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## The Elephant In the Room

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**It is said the only thing constant is change, but it could also be said that change is constantly avoided, denied and feared. Like it or not, when it comes to change, project managers are usually right in the middle of it. Here is a three-step approach to help you lead in tumultuous times.**

In the age of AIG bonuses, mass layoffs and automakers rattling tin cups before Congress, today's top brass is looking a bit, well, tarnished. But that doesn't mean management is obsolete.

Whether your office is in the C-suite or off the shop floor, management will always have an enormous impact on change. The central question: Will it be managed or it will manage you?

Jonathan Gilbert, PMP, director of client solutions at ESI International, has more than 30 years of experience as entrepreneur, educator, chief executive officer, construction manager, management consultant, project manager and engineer. Gilbert describes the changes roiling every industry as a result of the recession as the "elephant in the room."

"It's unbelievable what's occurring right now," he says. "And project managers are right in the middle of it. Peoples' roles are shifting enormously."

He shares his top three leadership activities for a successful change:

### **Identify phase**

Identify that a change is required, perhaps due to:

- Competitive pressures
- Marketplace conditions
- Resource constraints
- Other organizational imperatives

Leaders do this by conducting a constant stream of communications within the organization, both broadly and deeply, using multiple media (it's not unlike a marketing campaign).

Get people involved by clarifying the unacceptable current state and it's effect on all organizational constituencies — examples:

- Shareholders expect a certain ROI and dividend and we're not meeting those expectations.
- Costs will need to be reduced.
- Profit sharing, and other forms of merit pay, will have to be eliminated.

Leaders accomplish this by spending time with different constituencies up and down the

organization, and listening with empathy for individual pain points.

### **Engage phase**

Give people a chance and time to become aware of the current unacceptable state, and to produce their own insights about what the change means to them personally, so that they:

- Own the change.
- Are energized by the change.

Believe in the latent wisdom of the people throughout the organization to understand the change, and to create relevant solutions to deal with the problem/challenge of change by:

- Enlisting their support and ideas on how to deal with the change.

Leaders make these happen by:

- Multiple skip-level meetings.
- Broadcasting requests for help.
- Encouraging self-organizing behaviors and activities to bust bureaucracies and create meaningful cross-functional solutions.

### **Implement phase**

– Tolerate prototype development and implementation of solutions at the local level, while keeping an eye on possible unintended consequences; this requires suspending the need to control, and the need to have a “master plan” for the change.

– Accept and encourage continual refinement and adaptation to the changing conditions, recognizing that the processes and tools developed during the change need to be flexible and adjustable.

– Give people adequate time for deliberate practice of the new ways of doing work within the changing organization; this means allowing people the time and space to work with the new tools and processes to gain facility and a modicum of expertise with them.

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