



THE UNSEEN FORCE OF CHANGE AGENTS IN RECORDS MANAGEMENT

February 1, 2024

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Change is hard, but in law enforcement, there is a key position that is often overlooked to help make it happen. In the information and technology driven era of policing, which isn't going away, this key position must be filled with someone who is inherently an agent of change. Records supervisors must not only be open to change, but be leaders who continually work to evaluate processes, pursue technology to streamline workflows, and be the catalyst that alters the decision makers' mindsets about modernizing records management in the interest of information sharing, data analysis, and proactive policing.

Ed Claughton, a former police lieutenant, and founder and President of PRI, says, "While we are seeing improvement in this area, there are still too many agencies hanging on to records management of yesteryear. The time to modernize was nearly three decades ago. Today the customer experience in law enforcement is still largely driven by Word documents which are printed and signed with a pen, spreadsheets used to track public records requests, and case files which are fully electronic get printed and routed in manila envelopes."

Who is a change agent?

A change agent is an individual who identifies, advocates and plans for, and successfully implements needed organizational initiatives and changes. They succeed in getting things done, drive innovation, and improve organizational culture. They help obtain support and get buy-in. A change agent does not accept the status quo, nor buys into the "we have always done things this way" expression when aware that tasks being performed and/or services being provided are failing to promote the best use of time and/or resources.



Activities performed by a change agent

Change agents seek buy-in from key decision makers within the organization, the people who are inundated with responsibilities of operational and fiscal management, and development of strategy, policy, and procedure. Decision makers exist to ensure the department is delivering public safety services in the best way possible. They rely on their team to help make it happen.

Change agents in Records are those who make things happen. They research, plan, strategize, and execute. They are proactive and stay informed about the latest technology, information management best practices, and legal requirements.

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They draft strategic plans, have a voice in the selection of technology, and develop training curriculum for employees to ensure compliance with retention schedules, NIBRS, and CJIS security policy.

Change Agent Strategies

Affecting change requires a roadmap to get to the desired outcome. A written plan will give clarity to the purpose and keep one focused on the task at hand. If not clear and committed to the objective, the push for change will appear ambiguous. Without a plausible argument for change, the decision maker will be unable to decide if it is worth pursuing. Inspiring and selling change is best achieved through positive persuasion and influence, use of data-driven, results-oriented, concise presentations, and helping the decision maker to see what's in it for them (WIFT).

Change agents succeed in getting buy-in from decision makers by:

- ✓ Identifying and communicating the benefits and potential risks of change initiatives.
- ✓ Communicating up and down why the change is necessary and how internal and external stakeholders will be impacted.
- ✓ Advocating strongly for, and monitoring of, the transformation.
- ✓ Providing analysis of data to quantify the needs for, and success of, the proposed change.

Persuasion and influencing is the art of getting someone to believe in your goal and creating the same passion and desire you have to achieve the objective. Remember, decision makers are not in the weeds, so avoid terms they are unfamiliar with. Keep it high level, as speaking too technical may cause them to lose interest.

Initial discussion should be short and succinct. Avoid presenting multiple topics all at the same time; break a complex discussion into individual elements. If it is too difficult to explain, then it will be too difficult to be understood. Present facts that are relevant, difficult to dispute, and easy to agree with.

In doing this, you are beginning to create the "buy in" and the credibility needed to effect change.

Provide workload metrics which include the volume and types of work performed, how long it takes to get it done today, and how it could be done faster and easier with the proposed change. Providing comparisons showing data for the past three years often makes a significant impact. A decision maker is numbers driven. When a change agent demonstrates hard evidence to support the argument, you have created trust and potentially more buy-in.



Create a visual presentation to articulate your argument. A visual presentation combined with sound reasonable argument will make an impact. It is a tool to help solidify the points you want to make with the goal of informing, convincing, and inspiring the decision maker to support the initiative and take action.

The WIFT method involves presenting what is proposed through the lens of the decision maker, and those who will be impacted. The change agent has to consider what the effect of the transformation will be on others, including the pros, cons, and potential roadblocks. This technique helps to prepare a strategy and approach that is more likely to lead to success.

Change agents succeed in articulating how digital transformation will reduce the work hours required to manage paper-driven process. They explain the risks of losing records on paper, not complying with NIBRS, and failing to properly update case status and disposition.

Change agents understand the risks involved in choosing a CAD/RMS vendor without conducting a thorough needs assessment, or including the voice of the end-users in the RFP.

Change agents face backlogs head-on and get them resolved. They ensure public records requests are handled quickly. They don't use insufficient staffing as an excuse for poor performance and inefficiencies.

Change agents see the details, and the big picture, and calculate the cost savings associated with better information management procedure and technology.

When to be a change agent.

Today's records supervisors can evaluate the steps an officer must take to handle an arrest, an accident, issue a citation, or obtain a warrant, and use the information to build better workflows. If employees are having to spend unnecessary time navigating overly complex technology, inefficient business process, or outdated records management procedure, it is incumbent on records managers to take action. Organizational, technological, and procedural change can be daunting. It requires persistence and a willingness to overcome obstacles. The reality is, it can't be done alone. "This is how PRI was born", says Ed Claughton. "We exist to lighten the burden and help effect change".



FEBRUARY 2024

HOW PRI CAN HELP:

PRI specializes in public safety information management consulting, training, and technology. We help mitigate risk, re-engineer processes to enhance efficiency, and achieve compliance. Since our establishment in 2008, we have been steadfastly dedicated to assisting law enforcement with procuring, managing, and implementing information management systems, procedures, and policy, all the while ensuring compliance with the complex landscape of public records, NIBRS, and technology standards. Our web-based public records request management system, GovQuest, allows you to receive, track, assign, and process requests online. Our consulting programs help you implement technology successfully, while controlling vendor's unnecessary costs.

Contact us for assistance at info@policerecordsmanagement.com or 305-460-0096.