



# The Ups and Downs of Organizational Change Management:

Institutional Readiness, Practice and Individual Experiences 2020



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# Introduction

AACRAO has defined the ability to manage change as a professional competency for all higher education professionals. In order to gain an understanding of the predominant change culture, institutional preparedness to manage change, and our members' own experiences with change management, AACRAO partnered with Ellucian to establish a benchmark on this topic.

Organizational change management (OCM) refers to the business practices and procedures that address the human and organizational culture aspects of change.

In this report, we discuss the outcomes and implications of the recently completed change management readiness assessment and experiences survey. From this data, you will be able to: A) gain a perspective on your institution's readiness for change management as compared to other institutions; B) compare your level of change management experience with other institutions; C) understand how change management projects can be supported to be successful; D) identify impediments to success; and E) gain a perspective on the scope, volume, and success rate of technology change management projects in higher education.

This report contains three main sections: the first addresses institutional change management readiness assessment and OCM culture, the second discusses personal experience with change management and a change project, and the third section takes a closer look at technology change management. 455 respondents completed all or part of the email survey, representing 49 states, Puerto Rico and 15 other countries. More than three-quarters hold a director level or higher position.

## **Key Findings**

- The overall preparedness for organizational change management varies considerably in higher education.
- The regular use of an executive sponsor to manage change initiatives significantly increases the likelihood that an institution will self-report as sufficiently prepared to undertake managing change.
- The use of an executive sponsor significantly increases the likelihood of project's success; however, nearly a third of institutions rarely or never identify an executive sponsor for a change initiative.
- Effective stakeholder engagement is crucial to the perceived success of a change initiative.
- Almost three quarters of individuals sampled are somewhat or extremely comfortable managing change.
- Change initiatives with a project plan and/or an assigned project team are more likely to have the
  project success level rated as excellent, average, or good.
- Staffing change initiatives are least likely to be rated as successful.
- Among the institutions with current technology change projects, half have 2-5 projects under way simultaneously.
  - Only 12% of completed technology projects were described as full-feature/functionality implementations.
  - The level of technology implementation success is positively correlated with the reported level of stakeholder engagement.
  - Effective training and the success of the implementation of technology are also highly correlated. Better training often has a close association with a more complete technology implementation.

# **Institutional Readiness for OCM**

There are a number of open-source change management resources that could be used to complete a self-assessment, and each has value for the process. For this self-assessment, we chose to adapt the readiness assessment from the 2014 State of California Organizational Change Management Readiness Guide.<sup>1</sup>

This first section focuses on institutions' readiness for change. Respondents were asked to imagine their organization is about to embark on a new change initiative or recall a recent initiative, and answer the questions based on their opinion about how their organization would plan, or did plan, for that change. The **five pillars** of OCM success in this self-assessment are:

- Communication: informing who is affected and impacted by change
- Sponsorship: senior executive sponsorship (ES) for the change initiative
- Stakeholder management: gaining buy-in from those impacted either directly or indirectly
- Readiness: the degree to which stakeholders are ready for the change initiative
- Training: providing an appropriate level of training to those impacted by the change initiative

The pillars contained four to eight factors meant to assess readiness for that pillar. Each factor was then scored, and a comprehensive score was created for each (for more on this, see Appendix A, "Self-Assessment Scoring for the Five Pillars of OCM"). The higher the score, the better the level of institutional preparedness for OCM.

We hoped to be able to provide an aggregate mean score which could be used to help respondents and others compare their institutional readiness for change with others in a meaningful way. What we discovered was high variance<sup>2</sup> among the aggregate scores, so much so that referring to just a mean score for each pillar would misrepresent the data.

What the aggregate readiness assessment data tells us is that **there is considerable variance in the degree of OCM preparedness among institutions of higher education**. Given this result, data were further examined for statistical differences by institutional size, type, and control. We found that only one factor/statement in the training pillar and one in the readiness pillar were found to be statistically different based on institutional control (i.e., public, private not-for-profit, private proprietary). Keeping in mind that the variance is high<sup>3</sup>, a comprehensive mean readiness score of 72 out of a possible 135 was recorded (see Table 1), indicating a moderate aggregate level of institutional preparedness for OCM.

 $<sup>^{1}\ \</sup>underline{\text{https://eslstoriesusa.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/ocm-fiscal-readiness-guide-organizational-change-management.pdf}$ 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> <a href="https://www.khanacademy.org/math/statistics-probability/summarizing-quantitative-data/variance-standard-deviation-population/v/variance-of-a-population">https://www.khanacademy.org/math/statistics-probability/summarizing-quantitative-data/variance-standard-deviation-population/v/variance-of-a-population</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Minimum 6, maximum 135, mean 72, standard deviation (SD) 29, Variance 816

Table 1: Self-Assessment Scores for the Five Pillars of OCM

	Min	Max	Average	Standard Deviation	Variance
Communication	5	25	15	5	26
Sponsorship <sup>4</sup>	4	20	14	3	11
Stakeholder management	4	25	14	5	23
Readiness	4	40	23	8	62
Training	5	25	14	5	25
Comprehensive score	6	135	72	29	816

The chances that an OCM effort will be successful is understood to be associated with the use of an executive sponsor (ES).<sup>5</sup> One resource cited by the Project Management Institute defines the role of an executive sponsor as someone who is responsible for:

- 1) providing clear direction for the project and how it links with the organization's overall strategy;
- 2) securing project resources;
- 3) ensuring the project is on time, on budget, and on scope;
- 4) providing feedback on status reports and making sure they reach the necessary stakeholders; and
- 5) championing the project at the executive level to secure buy-in.<sup>7</sup>

Based on similar studies in other fields, we hypothesized that OCM success pillar scores are correlated with the use of an executive sponsor in higher education as well. We found that **the use of an ES is strongly statistically correlated with an institution's measure of readiness for OCM** (see Table 2). However, in this sample, only22 percent of institutions always identify an ES for a change initiative, while 47 percent report only often doing so, 22 percent rarely do so, and 9 percent never identify an ES for a change initiative.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Among those who use an executive sponsor always, often, or rarely.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> https://www.pmi.org/-/media/pmi/documents/public/pdf/business-solutions/improve-program-management-federal-government.pdf?v=b72d4e14-85a5-45ba-9c50-c6ea41dc6f6f

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> https://www.beconfident.co.nz/files/events/Project-Management-Survey-report%20copy.pdf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> https://www.pmi.org/-/media/pmi/documents/public/pdf/business-solutions/executive-engagement.pdf

Table 2: Average Pillar of Success Self-Assessment Score by Use of Executive an Sponsor

**Use of an Executive Sponsor** 

		-				
	Always	Often	Rarely	Never	P-Value & Effect Size (Cohen's f)	
Communication	17.6	15.6	12.2	12	P<0.00001; f 0.430	
Sponsorship	16.1	14.3	12.3	N/A	P<0.00001; f 0.427	
Stakeholder management	17.7	15.4	12.2	9.1	P<0.00001; f 0.615	
Readiness	28.4	24	18.8	15	P<0.00001; f 0.599	
Training	17.3	14.9	11.7	10.1	P<0.00001; f 0.528	
Comprehensive score	90.4	78.1	63.5	45.2	P<0.00001; f 0.505	

#### **Words of Wisdom from the Field**

"Never underestimate how embedded a process is to the department/organizational culture. Serious self-examination of an organization rarely happens unless triggered by an audit/complaint, etc. Helping stakeholders understand where there are issues with the process being changed, identifying inconsistencies in policies, and helping them reach the conclusion that change is needed themselves, is key."

- Jerry Martinez, registrar, Brazosport College

#### **Words of Wisdom from the Field**

"There are always more stakeholders than you think there are. Dig deep."

- Mark Ammann, associate dean, Learning Support Services Admissions and student records registrar, Richland College

#### **Words of Wisdom from the Field**

"Ensure that all stakeholders, especially those who will be taking the bulk of the hands-on work, are in the discussion from day one."

- Dawna Mackay, registrar, British Columbia Institute of Technology

# **Predominant OCM Culture on Campus**

Jisc, a UK-based organization, has a number of readily available resources on OCM.<sup>8</sup> One resource provides a self-audit to help institutions identify their institutional culture around OCM, out of four possible cultures, and identifies the advantages and disadvantages of each. For this survey, an abbreviated format of this self-audit was used.<sup>9</sup> Respondents were asked to think about a number of change initiatives at their institution and select the Jisc-defined<sup>10</sup> cultural approach to OCM that most accurately described their institution:

- **Firefighting:** Change happens readily. The organization reacts to change and threats at very short notice and doesn't feel in control of circumstances and actions.
- **Bandwagon:** Change happens readily and is always driven by external factors and the latest initiative. Change in this context is considered responsive.
- **Super tanker:** Change is slow and driven by external factors rather than by a sense of drive and purpose from within the organization. Change can be managed.
- **Space explorer:** Change is slow and driven by opportunities from the internal and external environment. Change is managed and embedded.

These four cultural approaches to OCM were arranged by Jisc to fit into one of the four quadrants of a standard SWOT analysis (see Figure 1). This arrangement helps us further understand how the predominant culture reflects the conditions under which institutions undertake change. Among the respondents, 29 percent have no single dominant culture around OCM, followed closely by 27 percent that use the bandwagon approach, 20 percent firefighting, 16 percent super tankers, and 8 percent space explorers.

Figure 1: OCM Culture SWOT Matrix

	Threats	Opportunities
Long-term	Super Tanker	Space Explorer
Short-term	Firefighting	Bandwagon

Source: Jisc

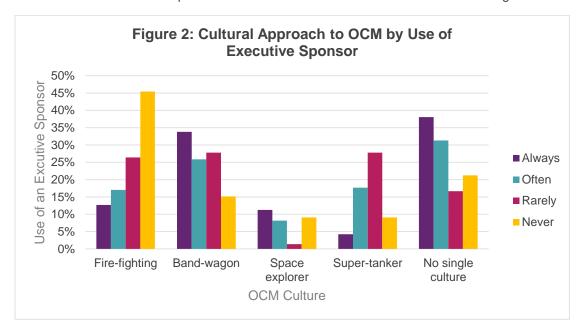
The use of an executive sponsor is statistically correlated with the predominance of a particular OCM culture. For example, those who never use an executive sponsor (ES) are more likely to identify as firefighting - the most reactive of the cultures - than those who always have an ES (see Figure 2).

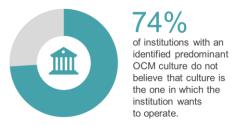
<sup>8</sup> https://www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/change-management

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> The survey did not include a SWOT diagram of the cultures, nor did it include the list of disadvantages for each culture

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Source of definitions: https://www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/change-management/change-audit

Interestingly, those who always have an ES for change are more likely to report no single dominant culture for OCM. One hypothesis to support the reason for this is that the use of an ES may lend itself to an OCM culture more able to adapt to the various factors that influence the need to change.





Among institutions with a predominant OCM culture, almost 74 percent do not believe that their culture is the one in which the institution wants to operate. This includes all those operating in the firefighter (18 percent yes, 82 percent no), bandwagon (33 percent yes, 67 percent no), and super-tanker (18 percent yes, 82 percent no) cultures. In sharing reasons why the culture is not a good match for the institution, several common themes in respondent data became apparent including noting that the current OCM culture:

- Causes stress
- Is reactive, not proactive
- Lacks a guiding vision
- Contributes to an inability to be strategic
- Is short-sighted
- Results in too many fires to put out
- Has a very slow change process which introduces fear and anxiety around the issues has little consideration for those impacted

In contrast, those who report having a space explorer OCM culture are more likely to agree that it is a good match than not (56 percent yes, 44 percent no).

# Personal Knowledge of and Experience with a Change Initiative

Personal experience level with OCM practice varied among the respondents. However, most reported average (42 percent) or above average experience (44 percent), while only 12 percent reported somewhat below average, and 1 percent reported far below and none. Most (73 percent) are also comfortable leading change given their level of experience with doing so.

Respondents were asked to think about a single change endeavor of which they were part and the survey contained several questions related to this change endeavor. Participants involved in operational (medium) or transformational (large, complex) change endeavors were asked additional questions about the project and those reporting being involved in a transactional (small, simple) project were excluded. At the time of the survey, 62 percent reported the project was in progress, 36 percent completed, and 2 percent abandoned the project before completion. Technology and practice changes were the primary driver of change for over half (see Figure 3). Figure 4 highlights common words used to describe the projects.

Figure 3: Primary Driver of Change Initiative

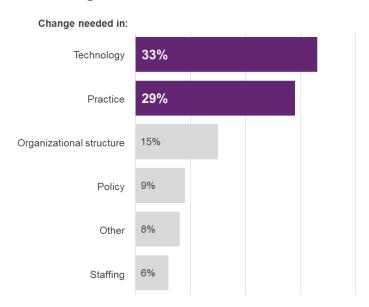
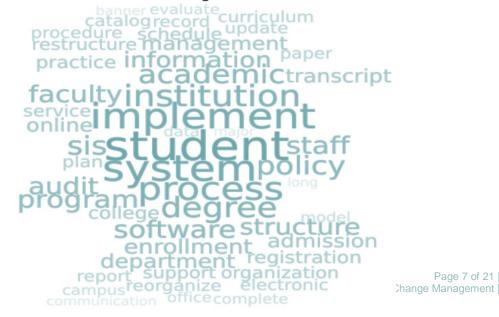
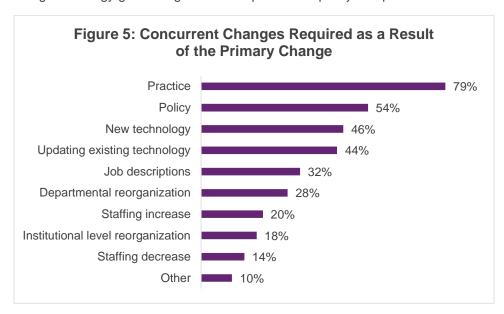


Figure 4: Keywords used to Describe the Change Initiative



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It is not uncommon for the primary driver of the change to generate the need for simultaneous changes in several other areas (see Figure 5). The most reported combination of changes in this sample was an update to existing technology generating a need to update both policy and practice.



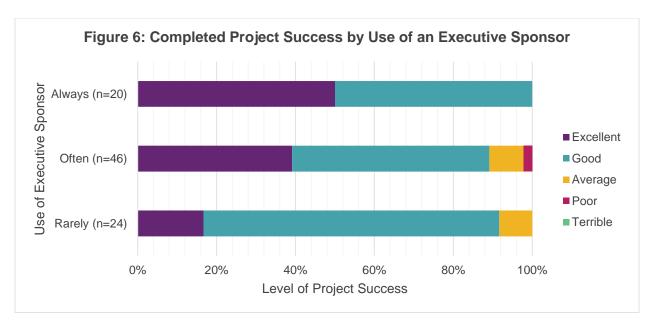
We asked participants to rate the level of success for both completed and in-progress change initiatives and **overall**, **most were pleased with the level of success** (see Table 3).

**Table 3: Level of Change Initiative Success** 

	Completed	In Progress		
Excellent	36%	13%		
Good	55%	48%		
Average	7%	27%		
Poor	1%	10%		
Terrible	1%	1%		

Success data were compared to the primary driver of the change, to the predominant change culture, and to the use of an executive sponsor (ES). No statistical correlation was found to exist between the success of the project and any of these variables. However, we found that Projects where a staffing change was the primary driver had a lower level of success than other project types, with 11 percent of completed projects and 9 percent of in-progress projects rating success as "terrible." Further, although no statistical correlation exists between success and the use of an ES, the data show that those who always have an ES and have completed the project were more likely to rate a project as "excellent" than those who use an ES often or rarely (see Figure 6). A similar relationship exists between use of an ES and the level of success associated with in-progress projects.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> The sample of those reporting "never" using an ES were not included in figure 6 due to a small sample size.



Most (88 percent) of the projects assigned a project manager (PM) and 95 percent were filled with a person already within the institution. Three quarters assigned a formal project team and 63 percent developed a project plan. Those with a project plan and/or an assigned project team were more likely to rate the success of the project as excellent, average, or good.

The open-ended responses to the question "Lesson learned?" were examined for key words and themes, and the resulting word cloud highlights common themes around the importance of communication, planning, training, and engaging stakeholders (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: Keywords from "Lesson Learned?" Responses

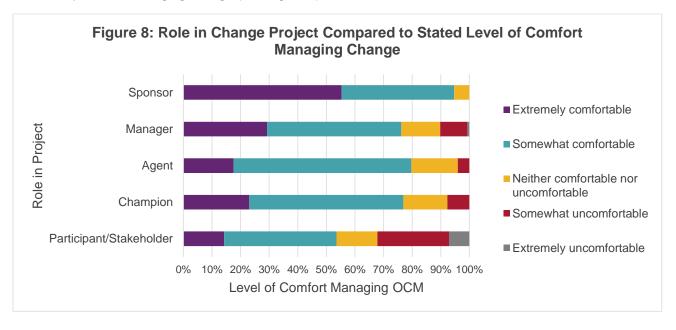


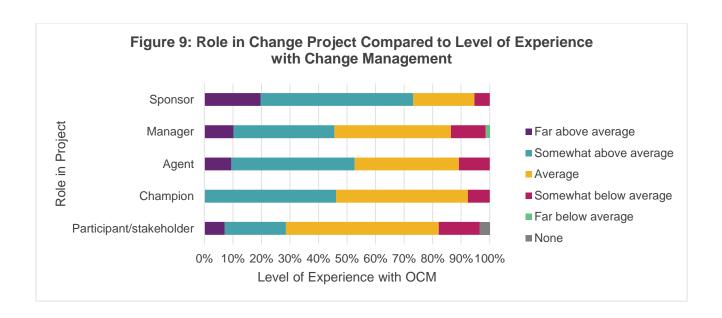
# **Personal Role with this Change Initiative**

Participants were asked to describe their level of engagement and experience with this specific change initiative in order to better understand professional development needs around OCM in higher education. Categories of engagement were defined as follows:

- Change sponsor (executive sponsor/ES): has the authority, seniority, power, enthusiasm, and time to lead the change. May not be involved in day-to-day but should monitor progress.
- Change manager: has the responsibility for the day-to-day implementation of the change, designs the change processes, monitors progress, and liaises up and down the organizational culture.
- Change agent(s): often middle managers responsible for gaining commitment for the change, facilitating evaluation, monitoring and reporting on progress of change, and identifying bottlenecks; is fully aware of the need for change.
- Change champion: usually a member of staff who wants the change to succeed and who may make a good change agent but does not necessarily want the extra work associated with that role.
- Change participant/stakeholder: involved and affected by the change but not serving any of the
  other roles.

In this group, 18 percent served as the ES, 46 percent as the change manager, 23 percent as a change agent, 4 percent as a change champion, and 9 percent as a stakeholder/participant. In this sample, the role in the change project was well-aligned with the individuals' level of comfort (see Figure 8) and their level of experience managing change (see Figure 9).





#### **Words of Wisdom from the Field**

"For change to become embedded in the culture, there need to be quick wins early on and an ongoing commitment to champion the new way of doing things."

— Kathleen Massey, associate vice president of students, University of Lethbridge

# **Technology Change Management**

The survey also included a section focused on change management specifically related to technology. AACRAO had gathered enough anecdotal data from our membership and data from other resources, such as EDUCAUSE, to anticipate that technology would be one of the predominant drivers of change. In addition, the higher education technology landscape is complex and ever-evolving as evidenced by Eduventures' technology landscape reviews<sup>12</sup>, <sup>13</sup>. As such, we wanted to gain a deeper understanding of how technology-driven change is managed in higher education.

The data indicate that 41 percent of institutions always or most of the time regularly and formally review the utilization of existing technology, 14 percent do so about half the time, 38 percent sometimes do so, and 8% never regularly and formally review the utilization of existing technology. Not unexpectedly, whether or not an institution regularly reviews the use of technology is strongly statistically correlated with the perception of how well technology is managed (see Figure 10).

<sup>12</sup> http://pages.nrccua.org/rs/514-WFI-660/images/Eduventures-Research-2019-Tech-Landscape.jpg

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> https://encoura.org/how-technology-trends-are-changing-eduventures-tech-landscape/?mkt\_tok=eyJpljoiTjJFeFpqbGhOR05sTlRjeClsInQiOjJDSjAyenJ1NzlBdmttMUpHakpjbFN0MUISTXI3d2N\_menZoS25kQmZTblByVFNTWTByK1wvWW14SlZlTStxUG82ZFwvNXFhMzhLM2Vkd3ZVWWUxMmhFeEFSc3BuOHIHRHhVWjk4Rmg5aStlVG45RzBxQVICUjlRaFwvM3FBY2hNSGIXVyJ9

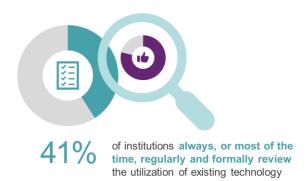


Figure 10: Rate of Formal Technology Review compared to the Perception of Effective Technology Management

Always

Most of the time

About half the time

Sometimes

Never

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

The self-reported circumstances under which new technology is acquired and/or changes are made to existing technology were categorized into these themes:

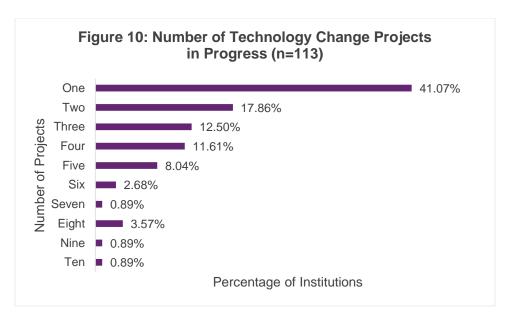
- Technology obsolescence
- Mandate by institutional oversite (e.g., system office)
- To fix a known problem
- To remain competitive
- Compliance
- Cost reduction
- External influences
- Request by institutional leadership
- Departmental need
- Seeking efficiencies in process
- Free for all/wild west/unknown rubric

Respondents were asked to describe a recent change in technology at their institution. The data show that the scope of technology change initiatives in the last few years is considerable (see Table 4).

**Table 4: Focus and Timeframe of Recent Technology Change Initiatives** 

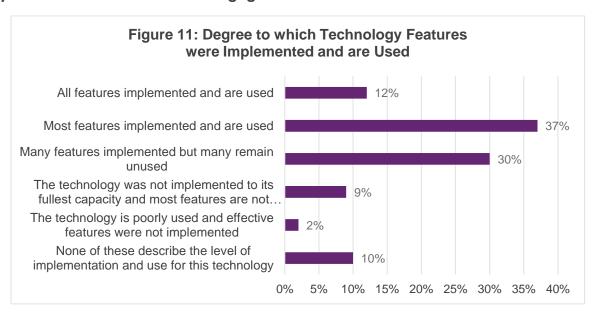
	In progress (n=113)	In the last 12 months (n=95)	13 months to less than 36 months ago (n=97)	More than 36 months ago (n=18)	Count
Enterprise content management (ECM) solution	43%	30%	19%	8%	37
Enterprise mobile application development solution	32%	26%	35%	6%	31
Enterprise business intelligence and analytics solution	34%	25%	38%	3%	32
Enterprise resource planning (ERP) solution	47%	16%	32%	5%	38
Student information system	34%	27%	30%	9%	125
Productivity and collaboration solution	46%	35%	15%	4%	26
Social media solution	24%	59%	18%	0%	17
Constituent relationship management (CRM) solution	36%	27%	32%	4%	77
Academic advising solution	41%	25%	30%	4%	56
Course evaluation solution	44%	24%	20%	12%	25
Course registration and/or degree planning solution	41%	26%	24%	8%	87
Web content management solution	43%	22%	29%	6%	72
Digital courseware solution	23%	27%	41%	9%	22
Learning analytics solution	33%	17%	50%	0%	12
Student retention solution	35%	33%	27%	4%	51
Adaptive learning solution	33%	33%	33%	0%	3
Online course solution and/or learning management solution	39%	26%	26%	10%	31
Student lifecycle management solution	42%	26%	32%	0%	19
Digital credentials solution	30%	41%	26%	4%	27
Competency based education solution	14%	57%	29%	0%	7
Tutoring solution	17%	17%	67%	0%	6
Other	39%	19%	42%	0%	31

Further, half who are currently managing a change in technology identified 2 to 5 simultaneous technology projects (see Figure 10). As noted earlier, technology change projects also routinely require concurrent changes in practice, policy and staffing.



Opinions varied about how well the pillars of OCM success were applied to technology change management. For example, 70 percent of respondents felt that OCM techniques were applied moderately well to very well, 18 percent responded slightly well and 12 percent responded not well at all. Two-thirds agreed that stakeholders were involved in the selection of new technology, 11 percent had no opinion, 14 percent somewhat disagreed, and 9 percent strongly disagreed. On the other hand, 80 percent agreed that stakeholders understood why a change in technology was necessary.

The level of implementation success was assessed by the selection of one of six descriptive statements about the available features/functionality implemented and subsequent use of the technology. Eighty-eight percent indicated that the implementation was incomplete to varying extents (see Figure 11). We did find however, that the *level of implementation success is positively correlated with the reported level of stakeholder engagement.* 



Sufficient and effective training is another pillar of OCM success, and the majority respondents reported that training to support the change in technology was moderately to extremely effective (69 percent), while 15 percent of respondents selected slightly effective, 7 percent chose not effective at all, and 10 percent indicated that little to no training was provided. Reasons stated for rating training as ineffective included the need for better communication, the need for more training, the need for more effective training resources, stronger leadership about the importance of training and more time needed to learn the product. Effective training and the degree to which the technology is implemented are highly correlated, i.e., better training is associated with a more complete implementation and subsequent

Several thematic responses were observed in the reasons why the technology was not fully implemented, including:

- Lack of buy-in
- Lack of clear business processes
- Cost
- Bad data migration
- A purposeful choice not to implement fully/phased implementation
- Lack of staffing/IT resources
- Problem with the technology itself
- Poor training

In addition, a lack of training, time, money, and leadership are some of the explanation for why staff are not using features of the technology already implemented.

# **Closing and Recommendations for Practice**

In this report we outlined the pillars of success for OCM and how institutions of higher education ranked themselves on these pillars and their overall preparedness for OCM. We gained an understanding of how change initiatives are managed, the culture of change on campus and an understanding of the experiences of those who have been involved in operational or transformational changes. Preparedness for OCM in higher education varies widely but

executive sponsor to lead change are statistically more prepared for OCM than those that do not.

institutions who regularly have an executive sponsor to lead change are statistically more prepared for OCM than those that do not. The data also highlight the importance of having an executive sponsor and engaging stakeholders to the perceived success of any change initiative. Most individuals report being comfortable managing change but still would like to have additional OCM focused professional development opportunities.

Further, we learned that technology is one of the primary drivers of change and a change in technology often involves more than one type of technology being implemented or changed simultaneously. In addition, it is clear that change driven by one factor regularly leads to concurrent changes in other areas such as policy, practice and staffing.

Institutions should engage in an evaluation of their institution's' overall OCM culture and preparedness to manage change, if not already completed.

One of the reasons for completing this examination of OCM in higher education was because we know institutions are constantly managing change in one or more areas and we did not have a baseline with which to compare one institution's OCM to another. We also did not know what works well in OCM in higher education and where the challenges lie.

**Preparedness for OCM in higher** 

institutions who regularly have an

education varies widely, but

Based on what we learned, institutions should engage in an evaluation of their institution's' overall OCM culture and preparedness to manage change, if not already completed. The results of which should be used to help shape discussions about the strengths and weaknesses of OCM on their campus and how to address the weaknesses. Ellucian leverages over 50 years of higher education experience to support institutions in accelerating and succeeding with their OCM projects. Ellucian's solutions and services are powering what's next in higher education and supporting institutions on their journey to improve operational efficiencies. Individuals involved in OCM should seek professional development in OCM either through formal channels, like AACRAO and free online courses, or informally on their own. A select number of readily available resources have been included below.

## Resources

The Heart of Change Field Guide: Tools and Tactics for Leading Change in Your Organization by Dan S. Cohen

California Organizational Change Management (CA-OCM) Framework (2014): <a href="https://projectresources.cdt.ca.gov/ocm/">https://projectresources.cdt.ca.gov/ocm/</a>

California Organizational Change Management (CA-OCM) Framework (2020) <a href="https://projectresources.cdt.ca.gov/ocm/">https://projectresources.cdt.ca.gov/ocm/</a>

Change Management Toolkit: https://hr.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/change\_management\_toolkit.pdf

Free Change Management Courses:

https://www.edx.org/learn/change-management

https://www.coursera.org/courses?query=change%20management

Change Management Leadership Guide: <a href="https://www.ryerson.ca/content/dam/hr/manager-resources/docs/change-management-leadership-guide.pdf">https://www.ryerson.ca/content/dam/hr/manager-resources/docs/change-management-leadership-guide.pdf</a>

Change Management Guide: https://www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/change-management

Five Questions to Ask in Measuring Your Change Effort's Success: <a href="http://www.realtimestrategicchange.com/five-questions-to-ask-in-measuring-your-change-efforts-success/">http://www.realtimestrategicchange.com/five-questions-to-ask-in-measuring-your-change-efforts-success/</a>

8 Critical Change Management Models to Evolve and Survive: <a href="https://www.process.st/change-management-models/">https://www.process.st/change-management-models/</a>

# **Appendix A: Self-Assessment Scoring for the Five Pillars of OCM**

