

CLOUD IMPLEMENTATION:

THE POWER OF A CHANGE AGENT NETWORK

How establishing and leveraging an effective network of change agents is fundamental to drive technology adoption.

The Power of a Change Agent Network in Cloud ERP Implementation

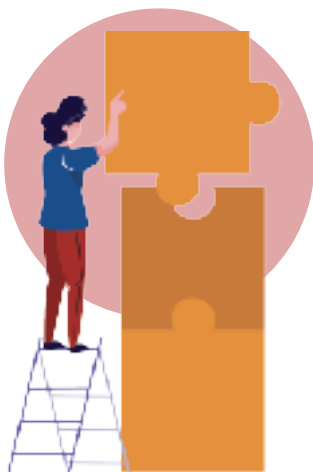
Introduction

Driving technology adoption is not a new concept. However, rapid technology advancement, the global response to the Covid-19 pandemic with the corresponding remote work environment, and the increasing shift to the cloud for enterprise resource planning (ERP) efforts keeps this topic at the forefront of transformation conversations.

The challenge today is multi-fold:

- *Change saturation and competing priorities results in reduced attention*
- *Lack of engagement from critical stakeholders leads to solutions that don't meet business needs*
- *The counterintuitive nature of adapting process to fit technology produces increased resistance from end users*
- *Ongoing resource constrained environment generates increased scrutiny on tactics*

These challenges make technology adoption more difficult than ever before and spotlights the need to be more efficient with limited resources.



Cue the Change Agent Network

The Association for Change Management Professionals¹ in their 2019 Standard for Change Management define change agents as:

- Functional or social leaders, middle management, and subject matter experts
- From different areas in the organization who are trusted by colleagues, stakeholders, and executives for their insight into and understanding of the organization

Change agents are often selected

- Network and influence over other individuals or groups
- Ability to model behaviors, provide feedback on change activities, and actively engage with others around change activities



Research has shown repeatedly that establishing and leveraging an effective network of change agents is fundamental to the adoption of a change and the overall success of a project. One study showed that colleague opinion is the biggest mitigator of resistance by influencing perception on benefits and costs². Additionally, change agent networks can allow employees to understand and provide input into change, increasing investment and buy-in in the success of the project.

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Much can be said about the role of an effective change agent network when planning major or minor changes for your organization. From training to sponsorship to communications, a change agent network crosses and combines many of the critical paths for any well-structured change plan. According to Batchelor³, the key benefits of a change agent network are to:

- Provide consistent local messaging
- Ensure consistent and appropriate critique of plans, communication, and other engagement plans
- Offer a focal point for change, containing all needs within one person
- Introduce a subject matter expert for new and developing change considerations
- Encourage a feedback touch point for measuring success
- Provide a familiar face for local staff to relate to when experiencing change
- Deliver a voice for the local needs and consideration of the needs of overlapping and connected changes

Let's consider a recent successful cloud-ERP deployment to understand the role a change agent network can play as a change management tactic.

In 2019, a major regional healthcare network with 11 hospitals and medical campuses, 300 individual physician practices and more than 29,000 employees began a multi-year journey to implement a cloud ERP system for finance and supply chain. In the middle of this effort, the Covid-19 pandemic forced the project team and impacted stakeholders to find their footing in a new 100% virtual work environment. This made identifying the right people to support the change agent network twice as important.

Here are four tips gleaned by the project team on leveraging a change agent network to drive successful adoption of a new cloud ERP system.

Lesson 1: Choose the right people to participate, starting with your sponsors and leaders.

When building an effective change agent network, it is necessary to give the effort credibility by having a sponsor within the business to back the effort. This ensures that associates view it as a legitimate use of their time. Typically, a sponsor is someone who others trust, recognizes and addresses barriers and builds genuine relationships; and is inclusive, accessible, and engaged.

Case Study Example

The project team worked with the project's executive sponsor and executive steering committee to identify an executive sponsor for the Change agent network. This individual was connected directly with the business and viewed as an authority on the work they do. Additionally, leaders with a flexible, adaptive mindset stepped up to lead the change agent network.

With the change agent network sponsor and leaders in place, the team created a plan to find similar associates across the impacted stakeholder group, who emulated similar traits, to participate.





Lesson 2: Involve the business to select the right people.

Dictating or directing an organization on who will serve as a change agent, often fails. Representatives in the business know their work and what the sub-culture is like. Research indicates that the most effective change agents know the business inside out⁴. When partnering with the business, highlight the key qualities and expectations that you are seeking. The following three qualities are the most successful traits of an effective change agent⁵:

- Takes responsibility for resolving difficult challenges
- Articulates compelling reasons for the change
- Ensures accountability over time

Case Study Example

In the healthcare project, the team was looking for associates who could be promoters and influencers of change, but with the challenges of a remote work environment, now would be networking using WebEx, Teams, and other virtual technologies. The business analyzed a list of over 2900 users in the current system and identified the top 20 percent were responsible for generating 80 percent of all data over an 18-month period. This resulted in a list of 440 associates identified as super users.

After compiling the list of super users, the executive sponsor reached out to the business and asked for nominations for change agents who could influence communications and had some level of technological expertise and flexibility.

With the assistance of the directors, 200 associates, distributed across all locations and various associate levels, were invited to participate. Participation in a change agent network should always be voluntary with the option to opt out at any time. Of those invited to participate, 120 accepted.

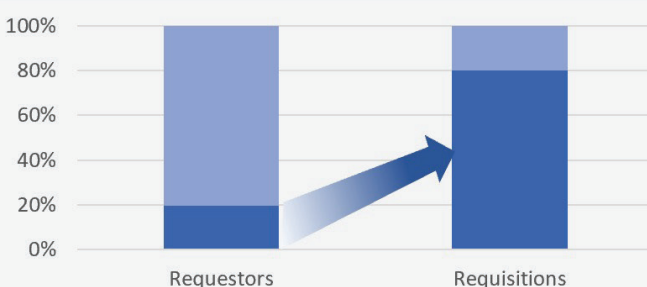
Lesson 3: Be deliberate in how you engage the change agent network.

As with any organizational change management tactic, a change agent network should be well-planned, including multiple ways for change agents to engage with the project and their peers. Most organizations understand the need to communicate to employees about a change and to train employees on the new way of doing work. Helping employees to be willing to engage in the process is often overlooked.

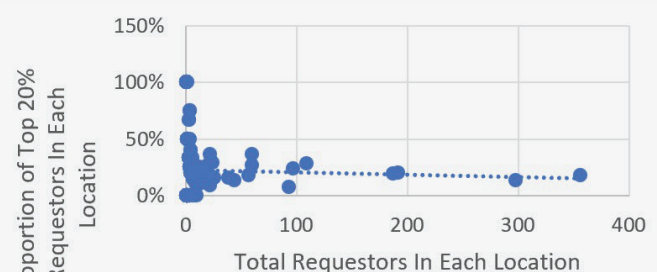
A change agent network crosses and combines many of the critical paths for any well-structured change plan.

CAN COVERAGE MODEL

The top 20% of requestors (440 associates) submit 80% of requisitions (297710 requests)



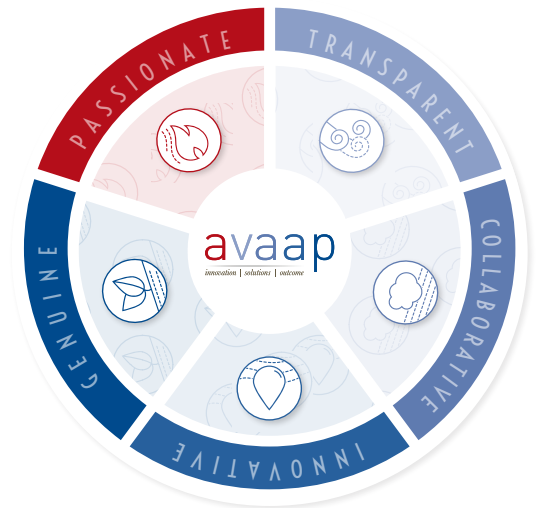
Representative of most locations and roll up to 35 leaders in clinical, administrative, or other roles





About Avaap

Avaap is an industry-focused management and technology consulting firm with experience in Workday, Tableau, and other applications. We offer full life cycle expertise from system selection through post-production support, including data analytics and a dedicated team with the skills and experience in planning and delivering successful change management programs. Organizations ranging from medium-sized businesses to large enterprises, including health systems, higher education institutions, and government agencies have partnered with Avaap for successful transformation. To learn more, visit www.avaap.com.



Is Your Organization Experiencing Change? Let's Connect.

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A key way of increasing employee willingness is through involvement in both the process and shaping of the solution. A standard meeting cadence, depending on the timeline of the project may be every month or even as often as every other week in the case of agile initiatives. The more opportunity that change agents have to share their voice with the project, the more they feel a sense of ownership of the change and have a stake in the adoption of that change.

Case Study Example

This group met regularly for the eight months leading up to the go-live and received additional information, training, communications, talking points, and coaching on how to share this with their remote peers. A virtual toolkit was used which included WebEx, Teams, Cisco Jabber, a robust intranet site with job aids and recorded videos and communication tactics to facilitate sharing information. Additionally, virtual instructor led training and eLearning were made available over an learning management system, along with collaboration forums for collecting and distributing feedback and tips and tricks.

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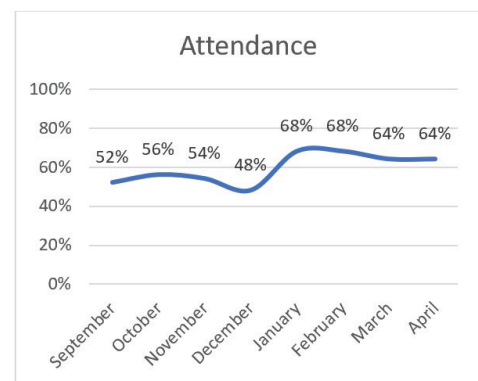
Additionally, change agent network members were included in business validation sessions, to provide direct feedback on changes to processes and technology. They were also included in user acceptance testing to review those changes in a live environment and invited to participate in the post go live support program, which included answering help desk calls from their peers. Finally, for two weeks immediately after go-live, they were invited to office hours with key leaders and subject matter experts where they could bring their or their peers' questions and concerns to be addressed directly. All of these engagement opportunities allowed the change agents to bring their knowledge of the business to bear directly on their interaction with the project team.

Lesson 4: Track your progress and use the metrics to determine how to best engage the group.

You get what you measure. When it comes to change management efforts, you should be measuring and tracking your change agent network progress. There are several ways to track the progress of a change agent network, including “post-training evaluation, communications pulse checks, and change agent network feedback.”⁶ The primary goal of any of these metrics is to show that the change agents are engaged properly with the project team, that they are moving toward readiness and adoption themselves, and that the change agent network is helping move the needle with the larger set of impacted stakeholders they interact with. This measurement can be as simple as a one question pulse check on some aspect of the change, or a multi-question survey. The key is to determine up-front what metrics will help you determine if your tactics are having a positive influence and the cadence you need to check so that you can make mid-course corrections.

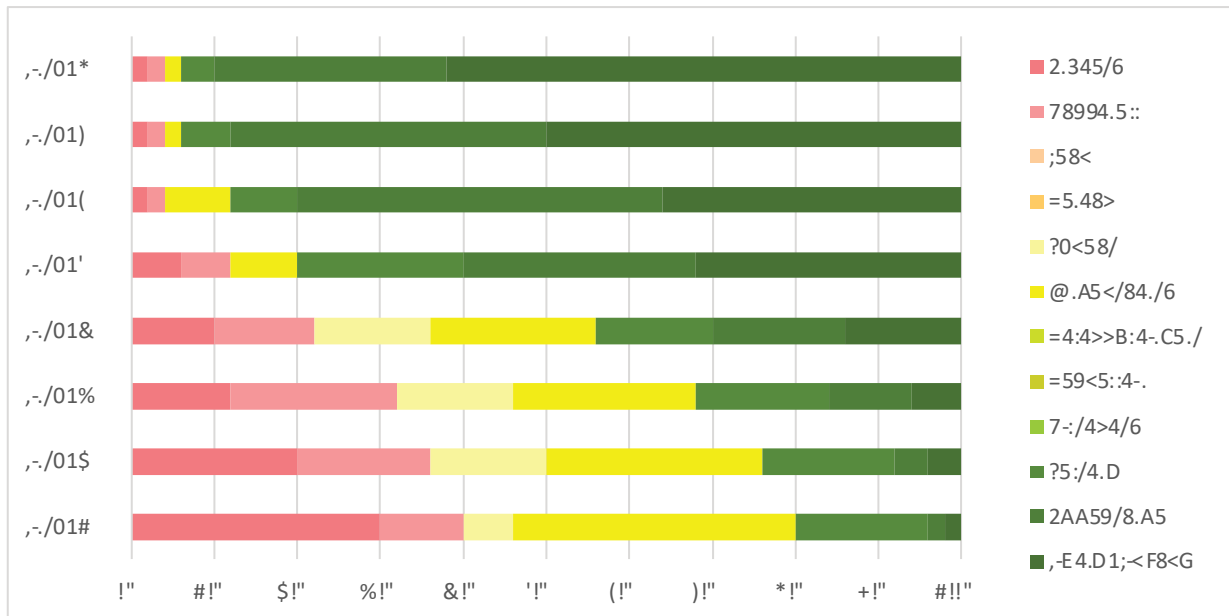
Case Study Example:

The team focused on meeting attendance and live polling in the meetings of the change agents progress through their own change curve. Apart from a dip during the month of December, coinciding with the holiday season, meeting attendance started strong and trended well toward the go-live date.





At each meeting following the kick-off in September, the facilitator also utilized Poll Everywhere, an online tool for live polling in meetings, to engage the change agents in a measurement of their own emotions as they learned more about the change and how they and their peers would be impacted in the future state. This gave the team a concrete representation of their engagement and readiness for the change, as well as their potential for adoption.



Conclusion

A change agent network is a critical tactic available to all organizations embarking on change. Be sure you pick the right people by leveraging your executive sponsor and business leaders. As you engage the change agent network be deliberate in promoting two-way communication, encouraging input from the business, and bouncing ideas of the group. Additionally, measure your progress on the change curve and use the data to help make decisions about what is and is not working. Collectively, these four steps can help you develop and maintain grassroots representation of impacted stakeholders and build a core group of supportive end users who reach out and help their peers.