



# How to Implement a New Approach the Easy Way?

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## The hypothetical new approach

Let us suppose for the sake of readability of this article that there is a new approach with the name 'High Fidelity'. HiFi in short, as we love abbreviations in NATO.

Some companies claiming to be pioneers in the application of HiFi have made impressive strides forward in these difficult times and enjoyed a more than normal increase in shareholders' value. This is certainly something to copy in our aim for success. Although there are a lot of talks, plenty of articles on the internet, many opportunities for conferences on the topic, and tons of books on this new management approach, there is a public discussion about what it is. There is no one, unique passe-partout approach. However, everybody agrees that it is a change in enterprise culture supported by the use of special techniques.

You and some of your colleagues have attended a conference that touched on the new approach. Later, there was a guest speaker in the HQ giving a TED-level speech on HiFi. He presented a plan and led a workshop on the topic. His exposé confirmed that HiFi is the thing of the future. We should be its leading example in NATO.

You are thrilled when you are asked to implement HiFi in our HQ. After SACT and COS brief you on the task ahead, you step out of the meeting room and wonder how to implement this new, promising approach. You remember that you had taken a leaflet after an interesting lecture. You run through the books and papers on your desk in search of that golden ticket. There it is. The trifold reads:

## The Easy Way

This implementation blueprint is based on years of experience with all kinds of changes. It is a sound change management approach that works with whatever type of change you want to implement. Change management theory does not care about the subject in need of change, only with the process of change. No matter if it is about implementing a culture of quality, innovation, warfighting... the steps to follow are always the same. Copy-replace (smartly) all by whatever you want to change.

There are several change models out there. Think about the Lewin's, the Kotter's, the ADKAR model, and the Nudge theory, just to name a few. These are complicated models to use, certainly, if you have no experience with them, and even then, success is not guaranteed. Anyhow, their success rate is not higher than the "easy way". The latter fits better the standard management style and is simple to execute.

The blueprint follows a quasi-standardized, straightforward plan for somebody tasked with implementing a new way of working with an underlining culture change assessed as very promising or even absolutely necessary by people high in the command chain.

What are its major steps?

*Step one: Make an inventory of projects.*

Make an inventory of all current projects you can put the label 'HiFi' on (or whatever name your new approach has). Make sure you are broad enough with your criteria or better do not have criteria. There is no agreed-on definition out there and you do not want to be bogged down in a discussion of what HiFi really means and what the difference is. The goal is to be as inclusive as possible.

Once staff sense that one must have that new label attached to a project to be visible, they will happily present their project in such a way that it will fit in the inventory. There may be some staff members unwilling to offer their project because they do not believe in the new approach. There are always people resisting change, even if it is for the better of the organization or themselves. Do not be shy to put also projects of resisting leaders in the inventory if that helps you.

Of course, once you have a bunch of projects collected, somebody will suggest streamlining your collection. It is logical to get rid of duplication whatever that might be, to make a master plan to match the priorities, to link the different projects to make sure that all objectives are supported... These tasks are hard to counter because they make perfect sense. You should be grateful for such a suggestion because it gives birth to a multitude of tasks. Enough to keep you and a whole team busy for months.

Do not worry, if nobody proposes the improvement of the inventory. You can suggest it yourself and still get a lot of support. People like to put their teeth into tasks they know, and applying procedures is an easy and well-known one.

*Step two: Write a communication plan.*

To be viewed as important, by that I mean your work, you have to tell how good you are to the rest of the world. Your new approach will change, no, is changing the way you do

business and everybody needs to know that. Your huge inventory of projects in line with the new approach is the perfect proof of that. Shine up the armour. Sell what you are doing by drafting a communication plan, make sure that the communication plan of your organization is aligned with it. Also, you must stress that people use your plan and that they preach the good news. This is a success and everybody has to spread the good news. There may be no doubt as to the effectiveness of the approach.

*Step three: Send out the troops.*

Make apostles that must preach the new religion. Send your troopers to every corner of the organization. Do not bother about telling them what the principles are, they will learn it by studying the projects. We are at the beginning of this approach and we all have to learn.

There will be techniques to be learned and courses to attend. Send people to these. You will not be able to send enough to these kinds of training opportunities, but that is not your fault. Keep pressing for more. Make sure you have a 'trooper' in every successful project.

Anyhow, you can tell that HiFi must be applied in every step of every process. Even more important, HiFi should be built into every process and procedure from the start. The earlier in the process it is considered, the better. Appoint somebody responsible for checking that it is done.

### Super-relativity

By now, you should be convinced of the simplicity of this popular approach. It is really easy. Everybody can do it, or even come up with it without prior knowledge. It is loved by almost every would-be change manager. During my career, I have seen it put into action 5, 6 times.

And see it fail every time! Why?

Although it makes sense, the 'Easy Way' does not take into account that change is a human-centric or cultural approach. It is not a new production line you want to introduce. No, you want to change how people think, act. To change people, your movement needs energy. The bigger the change, the more energy you need. Loving the bare beauty of formulas, the energy you can harvest for a change project can be found by applying the law of super-relativity. That law is expressed as:

$$E = mc^3$$

With:

E = The energy of the change impulse. A good approach will lead to high energy available to overcome the 'resistance' against the change. This resistance is the sum of all forces pushing to return to the old way of doing things. The energy level is not constant. It varies during the period of change and is consumed by resistance. You need to pay close attention to it until the very end.

m = The mass of people willing to change. Ideally, every member of your organization wants the change, but that is rarely the case. Your mass needs not to be competent, yet. Their understanding of and desire to change is what is important here. Although the more people, the better, remember that the first atomic bomb weighting tons only transformed 8 grams into energy with great effect. A small, engaged, and successful group may cause a chain reaction.

c = The level of commitment. Pay close attention, I do not use the word 'involvement'. I talk about commitment, the degree that expresses the stakes that people have in the change. Real commitment comes from people that (implicitly) follow the rule: succeed or out. Being a 'homo constitution', the effect of a committed person high in the hierarchy is bigger than that of a committed staff officer. Commitment goes much farther than telling somebody else to change. Although a committed commander can tip the scale, there is an important lesson to be learned from the toilet paper crisis a few months ago. A seamlessly unimportant commodity can have a huge effect. A few committed workers can be powerful change agents too.

c = The perceived level of the crisis or competition. A high level of crisis, with individual survival at the extreme end of the scale, will free a high level of energy if there is a plausible solution offered. Most people prefer to fight over flight if they have a chance, however slim, of success. Standing on a burning platform, most will jump quicker in the water if they see a nice beach within reach. Be aware that some only need to be dreaming of the beach to jump. The fire, the crisis, must not be real, just perceived. Although an imaginary one only has a temporary value.

c = The level of competence in the new approach. You need people who know how to swim. In the beginning, you might need to get that expertise from outside - you might be surprised by the available in-house expertise - unless the crisis is not a clear and present danger. However, external expertise needs to be translated into your organization. There is only one option for that translation and that is doing it. Do not look for low-hanging fruits. These are long gone. Intelligent people spot these quick wins easily and do not consider these as convincing proof. Pick a project that is assessed as moderately difficult with an output in the short term. Do not overload it with exceptional resources and focus on the new approach. Learn from it!

As with all multiplications, the highest result is reached by finding a good balance. If one factor is going towards zero, the energy for your change project will be drained. For example, without commitment, things will stay the same. Take care that your change activities are divers to all factors. Sometimes you might need to sacrifice one high scoring factor in favour of a very low one.

### Why the 'Easy Way' goes against super-relativity?

#### *Step one: Make an inventory of projects.*

By collecting current projects, you start diluting the new approach. If most, current projects are HiFi, what is the new thing? Why do we need to change if old projects are fine? Where is the fire? Do we need a beach? If their project is HiFi, why not mine?

Committed people trying to bring change are prevented from using the new skills because others do not feel the need for change. Your change agents are becoming isolated.

An inventory does increase, to put it mildly, neither the number of people willing to change, nor the collective competence, the crisis, or the commitment. At best, it keeps the energy level at a status quo, but most of the time the energy flows away like a leaking, peeping balloon.

Change is much more than a collection of HiFi labelled projects. As far as I know, an inventory has never produced an output, all that work is just overhead.

#### *Step two: Write a communication plan.*

A plan to communicate how good you apply the new approach has a similar effect on your available energy. If you are already that good, why changing? With a good plan, you will fool your external stakeholders for a while, but internally, your staff knows. They may talk the talk by copying the official communication; they will not walk the talk. HiFi is great, but do not ask me to implement it. Show! Implementation?

What must be communicated and demonstrated, certainly internally, is the crisis and the commitment of the top.

#### *Step three: Send out the troops.*

People without a good understanding of the new approach will be contra-productive to the effort. Being unable to explain the new approach and only equipped with 'old' tools, they will quickly be recognized for what they are: extra overhead. They can even express their concerns about the new approach, certainly, if they are 'selected'.

A motivated trooper may be worse than an uninterested one. He or she may be eager to help the project, but not knowing what to do differently, only confirming that it is business as usual and that labelling a project HiFi gives you access to additional resources.

Does that mean that only experts should be sent out? No. Motivated people with a good understanding of the new approach and limited knowledge of the tools can make a difference. A project team will understand and enjoy being part of trying out the new approach. Most people are eager to learn and appreciate the opportunity to improve a new approach. If the trooper communicates that the objective of his/her participation is to learn how HiFi can be put into practice, team members will help him/her out.

### Epilogue

So, HiFi starts with all the signs of previously failed approaches. The staff will keep on running through their daily routine, keeping up the appearance till the high bosses are gone and the new group comes with another approach.

What should have been a better approach?