Quality Group – A Continuous Change Catalyst and Change Manager

By

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Introduction

We hear many success stories of major changes brought on by IT implementations in industries such as Banking, Oil & Gas, Insurance, Sales setups, and Media, for example. IT service organizations involved in making changes in these industries also go through transformations through a series of small or big changes.

This includes adapting to changing business requirements, new technologies, new domains, and new process models. These changes influence various lifecycles such as application development, maintenance, support, testing, migration, product engineering, and ERPs to name a few. Leveraging automation brings yet another big change.

The Quality Assurance (QA) Group plays an important and major role in institutionalizing major process and automation related changes in the organization. Change management is applied for the overall success of the projects and operations of the organization.

This paper focuses on sharing best practices that the QA group in L&T Infotech follows to manage changes.

QA group as Change Manager

To set the context, it is important to understand responsibility of the QA group. Quality group is structured into three major functions – Quality Assurance (QA) function in business units, process excellence team and Metrics function.

These functions coordinate with each other and project teams to improve software processes and tools used in the organization. The QA group is instrumental in establishing and improving processes and tools based on the input gathered from within and outside the organization. This involves gathering input for improvement, analyzing these inputs, prioritizing, piloting and finally implementing these inputs.

The QA Group is also responsible for leading major initiatives across the organization such as assessments related to various standards such as ISO, CMMI. All these initiatives require change management in a structured manner.

Over the years we have understood the major hurdles and have come up with strategy for preparing and implementing the change. This paper describes the best practices adopted by Quality Assurance Group for managing changes brought on by any initiative.

Identifying the change

Changes can be big or small. Change can be suggested by senior management or by young talent in the organization. We believe in keeping an open window strategy and welcoming all positive changes. The QA group at L&T Infotech adapts many practices for seeking input to initiate change. Practices include:

- The QA group conducts yearly client satisfaction survey. This questionnaire is applied at various levels in the organization- from developers, managers to senior management to obtain inputs around improvement.

- Voices of the client (VOC) interviews are conducted in each business unit to understand user requirements in terms of processes for new types of business. This also includes certification and automation requirements. The VOC also focuses on changes required in the current operation in terms of QA consulting, current tools and processes
L&T Infotech’s ‘Got an Idea’ system enables employees across the organization to suggest improvements in the current operation, processes or systems.

QA group also performs analysis on various aspects. It includes non-compliance observed in audits, deviation in using of process/ templates, client satisfaction feedback, defects and risks identified in the projects etc. Analysis often leads to defining of new processes, or strengthening of existing processes.

**Involving stakeholders**

Changes are accepted well when the stakeholders are involved in making decisions in the journey. The QA group at L&T Infotech takes care of this point by involving right stakeholders at right time.

- The QA group usually forms a taskforce involving stakeholders- primary impacted users, their supervisors and the QA team. QA team guides and supports other taskforce members throughout the change lifecycle.
- Taskforce gathers input from their respective groups and thus ensures larger participation in defining or reviewing the change.
- All changes require validation before deploying on larger scale. Quality Assurance group pilots the change in smaller pockets by identifying the projects or BUs that will be impacted the most. Based on the feedback received during the pilot phase, required changes are made before deploying the change across the Organization. Another important benefit of this strategy is that these piloting stakeholders act as process champions in their BU. They set good examples and encourage others to implement the change.
- For larger initiatives at corporate level, we form Change Control Board (CCB), to identify and prioritize the activities. When change inputs come through various sources, the CCB decides on changes to be taken up and their priority.
- An example is an ERP process initiative in which Oracle processes were aligned to Oracle-unified methodology in the Quality Management System. The

**Sponsorship for the change**

Sufficient resources and funding is a key parameter for the success of any change initiative.

- QA group is a cost center. As such, it is important to seek approval and sponsorship from senior management for major changes.
- The QA group identifies major initiatives and presents high level plan and budget at the beginning of fiscal year for:
  - Major change initiatives/ Assessments (CMMI, /ISO etc.).
  - Travel and communication for deployment, training etc.
  - Automation of tools.
  - Resources for process consultancy and auditing the deployed changes.

Presenting the plan and the budget for initiatives also provides an opportunity to obtain validation from senior management and know their priorities.
QA group started with this change using VOC inputs. Users from various practices of Oracle VIZ, PeopleSoft, Siebel, EBIZ and JDE were part of the task force along with the QA team. Approval was obtained by practice heads before deploying the changes.

**Continuous Communication**

Communication is the most crucial factor in the process of change management. It improves acceptance from the users.

- After the taskforce is formed, the QA group conducts a kick-off meeting with the stakeholders.
- As a prelude to the change, e-mailers notifying that changes are coming soon are broadcasted. E-mailers circulated help to set the context and to draw attention to the change and set a positive notion.
- Some changes are organization-wide while others are BU-specific. The communication method is selected based on target users.
- Important changes are flashed in the section ‘What’s Coming Up’ and ‘What’s New’ on quality management section website.
- A series of mailers with catchy pictures, diagrams and aptly drafted content are broadcasted to explain the change.
- Space on the computer desktops is also used to communicate the change information. The desktop pin ups are published on all employee computers. This strategy has been very helpful for sharing information to masses. We have used this strategy for announcing new system launches and changes in systems such as Application Lifecycle Management Systems, knowledge sharing tools, events and trainings in the organization.
- To increase awareness on the changes, the QA group also runs e-quizzes with exciting prizes.
- L&T Infotech has culture of sending “Appreciation Notes” and sharing these in the HR portal. The QA group makes use of this system for appreciating participants who made noticeable contributions in supporting and deploying the change.
- The QA group prepares and sends newsletters regarding various activities around major changes, including the status of the initiatives. To encourage users to know and adapt the change, the QA group also produces a video of users. These users share their feedback, benefits realized and challenges overcome. These video clips are played on central displays within all centers in the organization. The QA group used this strategy effectively for various initiatives such as agile practice awareness initiative and annual project management practice sharing event.

**Training**

For implementing the change it is important to educate and train the users based on the nature of the change the QA group plans the training to end users. Final objective of the training is to make users comfortable with the change and make this change apart of a regular process. Impact on the existing training materials is identified during the Impact analysis phase of the change initiative.
QA group plans for training in various ways:

- Training is conducted at every center of the organization. Usually, this strategy is adapted when change impacts several users at various levels. Audiences are grouped and trainings are conducted for various groups such as training for team members, middle management, senior management etc.

- For changes that are simple to implement, train-the-trainer strategy is adapted. Information sharing sessions are conducted with the key users and these users further propagate the changes and train other users. Based on the first hand queries received during information sharing sessions or initial trainings, the QA group also prepares frequently asked questions (FAQs). These are typically created for certain changes in processes/ templates/ tools and we make these available in the quality management system website.

- For training the users on complex tools and templates, video recording is created. These video clips are then shared on the quality website or made available to respective users. When our new project management tool was launched, and new estimation templates were established, this strategy of training was very effective.

- The QA group conducts quarterly process audits for the ongoing projects. These audits provide an opportunity to verify if the changes are deployed and on-track in projects.

- The QA group raises a noncompliance notice if mandatory changes are not deployed. Compliance reports are shared with senior management at the BU level and at organization level.

- Operations dashboards are established which describe status of the change at a high level. Status of deployment is shared management review meetings at BU level. If the deployment is not progressing as expected, this reporting to senior management helps expedite and remove hurdles in the implementation.

- At times, top down approach is followed for implementing change. Senior management assumes a responsibility of jointly tracking the deployment of these changes.

**People Management**

Managing people who are impacted by the change is critical aspect for successful change implementation. Involving users in decision making, communicating with them on regular basis, and training them to handle the changes are steps towards preparing people for accepting and adapting to change.

**How QA group prepares people for change**

- QA group explains the benefits of adapting to the change in terms of ‘What’s in for me’ rather than making the change mandatory and imposing.
The QA group often deploys the change in phases. Bandwidth of the users is also considered while establishing the change deployment timeline.

Quality group listens to the concerns of the users. This helps us assess if more training or handholding is required. In special cases in which the change implementation is not beneficial the QA group helps seek a waiver on implementing the change.

### Challenges faced by QA group in people management

It is very rare that change implementation team does not face any challenge. The QA group at L&T Infotech also faces certain challenges while deploying changes, but has established solutions to overcome common challenges mentioned below.

- Some of the project managers comment that their project is executed smoothly and they don’t need to implement the change for improvement of project. Some project teams resist upgrading their project templates to newer version.

### Solution

- Identify which projects require the changes and determine applicability of change.
- Decide timeline. The QA group assesses if the changed process should be used only for the projects that are ongoing for a certain period.
- Sometimes users do not implement the mandatory changes or accept the noncompliance observed in the audits.

### Summary

IT service organizations constantly implement changes. Some changes are large, impacting the entire operation, while other changes are small to keep organization operations running smooth.

In both big and small changes, the QA group plays major role and performs complete lifecycle of change management. The structured approach followed throughout the initiative helps QA team to overcome the major impediments associated with changes and make change implementation smooth and seamless.

Some of the best practices shared from L&T Infotech might be unique and will be helpful to the QA community across IT industry.

### Acronyms

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<td>IT</td>
<td>Information Technology</td>
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<td>QA</td>
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<td>VOC</td>
<td>Voice of Client</td>
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<td>BU</td>
<td>Business Unit</td>
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<td>Change Control Board</td>
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