



Enterprise Pursuits

Mini-Case Study

Human-Centered OCM, Gamification, Community, Swag, and Managing Stakeholder Resistance in a Multi-Line Data Migration

Background:

As the Senior Change Management Consultant, I was entrusted with leading the people side of a highly complex data storage migration project. This project spanned 14 distinct lines of business, each with 30 to 200 end users, and impacted over 1,000 employees who relied on various data solutions in their day-to-day work. The project was already underway and faced a series of entrenched challenges, including widespread disengagement, minimal voluntary participation in training, and little enthusiasm for the upcoming changes. The technical migration itself was ambitious, but the true challenge lay in aligning diverse business units, each with unique cultures and operational priorities, toward a common goal of successful adoption.

A key obstacle was leadership's clear stance against mandatory training requirements or enforcement mechanisms, meaning that traditional top-down approaches to compliance or attendance were off the table. It quickly became clear that to ensure the project's success, I would need to design and implement engagement strategies that motivated users through intrinsic and



community-driven means, rather than relying on external pressure or punitive measures. My role demanded not only expertise in organizational change management methodology but also creativity, empathy, and the ability to navigate complex, at times competing, stakeholder interests. Overcoming these early hurdles required a tailored approach that prioritized communication, buy-in, and continuous feedback, ensuring all 14 business lines moved forward together toward actual adoption and sustainable outcomes.

To achieve this change management vision there was a need to incentivize the end-users and motivate them. Therefore, I employed a model of gamification and rewards pulling from psychology to implement dopamine and reward circuit reinforcement. Paired with an extrinsic reward system built of the B.F. Skinner variable reward system to increase extrinsic motivation.



Initial Challenges:

- Training attendance and engagement were low (below 50% at kickoff).
- Communication occurred primarily via email and a virtual resource hub, but users weren't self-motivating.
- No system was in place for tracking adoption and engagement metrics.
- Middle managers believed their teams were most critical and pushed hard to get prioritized support and training dates, creating strategic and political friction.
- Change-related communications were technical, lengthy, and lacked personalization, resulting in information overload and minimal message retention among end users.
- Early attempts at virtual training suffered from poor scheduling alignment with user availability, causing frequent conflicts with operational demands and perpetuating low turnout.
- There was no formal mechanism for surfacing resistance or user concerns, leading to silent frustration and unresolved pain points beneath the surface.
- Leadership was hesitant to implement “carrot or stick” incentives, limiting options for driving engagement and placing extra emphasis on the need for organic participation
- Business line managers lacked a shared definition of project success, resulting in inconsistent messaging and reduced collective momentum during the organizational rollout.
- We were only assigned one subject matter expert to provide all technical training, who was splitting her time between two projects; leading us to adhere to a tight schedule and focused timeline that had to stay rigid to ensure proper time management.





Strategy & Execution

Stakeholder Buy-In and Metrics:

- Conducted 1:1s with executive and technical leadership to define meaningful adoption "success" measures—resulting in the following targets:
- ≥65% attendance in live training sessions (eventually tracked across all lines of business)
- ≥65% overall engagement rate (attendance, resource use, participation)
- ≥80% Net Promoter Score end-user satisfaction (final survey)
- Communication, milestone, and awareness deliverables tracked for ≥95% completion

Community Structure:

We built dedicated channels for each business line and a company-wide group to drive peer-to-peer support and streamline comms. One of our key initiatives was the establishment of



a Change Champion program. This program involved selecting peer leaders from each business area who would meet privately to surface any resistance and receive expert support. These Change Champions played a crucial role in identifying potential issues early on and ensuring that they were addressed effectively, thereby contributing to the overall success of the project.

The Change Champions acted as a bridge between the project team and the end users, helping to address concerns and ensure a smooth transition. Their role was instrumental in fostering a culture of open communication and collaboration, which was key to overcoming resistance and driving successful adoption.



Strategic Gifting:

- Launched weekly "swag scavenger hunts": End users solved technical challenges for small rewards (gift cards, merchandise, and special recognition).
- To win, users needed perfect attendance. No answers were allowed in public channels, preserving inclusivity and anonymity.

Strategic Scheduling:



- Early-mover lines of business were those most eager to adopt, so their success could be showcased to others ("excitement begets excitement").
- Pushback from some groups (who wanted their sessions moved up) was met with careful, direct communication, alternative asynchronous resources, and limited early access, while maintaining the integrity of the schedule to protect training quality.

Escalated Incentives for Resistant Groups:

- For less-engaged/high-resistance business lines, additional incentives were used: an increased-value gift card and a PTO day for top participants.
- This was strategically possible as only two small groups remained (ensuring fairness and limiting any negative fallout from "swag rollbacks").

The need to adhere to a tight schedule due to only one subject matter expert having the technical knowledge and educational background to lead a training outweighed LOB leadership concerns. (Note: Backup SME technical trainer had no prior knowledge of education or training; our crash course in effective training for an emergency only.)



Results

Key Achievements:

- 69% overall live training attendance across the program (with resistant groups hitting as high as 89% when incentives were escalated)
- 67% engagement across all lines of business
- Scavenger hunt participation rates soared to 92% in the most challenging cohorts, a testament to the success of the gamification strategy. This innovative approach not only boosted participation but also fostered a sense of fun and camaraderie among the end users. The high participation rates in the scavenger hunts inspire you to consider similar innovative strategies in your change management initiatives.
- The 90% end-user satisfaction at the final survey for previously low-engagement groups should reassure you of the success and impact of our strategies.
- Communication milestone, and awareness deliverables: ≥98% completion.
- Project deliverables were completed within 4 days of final review/approval, a testament to the team's dedication and efficiency. The successful and timely completion of the project deliverables should be a source of pride and satisfaction for all involved.
- Technical questions from end users trended consistently downward as the project advanced, indicating a high level of understanding and adoption.
- The Net Promoter Score (NPS) rose to 92% industry-best levels for a change initiative of this scale, a clear indication of the project's success and the high level of satisfaction among the end users. This achievement should be a source of pride for all involved.





Lessons Learned:

- **Sequencing Matters:** Deploying early wins with engaged groups creates case studies and energy for later, less motivated teams.
- **Incentives Work:** Carefully-timed rewards and recognition, especially paired with peer-led programs, drive significant gains in participation and learning.
- **Transparency:** Data-driven reporting builds trust with leadership and helps spot friction before it becomes resistance.
- **Human-centered OCM:** This approach isn't just about softer; it's more effective for complex, cross-group tech migrations.

Suggestions:

For organizations embarking on complex transformation initiatives, this case clearly demonstrates the critical importance of designing change management strategies that combine strong stakeholder alignment, early and transparent success measurement, and flexible, human-centered engagement, especially when mandatory participation is off the table. Prioritize building initial momentum by sequencing early wins with the most receptive teams, leveraging gamification and meaningful incentives to drive engagement, and creating peer-led change champions who can surface resistance and amplify buy-in across business lines. Ensure communications are frequent, accessible, and tailored to user needs, and never underestimate the impact of direct, empathetic interactions with both leaders and end users. Finally, measure everything that matters, from attendance to satisfaction, and anticipate evolving resistance by having a plan for both recognition and real-time adaptation. Together, these practices foster genuine adoption, mitigate friction, and allow even the most challenging projects to achieve sustainable, positive outcomes.