

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY  
UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

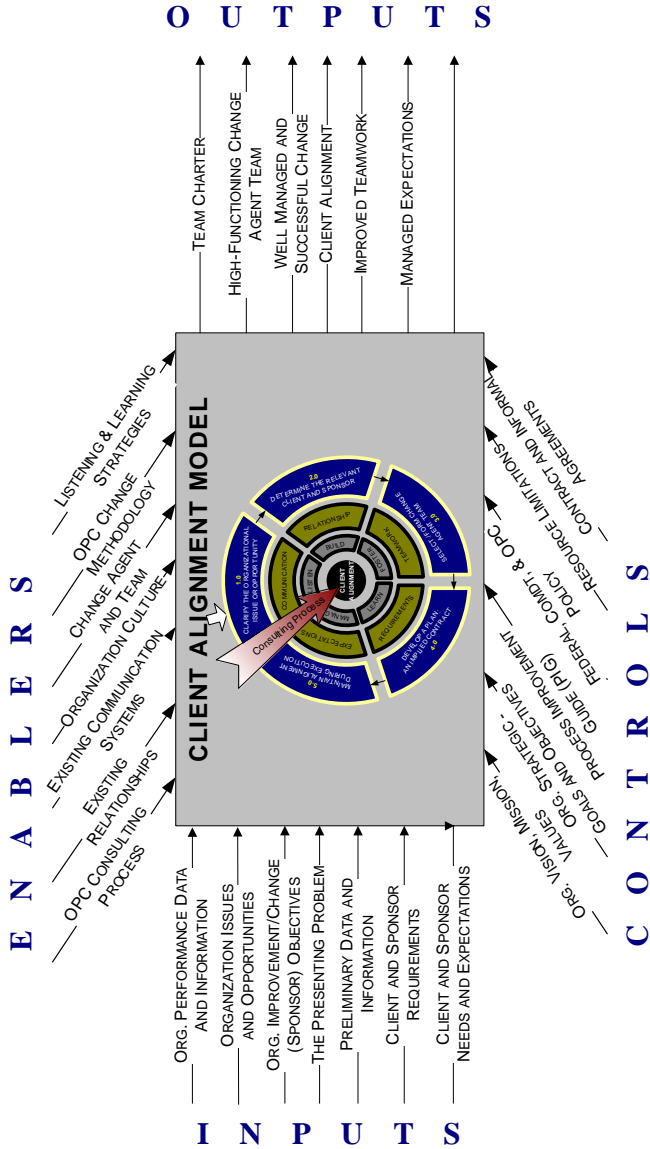
**S**emper **P**aratus



**Aligning with  
Our Clients**

# ALIGNING WITH OUR CLIENTS

## CONTEXT DIAGRAM



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# ALIGNING WITH OUR CLIENTS

## CHECKLIST

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### **1.0 CLARIFY THE ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUE OR OPPORTUNITY**

- Determine the Sponsor Objective(s)
- Gather/Discuss Preliminary Data
- Look Beyond the Presenting Problem

### **2.0 DETERMINE THE RELEVANT CLIENT AND SPONSOR**

- Determine the Relevant Client
- Recognize Your Sponsor
- Obtain a Leadership Sponsor

### **3.0 SELECT/FORM THE CHANGE AGENT TEAM**

- Review Change Agent Team Considerations
- Weigh Internal or External Team Creation
- Form and Charter the Team

### **4.0 DEVELOP A PLAN: AN IMPLIED CONTRACT**

- Explicitly Articulate the Objective(s)
- Describe Your Methodology
- Specify Roles and Expectations

### **5.0 MAINTAIN ALIGNMENT DURING EXECUTION**

- Maintain Alignment with the Sponsor
- Maintain Alignment with Leadership

## ALIGNING WITH OUR CLIENTS

**DESCRIPTION:** The process by which Organizational Performance Consultants (OPCs) align themselves, and their services, with their clients and their clients' needs.

**USE THIS TOOL:** When you want to more fully understand the presenting problem and contract with your client to achieve success in resolving it.

**DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY:** *Beginner to Practitioner Level*

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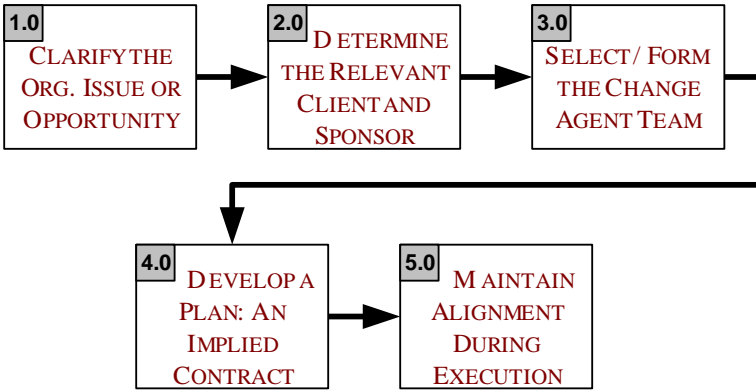
## INTRODUCTION

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This booklet provides guidance on establishing an OPC–client system relationship. At the outset of any planned change effort, the OPC should proactively attempt to align with the client. By establishing a collaborative relationship and a clear preliminary understanding of how the change process will be approached, an OPC can better assure the change effort's success. Below is a list of the primary steps involved in this alignment process.

- Step 1.0** Clarify the Organizational Issue or Opportunity. Covers issue or opportunity clarification and the initial steps to be taken when addressing either.
- Step 2.0** Determine the Relevant Client and Sponsor. Provides guidance on identifying the relevant client and sponsor; who are not always apparent, particularly if multiple functions or units are involved.
- Step 3.0** Select/Form the Change Agent Team. Provides guidance on selecting, forming, and preparing a change agent team to address the organizational issue or opportunity.
- Step 4.0** Develop a Plan: An Implied Contract. Explains how to establish a written client—OPC agreement detailing project commitments, plans, roles, and expectations.
- Step 5.0** Maintain Alignment During Execution. Provides advice on maintaining alignment as key people, perceptions, understandings, and thoughts change.

# PROCESS STEPS

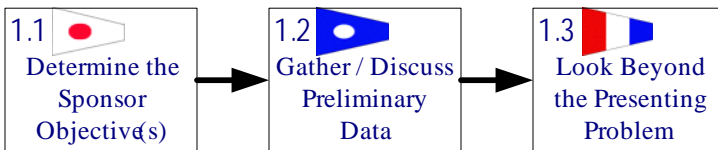


## Client Alignment Model

### 1.0 CLARIFY THE ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUE OR OPPORTUNITY

This process covers the initial steps to take whenever an improvement opportunity is brought to an OPC’s attention. It is imperative that the OPC and the client proactively attempt to clarify the issue facing the unit at the onset of any consulting effort. The clarification is essential, for it allows the subsequent steps in the consulting process to be appropriately focused.

DETAILED CHECKLIST		EVENTS / TOOLS
1.1	Determine the Sponsor Objective(s)	One-on-One Sponsor Meeting
1.2	Gather/Discuss Preliminary Data	Structured Interview
1.3	Look Beyond the Presenting Problem	



## Clarify the Organizational Issue or Opportunity

1.1



## DETERMINE THE SPONSOR OBJECTIVE(S)

★ Use the one-on-one Sponsor Meeting to verify objectives.

Any consulting process generally begins with one or more key leaders sensing an opportunity to improve the organization's ability to achieve its mission. This may take the shape of the leader sensing a specific problem or issue, or it may consist of more general and vague feelings. For example, feelings that the unit needs to be more focused, have higher morale, or become more innovative. Often in these situations, an OPC can provide a great service to the organization simply by helping to clarify the issue to be resolved or the objective that is to be pursued.

1.2

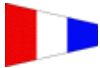


## GATHER/DISCUSS PRELIMINARY DATA

🕒 Refer to the Organizational Assessments Toolset CD: *Structured Interview Diagnostic Contract Sample*

Clarifying the improvement opportunity typically involves an OPC collecting data. This may involve key staff interviews to gain an understanding of the issue or an examination of the unit's logs, records, or meeting minutes to shed light on the improvement opportunity. This preliminary data gathering effort should occur quickly and not be exhaustive. Its purpose is merely to garner enough basic knowledge to allow the OPC and key unit-members to make informed choices as to how best to approach the planned change effort.

1.3



## LOOK BEYOND THE PRESENTING PROBLEM

💬 Refer to call-out box below for an illustration of this concept

The presenting problem should always be fully assessed – and not accepted at face value. Often the *presenting problem* is a symptom of a deeper problem or represents a more complex improvement opportunity. Indeed, practiced consultants often use a somewhat trite but common phrase: “The problem is never the problem.”

The popularity of this phrase is indicative of the complexities of organizational change and the need to do a complete assessment before charging forth with a solution. To make matters worse, clients often have a tendency to jump straight to what they think the solution should be. Many even state presenting problems in

## **2.0 DETERMINE THE RELEVANT CLIENT AND SPONSOR**

This step ensures that the OPC carefully identifies those organizations, leadership teams, and organizational members that can most directly affect and positively influence the change effort. It is not enough to simply form a team and begin work. Lines of support and communication must be established and key individuals identified and brought onboard early to ensure success. By involving leaders, managers, and staff at all levels of the organization, the change agent can be sure the team will have the resources and buy-in needed to ensure progress and momentum throughout the change effort. Many a change effort has been derailed due to a poorly established improvement infrastructure, waiting too long to bring key individuals onboard, or misalignment (i.e., the wrong client, Sponsor, – goals or objectives).

### **Fully Exploring the Presenting Problem**

I know of one CO who observed a high level of disagreement and discord among her unit’s leadership team. She approached her OPC, saying:

*“We need some teambuilding. Please arrange for a teambuilding intervention that will elicit some teamwork and will allow us to get to know one another better outside of the office environment.”*

The energetic, eager-to-please OPC “turned-to” and arranged a top-notch teambuilding session that involved a set of team-oriented experiential exercises at an offsite facility. Unfortunately, the OPC and the CO were disappointed when the leadership team returned to their office environment and continued their contentious and disagreeable behavior pattern.

In this case, the CO (and the OPC) too readily came to the conclusion that a solution, teambuilding, was the answer to the problem. The problem itself was never clarified in this case. A better approach would have been to more completely explore, via a couple of confidential interviews, some probable causes for the leadership team’s disagreement. Early indications may have revealed the need for a *Role Clarification* or focused *Problem Solving Session*, or perhaps a session aimed at establishing a common vision regarding what the leadership team should collectively strive to achieve.

The lesson to be learned here is that presenting problems must be fully explored before any solution is chosen.


DETAILED CHECKLIST		TOOLS
2.1	Identify the Relevant Client	Key Stakeholder Questions (See callout box below)
2.2	Recognize Your Sponsor	
2.3	Obtain a Leadership Sponsor	



### Determine the Relevant Client and Sponsor

## 2.1

### IDENTIFY THE RELEVANT CLIENT

 See callout box below for a list of relevant questions

Determining the relevant client is an important part of designing any organizational change process. In some cases, determining the relevant client is quite simple, while in others it is more complex. For example, if the change effort's objective involves the functioning of the members of a single unit, the relevant client is the membership of that unit. The unit's leaders undoubtedly need to be involved in the design of such a change effort.

If the organizational issue to be addressed involves more than one unit, it may be necessary to define the relevant client as a system that involves multiple units. In this case, key decision makers from all of the units involved need to be part of designing the change effort. For example, a change objective aimed at increasing the speed of the seized vessel transfer,

## Questions That Help Identify the Relevant Client

- ✓ Who can directly affect the issue at hand?
- ✓ Who has the most interest in the situation?
- ✓ Who has the power to approve the change effort?
- ✓ Who would be able to cause the change effort to fail?

that often occurs between Coast Guard and Customs, would necessitate defining the Relevant Client as interdependent subsystems of both the Coast Guard and the Customs systems. Key leaders of both organizations should be involved in designing a change effort of this nature.

## 2.2

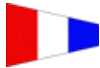


### **RECOGNIZE YOUR SPONSOR**

It is important to note that the person who invites or asks you to conduct a change intervention is not your client. It is better to define this person as your Sponsor. Your Sponsor is very important to your change effort for many reasons. You may need the Sponsor to provide the resources needed to conduct the change effort. He or she may also be the person who can provide you the access you need to unit members or records that allow an adequate diagnosis.

Your client, on the other hand, is better defined as the system or organizational unit that is undergoing the change. While this delineation between client and Sponsor may initially seem like semantics, it is important. The OPC needs to stay focused on the client and its needs. Though the Sponsor and the Sponsor's needs are important, they are secondary to the needs of the client.

## 2.3



### **OBTAIN A LEADERSHIP SPONSOR**

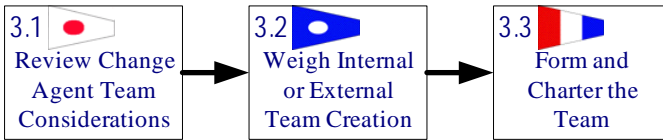
Many change experts employ the tactic of acquiring a *Leadership Sponsor* to help champion their cause. As the name implies, a Leadership Sponsor is a senior member of the organization with the ability to promote the change. They might help obtain needed resources, encourage key member participation, or remove barriers to the change effort.

OPC's should think carefully about who might be the best Leadership Sponsor for any particular change effort. The OPC should think the role of a Leadership Sponsor and then ask the appropriate individual if they would be willing to serve in such a capacity. It is important to remember that most potential Leadership Sponsors are extremely busy individuals. Take care in guarding their time, and only ask their help when it is needed and appropriate.

### **3.0 SELECT / FORM THE CHANGE AGENT TEAM**

A change agent team is a group of internal and/or external individuals, with the appropriate skills, knowledge, and abilities, brought together for the purpose of assisting the change agent with solving or leveraging an organizational problem or opportunity. It is usually not possible for the change agent to affect organizational improvement on his/her own, nor is it advisable to do so. The more people (internal to the organization) the change agent can directly involve in the effort, the greater the organization's resulting buy-in. With this in mind, teams must be carefully chosen and strategically selected, effectively managed, and appropriately rewarded for their efforts.

<b>D E T A I L E D   C H E C K L I S T</b>		<b>T O O L S</b>
3.1	Review Change Agent Team Considerations	
3.2	Weigh Internal or External Team Creation	
3.3	Form and Charter the Team	Team Charter Template



### **Select / Form the Change Agent Team**

#### **3.1 REVIEW CHANGE AGENT TEAM CONSIDERATIONS**

There are many considerations to be taken into account in selecting change agent team members. It is not enough to select qualified individuals if those individuals do not have the time or desire to contribute. Likewise, just because an individual has the time and desire to participate, it does not make them a good choice, particularly if they have difficulty working in a team environment. In the ideal situation, an OPC and his or her Sponsor would be able to select a change agent/change agent team with the:

- Time and motivation needed to focus on the problem;
- Experience and knowledge regarding at hand problem;
- Ability to form sound interpersonal relationships between themselves and members of the client unit.

## 3.2



### WEIGH INTERNAL OR EXTERNAL TEAM CREATION

An ideal situation occurs when the unit can afford to create a team composed of an internal change agent (likely the OPC) and an external change agent (likely a contracted consultant or organizational development practitioner). Each type of change agent has inherent advantages. For example, an internal agent has ready access to and relationships with unit members. They know the language of the organization and perhaps have early ideas as to the root cause of any problems.

*Quote: "If you are a fish living in a fishbowl, you can't see the water."*

Counter intuitively, some of these advantages can be hindrances in certain change situations. If the intervention involves cultural or behavioral changes, it may be difficult for an internal agent to perceive the need for change. A metaphor commonly mentioned by consultants asserts: "If you are a fish living in a fishbowl, you can't see the water."

A fresh, objective perspective of an external consultant can be very helpful in many situations. Ideally the organization you can choose a contractor with extensive expertise in the type of intervention being considered and then synergistically blend the advantages of both internal and external agents.

### **Internal Change Agent**

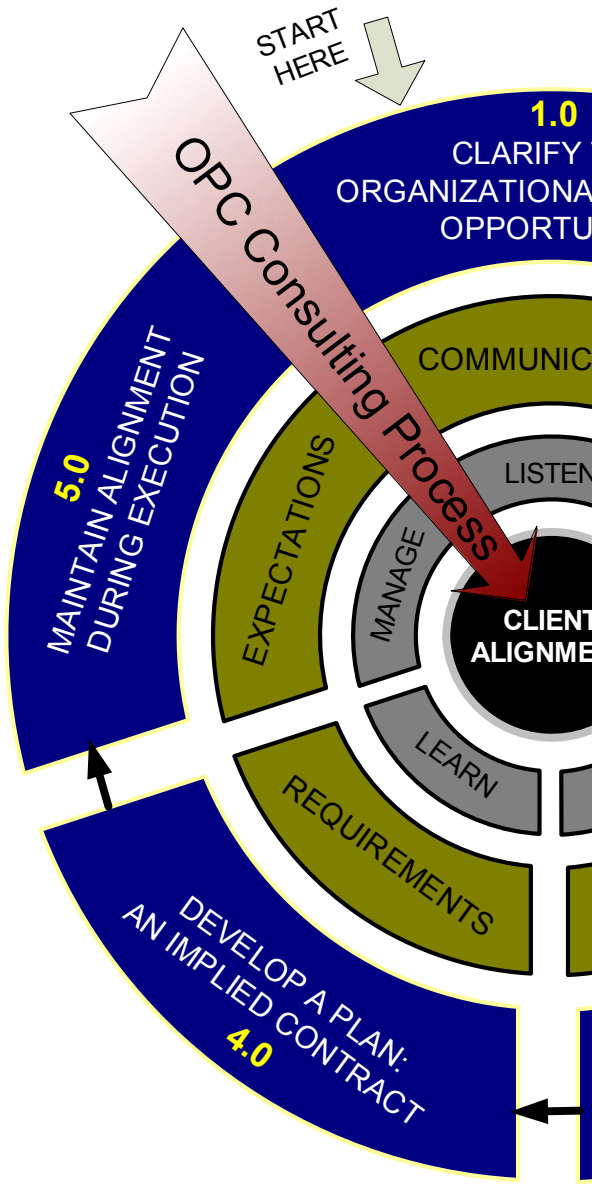
#### **Benefits**

- Ready access to and relationships with the unit members
- Familiarity with the organization's structure, processes and language
- A basic level of rapport and trust

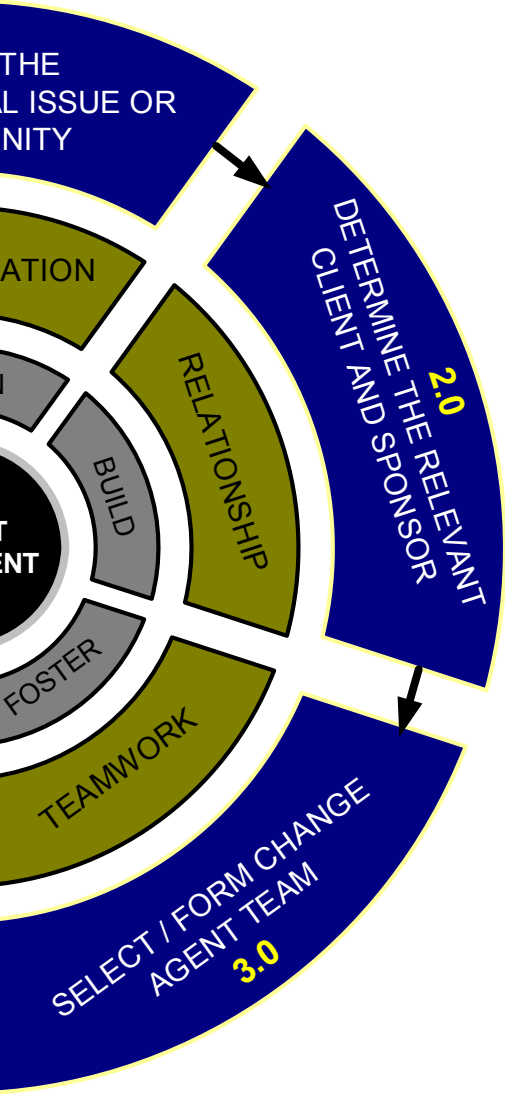
#### **Challenges**

- It is more difficult to perceive the need for behavioral and cultural change when one is part of the culture
- Consultant status is dependent on rank and reputation – less on expertise; "It's hard to be a prophet in your own land"
- Dependence upon the organization (and senior members of the unit for OER purposes) can make one overly cautious

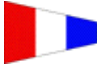
# OPC CLIENT ALIGN



# IGNMENT MODEL




### 3.3



## FORM AND CHARTER THE TEAM

As with all project teams, the change agent team will need time to learn how to function and perform effectively as a team. Functional leaders must understand, commit to, and support the time and resource requirements of their participating staff. And, all team members must be in agreement as to team:

 Refer to the Stakeholder Alignment Toolset (CD): *Team Charter Template*

- Goals and timelines;
- Member roles and responsibilities;
- Ground rules and operating guidelines;
- Administration.

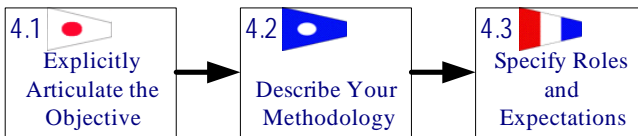
Each of these items can and should be covered in the team charter. Specific guidance on forming a team, the stages of team development, and creating a team charter can be found in Desk Guide Booklet 8, Working with Teams.

### 4.0

## DEVELOP A PLAN: AN IMPLIED CONTRACT

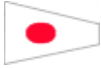
This step recommends the explicit development of a detailed explanation or plan that describes how any consulting process will be carried out. This plan should be developed by the Sponsor and the OPC in a collaborative fashion. Once the plan has been fully fleshed out, it can be vetted with the Leadership Sponsor and other key stakeholders.

DETAILED CHECKLIST		TOOLS
4.1	Explicitly Articulate the Objective	Sample Proposal
4.2	Describe Your Methodology	Sample Proposal
4.3	Specify Roles and Expectations	Sample Proposal




### Develop a Plan: An Implied Contract

4.1



## EXPLICITLY ARTICULATE THE OBJECTIVE

 Refer to the  
Toolset (CD):  
*Sample Proposal*

Putting the goals of any consulting effort on paper, in the form of a proposal, serves several purposes. It helps to clarify the objectives to be achieved by the effort, it focuses the organization, and it begins the process of ensuring that the planning team has made good decisions about how to carry out the consulting process. Perhaps most importantly, it can be used as a tool that helps to ensure alignment between key stakeholders: the OPC, the client system, the Leadership Sponsor, and perhaps the Commanding and Executive Officers.

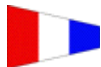
4.2



## DESCRIBE YOUR METHODOLOGY

Having sharpened your focus by developing the objectives to the point that they can be clearly articulated, you are now ready to design the method by which you approach a planned change initiative. It is often helpful to describe the steps associated with a planned change effort in *Phases*. For example, Phase I might involve a set of activities that allow an accurate diagnosis of the current situation. Phase II might describe the interventions (or activities) that will move the organization from the present state to the desired future state. Phase III could be a follow-up assessment (conducted at some later point in time) that will inform the organization as to whether or not the change effort has had the desired effect.

4.3



## SPECIFY ROLES AND EXPECTATIONS

One of the most important parts of the alignment process involves clarifying the roles and expectations of all of the parties involved in the change effort. To accomplish any substantial change, both the OPC and the unit need to commit time and resources to the change process. It is important to make clear the resources required and their source. Many a change effort has failed because the key individuals did not realize the necessary extent of their involvement, or worse yet, did not clearly understand their roles and responsibilities. An effective method for minimizing misunderstandings is to explicitly write the

necessary requirements and the roles to be played by each party. Requirements include:

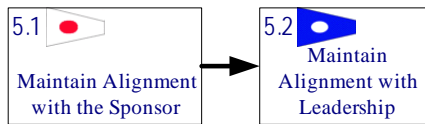
- Access to key people or information;
- The time needed to do the job;
- Support from specific leaders.

It is also wise to explicitly state a set of ground rules that define the nature of the OPC’s relationship with leadership. Parties should also discuss confidentiality issues and the means by which sensitive information is to be handled.

## **5.0 MAINTAIN ALIGNMENT DURING EXECUTION**

While it may seem common sense, it is important to note that it will take proactive effort to maintain alignment during execution. Often, as change efforts progress (particularly longer-term change efforts), people, perceptions, understandings, and profundity of thought evolve, causing goals and objectives to change. When, and as, this happens, it is critical that the change agent team change with them. They must maintain their alignment with the client, Sponsor, and Leadership Sponsor or risk failure as they work to achieve invalid or incorrect results.

<b>D E T A I L E D C H E C K L I S T</b>		<b>E V E N T S</b>
5.1	Maintain Alignment with the Sponsor	Alignment Meetings
5.2	Maintain Alignment with Leadership	Change Effort SITREPs



### **M a i n t a i n A l i g n m e n t D u r i n g E x e c u t i o n**

## **5.1**

### **MAINTAIN ALIGNMENT WITH THE SPONSOR**

The very nature of consulting efforts necessitates the need for midcourse corrections. For example, a change process can not even be fully designed until a diagnostic effort aimed at fully understanding the current situation is conducted. It is essential that the Sponsor, Leadership Sponsor, and the OPC meet to review the results of the diagnostic effort and then

plan the change intervention in light of that review. As the change effort progresses, it is important to have periodic change agent—Sponsor meetings. Any changes to the plan previously designed need to be fully agreed upon.

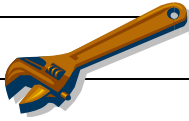
5.2



## **MAINTAIN ALIGNMENT WITH LEADERSHIP**

Often you will be fortunate enough to have the CO or XO of a unit be your Sponsor or Leadership Sponsor. In other cases, however, your Sponsor or Leadership Sponsor will be other officers within the Command. In these cases, it is essential to keep leadership informed of the progress of the change effort.


Ask the Command how often they would like Change Effort SitReps and then ensure you follow through and deliver informative SITREPs throughout the effort. Do not hesitate to deliver bad news as it occurs. The sensitivity associated with many change efforts mandates that you take caution not to surprise leadership at the end of the change process.



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## USEFUL TOOLS

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The following tools: templates, forms, worksheets, calculators, slide decks, facilitator notes, etc., are included in the following references or on the accompanying compact disc .

Tool	Reference
Structured Interview Diagnostic Contract Sample	 Stakeholder Alignment Toolset
Sample Proposal	 Aligning With Our Customers Toolset



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# REFERENCES

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# TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

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*“The problem is never the problem!”*

**Alignment:** Alignment involves establishing (in a preliminary manner) the unit’s improvement opportunities AND establishing a collaborative relationship between the OPC and key members of the system about how to work on those opportunities.

**Change Agent:** The OPC or unit member that guides the client system through a required change.

**Change Agent Team:** A group of internal and/or external individuals, with the appropriate skills, knowledge, and abilities, brought together for the purpose of assisting the change agent with solving or leveraging an organizational problem or opportunity.

**Contract:** An explicit or implied understanding of the OPC’s responsibilities and the responsibilities of key members of the system in any change situation.

**Sponsor:** The person who invites or asks you to conduct a change intervention.

**Leadership Sponsor:** A senior member of the organization with the ability to champion and promote change – obtain needed resources, encourage key member participation, and remove barriers.

**Relevant Client:** That part of a unit that can directly affect the change issue at hand (i.e., identifies those who need to be involved in the change effort).

**External Consultant:** A supplementary resource that can be contracted to assist in certain change efforts.

**Objective:** An organizational problem or issue; an opportunity to improve the organization’s ability to achieve its mission – may be first presented as a general or vague feeling expressed by an organizational leader.

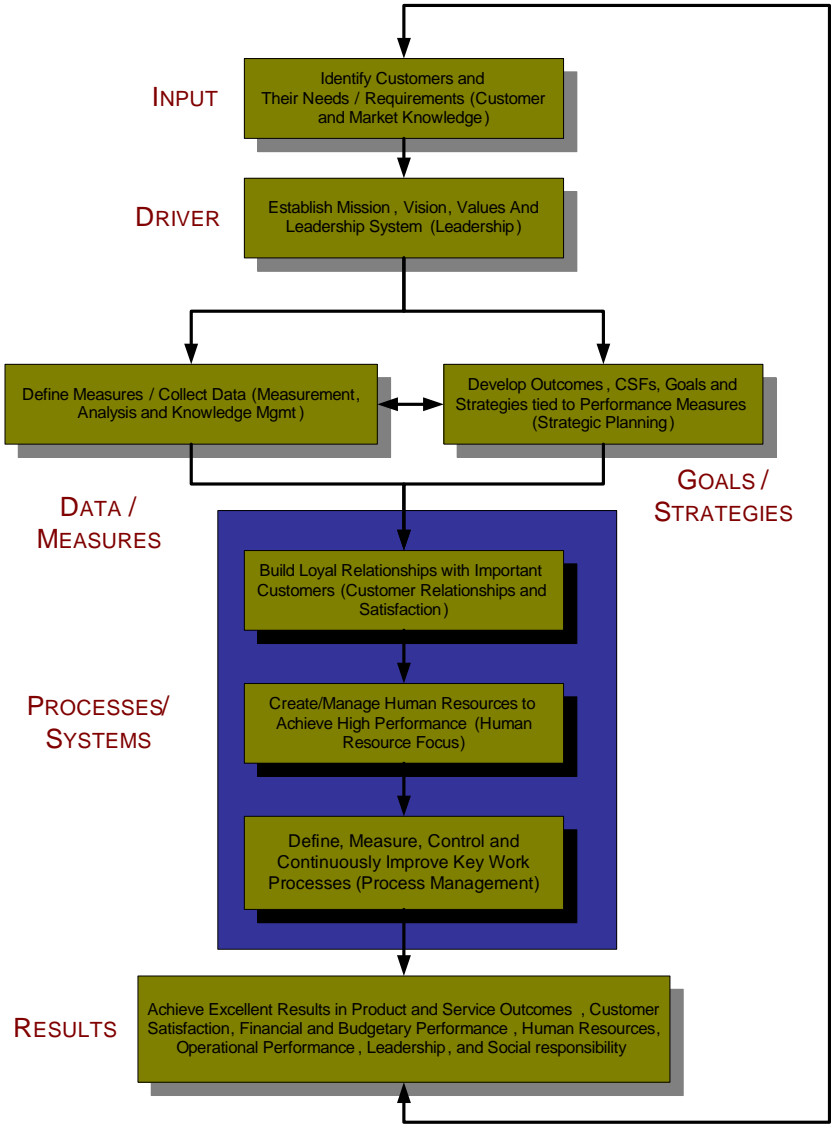
**Presenting Problem:** A problem or issue first recognized by a unit leader as an improvement opportunity. The presenting problem needs to be fully assessed and not accepted at face value, for it may simply be a symptom of a deeper problem or a more complex improvement opportunity.

**Proposal:** A written description of the presenting problem, sponsor objective, or organizational opportunity; anticipated change agent methodology and team; change timeline and resource requirements; and relevant issues and concerns.





# BALDRIGE LINK



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