

Winning Hearts and Minds to Drive Successful Finance Transformation

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Introduction

You're about to embark on a new Finance Transformation project – investing a significant amount of time, money and resources to bring about a technology and organisation change.

Success of the project can be determined on how the new technology is received by those that use it on a day-to-day basis. Therefore, successful user adoption is about winning hearts and minds on Finance Transformation projects.

Michael Ryan, Managing Director of Finance Transformation UK, shares his thoughts on successful user adoption – otherwise known as **ADVICE³**.



Assume responsibility

Delegate wisely

Vision

Involved

Communicate

E³ Execute, Engage, Enforce

A = Assume responsibility

A project largely succeeds due to the leaders that are in place. While this may sound simple and straightforward, every project has somebody in charge – a project manager, a project director, or even procurement directors or finance directors. But there's a difference between being appointed to a position and assuming the responsibility of the position. Be the person that makes a difference.

When it comes to leadership, you've got to stand out. One of the key jobs is to ensure that you win the hearts and minds of the people that are involved in the project. You are the walking, talking exposition of what it is you're attempting to achieve – one of the key attributes of leadership is being seen. While this can be done

online, nothing beats going to meet somebody, shaking hands, chatting to them, and putting across that you're actually listening to them.

It's not just that you stand up and express your views. Your job is to create the environment from which everybody else can speak. If you want everyone to be engaged on a project, you've got to get everybody to express what their concerns are, what their fears are, what they consider success to be – what does it look like to them? And if you're not seen as the leader of the project, you're not going to actively encourage people to open up. You're not going to create the right environment.

D = Delegate wisely

From a leadership perspective, you want to bring everybody along with you and you cannot act in isolation – you must delegate wisely.

The implementation of technology can create a stressful environment because things are going to change. Think about how you would feel if somebody decided in the morning that your entire wardrobe was going to alter? Changing the software you use every day is a similar principle, sparking immediate concerns such as "How?" and "Why?" This is where leadership and trust are key to ensure people get onboard and stay there. You need to be sure that there is trust across the project.

And nobody delivers a project on their own, with major technology projects often involving five to six direct reports. The project leader's job is to be there, to communicate and put the message across strongly, to promote the change, and to defend it if needed.

So, there is a need to delegate, and to do it wisely. The one thing that a leader never delegates, if you want to keep the hearts and minds of everybody on the project team and indeed the people within the business who will be subjected to the change, is bad news. If you have something to say that's not going to go down too well, be the leader and the voice.

You can delegate in many different instances. One of them is to develop the personal skills of the direct reports. Decide which way you're going to split the work and the responsibilities that you have. When something's to be done which is tough, particularly if it's to be done for the first time, take responsibility. Be very careful about how you delegate and do not hide from that responsibility of being the leader.



V = Vision

The most important things to identify in a technology project are:

- What's the current situation, and the problem?
- What's the vision and how are we going to achieve it?

Identifying what the problem is involves gathering the metrics which are not necessarily readily available. And this drives a discussion. A business case for any technological change should not be concluded without some numeric evidence. And not just costs. The reasons why, the volumes affected, the people affected, the savings potential.

Identifying the problem, and the numbers involved, will also cause discussion. Some may even challenge the facts or the data. This is a good thing as you can discuss the findings further. If you don't gather the numbers and prove your base supposition that there's something wrong, and continuing will cost the business. Buying technology at this stage could be a potential disaster. If you don't define the problem correctly and put numbers in place to back it up, nine months down the line when you're implementing change, you're going to struggle to understand what has and hasn't been achieved.

So, gather the facts and figures about your current situation. Do not be afraid to benchmark, compare yourself externally AND internally, where you have several teams, or several people engaged in the same activity. The Peter Drucker maxim, which states that if you don't measure it, you can't manage it, supports this approach.

This process ultimately leads to the definition of your KPIs. You've measured it and you've proven there's a

problem. So, the next step is to work with the functional heads - Head of Finance, Head of Procurement, etc. to absolutely agree what the problem is - the first stage of winning hearts and minds in the teams that are doing the work.

So, you've agreed what the challenges are, but what are you going to do about it? How are we going to fix this? What does success look like? Many senior professionals are unable to take the time to consider the blue sky thinking of what success looks like. By human nature we tend to avoid change, and businesses are no different. Ask your team to write down what success looks like. Write down the future. Write down your vision. Create an open forum to discuss ideas of what success looks like. It's up to you when you're running a technology project to set the right environment where everyone involved is prepared and able to express themselves. This way you will get to a suitable consensus and is a critical step in winning hearts and minds. If you want technology successfully adopted, you need to be clear from the very top what the problem is and what it is you are trying to achieve.

And this is where identifying the correct technology provider is key. Software functionality alone will not solve the problems. Ultimately, any technology is merely a tool that supports change, to help deliver measurable outcomes. Procurement and Finance professionals are becoming less focused on software features and functions, they want a partner that is focused on outcomes and bottom-line results, one that actively participates in the delivery of those outcomes. They need a trusted partner to achieve the vision.



I = Involved

As outlined, for any change programme, you need to define the problem or challenges, and then define the vision and this needs to be done not just top down, but also bottom up. A high-level executive stakeholder workshop should be held at the start of the project as the leadership of the business must endorse what is being done. They are the most critical stakeholders, so a visioning workshop is recommended.

Many organisations go straight to the solution, but it's vital to initially identify the exact problem and to involve those who encounter these problems in this discussion. For example, the reporting requirements of an AP team are severely impacted by what procurement do. Procurement may not be aware of that so there might not be the necessary synergy. It's imperative to not only understand the problems of one department, but all that are affected. You don't know how big a problem is until you've counted all sides, so make sure you expand your research wide enough. So, for example, if the AP team can't process an invoice because none of the purchase orders have been raised, there are issues as it could be one of the most important invoices that needs to be paid. But this issue isn't immediately clear to all involved.

Many projects fail due to business cases being created with limited input from across the organisation. So, carry out workshops, including the project team, but also involving all the staff affected by the change. There will likely be sensitivities to technological programmes,

so you need to be clear in your message and manage what you are communicating – in an appropriate format to the people that are going to be affected by it.

Once you have the vision, and agreed the definition of the problem, where you are going, what you want to achieve and what your budget looks like, you need to involve people affected by the change as often as possible through the process.

You can pick super users out of the team to be part of the project team or send people on training courses to get them used to what a project environment is going to be, but where involvement is key, is in the blueprinting of what the future is going to look like. What often happens when technology projects are run is the project management team gets as much information as it can from the users and decides what is going to be done. If you don't involve them at regular intervals, across the whole project, you will lose them. So, you need to involve everybody in most, if not all, stages of the project otherwise you're going to be overrun when you reach user acceptance, testing and training. If you want their hearts and minds when you really need them, you need to involve from the effective official start of a project. Involvement means respect, that the project leader is prepared to listen.

Speak to the technology experts for advice. Modern software vendors will share best-practices when it comes to project ad implementation management.

C = Communicate

As outlined previously, the best way to communicate is often in person as opposed to sending an email. Emailing project plans and roadmaps may seem fine, but do you win hearts and minds doing that? You can move to the cadence of a project and a programme for change where the email, the newsletter, the bulletin, the town hall, etc. has its place, but during the initial phases everybody's a bit scared of the change, they're nervous. Be aware that people will have a fear of what's going on and it's your job to allay that in the most appropriate way.

One of those ways is to use the correct communication. You will engender trust a lot more if you stand and

talk, especially if it is something difficult to say. The cadence of communication is very, very important, as well as the method used and how often it is done. This relates back to the "A". When you assume leadership, you assume responsibility, you must stand up and be counted. For example, people may lose work because of a technology change, but if you work with them, talk to them, have a constant presence with them, you're at least treating them with respect. This is an important aspect when dealing with the business as usual because you want it to bring everybody's hearts and minds to the point where everyone will embrace the change.

E³ = Execute, Engage, Enforce

You've now defined the problem, identified where you're going, involved everybody as appropriate, and communicated. Now you're about to execute the change. But it's very simplistic to think the change is done once to go-live button is pressed.

You need to manage go-live with project teams that are geared up and good to go. Bring in somebody to manage through the week to 10 days before to the week after go-live. If there is stress and uncertainty around the go-live of the project, it isn't going to work. You have a responsibility to walk the floor, live and breathe the change that you've said is going to come in the vision. But you've also got a responsibility to show everyone, that everything is under control. You must put forward a face which says, we're executing change. And the reason we're executing change is we're professionals and we're ready and we're good to go, and we have the right team to do this. You can believe in us.

You should also be able to rely on your software vendor to help at this stage. Reliable providers will have implemented hundreds of instances, so ask them for support.

The second part is engage. When the change has been executed, it's not just a case of "job done". You engage with everybody. You have a go-live communication

plan and are a visible presence. Take the team and executives through the process that the change improved. For example, raise a purchase order and match an invoice. Engage with the staff and ramp up communication levels. Don't just hand out user manuals, sit with them, understand that they're going to be nervous, understand that they don't necessarily possess anything like your level of self-confidence or experience. Work with them until the point where they are comfortable.

Finally, enforce. But how do you enforce that the change is a success? During the initial phase you identified the benchmarks, and in doing so the KPIs. But how are you going to check that the change is done? When you define the requirements of the technology change, you'll have defined reports that are to ensure that the process works. Not just that the top management have the information that they need in order to run the business. You'll have defined reports necessary to make sure that somebody can run the system and run the process of the system. If you release your change and you've no safety net or reporting net around that, how do you know it worked? And if you don't know it worked, do you think the people whose hearts and minds you've been trying to bring through this along with you, will have any idea?



Conclusion

If you are responsible for implementing new technology or organisational change, winning hearts and minds from the beginning will help decide the success of the project. By winning hearts and minds you will ensure the success of your Finance Transformation project.

ADVICE³

About the author: Michael Ryan

Michael is the Managing Partner of Finance Transformation UK. A boutique consultancy specialising in helping organisations start their finance transformation journey. He is an Accountant by profession with 25 years' experience leading Finance Transformation projects in industry roles or for the Big 4. Michael has also launched the award winning **Finance Transformation Magazine** to share his passion for sharing best practice and innovation in Finance Transformation.

A published author on Transformation, he started his career with Whitbread before moving to Argos, Deloitte Consulting and Logica CGI. He has led the design, creation and turnaround of several large-scale finance functions ranging from 50 to 1,500 FTE across multiple sites and geographies and is a regular speaker about finance and purchase-to-pay (P2P).



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**Winning Hearts and Minds to Drive
Successful Finance Transformation**

1 CPD Point

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Ryan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

On behalf of Finance Transformation UK
Michael Ryan

1st May 2024

Date