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A Systems Engineering Approach to Change Management That Overcomes the Barriers to User Acceptance

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Definitions are important to understanding the message of this paper. Therefore, let's begin with the two key definitions. At a high level a system is defined as the combination of related parts organized into a complex whole¹. And change management is defined as a structured approach to transitioning individuals, teams, and organizations from the current state to a desired future state². Taken together, these definitions should dispel the notion that moving people from the status quo to a new way of working with digital technology will not be either easy or quick. As we have all learned, it is complicated and sometimes, unpleasant.

As an illustration, Douglas K. Smith gives us words of wisdom as we try to get users aligned with the new technology. He says, "You can encourage, cajole, demand, reward, support, flatter, educate, reassure, inspire and threaten, but until enough people, including you risk some combination of

- Choice
- Action
- Reflection
- Repetition

Neither individual nor organizational change occurs.³

For another example, we can look back at the construction of the Eiffel Tower. It was built in 1889 by Alexander Eiffel for the World's Fair being held in Paris. It was considered a radical design at the time and, when completed, was the tallest structure in the world until the Empire State Building was completed 40 years later in New York City. From the very beginning, the Tower elicited strong reactions from the citizens of Paris. Almost immediately, there was a petition circulated to prevent it from being built. In addition, there were strong protests from the artist community which was very powerful in Paris at the time. Others concerns were expressed, such as the nature lovers who feared its great height would interfere with the flight of birds over Paris. As a result it was almost torn down in 1910 but survived and is now a symbol for Paris recognized all over the world. Acceptance finally occurred and we can learn from the Tower.

The purpose of this session is to provide a blueprint for a systems engineering approach to change management to overcome user resistance.

As we begin, there are certain questions that always come to mind.

¹ From Encarta Dictionary (North America)

² Ibid

³ Taking Charge of Change by Douglas K. Smith. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1996.