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DECODING SUCCESS



Navigating change management for lasting impact by Peter J. Sherman

JUST THE FACTS

Change management is a crucial element of any quality management system because it ensures that all changes to processes, products and services are

managed systematically to maintain or improve quality.

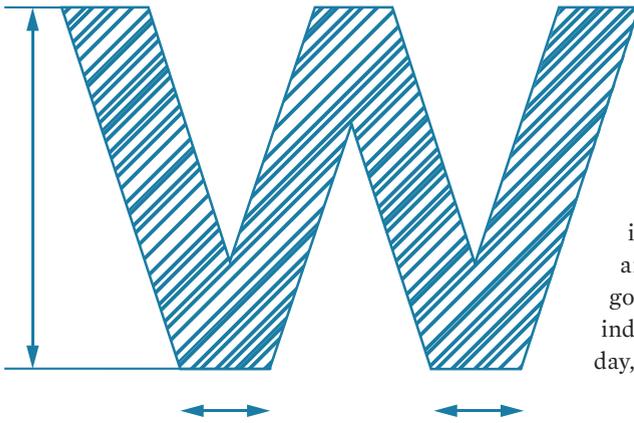
Successful change management hinges on a clear vision, strong

leadership and effective communication.

A quantitative-based change management survey can be used to

assess a change initiative's probability of success. It consists of the three sections: planning change, implementing change and sustaining change.

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What makes some quality programs succeed while others never get off the ground? Why do some organizations succeed in sustaining continuous improvement gains while others fail?

Several factors play a role, including vision and goal clarity, strong leadership commitment, training, access to systems and tools, resource availability, consistent communication, governance, a way to measure and monitor key performance indicators (KPI), and a recognition program. At the end of the day, it boils down to effective change management.

This article defines change management and offers a practical change management survey to help identify gaps earlier in the cycle before they become major problems. I also share two case studies involving a large manufacturer and an international joint venture.

What is change management?

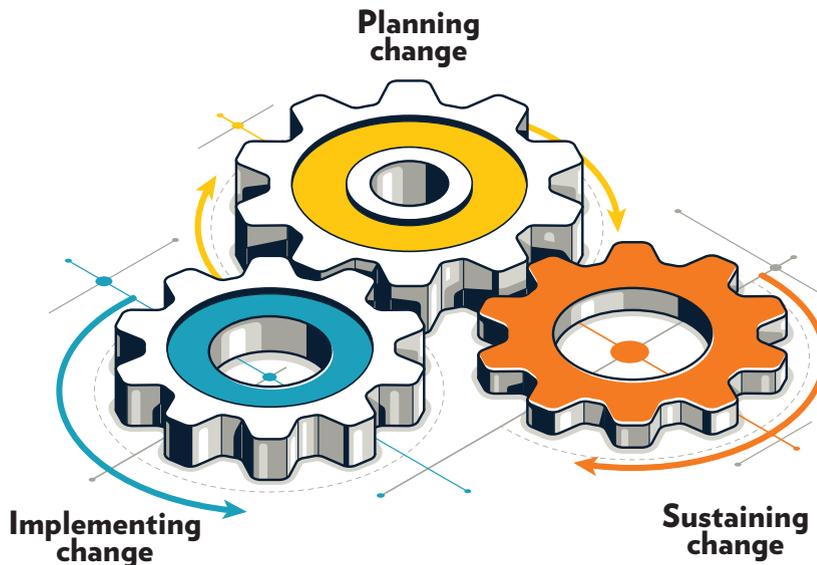
ASQ defines change management as “The process, tools and techniques used to manage change, including planning, validating and implementing change, and verifying effectiveness of change.”¹

The purpose of change management is to implement strategies for effecting change, controlling change and helping people adapt to change. Meaningful organizational change can be daunting. Often, it requires many levels of cooperation within an organization, significant planning and tireless execution. Think about your new program as a life cycle with three distinct phases (see Figure 1):

1. **Planning change.** Committed leaders must drive the effort and communicate a vision of that change. Change cannot be fragile. It must be compelling, clear and bold. Stakeholders must understand how they will benefit from the change and articulate it to others.
2. **Implementing change.** Leadership and stakeholders must be actively engaged in the effort. KPIs are identified. Training, tools and systems are provided. Stakeholders are trained appropriately. Projects that support the change are selected and managed actively.
3. **Sustaining change.** This is more than monitoring results and locking in the gains. It’s about making the change endure and flourish. To this end, it is vital to celebrate success and share key learnings of what is and is not working. Establishing a governance structure helps reinforce the change while holding stakeholders accountable. Change management is a crucial element of any quality management system (QMS)—such as ISO 9001, the Malcolm Baldrige Excellence Framework or total quality management, for example—because it ensures that all changes to processes, products and services are managed systematically to maintain or improve quality.

FIGURE 1

Planning, implementing and sustaining change



Change management survey

I have developed a quantitative-based change management survey to assess the probability of success with any change initiative. See Table 1, p. 28, for a tearaway template. It consists of the three sections that correspond to the change management phases mentioned earlier. Depending on the stage of your change initiative, use the appropriate section. The scorecard uses a Likert scale (one to five) to quantify the answers and is color-coded for easy interpretation. The scale is:

1. Strongly disagree (red).
2. Disagree.
3. Neither agree nor disagree (yellow).
4. Agree.
5. Strongly agree (green).

Each section contains a set of questions, and participants rank their answer along the Likert scale. The last column calculates the score by averaging the individual numerical rankings.

For example, Table 2 (p. 29) shows how 10 participants answered question one about planning change. Table 3 (p. 29) shows how the scores were captured. Cross-multiplying the ranking with the number of respective scores for that ranking

produces a raw score of 28. The raw score of 28 divided by 10 participants results in a score of 2.8.

Each question is categorized broadly in terms of people, process or technology for high-level analysis. These categories are broken down further into various dimensions of change management including leadership, vision, stakeholders, communication, benefits, metrics, tools, training, project management, reporting, governance and recognition. These dimensions allow the organization to identify precisely recurring themes in its change initiative.

Interpreting scores

Results that are solidly green (scores between four and five) indicate the change initiative has a high likelihood of success. The organization is aligned on planning, implementing and sustaining change. There is a healthy balance among people, process and technology. The culture of change is lasting and durable, so it must be kept alive and top of mind. In other words, continue investing in people (new employees and leadership development), processes and technology.



TABLE 1

Change management survey

Category	No.	Category	Dimension	Question	Strongly disagree		Neutral		Strongly agree		Score
					1	2	3	4	5		
Planning change	1	People	Leadership	Are there designated senior leaders who are the champions of change?							
	2	People	Leadership	Do they provide the time, passion and focus needed for change to happen?							
	3	Process	Vision	Has the reason for the change been articulated clearly throughout the organization?							
	4	People	Communication	If asked, could anyone in your organization explain the reason and why they support the change?							
	5	Process	Benefits	Is the desired outcome from the change clear?							
	6	People	Benefits	If asked, could anyone in your organization explain how the outcome will affect the organization as well as themselves?							
Implementing change	1	People	Stakeholders	Have key stakeholders been identified and actions taken to gain their strong commitment to the change?							
	2	People	Stakeholders	Are the stakeholders' actions of commitment visible throughout the organization?							
	3	Process	Standard work	Have standard policies, processes and procedures been developed?							
	4	Process	Training	Have stakeholders been trained with the appropriate tools and techniques?							
	5	Technology	Systems/tools	Are the necessary systems, technology and resources available?							
	6	Process	Project management	Are projects identified, evaluated and prioritized using a framework that aligns with your organization's goals?							
	7	Process	Project management	Are projects actively managed throughout the life cycle (initiation, planning, implementation and closure)?							
Sustaining change	1	Process	Benefits	After the change has started, does it endure and flourish?							
	2	Process	Communication	Are key learnings shared throughout your organization to reinforce the change consistently?							
	3	Process	Reporting	Have meaningful indicators (key performance indicators) been established to measure the change's progress?							
	4	People	Governance	Are individuals held accountable (performance reviews) for meeting the change's targets as well as progress toward the targets?							
	5	People	Governance	Are all management practices (staffing, development, communication and resources) aligned to complement and reinforce the change?							
	6	People	Recognition	Are accomplishments and milestones celebrated? Are stakeholders recognized for their achievements?							

TABLE 2

Scoring example

Participant	Score
1	3
2	3
3	2
4	3
5	3
6	4
7	2
8	3
9	3
10	2

TABLE 3

Final score calculation template

Strongly disagree	Neutral		Strongly agree		Raw score	Score
1	2	3	4	5		
0	3	6	1	0	28	2.8

Scores that are solidly red (between one and two) indicate the change initiative has a poor probability of success. Without strengthening the organization's change management systems, the organization may not see the expected results.

The case for change cannot be fragile. It must be bold, clear and direct with leadership out in front. It also must be communicated openly and consistently. What type of vision are you developing? What does success look like? How will you win in the marketplace? How can you create the need for change (creating a sense of urgency)? How are you building a guiding coalition (a shared vision, trust and the right people)?

If most scores are yellow (three), your odds of success are 50/50. The change initiative is stuck in the middle. Stakeholders are along for the ride instead of behind the wheel. Mobilizing commitment is challenging, and change efforts can easily slide into jeopardy (red).

Consider strategic workout sessions with key stakeholders to gain clarity, alignment and prioritization. Activities might include strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis, visioning (today vs. tomorrow) or goal setting/action plan framework (objectives, goals, strategies and measures). Explore how you can influence change at the individual, department and enterprise level using the influencer model.² Break through functional area silos or competing intra-company interests with voice of the customer (VOC), *kaizen* events and *gemba* walks.

Case study: auto manufacturer

In early 2021, I was working with a large auto manufacturer that was embarking on a new product compliance program. The scope was broad and deep. It touched every part of the organization including risk management, processes and IT systems, training compliance, engineering and design, testing, technical audit and administration.

The most challenging part was that the organization was rolling out the change initiative while also operationalizing it. This generated a lot of firefighting, frustration, inefficient work practices, inconsistent quality of deliverables, as well as missed or nonexistent deadlines. We were flying the proverbial airplane while trying to fix it.

Given the circumstances, we conducted the entire change management survey anonymously with 68 stakeholders (leaders, managers and frontline staff) encompassing two groups: the product compliance group and its internal customers (other departments). In this way, we could see how aligned the groups were.

1. Planning change. Initially, we analyzed the overall results (see Table 4, p. 31). The overall 3.5 score for the questions about planning change indicated uncertainty around the initiative's launch—specifically, leadership's role (questions one and two) and the organization's ability to explain why it supported the change and how it would benefit (questions four and six).

Despite strong agreement on communicating the reason for the initiative and its outcomes (questions three and five), this was only part of the story to create lasting change. Leadership must be highly visible, out in front and take time to support the change. Likewise, the organization must internalize the change by explaining why it supports the change and demonstrating how it will benefit.

When we broke down the scores in the “Planning change” section by the two groups, we noticed something more troubling: The product compliance group scored a 4.3, while the internal customers scored a 3.1. Clearly, there was a major disconnect between how these groups viewed the planning change stage. The case for change cannot be fragile or fragmented. It must be bold, highly visible and clearly supported throughout all levels of the organization with a sense of urgency. Understanding “Why” is key.

Our first action was to conduct a VOC survey with internal customers to better understand their needs relative to product management compliance. The most consistent need across departments was to simplify the compliance process (who, what, where, when and how) to reduce rework and delays associated with mistakes.

We developed a clear product compliance roadmap, created a streamlined work request intake process and conducted a series of training workshops for the departments. In parallel, we organized a series of informal town hall meetings with leaders to leverage the findings of the VOC survey to level-set with the departments, reinforce how the product compliance program would address those needs, and field questions from the frontline and managers.

Six months later, we conducted the same survey on planning change. The overall results showed firm agreement (4.5 score), while the gap between the product compliance group and its customers narrowed significantly to 4.4 and 4.6, respectively.

2. **Implementing change.** The overall 3.7 score for implementing change reflected borderline agreement on how the change initiative was being implemented. While there was consensus on daily work activities, training and resources, uncertainty remained regarding stakeholder visibility (question two). Visible signals of commitment can be powerful levers for implementing change.

We performed a SWOT analysis to help develop strategies to improve internal operational capabilities during implementation. We also created and published a formal responsible, accountable, consulted and informed chart to identify and clarify roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders. Finally, we took time to formally recognize the four stages of team development (forming, storming, norming and performing) to help identify and overcome organizational barriers to success.

Recognizing the progression of team development is vital to knowing what type of leadership technique to apply. When the team is forming (enthusiasm is high, but there is anxiety about roles and expectations), for example, it is critical to educate the team on the “why” and expectations. If the team is storming (resistance to collaboration and conflict), the leader should demonstrate the appropriate expectations and behaviors. If the team is norming (cooperation begins and adjustment to team concept), the leader should be a coach and guide team members when needed. Finally, when the team is performing (team members are energized and excited about working together, proactively identify issues and take actions), it is time to enable team members by providing them with the resources to lead and grow. Let them drive the initiative.

Externally, we conducted regular, methodical *gemba* walks with each department to understand how they were adapting to the new product compliance process and identify improvement opportunities. *Gemba* is a Japanese word meaning “real place,” or the place where the action is and where value is created. A *gemba* walk, sometimes referred to as a process walk, is a structured, respectful approach to understanding the nature of the work and improving it.³

In conjunction with the *gemba* walks, we conducted regular *kaizen* events with the departments. *Kaizen* is a Japanese word meaning “continuous improvement.” A *kaizen* event as an “accelerated improvement effort lasting one to five days in which actual changes are rapidly implemented.”⁴

Our *kaizens* were mini *kaizens*: well-defined, small in scope and conducted over one to two days. Leadership participation was required. The primary tool we used to get leadership buy-in was a simple business case. We made a commitment to conduct one to two mini *kaizens* every month. One year after the changes, we took another



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TABLE 4

Case study overall results

No.	Question	Strongly disagree		Neutral		Strongly agree		Score
		1	2	3	4	5		
1	Are there designated senior leaders who are the champions of change?			3.4				3.5
2	Do they provide the time, passion and focus needed for change to happen?			3.3				
3	Has the reason for the change been articulated clearly throughout the organization?				4.0			
4	If asked, could anyone in your organization explain the reason and why they support the change?			3.4				
5	Is the desired outcome from the change clear?				3.8			
6	If asked, could anyone in your organization explain how the outcome will affect the organization as well as themselves?			3.1				
1	Have key stakeholders been identified and actions taken to gain their strong commitment to the change?				4.0			3.7
2	Are the stakeholders' actions of commitment visible throughout the organization?			3.0				
3	Have standard policies, processes and procedures been developed?				3.8			
4	Have stakeholders been trained with the appropriate tools and techniques?				3.8			
5	Are the necessary systems, technology and resources available?				4.1			
6	Are projects identified, evaluated and prioritized using a framework that aligns with your organization's goals?				3.7			
7	Are projects actively managed throughout the life cycle (initiation, planning, implementation and closure)?				3.7			3.6
1	After the change has started, does it endure and flourish?			3.6				
2	Are key learnings shared throughout your organization to reinforce the change consistently?			3.4				
3	Have meaningful indicators (key performance indicators) been established to measure the change's progress?				3.7			
4	Are individuals held accountable (performance reviews) for meeting the change's targets as well as progress toward the targets?				3.9			
5	Are all management practices (staffing, development, communication and resources) aligned to complement and reinforce the change?			3.2				
6	Are accomplishments and milestones celebrated? Are stakeholders recognized for their achievements?				3.7			

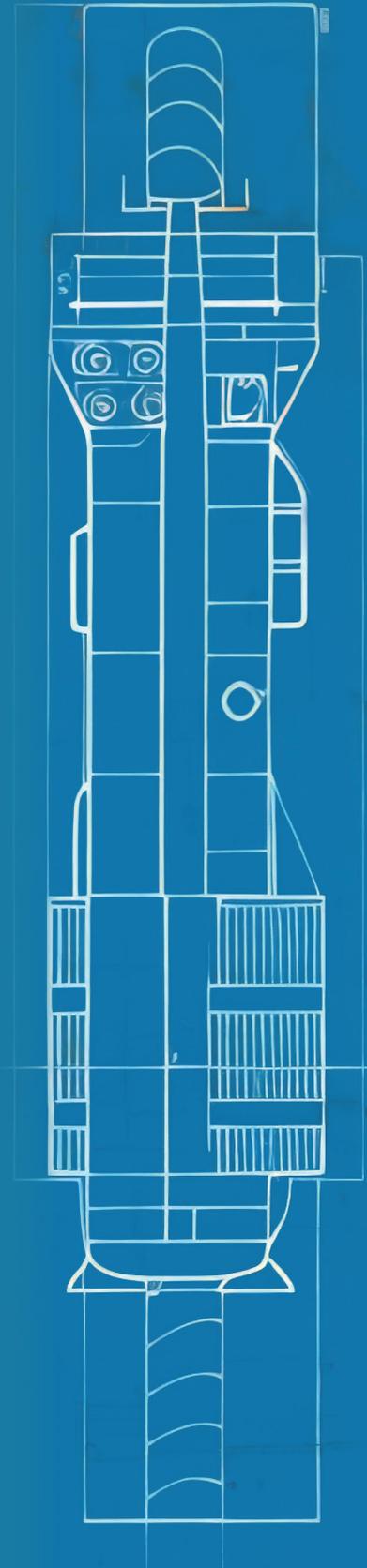
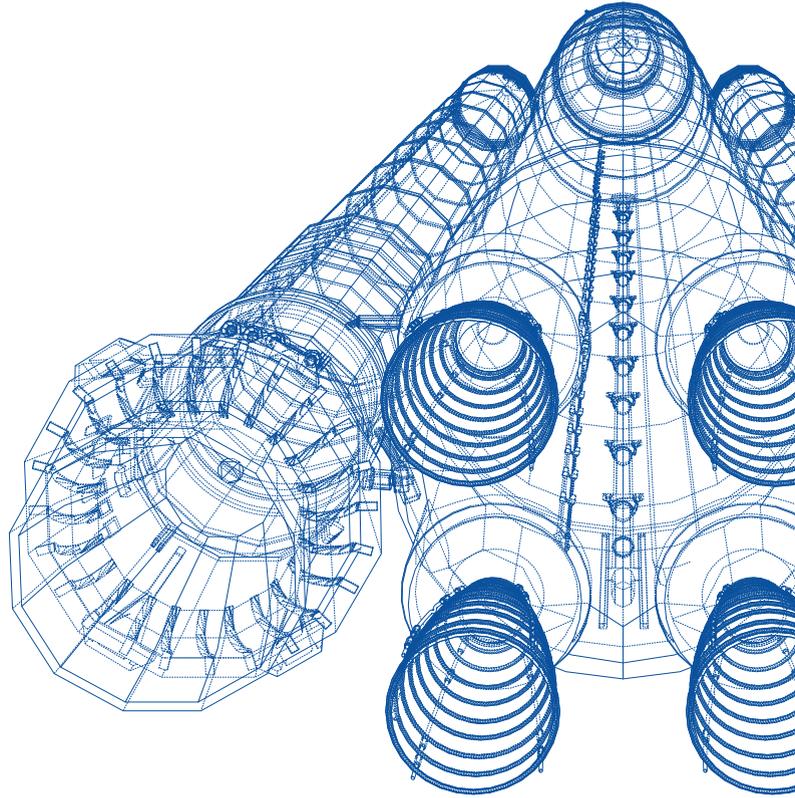
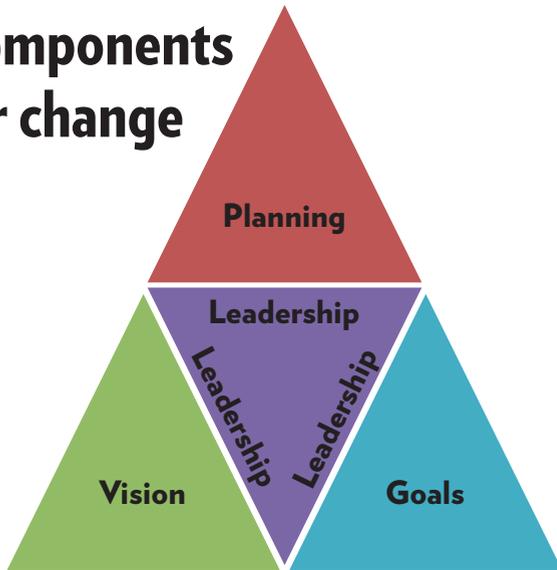


FIGURE 2

Components for change



survey on implementing change. The overall results showed a marked increase from 3.7 to 4.7.

- Sustaining change.** The overall 3.6 score for sustaining change showed continued uncertainty in cultivating a culture of lasting change. While there was lukewarm agreement on the mechanics of sustaining the program (such as establishing KPIs, performance reviews and recognition programs), uncertainty remained about sustaining the changes, sharing key learnings to continuously improve the program and aligning management resources to optimize outcomes (questions one, two and five).

The convenient answer was the product compliance program was in the early stages of deployment when the survey was taken. We knew we needed more time to evaluate this stage properly. Measuring the success of a new product compliance program is challenging largely because the scope of the effort is large and the product life cycle is so long. We took another survey on sustaining change 18 months into the program and the results improved from 3.7 to 4.2. The organization was starting to see fruit from its efforts.

Case study: Cbeyond Communications

The strategies, tools and techniques described earlier for addressing change initiatives vary depending on the organization and challenges. Ultimately, everyone must draw on their own experiences and contexts to determine what is best. My professional experience dealing with large-scale change occurred in 2013 with Cbeyond Communications, a \$500 million revenue, publicly held telecommunications firm based in Atlanta.

At the time, we decided to partner with Tech Mahindra, an IT and telecom company based in India, to perform critical telephone porting, circuit provisioning and service order activities. As director of continuous improvement and the program leader, I knew this was going to be challenging given the sensitive nature of the initiative, scope of work, distance (Atlanta is 8,000 miles from Delhi), difference in hours of operation (Delhi is 9.5 hours ahead of Atlanta), and language and cultural differences. We could not afford to create an us (Cbeyond employees) vs. them (Tech Mahindra employees) environment.

Our first step was to make the case for change—or, in other words, provide context to internal and outsourcing employees. They had to know the “why.” For Cbeyond, the partnership was a strategic decision to free up its employees to deliver newer products. The alternative meant more layoffs and risking the organization’s demise. For Tech Mahindra, it was an opportunity to leverage its operations skills and talents to assist a U.S.-based company.

Although requirements for change vary, at a minimum they should include the following core components (see Figure 2):

- Vision:** What future success looks like—not next quarter or next year, but three to five years from now. Vision should be grand in scope. A vision is a picture of where you want to be. If you can see it, you can be it.
- Goals:** These are the steps toward your vision. How do you achieve a vision? One step at a time. Goals are like the rungs of a ladder or the footsteps of a journey. Having goals makes accomplishment more likely. Goals should be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and timely (SMART).

FIGURE 3

Change management success equation



► **Planning:** A means of fulfilling goals efficiently. Some goals can be achieved quickly while others are long term and might require several smaller steps. Organizing goals and capturing details is part of planning.

You need all three components of the equation to achieve successful change management. If the vision is missing, chaos and confusion will ensue. Fear and anxiety will thrive in an atmosphere in which leaders don't provide employees with proper context about why they are embarking on the quality program or transformation initiative. Without SMART goals, change will be slow or nonexistent. In the absence of planning, expect false starts, frustration and aggravation. See Figure 3.

Strong leadership is the glue that holds all three components together. Leadership embodies many characteristics including developing rather than just managing people; innovating instead of administering; thinking long term instead of short term; looking at the horizon, not just the bottom line; and asking "what" and "why" instead of "how" and "when." Leadership is as simple as raising your hand.

The hardest part about any quality culture is making it sustainable. It requires relentless discipline, steady communication

and regular recognition. The formula for sustaining the quality culture in the India office was the same formula used 8,000 miles away in Atlanta. We continued conducting daily meetings, real-time coaching and corrections, regular root cause analysis and start-stop-continue exercises. Achievement recognition was frequent and communicated throughout Tech Mahindra and Cbeyond. There was no secret to our success. It was based on a solid foundation of a compelling vision, shared goals, detailed planning and strong leadership.

The keys to success

Successful change management hinges on a clear vision, strong leadership and effective communication throughout the organization. Having a QMS in place significantly enhances the chances of successful change management. By implementing practical tools such as the change management survey and learning from case studies, organizations can navigate the complexities of change with confidence, ensuring sustainable progress and lasting impact. **QP**

EDITOR'S NOTE

Visit this article's webpage at qualityprogress.com for a list of references.



Peter J. Sherman is the managing partner of Riverwood Associates LLC in Atlanta. He earned a master's degree in civil engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge and an MBA from Georgia State University in Atlanta. From 2008 to 2011, Sherman was the lead instructor of Emory University's Six Sigma certificate program in Atlanta. A senior member of ASQ, Sherman is an ASQ-certified quality engineer, a Smarter Solution-certified Lean Six Sigma Master Black Belt and an APICS-certified supply chain professional. Sherman has served as chair of ASQ Atlanta Section 1502.