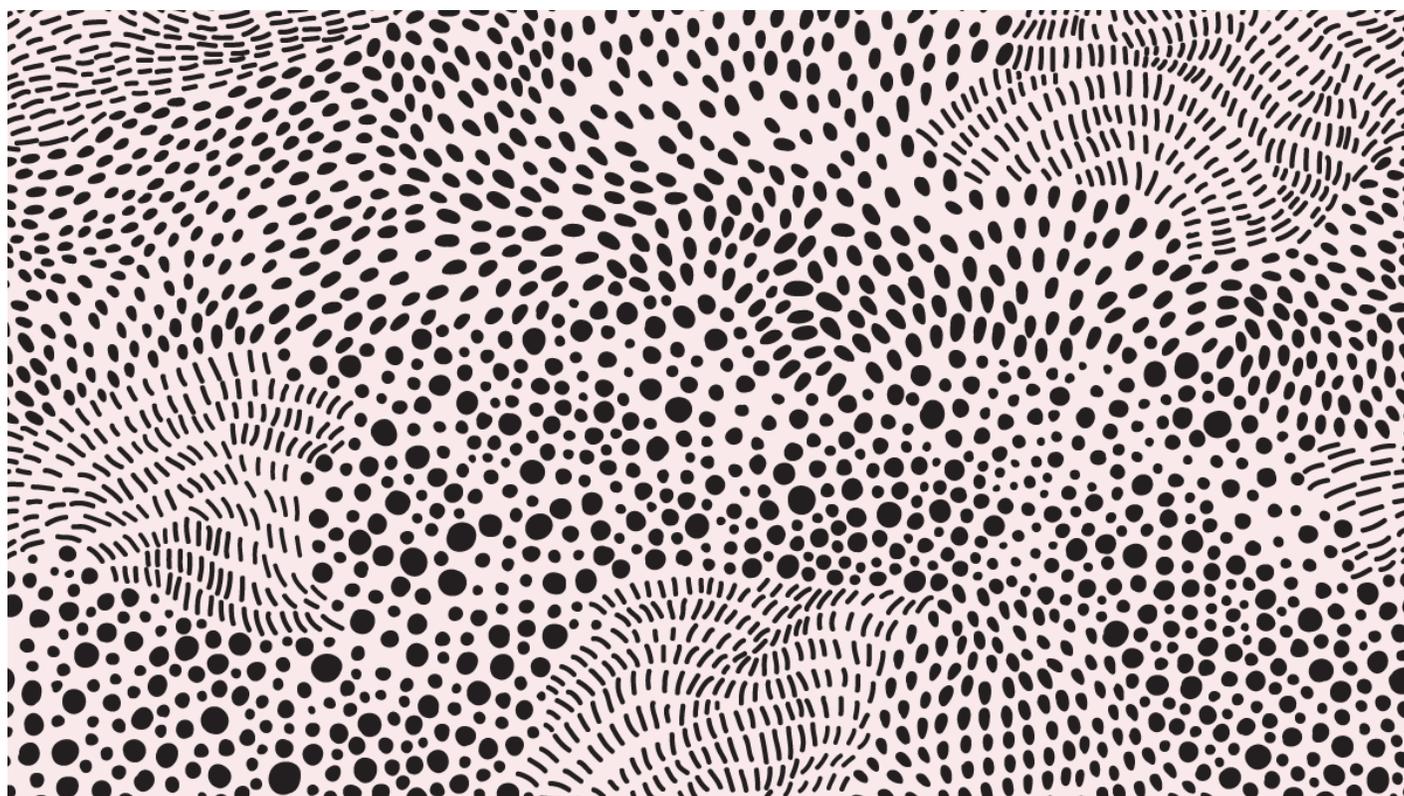


CHANGE MANAGEMENT

# All Management Is Change Management

by [Robert H. Schaffer](#)

October 26, 2017



Maria Galybina/iStock

Change management is having its moment. There's no shortage of articles, books, and talks on the subject. But many of these indicate that change management is some occult subspecialty of management, something that's distinct from "managing" itself. This is curious given that, when you think about it, all management is the management of change.

If sales need to be increased, that's change management. If a merger needs to be implemented, that's change management. If a new personnel policy needs to be carried out, that's change management. If the erosion of a market requires a new business model, that's change management. Costs reduced? Productivity improved? New products developed? Change management.

The job of management always involves defining what changes need to be made and seeing that those changes take place. Even when the overall aim is stability, often there are still change goals: to reduce variability, cut costs, reduce the time required, or reduce turnover, for example. Once every job in a

company is defined in terms of the changes to be made (both large and small), constant improvement can become the routine. Each innovation brings lessons that inform ongoing operations. The organization becomes a perpetual motion machine. Change never occurs as some sort of happening; it is part of everyday life.

Today's change management movement has arisen in response to the difficulty companies have had in making constant, rapid improvement a routine aspect of work. Efforts to overcome this have led to the bifurcation of organizational life into ordinary times and change management times. As an increasing number of people take on the role and mindset of the change management professional, instead of striving to make innovation and improvement routine, they naturally encourage the treatment of change as something special. Managers start to view change as an extraordinary event that must be dealt with using change management techniques and special skills. And then it's easy for people to become resistant to change.

What needs to change is that thinking. Leaders should view change not as an occasional disruptor but as the very essence of the management job. Setting tough goals, establishing processes to reach them, carrying out those processes and carefully learning from them — these steps should characterize the unending daily life of the organization at every level. More companies need to describe their work in terms of where they are trying to go in the next month or next quarter or next year.

How do you transition into such a company? The simple answer is to skip the months spent creating a comprehensive plan to make the company more change-oriented. Instead, focus on some important goals that are not being accomplished. Have teams carve out some sub-goals they will aim to achieve in a few months. They should be asked to test innovative steps they think will make a difference and to learn from the process. Maintaining a short time frame for these experiments permits the rapid testing of many modest innovations. Of course, these are steps to advance major strategic goals, but the emphasis should be on executing specific changes — with each success followed by a new round of more-ambitious goals to tackle.

For example, Gary Kaplan, president of XL Catlin's North American Construction insurance, got his division started by formulating some major strategic goals. Then he launched a series of short-term "results-seeking projects," each focused on achieving some aspect of those strategic goals. The projects aimed to have people experiment with innovation. As they tested ideas and learned from them, they incorporated new ways of working into the fabric of the organization.

Each year they carry out about 50 such results-seeking projects. Of those recently completed, one won \$8 million of new business in a particular region of the country and another focused on reducing costs by redesigning a process to shift major tasks to lower-level, less-costly staff. Kaplan's project-centric

strategy allowed the company to bring in \$1 billion of premium revenue five years after the launch of the division, and then another billion dollars in the next 18 months.

A critical part of this evolution is holding managers accountable for continuing improvements. As Kaplan told me, by making the operating managers responsible, they develop their capacity to lead continual change while their people develop the capacity to implement it. Specialist experts can be used for support, but actual management of the changes must remain in the hands of the managers. Because, as Kaplan so neatly demonstrates, change management is management, and management is change management.



**Robert H. Schaffer** ([rschaffer@schafferresults.com](mailto:rschaffer@schafferresults.com)) is the founder of Schaffer Consulting in Stamford, Connecticut. He is also a coauthor of *Rapid Results! How 100-Day Projects Build the Capacity for Large-Scale Change* ([Jossey-Bass, 2005](#)).

### This article is about **CHANGE MANAGEMENT**

[+](#) Follow This Topic

### Comments

Leave a Comment

Post Comment

### 25 COMMENTS

**Jasreen Jalil** 2 months ago

Change is a way-of-life. It should be embedded by all at every level of the organisation and instilled the desire to always wanting to improve for the better so as to remain relevant in the market, highly competitive against competitors and technologically and informatively up-to-date.

[↩](#) Reply

0 [👍](#) 0 [🗨](#)

[∨ Join The Conversation](#)

### POSTING GUIDELINES

We hope the conversations that take place on HBR.org will be energetic, constructive, and thought-provoking. To comment, readers must sign in or register. And to ensure the quality of the discussion, our moderating team will review all comments and may edit them for clarity, length, and relevance. Comments that are overly promotional, mean-spirited, or off-topic may be deleted per the moderators' judgment. All postings become the property of Harvard Business Publishing.

