

10 Tips for Choosing the Right Change Management Consultant

The right fit can make or break your change initiative

If you've been thinking that Change Management Consultants are flakes who spend all their time talking about 'feelings' and not enough time demonstrating a commitment to the bottom line, you're not alone. But the truth is that the right change management expertise can make all the difference to a change initiative: They can help improve ROI, speed the pace of change, help you retain your top performers, and prevent the project from going off-track. All of that contributes to the success of your project and your company's bottom line.

It's just a matter of partnering with the right consultant.

Here's what you need to consider in order choose the right consultant for your change initiative:

1. **Experience:** What changes have they implemented as part of an organization? What changes have they experienced as an employee? As a manager? As a leader? Someone who has experienced change from a variety of perspectives is going to bring more understanding to your initiative. If a change consultant has never worked in a company (other than his or her consulting firm) they may not be able to help you build the best plan for your initiative, no matter how much training they have.
2. **Who will actually be doing the work?** A senior consultant may be the one creating and perhaps even overseeing the change plan, but delegating the actual work to specialists or juniors. That can be a problem if you need someone 'on the ground' who can make decisions and bring his or her expertise fluidly into a project. Decide what is most important and make your decision accordingly. You may save money on a junior consultant in pure costs, but it may cost you money in the long run.
3. **Their role in the changes:** Be clear about what you are looking for in a change consultant. Is this someone who will be working with change control? Are they needed to figure out the structure needed to achieve your goals? Do you need help managing the people side of the change? Change consultants can have experience in different areas. Be sure you know what component(s) you need, and look for someone with the right experience.
4. **Buzzwords vs results:** The best consultants are good at straightforward communications and outlining clear expectations. If you're hearing a lot of terms like 'change agent' and 'transformation catalyst', call someone else. Likewise if the consultant spends a lot of time talking about models and

theories. You want them to be grounded in all of that, but it is essential that they can translate that knowledge into action and be able to relate what they do to the business. If they can't, make that call.

5. **Approach:** Effective change management consultants ask good business questions and are looking to understand how all the pieces fit together before outlining a plan. If they say they can just jump in and start delivering results, no questions asked, they may not have the skills or the depth you need.
6. **How many people will the consultant be bringing in?** An outside consultant may be able to bring clear vision and specialists to the table, but in order for a change to be successful, your internal employees should be fully engaged in the process. Leaving change entirely to external consultants can mean the change leaves when they do. Find someone who can help you build your internal expertise. And I don't mean in HR, I mean in the business units. Long-term change success requires building agility and change skills in your line organizations, not in HR.
7. **Pragmatism:** Good change management isn't about holding hands and singing folk songs with employees - it's about making smart business changes that ultimately lead to a better bottom line. A successful change management consultant is one who knows that managing the people piece will drive business success. Your chosen consultant needs to demonstrate that they understand the business and can balance the people side of things. If they can only talk about the people side it will not help in the long run.
8. **What is their success rate?** Don't be afraid to ask. If they can't tell you it's higher than 98%, don't hire them. It's that simple. If they say it is hard to tell just how the change management efforts related to the success of past projects - REALLY don't hire them.
9. **Ask about their biggest failure** - and how they turned it around. Anyone who tells you they haven't had a failure is lying - and anyone who can't tell you how they fixed a big failure isn't ready to lead your change initiative.
10. **Does their process include a 'Lessons Learned' component?** It should. Successful change management generates valuable knowledge and insight about the organization, and it's important that this knowledge is articulated, documented, and transferred to the organization. Otherwise all that knowledge just walks out the door along with the consultant at the end of the project.