: How can DSS builders reduce resistance to a new system?

by Dan Power

Editor, DSSResources.com

A new decision support system (DSS) may be an incremental change in an existing process, or provide a radical new way of creating and sharing decision relevant information, or something in between. Any new DSS is a technology change and will cause resistance from some stakeholders. Resistance to using the DSS should be anticipated and managed. DSS builders need to act to deal with both rational and emotional concerns of those impacted by the change. In general, the amount of resistance is more a function of how the new system is built and deployed, then it is a function of the magnitude of the change. So what can builders do?

First, develop and explain a rational justification for the change; share the vision. Schuler, a clinical psychologist and leadership coach, notes "To win people's commitment for change, you must engage them on both a rational level and an emotional level." An analysis of decision support needs involves making assumptions and tradeoffs. Rational objections to the change may exist and DSS builders must be open to feedback and dialogue with stakeholders. People often have a healthy skepticism of radical change. If the diagnosis has been systematic and appropriately executed, many objections and concerns of stakeholders can be minimized.

Second, identify and recruit champions for the change. Make sure the advocates understand the pros and cons and are good role models for the new way of making decisions. If the goal is more and better fact-based decision making, make sure a champion is known for finding and using facts in current decision situations. Champions can help gain consensus at the beginning of a project and explain the project. Do champions find builders or do builders find champions? A business unit or IS/IT manager/champion often initiates a project request and finds a builder/analyst. But, at some point a builder/analyst needs to recruit other "champions". During the project more champions are usually needed to reduce resistance to change.

Third, demonstrate and communicate successes. Professor John Kotter emphasizes the importance of creating short term wins. Long, delayed implementations with no concrete results create stress and test the commitment of everyone involved in a DSS project.

Fourth, provide training and help people adjust to the new system. The negative consequences of not changing for individuals and the organization need to be perceived as much greater than changing to the new DSS. Some people may fear they can not learn the new system, others will fear a loss of status or influence. Change creates new roles and requires new learning.

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Harvard Professor John Kotter (1999) identifies a general change process with 8 steps: 1) defrost a hardened status quo and establish a sense of urgency; 2)create the guiding coalition: 3)develop a vision and strategy; 4)communicate the change vision; 5) empower a broad base of people to take action; 6) generate short term wins; 7)consolidate gains and produce even more change; and 8) institutionalize new approaches in the corporate culture. DSS builders need to understand the change process and become facilitators of change.

According to the ToolPack Consulting website, "There are many documented cases where companies tried to install new
technologies or systems of working without considering the impact on
social systems (the way people work and interact with each other), or
without giving thought to how the people who actually do the work feel
about the changes. The result is usually an expensive failure, with employee
reactions ranging from simple misunderstandings (resulting in lost
productivity or damage) to outright sabotage and organized labor actions."

Four broad strategies of change management have been discussed by various authors. The strategies can sometimes be combined and include:

1) Rational argument strategy -- communicate the what, how and why of a new DSS and provide incentives to adopt the system.

2) Education strategy -- use the culture and social norms to reinforce adopting the new DSS. Provide training and informational materials and develop a commitment to the new decision process.

3) Coercive strategy -- mandate use of the new DSS and impose sanctions on those who do not comply. Change becomes based on the exercise of authority.

4) Adaptive/incremental strategy -- change organizational circumstances, reorganize and restaff as part of introducing the new DSS. Make small changes and introduce the DSS using pilot or phased deployment.

In general, choose a strategy or mix of strategies that is best matched with situational factors like 1)

anticipated resistance, 2) attitudes of the target users, 3) stakes associated with success and failure, and 4) urgency of adoption.

The existing social system in a company, including how decisions are made and implemented, is usually firmly entrenched. DSS builders need to begin a new project by understanding and documenting existing decision processes and discussing the effectiveness of the processes with those who currently make the decisions. New DSS can not be imposed by outside consultants, rather, if possible, the system must be accepted by all key stakeholders early in the building and design process and then their support must be maintained.

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Author: Daniel Power
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