new system?
- Are they involved in the development process to provide insight on how this system will be used in real life?
- Do plans exist to help ensure that they get the training they need so that they are ready to use this new system on the deployment date?
- And after the system is deployed, what plans are in place to reinforce training, keep training current, and keep them abreast of system enhancements in the future?

The success of an organization's DME initiatives hinges on

these three factors:



**Speed:**

How quickly people are up and running on new systems, processes, and job roles.



**Buy-in:**

How many people demonstrate buy-in by using the new system.



**Proficiency:**

How proficient people are at using the system.

Often, after solidifying resources to develop the technology, project managers and sponsors will look to engage a single communications specialist who will be responsible for communicating about and promoting the technology to users and other stakeholders. Usually, the communications specialist is engaged too late in the development process. And the fact is communications alone will not address the three factors above adequately.

# About this eBook

This e-book makes the case for looking beyond communications to integrate change management as a valued function of a DME project. Change management, communications, and training functions all work together to eliminate information bottlenecks that occur during the project while they pursue the goal of 100% user adoption of the new technology.

To illustrate the issue, we've developed a case study involving the large-scale modernization of an enterprise IT system at a fictional federal government agency. This scenario will spotlight how projects are impacted when the following change management risks are left unmitigated:

- ➔ **A change management team that:**
  - Is not at the table at project kickoff.
  - Has limited or no exposure to decision-makers and other key stakeholders throughout the project.
  - Is not able to engage end users and other key stakeholders in usability feedback, communications, and training early and often.
- ➔ **Internal and external stakeholders, particularly end users, are not prepared for the change that the project brings.**
- ➔ **If internal and external stakeholders are unprepared for the change, the help desk and/or other support staff are left to pick up the slack in crisis mode.**



# Who This eBook is For

This e-book is for the following audiences:

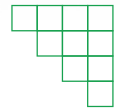


- **Leaders involved in business development and growth at IT contracting companies (GovCon)** who specialize in helping federal government agencies modernize their legacy systems and/or build new systems.
- **Chief Information and Technology Officers (CIOs and CTOs) and other executives at federal government agencies** who are looking to embark on or are currently undergoing large-scale DME initiatives.
- **Chief Information and Technology Officers (CIOs and CTOs) and other executives at other public or private sector organizations** who are looking to embark on or are currently undergoing large-scale IT modernization initiatives.





# What is Change Management?

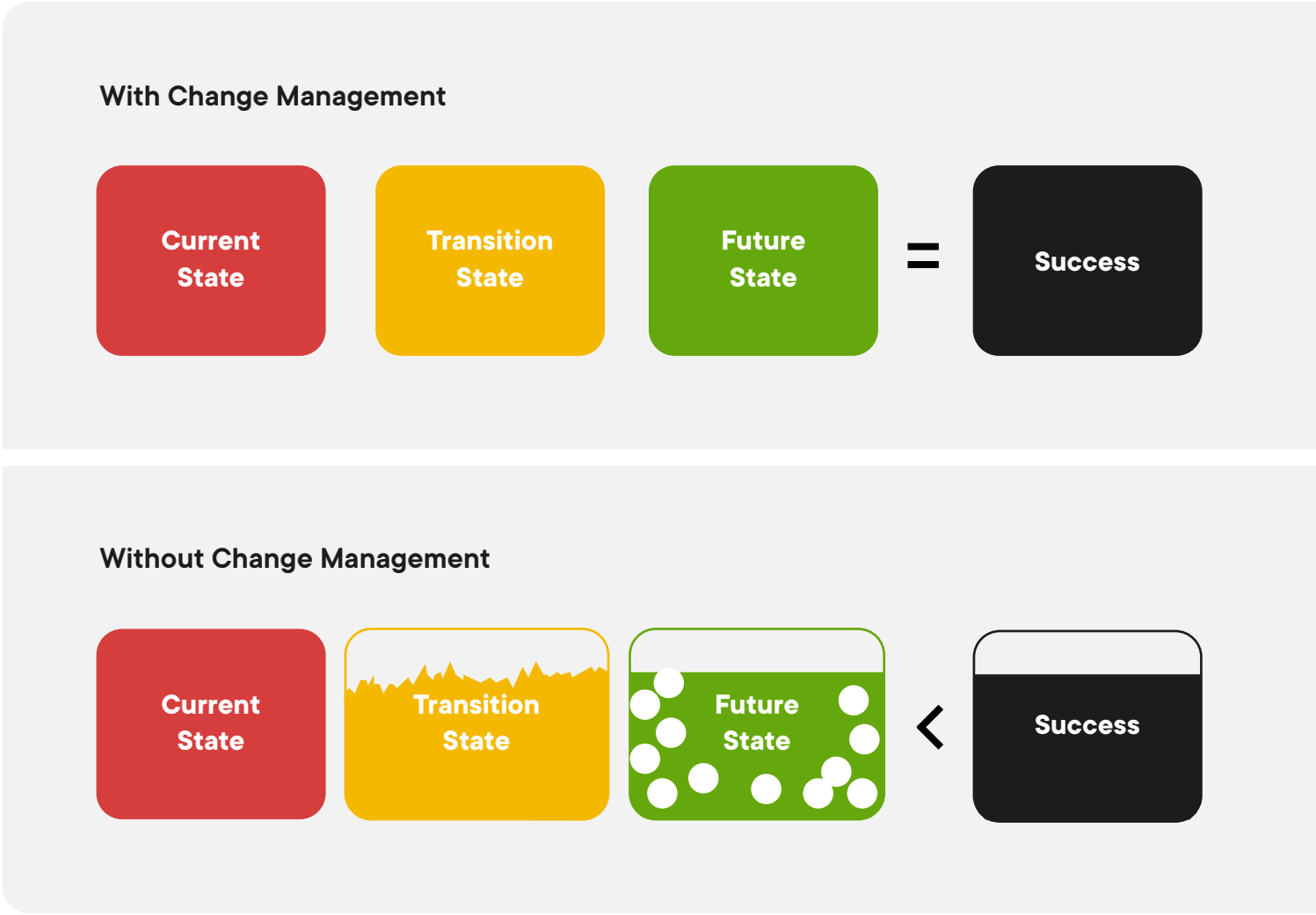


Prosci, the world leader in change management research, defines change management on a project level as “the application of a structured process and set of tools leading the people side of change to achieve a desired outcome.” According to research from Boston Consulting Group, a global management consulting firm, 70% of digital transformations fall short of their objectives. CIO attributes this to numerous factors, like no clear definitions of success, alignment that exists at the top but not throughout the organization, inadequate resourcing, and an underappreciation for change management. With top-notch change management in place, a project is six times more likely to reach desired change outcomes.

Change management plays an integral role in ensuring that the three factors—speed, buy-in, and proficiency—remain top of mind from kickoff until deployment and beyond.

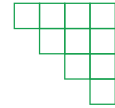
Change management can help ensure a smooth transition from current state to future state, as shown in Figure 1.

**FIGURE 1: Why Change Management is Important**



As we see in Figure 1, without change management, the transition from current to future state is rocky. Users don't know why the change is happening, don't even want the change, and don't feel adequately prepared or trained for the change. These kinds of issues lead to a future state where the adoption of a new or modernized enterprise IT system is piecemeal, the return on investment for the organization is lower than anticipated, process improvement isn't achieved, and the project is solidified in the minds of users and other stakeholders as a failed change.

# Unmitigated Change Management Risk

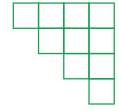


## A CASE STUDY

In the following case study, a federal government agency works with a GovCon company to perform a large-scale modernization of an enterprise human capital IT system. It demonstrates how speed, buy-in, and proficiency are all impacted when change management risks are left unmitigated on projects of this magnitude.



# Fictional Project Background



At the Department of Land and Assets (DLA), a federal government agency, the Technology Division manages the mandated People Management System (PMS). This human capital information system comprises a patchwork of technologies that the Office of Regional Operations, the business owner, uses to manage human resources functions for more than 40,000 employees throughout the agency nationwide:

- Because PMS consists of aging legacy technology, the Technology Division engages Entelitek, a fictitious IT government contracting company, to begin a phased approach to modernizing PMS, starting with replacing the system's employee onboarding solution with a new, modernized version called AllAboard.
- The Technology Division, the Office of Regional Operations, and Entelitek work together to develop a pilot program for the new AllAboard solution.
- The AllAboard pilot group consists of:
  - 50 Office of Regional Operations test users.
  - The AllAboard team, which includes the:
    - Technology Division project manager.
    - Entelitek functional analysts, development team, and help desk lead.
    - Representatives from the Office of Regional Operations.

- Once the AllAboard pilot group is established, they conduct a series of kickoff meetings.
- The AllAboard pilot group then conducts biweekly status meetings for two years. During these meetings, the team demonstrates new functionality, discusses issues with the solution, and tests the solution as it is developed and finalized for deployment.

Prior to the deployment of the AllAboard solution, DLA begins other major IT initiatives, including transitioning the agency to Microsoft productivity tools, such as Outlook, Teams, and OneDrive.

*“Because change management focuses on the people side of change, a change management team can recognize when other changes within the agency will have a direct impact on the project’s success. The change management team can then work with the project’s leaders on planning to address the potential change overload users might experience.”*

**FIGURE 2: Pilot Program Information Transfer**

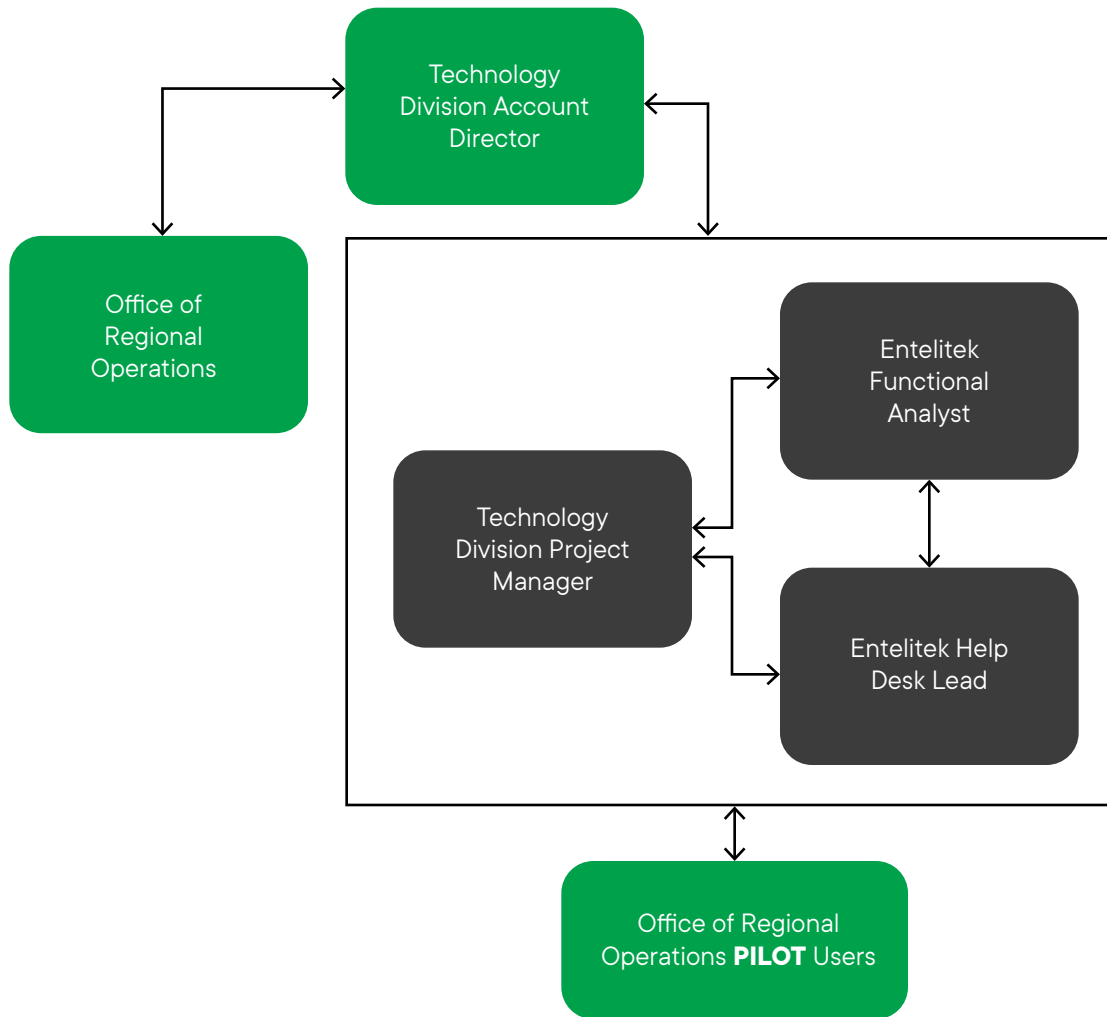


Figure 2 illustrates how the AllAboard team works together. Information flows from the Office of Regional Operations (the business owner); to the Technology Division Account Director; to the Technology Division project manager, the Entelitek functional analyst, and help desk lead; and to the pilot user group.

*“When communications and change management teams aren’t present, they have no exposure to decision-makers and key stakeholders, and can’t prepare people for the change. This poses a tremendous risk to the AllAboard project and DLA.”*

# Communications Integration

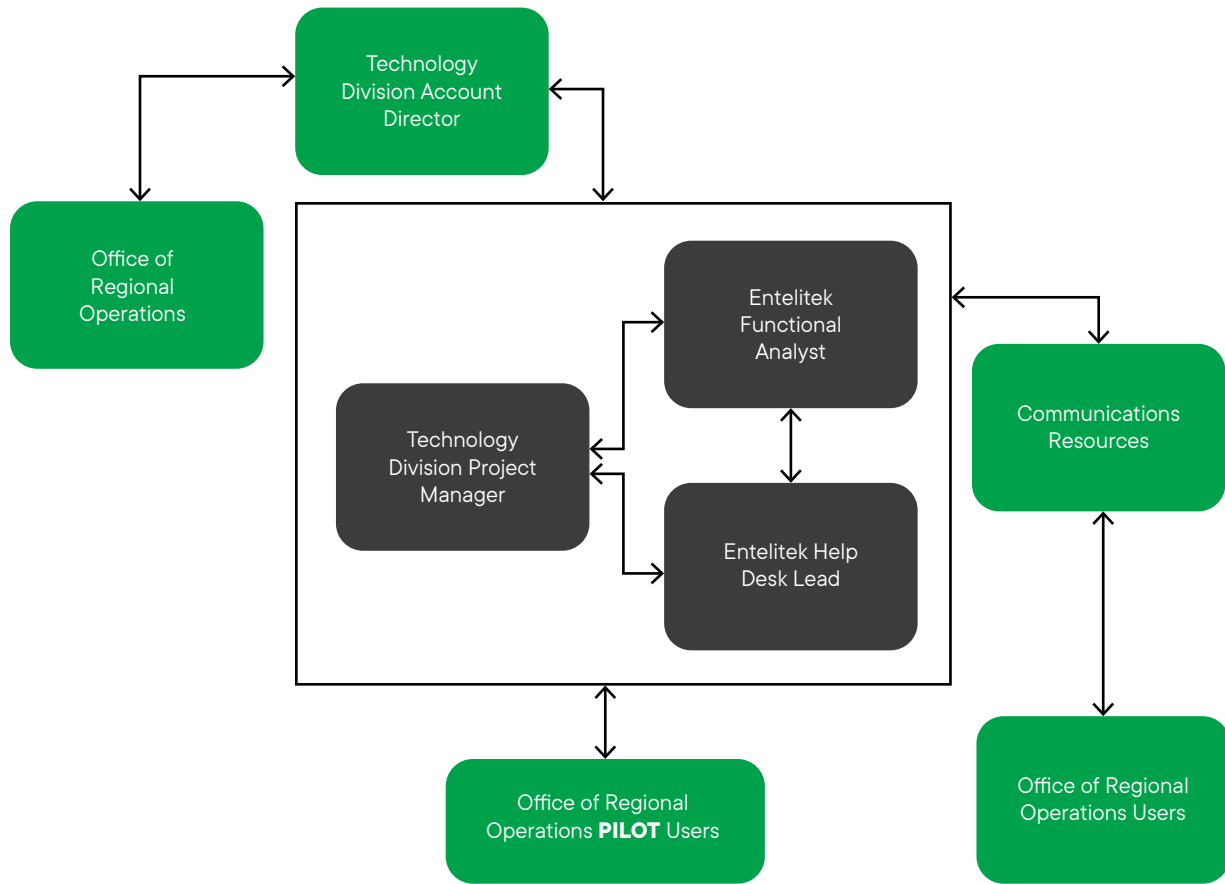
Six months prior to the AllAboard deployment date, the Technology Division project manager conducts a kickoff meeting with the Technology Division account director and Entelitek's communications specialist. Instead of engaging in a messaging discussion during the kickoff meeting, the project manager provides the communications specialist with an informational document and insists that this be used to develop the communications strategy and work plan.

The communications specialist proceeds with developing the communications strategy and work plan based on the project manager's document. The document's central message is that the AllAboard solution streamlines the human capital IT process involving onboarding new and transferring employees (i.e., identity access management, issuing email accounts, and other technology access) to ensure that new employees are ready to start work on their first day on the job.

*“Often, communications and training resources work in isolation from the project team. Change management can help ensure that communications and training personnel are incorporated into the project early and often.”*

The sole communications specialist for the AllAboard project has no access to users or leadership at the Office of Regional Operations or Technology Division leadership, as shown in Figure 3.

**FIGURE 3: Information Transfer During AllAboard Deployment**



This figure illustrates how information flows from the Office of Regional Operations (the business owner); to the Technology Division account director; to the Technology Division project manager, functional analyst, and help desk; and to the communications specialist. During the nationwide deployment, the project manager maintains a dialogue with the business owner, the functional analyst and help desk, and the pilot user group.

**Although the communications specialist is responsible for communicating the impact of AllAboard and evolving business processes to users nationwide, information cascades down to this staff member much later, only after it has already been received and processed by other project stakeholders.**

With input from the project manager, functional analyst, and help desk, the communications specialist produces the required deliverables leading up to the AllAboard deployment.



# Reactionary Communication

DLA deploys AllAboard nationwide to the Office of Regional Operations. The communications specialist produces and publishes deployment deliverables. However, according to information the Office of Regional Operations provides the project manager and functional analyst and an onslaught of help desk calls, the project manager pushes for a shift in AllAboard messaging from a streamlined IT process to caveats and exceptions for how to onboard new and transferring employees.

Users nationwide voice their confusion and frustration. They are having issues using the solution and issuing email accounts, all while dealing with changes resulting from the other major IT initiatives that DLA initiated prior to AllAboard development. These frustrations are echoed at the DLA executive level with regional directors and executives.

The AllAboard team's reactive response to these frustrations includes the following:

- Designating the Entelitek Help Desk as the single point of contact for nationwide Office of Regional Operations users.
- The sole communications specialist, with support from the project manager, functional analyst, help desk, the Office of Regional Operations, and DLA leadership, achieves the following:
  - Develops a central repository on the DLA intranet for users and other stakeholders to access all documents and procedures related to AllAboard.
  - Revises training materials with input from nationwide users.

- The project manager leads an open forum to discuss AllAboard issues with nationwide users and answer their questions.
- The communications specialist develops memos from the Technology Division and Office of Regional Operations executives to acknowledge issues with AllAboard and explain that DLA is working through the issues.

Project leaders and DLA leadership realize the importance of coordinated messaging and consistent, accurate communications after the Office of Regional Operations users express frustrations with the AllAboard deployment and the solution itself. Only then do these leaders, in a delayed and reactionary approach, lend support to the communications specialist. Instead, the communications specialist should have been part of a larger team dedicated to AllAboard user adoption throughout the project. Also, communication should have happened earlier and more often in the project lifecycle. Because of this belated strategy, DLA plays catchup to manage their response to issues users have with the solution. On top of this, DLA must dedicate additional resources to supporting the help desk with high call volume. These project failures work to damage the agency's credibility with the Office of Regional Operations users.

*“Message development is considered an afterthought during this project. As a result, confused users overwhelm the help desk trying to gain clarity.”*

# Communications Integration Strengths

The AllAboard deployment is an example of a project team's singular focus on modernizing and developing a new technology according to requirements while neglecting the people side of such a large-scale change. Despite many areas for improvement, which will be addressed in the next section, the lone communications specialist uses all available media to inform Office of Regional Operations users of the new technology deployment. When the project team learns that this communication is insufficient and inaccurate, the AllAboard project team as well as leadership from the Technology Office, Office of Regional Operations, and DLA communicate adequately among each other and work quickly to address the users' frustrations.

“*Communications specialists are often blamed unfairly for inaccurate and ineffective planning and execution. In reality, communication fails because these staffers are separated from the rest of the project team and have no access to key stakeholders and information.*”

# Project Areas For Improvement

Although project stakeholders at DLA work quickly to address user and other stakeholder concerns with AllAboard, some circumstances hinder effective information transfer during the pilot and deployment.

Information about the pilot program is not transferred to all Office of Regional Operations users.

The AllAboard team seems to communicate frequently and effectively to the 50 users involved in the pilot program. However, this is a missed opportunity to provide information about the development of AllAboard, how the pilot is progressing, and any lessons learned to all other Office of Regional Operations users and stakeholders. This information can serve as a heads-up to DLA that the team is working to modernize and improve PMS starting with the AllAboard solution. Also, any lessons learned during the pilot relating to the usability of the solution and frequent questions users have can inform the communications strategy and messaging.



## The Technology Division project manager dictated the messaging used for the AllAboard communications campaign.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the Technology Division project manager and Entelitek functional analyst and help desk lead functions successfully as one unit, with access to two-way communication with the Technology Division account director, the Office of Regional Operations, and the pilot user community. Because the pilot lasts for two years, individuals have time to process and understand the complexities of the AllAboard solution, and they have access to information from other stakeholders that provides context about the project and the technology.

As shown in Figure 2, the sole communications specialist does not receive the same information as the project manager, functional analyst, and help desk lead. Information that the communications specialist does receive is delayed and delivered by the project manager.

Essentially, the communications specialist must get up to speed on two years of knowledge transfer in six months. Employee engagement expert Tim Eisenhauer refers to this as message cascades.

Although this can be an efficient way to disseminate information in large organizations, “the problem is that at each link in the chain, the message can be changed, edited, or lost completely,” like a game of telephone. (Eisenhauer) This is because the communications specialist is not privy to meetings/conversations about deployment and implications on Office of Regional Operations users. The resource must rely on a “brain dump” document from the project manager.

The communications specialist operates at the bottom of the information chain instead of being integrated with the core team (project manager, functional analyst, and help desk lead).

This individual is charged with communicating key information, including business processes, about a project they are disconnected from to users they do not have contact with.

This contributes to the changes in communications messaging that are detrimental to DLA’s credibility with users and other stakeholders.

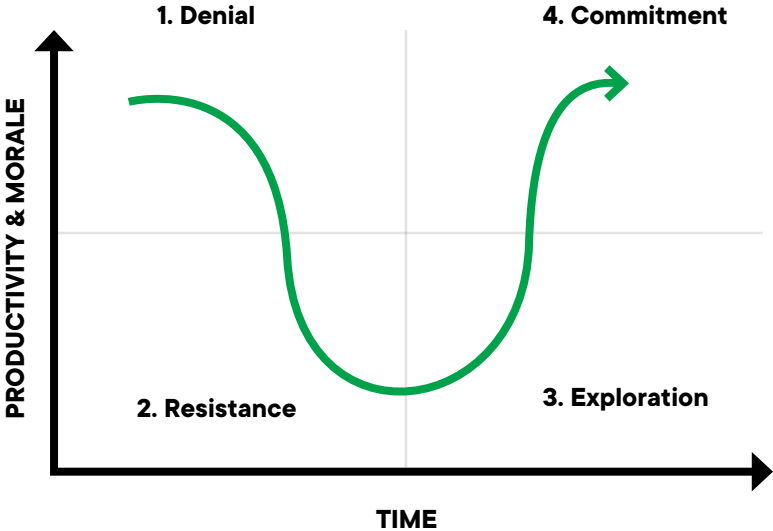
The AllAboard deployment did not consider the change impact on users from the outset.

For Office of Regional Operations users, the AllAboard deployment equals “uncertainty and loss of control. It can mean unwelcome surprises and the feeling that everything is unfamiliar.” The success of the deployment lies in the users’ and other stakeholders’ reactions to the change. (Eisenhauer)

As shown in Figure 4, the Change Curve, developed by psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, is often used to describe the transition from when the change starts to when the overall goal of the change is achieved. (Eisenhauer) The curve includes the following phases:

- > **DENIAL PHASE:** When people require information.
- > **RESISTANCE PHASE:** When people need support.
- > **EXPLORATION PHASE:** When people need direction.
- > **COMMITMENT PHASE:** When people need encouragement.

Figure 4: The Change Curve

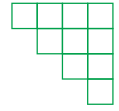


With the deployment of the AllAboard solution, users endured the denial, resistance, and exploration phases of the Change Curve all at once. Reasons for this include the following:

- ➔ The deployment of the AllAboard solution coupled with the other IT initiatives DLA implemented before the AllAboard deployment created a “perfect storm” of issues for users.
- ➔ DLA deployed AllAboard without transferring information to all Office of Regional Operations users and stakeholders about the pilot or the upcoming changes to existing business processes.
- ➔ These users did not fully understand the need to change, nor did they have a strong desire for change.
- ➔ Time spent with these users was not enough to determine the business logic needed for the project to be a success.
- ➔ There were no visible champions on whom DLA could rely on to help promote the technology to users and stakeholders.



# Best Practice Recommendations



Experts in project management, organizational development, employee engagement, and change management disciplines support the following recommendations for managing knowledge transfer and overall change during large-scale DME initiatives.

**A change management lead should be part of the pilot and deployment teams and be present at all meetings to receive a clear and efficient transfer of all relevant project information.**

As shown in Figure 3, information cascades down to the communications specialist after the pilot and after numerous meetings are conducted among project stakeholders.

However, “written as well as verbal communication needs to be ‘listened to’.

Effective verbal communication begins with hearing a message the way the sender intended it.” (Terrell)

Often, communications and training specialists work in isolation from the project team. Moreover, these roles sit very low in the project organizational structure’s hierarchy. This is because these professionals and the work they perform—the people side of change—is valued less than the development of the technology itself. But in fact, this work is just as valuable as development.

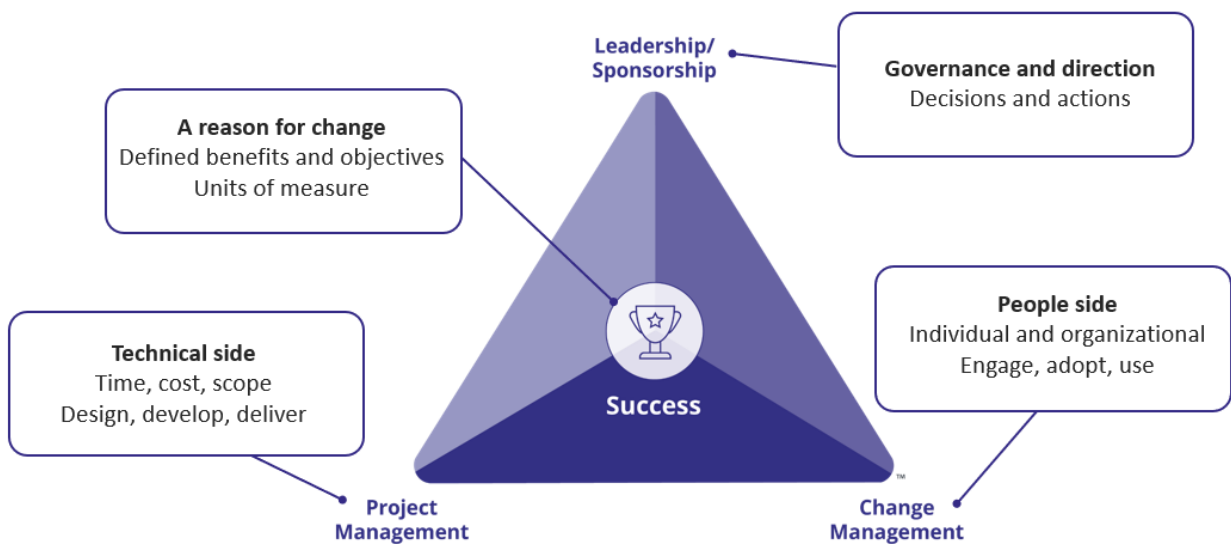




Including a change management team—particularly a strong change management lead who speaks the language and can gain the trust of the technical and project teams and project leaders and sponsors—brings tremendous value to DME project.

Prosci, the world leader in change management research, explains the role of change management in their Change Triangle Model (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Prosci Change Triangle Model: A Framework for Success**



The framework in Figure 5 shows the four critical aspects of any successful change effort and how they are interrelated. When change management is in place, leaders, sponsors, the project manager, and the change management team all work together to ensure project success.

Ideally, in large-scale DME initiatives like AllAboard, communications and training operate as part of or near the change management team, as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Ideal Information Transfer During AllAboard Deployment

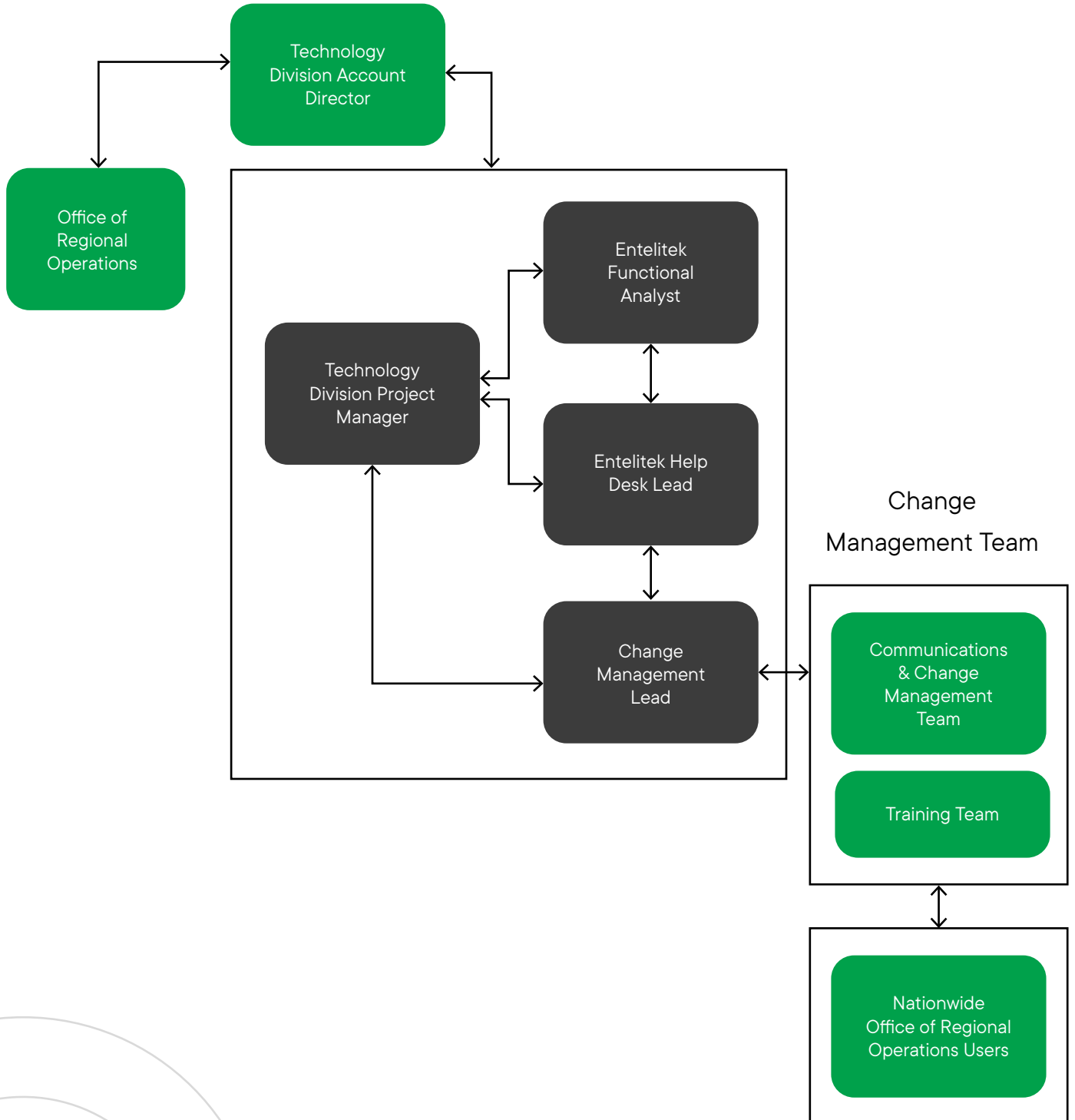




Figure 6 illustrates an ideal model in which a change management lead is part of the core team, receiving and processing project information at the same time as the Technology Division project manager, functional analyst, and Entelitek help desk lead. This allows for a more coordinated and accurate information transfer to Office of Regional Operations users and other project stakeholders.

Because change management operates at an elevated hierarchical level in the project's organizational structure, all teams—change management, communications, and training—receive information at the same time as other project stakeholders and can process and use the information first-hand.

**The “why” behind AllAboard system enhancements should be clearly communicated among the team and Office of Regional Operations users.**

Although all DME initiatives appear necessary on the surface, a clear understanding of the vision, mission, and objectives behind large-scale change can help all stakeholders realize how a change will impact them. (Heathfield) Is the purpose of deploying a solution like AllAboard simply to produce another product or to make users' daily processes easier and more effective? Defining the why can also help define what makes a project successful. “You cannot expect people to work toward a successful project outcome if you can't clearly define success.” (Ress) A change management team can ensure that the why remains top of mind to ensure project success.

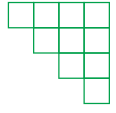
**The DLA Technology Division should work even more closely with users during future PMS modernization efforts.**

A change management team can help DLA work more closely with users during large system modernization efforts to ensure that the information transfer to this audience is a two-way exchange, not simply a presentation of what development work will be performed. (Heathfield) This also ensures that instead of moving through the Change Curve all at once, users are guided through the ADKAR approach to change (Stebbins), which stands for:

- **AWARENESS**      of the need for change.
- **DESIRE**            to participate and support the change.
- **KNOWLEDGE**      about how to change.
- **ABILITY**            to implement required skills and behaviors.
- **REINFORCEMENT**    to sustain the change.

**Transfer information to stakeholders proactively, not reactively.**

Change management team involvement improves the information transfer to the communications team and ultimately to users and helps ensure that DLA disseminates accurate information proactively. This will also help to prevent excessive reactive messaging changes later, allowing DLA to pursue “project objectives from a position of strength rather than a ‘reactive’ position of weakness.” (Ress)



# Conclusion



For a company assisting an organization with a DME initiative, managing the impact of the initiative on people is just as important as developing the technology itself. People want to know and understand how the business processes they use daily will change well before they're expected to use new technology.

The most common tactic companies resort to is placing individual communications and training specialists on the project with little to no support from the company and no access to the project leadership and other stakeholders who can provide the necessary project information.

In our case study, the AllAboard solution is part of PMS, a larger system that impacts tens of thousands of users. One communications staffer and one training staffer would have never been enough to perform the work necessary to impact how quickly people are up and running on the new system; how many people demonstrate buy-in by using the new system; and how proficient people are at using the system.

When staffing DME projects with contractor resources, set them up for success. Help the organization understand that entrusting extensive and complex efforts, as communications and training are, to one person late in the project lifecycle poses a risk to the project and to the organization. Additionally, one communications specialist and one training specialist is never enough to impact how quickly people are up and running on the new system, how many people demonstrate buy-in by using the new system, and how proficient people are at using the system.

To achieve a successful DME transition, partner with a company that specializes in communications and change management. This company will be able to place a strong change management lead on the project who can speak the language and gain the trust of the technical teams, project leaders, and others sponsors early in the project. Also, this person can build a team of change management practitioners and communications and training specialists to pursue the goal of 100% user adoption of the new technology and overall project success.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Angie Sanders** is Founder, Communications & Change Management of CMGT, a government contracting company providing communications and change management expertise to government agencies that are developing new technology systems, modernizing legacy systems, or looking to raise the profile of a technical office or division.

Angie has more than 15 years of experience in marketing communication strategy and messaging, content creation, and graphic design for organizations including the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, Administrative Office of the United States Courts, and Department of Veterans Affairs. She is a Prosci Certified Change Management Practitioner, Certified SAFe 5 Scrum Master, Certified Scrum Master, and Project Management Professional (PMP) with six years of experience performing change management communications in an Agile software development environment.

Angie holds an M.A. in professional writing from Kennesaw State University and a B.S. in media arts and design from James Madison University.

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