

# The Best Practices in Change Management during COVID-19 Crisis

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## Abstract

In the past year, human beings have lived in an increasingly more connected world. On average, we communicate almost every minute of our lives. Social distancing and lockdowns are changing our lives dramatically. In these very different times, change management practices can be helpful in overcoming change resistance. This article summarizes the best change management practices for COVID-19, in times of uncertainty and lockdown. COVID-19 has brought with unprecedented change. In every direction, organizations are in turmoil. Change is natural but unprecedented change brings turmoil and unpredictable and sometimes difficult to manage. Change is an inevitable and continuous phenomenon. Organizations must be proactive in affecting change. Organizations must keep a close watch on the environment and incorporate suitable changes if the situations so demand. Management properly anticipates or responds to the forces for change. It is important for management to manage the change properly for the survival and stability of the firm. It becomes very difficult for the firm to survive and stabilize in the current environment of Coronavirus. COVID-19 poses so many challenges for the firm and to some or other extent destabilizes the functioning of the firm and affects the vitality of the firm. The firms face the various types of challenges and crises at this time of COVID-19 and find out the ways to fight with the crisis and apply the various types of techniques of crisis management and practices in change management. The study undertakes to find out the best practices applied by the firm at the time of Coronavirus. The various sources of management of the firm are studied to find out the best practices applied by the firms.

**Keywords:** Management • Change • Crisis • Environment • Practices • COVID-19 • Crisis • Challenges

## Introduction

Change refers to any alteration which occurs in over all work environment of an organization. It may relate to change in technology; organizational structure, working processes, work environment, organizational policy and even the roles people play [1]. According to Keith Davis and J.W. New storm, the term 'change' refers to any alteration which occurs in the overall work environment of an organization. It implies alterations of structural relationships and role of people in an organization. Change results from the pressure of forces which are both outside and inside the organization. Introduction of change in one part in an organization forces change in other part. If the change is beneficial people accept it willingly [2]. If it is not desirable, there is great resistance. If it is of no consequence to the people, they may adopt an attitude of indifference. If they consider the change detrimental to their growth and prosperity, they may resist through counter pressure. This reaction is based not necessarily on the reality or facts but on their perception. The change therefore should be sufficiently strong

enough to overcome the counter pressure. Due to advancement of technology and social environment change has become a necessity. If the change takes place, a balance or equilibrium is achieved by the organization. Thus people learn to expect various environment relationships within the organization. They learn adaptation. The essence is that when people feel that there is need to change, and when they change, they actually are adjusting to changed situation thus equilibrium is achieved with the changed environment. This process carries on and is never ending because change takes place continuously.

Change is an accelerating and a fundamental-dilemma. The pace of change is now so fast that business faces constant market and organizational change and must respond very rapidly if they have to survive. Change is the essence of business growth and stability. The rate of change has accelerated over the last decade, COVID-19 are affecting the organizations at an alarming rate and change the lives of the organizations. Organizations need to adopt best change practices to survive and grow. It's important for the firms to identify

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**Received:** 05 June, 2023, Manuscript No. JBMR-23-101343; **Editor assigned:** 08 June, 2023, PreQC No. JBMR-23-101343 (PQ); **Reviewed:** 23 June, 2023, QC No. JBMR-23-101343; **Revised:** 07 August, 2023, Manuscript No. JBMR-23-101343 (R); **Published:** 14 August, 2023, DOI: 10.37421/2223-5833.2023.13.533

COVID-19 changes and respond quickly [3]. Businesses these days go through unpredictable during COVID-19 phases and bring out major changes within the firm and destabilize the parameters of businesses. During this phase, it's very difficult to predict changes and crisis, but the firm can adopt the best change practices to deal with the crisis.

In the COVID-19 crisis, businesses go through predictable stages of evolution and revolution, and need to change at each stage or go under. Change is continuous, there is no arrival point. But at least, anticipate change become crucial at the time of COVID-19 is very difficult and businesses find it difficult to anticipate nature of crisis [4]. However, generally change represents opportunity as well as threat, but most of the businesses facing threats. Managing change at the time of crisis is totally different in comparison to the normal circumstances. COVID crisis disturbs the existing equilibrium of the businesses. The whole of the organization tends to be affected by COVID-19 and affected all the parts of the firm at varying rates of speed. COVID-19 affects people, structure, technology, and all other elements of the businesses.

To deal with the crisis, change is brought by the firm and it may be proactive or reactive. When change is brought about due to the pressure of external forces, it is called reactive change. But proactive change is initiated by the management on its own to increase organizational effectiveness [5]. An organization is in a constant interactional and interdependent relationship with its environment, any change in its environment; make it imperative for the organization to make changes in its internal system.

### Importance of the study

COVID forces the firm to change its internal system. Businesses depend on external environment and get the inputs from external environment and export outputs to the environment. COVID-19 changes the entire paradigm of external environment; it is imperative for the businesses to respond and changes accordingly its internal components. Planned change is required to deal with the crisis and necessitate altering the existing organizational system [6]. Planned change deal with those changes crucial for survival and stabilize at the time of COVID-19. It requires greater commitment of time and resources, skills and knowledge for successful implementation to deal with the crisis of COVID-19. Planned change during COVID-19 can achieve its goals rapidly; to improve the efficiency and effectiveness, profitability, to protect and safeguards the staff interest, to restore supply chain system, to restart production schedule smoothly and to regain the market confidence [7]. The study concentrates on the best practices to be applied by the firm to restructure their internal components. The study finds out the best practices in change management applied by the firm to restart production, gaining the confidence of the market and restart supply chain, as these are the main obstacles in the way of businesses during the COVID-19 crisis.

### Role of change agents

The crisis can be handled by devising plan and planned change is executed with the help of change agents. Change agents manage the process of change and handle the crisis by bringing the change. Change agent's initiates change in the organization. Change agents may be consultants brought from outside or members from inside the organization. The study has noticed that the services of both inside as well as outside agents used by the firm during COVID-19 crisis. The services of internal change agents are used to restart the production schedules, operating system and internal processes of the firm, which have been disrupted by the COVID-19. It's a challenge for the businesses to regaining the system and operating facility. Outsiders change agents are hired by the firm where expertise services required in the processes. COVID-19 disturbs the entire organization functioning and forcing change in the organizational system. Businesses at the time of COVID-19 hires change agent's services to implement the needed change to stabilize the businesses in this difficult time. Businesses have to change the human resources, structure, technology, supply chain system, processes, and tasks, and for solving these problems thrust by COVID-19 the change agents have to follow intervention strategies. These days of COVID-19 align the internal forces and facilitating every help to the change agents to solve the problem and external change agents utilize the services of internal change agents. Change agents devise programme to resolve the crisis brought by COVID-19 and implemented by the organization itself by aligning all the units/divisions of the firm.

### Role of a change agent

Change agents diagnose the problem and installation of system properly. The study has notice and found that the most crucial tasks performed by change agents are as follows:

- The change agent develops a need for change on the part of his client (or organization). The client system is made to realize the importance and benefits of the intended change.
- As a change agent, the change agent builds a change relationship with the client. The client feels that change can be effectively achieved with the help and support of a change agent.
- The change indicates the problems that the client faces after a careful diagnosis. He will also be able to anticipate the problems that the client is likely to encounter during and after the change process.
- The employee is made to feel the need for change. The change is not thrust on them.
- The change agent prepares a blue print of action for implementing the change. The support of the client system is solicited in translating the planned change into action process.
- The change agent acts as a stabilizer of change. Any change takes the organization towards a new equilibrium. If the new equilibrium is not maintained, the organization is likely to revert to the earlier equilibrium and the change effort will be a failure. The client system should be made to realize the importance of stabilizing new patterns of behaviour.

- No change agent can continue to be associated with an organization change effort too long. At some time, during the change process, the client should feel confident to take over and maintain the change effort. That would be an opportune time for the change agent to terminate relations with the client system. The change agent must prepare the client system to carry on the change process with confidence.

In short, the change agent acts as a consultant, counselor and facilitator. As a consultant, he makes a detailed plan of change based on his knowledge, skills and experience. The agent will act as a consultant when making the change. It examines the attitudes, values, expectations and motivations of members of the organization and advises them on the reason for change and mentally prepares them to accept and work for change. The change agent also acts as a facilitator or cause of change. He is in contact with members of the organization, develops knowledge about the potential for change, creates a willingness to change and ensures their active participation.

## Materials and Methods

### Objectives of the study

This research paper has studied the best practices applied by the firm to bring the change by preparing the blue print for implementation or with the help of client system. The study revolves around the seven best practices of change management:

To study the best practices of change management adopted by the firm at the time of COVID-19 crisis.

To study change management on the basis of following seven best practices:

- Activate the active and visible primary sponsor.
- Effective deploy of resources for change management.
- Apply a structured change management approach.
- Involve employees and encourage their participation.
- Communicate regularly and openly.
- Coordinate and participate in project management.
- Get involved in middle managers.

To suggest measure for making the change management effective.

### Analysis and Interpretation of the study

**Mobilize an active and visible primary sponsor:** A positive leader who actively leads the organization through change and is visibly involved in the transition is the biggest predictor of success. The importance of sponsorship is mentioned three times more often than another contribution to changing success. Participants often used the keywords "active and visible" to describe this primary post. "Active and visible" sponsorship means that the sponsor is:

- Support change by paying close attention to change and the need to manage change.
- Promote change by leadership and inspiration of others in the organization.
- Effective Decision making in relations to change by integrate priorities among other leaders in the organization.
- Maintain direct communication with project management and change management teams and be accessible about updates.

The below shows that highly effective sponsorship projects are almost three times more likely to achieve or persuade project goals than inefficient sponsorship projects. Executives and senior leaders play an essential role in times of change. An organization looks to its leaders to be visible sponsors of change and to demonstrate why change is necessary. Senior leaders provide the authority and credibility necessary for successful change. Employees prefer those who send change messages. Employees want to hear about the change from two people in the organization: from the person who reports, and from the manager at the top.

## Results and Discussion

In addition to significantly influencing the success of macro-level change initiatives, senior leaders have a specific key role in supporting the application of change management and direct communication with employees by asking why change is needed. The sponsor must mobilize other key entrepreneurs and stakeholders to manage change and legitimize in its part of the organization. A healthy coalition of sponsors is especially important for change, which includes many functions within the organization. Employees affected by change want to hear from the leader at the top of their organization why change is important. Senior leaders are those who prefer to report on the business factors of change, such as the risks or costs associated with consistency. An effective sponsor legitimizes the need for change within the organization and prioritizes change through the direct involvement of affected employees. Change management professionals can support sponsors by playing an interesting role for leaders. Managers and executives benefit from support and encouragement for their sponsorship role. A change management specialist enables leaders to become more effective promoters of change by learning and facilitating specific sponsorship activities and actions. When change management teams effectively support sponsors, they become essential partners for managers in achieving successful change results.

**Adopt a positive change strategy and a vision for the future:** A clear and effective strategy is the number one requirement for achieving change success. The change management practitioner can support sponsors in developing an effective strategy for change. The most effective strategies are the ones that balance the tension of maintaining current business operations, while making space for new business opportunities. The change strategy should also have goals for specific metrics that relate to both operational

and outcome metrics the top three contributors to change success also related to an effective change strategy. While “adopting an effective strategy” was noted more than eight times more frequently than the second most frequently cited contributor, “having a positive change vision” for the organization was the second most frequently

cited contributor. An effective strategy must help to create a clear “change vision” for the organization. A clear change vision helps to focus efforts on the goal and provides a consistent message for Table 1.

Criteria of sponsor	Percentage of respondents met or exceeded objectives
Very effective sponsor	29
Ineffective sponsor	42
Moderating sponsor	54
Extremely effective sponsor	72

**Table 1.** Percentage of respondents met or exceeded objectives.

**Dedicate change management resources:** The project needs dedicated and adequate resources and funds to complete the change management task. Allocated resources and means for change management mean access to:

- Adequate amount of funds and resources.
- Dedicated resources with experience in change management.
- Dedicated team of employees for change or a community of flexible, ambitious, determined, cooperating individuals.

In order to realize the benefits of change management, someone must be responsible for it and have access to an adequate amount of funding. The data show a positive and meaningful correlation

between the availability of a dedicated resource (person) and the overall change in management efficiency. Participants with dedicated resources were significantly more likely to have good or good change management effectiveness than participants without dedicated resources.

When a firm goes about managing change, remember to manage firstly it as well. For instance, when a change needs to be made in a firm, firm may not have access to the full change management process because firm are working with bringing the required change. Instead of being caught in this situation, try to become aware of the change firm is facing, and identify whether it is necessary to get approval from managers and/or higher up. As you progress, firm may need to set up a change team (Table 2).

Change management effectiveness	Percentage of respondents	
	Not having dedicated resources	Having dedicated resources
Poor	65	34
Fair	39	58
Good	19	80
Excellent	9	91

**Table 2.** Relationship between dedicated resources and overall change management effectiveness.

**Use a structured change management approach:** Change is a constant in business life. Some changes are a natural part of business life. Some are a response to business needs and some are a response to your customer’s needs. But change isn’t always desirable or easily managed. Change management is the process of successfully managing the change, or the transition, from one state to another.

A well-structured approach of managing change provides the necessary system to remain consistent on track. It ensures time spending on important activities and tasks; and indicates gaps and informs how to fill up the gaps of the project. Formal approach of change leads to repetition of processes or consistent use of change management by taking more initiatives throughout the organization. The main practices of change management have been followed by participants:

- Built.
- Adapted.
- Updated.
- Easy to implement with many modifications.
- Easy to use at any stage of the project.

The study found that firm are applied a structured approach of change management. Most of the firms are applied change management methodology for planning, guidance, and directing and adequate application of resources; checklist or monitoring progress. Change management is applied by the firm to bring efficiency or making the system more efficient. The study also revealed effectiveness of change management by using a structural approach. Participants that applied a structured approach were 33% more likely to experience good or excellent change management effectiveness than those without a methodology (Table 3).

Criteria	Percentage of respondents	
	Did not have a particular methodology	Used a particular methodology
Poor	24	6
Fair	47	32
Good	27	53
Excellent	2	9

**Table 3.** Impact of using a methodology on overall change management effectiveness.

### Engage with frontline employees

The objective of change management is to bring desired organizational results and by effectively engaging the employees of the company. Employee involvement and participation is recognized as important contribution to success. The study found that the following techniques are applied in this respect:

- Giving opportunities and growth.
- Participation, recognition and award.
- Identify and build relationships and.
- Training, development and placement.

The objective of these methods of engaging employees is to increase the employee base that shows willingness to participate in change management process and to work with the people who manage change. The most critical step in the change management process is reinforcement. Because organizations are so heavily burdened by change, this movement is often overlooked because experts juggle change management a lot. Inadequate responses to strengthening and sustainability activities have a negative impact on the overall outcome of change. The impact of allocating of resources to reinforcement on project success is given below in the Table 4.

	Did not allocate resources for reinforcement and sustainable activities	Allocating resources for reinforcement and sustainable activities
Percentage of respondents who met or exceeded objectives	55	67

**Table 4.** Impact of allocating resources to reinforcement on project success.

### Open and effective communication

In business, we all spend a lot of time trying to “do right,” and at the same time, we spend even more time trying to “do better,” to “make things right,” and to “do differently.” These objectives are usually not easily attainable but are important. Inevitably, we have things slip through the cracks, often without our awareness. There is a misconception amongst the practitioners about change management that change management is only relating to communications. But it has been seen in larger perspective of establishing effective communication, which leads change successfully. More often, participants report the following factors that are important for success:

- Cadence.
- Consistency.
- Transparency.
- Use of multiple communication channels.

In addition, participants identified key topics to talk about, such as why the change occurred, expectations, long-term perspectives, and the impact of the change on employees and key entrepreneurs.

### Engage and integrate the change management with project management

The firm must ensure that scope of change accept by clients and not creating any additional burden. This can be done by engaging the client in a collaborative way, by creating a project charter that captures the scope change, and also by integrating change management and project management, to make sure the whole project is handled well. Change management ensures the change is done well, is communicated clearly to the client, and that the client does not have any other surprises. This research highlights a common trend of integrating change management work with project management activities. These complementary disciplines naturally intersect with the life of the initiative. In the latest study, 75% of participants combined the work of project management and task change management to some extent. Recognizing that this is a major contribution to success, they provided examples of how they have achieved unity:

- Adding change management activities to the project plan.
- Collaborate with the project team.
- Coordinate change plans with project plans.
- Consolidate or assign responsibilities and tasks.
- Provide and train change management for the project team.

More and more organizations are realizing the value of combining project management and change management.



Participants who integrated the two disciplines were 16% more likely to achieve or persuade the project objectives than those who

did not integrate. The Table 5 explains the integration of change management with project management:

Percentage of respondents that experienced good or excellent change management effectiveness	Did not integrate CM and PM	Integrated CM and PM
	35	50

**Table 5.** Engage and integrated with project management.

**Most resistant level: Engagement with middle level of management**

Managers can act the best change management practitioners and catalyst of change; this has been seen at the time of COVID-19 crisis, because they are closest to employees impacted by change. The study revealed that at the time of COVID crisis, managers continuously were emphasizing communication about the change and managers role in change, holding face to face meetings, interacting with colleagues, conducting team meetings, and alignment of sessions.

Managers focus on creating awareness, including how change affects them, the business reasons for change, and the need to manage change. They provide materials, tools, and support to help managers understand and navigate change, engage and engage managers in the early stages of change, and during the change process. The study found that the most resilient group was middle management, with 43% of respondents calling managers the most resilient group to change. The study found that most of the resistance experienced by managers can be avoided. Resistance can be reduced and managers will be able to push for change by fully adopting the group's change plan (Table 6).

Level of management	Percentage of respondents resist to change
Executives and directors	11
Senior level management	16
Mid-level management	43
Frontline management	25
Others	6

**Table 6.** Most resistant level.

**Conclusion**

The importance of sponsorship was cited over three times more frequently than the next contributor to change success. Executives and senior leaders play an essential role in times of change. An organization looks to its leaders to be visible sponsors of change and to demonstrate why change is necessary. Senior leaders provide the authority and credibility necessary for successful change. Employees prefer those who send change messages. Employees obey and follow change management process initiated by two authorities in the organization: from the person who reports, and from the leaders at the top. Change management practitioners can support sponsors by playing an enabling role for senior leaders. Executives and senior leaders benefit from support and encouragement around their sponsorship role. The change management specialist can enable leaders to be more effective sponsors of change by coaching and facilitating specific sponsorship activities and action steps. When change management teams effectively support sponsors, they become essential partners for managers in achieving successful change results. The study shows a positive and meaningful correlation between the dedicated resource (person) and the overall change in management efficiency. Dedicated resource participants were significantly more likely to have good or good change management effectiveness than those who did not have dedicated resources. An intentional and defined

approach to managing change provides the structure necessary to stay on track. It makes sure time is spent on meaningful activities and allows space to identify and address gaps throughout the project life cycle. Using a formal approach also makes processes repeatable for consistent application of change management on more initiatives throughout the organization. The most critical step in the change management process is reinforcement. Because organizations are so overwhelmed by change, this step is often overlooked because experts juggle more change management. Inadequate responses to strengthening and sustainability activities have a negative impact on the overall outcome of change. The study found that those participants planning reinforcement activities were more successful in comparison to those who do not make planning for reinforcement. Effective communications are critical to leading change successfully. Most of the organizations are realizing the importance of combining project management and change management. Participants who integrated the two disciplines were 16% more likely to achieve or persuade the project objectives than those who did not integrate. Managers may be the best allies in times of change and during the COVID-19 crisis, as they are closest to the employees affected by the changes. The study revealed that at the time of Covid crisis, managers continuously were emphasizing communication about the change and managers role in change, holding face to face meetings, interacting with colleagues, conducting team meetings, and alignment of sessions.

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**How to cite this article:** Kumar, Pardeep. "The Best Practices in Change Management during COVID-19 Crisis." *Arabian J Bus Manag Review* 13 (2023): 533.