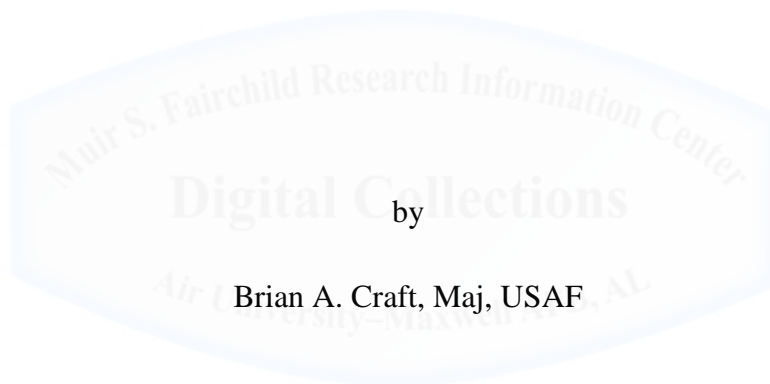


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AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

CHANGING AIR FORCE CULTURE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE NEW
AIR FORCE INSPECTION SYSTEM IMPLEMENTATION
STRATEGY



by

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A Research Report Submitted to the Faculty

In Partial Fulfillment of the Graduation Requirements

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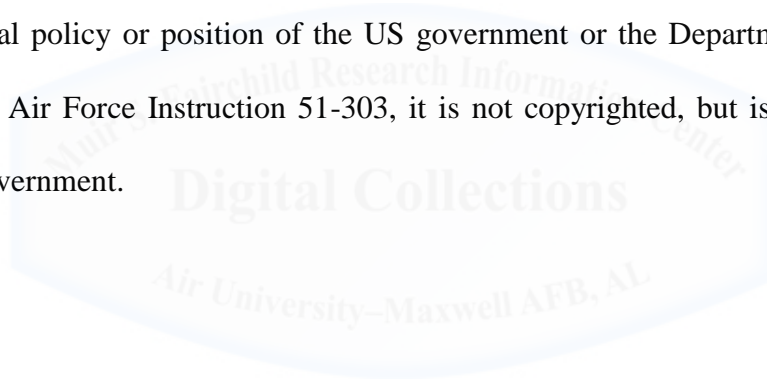


TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
DISCLAIMER	II
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	III
PREFACE.....	IV
ABSTRACT.....	V
INTRODUCTION	1
Research Methodology	4
BACKGROUND	5
Air Force Inspection System History	5
Forces Driving Organizational Change	9
Resistances to Change	12
Methods to Overcome Resistance to Change	16
CASE STUDY ANALYSIS OF THE NEW AFIS IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY .20	
John P. Kotter’s Eight-Stage Process of Creating Major Change	20
Establishing a Sense of Urgency	21
Creating the Guiding Coalition.....	24
Developing a Vision and Strategy	27
Communicating the Change Vision.....	30
Empowering Broad-Based Action.....	36
Generating Short-Term Wins	40
Consolidating Gains and Producing More Change	42
Anchoring New Approaches in the Culture	46
CASE STUDY ANALYSIS SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS.....	48
RECOMMENDATIONS.....	51
Communicate the Need for Change in Order to Establish a High Enough Sense of Urgency.....	51
Develop a Clear and Concise Vision Statement and Viable Strategy for Change	53
Create and Execute an Effective Strategic Communications Plan	54
CONCLUSION.....	56
ENDNOTES	578
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	65

PREFACE

I have been assigned as the Director of Inspections at an Air Force wing since the implementation of the new Air Force Inspection System (AFIS) was first directed in June 2013. Since I have been part of the new AFIS transformation effort from the beginning, I have watched first-hand the trials and tribulations of implementing this new inspection system and changing Air Force culture. As I progressed through my Air Command and Staff College Online Master's Program (OLMP), I became interested in the study of organizational change and how to best lead and manage such efforts.

One change model that appeared repeatedly throughout my courses was John P. Kotter's eight-stage process of creating change, which provided a straightforward, step-by-step plan for creating lasting organizational change. As I worked through the first few years of the new AFIS, I could not help but wonder if those who had directed the new AFIS implementation had considered Kotter's model in their planning. Thus, I sought to determine whether Air Force leaders had used the very methods they were asking me to learn during this program and whether the change strategy used to implement the new AFIS is going to result in lasting change for the Air Force.

I would like to thank Dr. Edward Ouellette for his guidance and feedback during each week of this last semester. I would also like to thank Dr. Elizabeth Niesiobedzki for helping me develop the proposal for this research paper. Additionally, I want to thank my fellow OLMP students who provided countless peer reviews and invaluable assistance on this project. Most of all, I would like to thank my beautiful and talented fiancé. Her patience and support throughout this entire program has been amazing, and I could not have done it without her.

ABSTRACT

Over the course of several decades, the Air Force Inspector General and other Air Force senior leaders determined that the increasing number of inspections being conducted on Air Force units had created an unsustainable burden in terms of both time and resources. Additionally, the quality of the data from these inspections did not provide senior leaders with an accurate assessment of the readiness, discipline, efficiency, and economy of the Air Force. As a result, they created an Inspection System Improvement Tiger Team to develop potential solutions, and, on 17 June 2013, the secretary of the Air Force signed *Headquarters United States Air Force Program Action Directive 13-01, Implementation of the Secretary of the United States Air Force Direction to Implement a New Air Force Inspection System*.

The changes brought about by the new AFIS affected Airmen at every level and were intended to transform Air Force culture; however, based on available Air Force guidance, it was not immediately apparent whether a reputable change management process had been used to create the new AFIS implementation strategy. Therefore, an exploratory case study framework and qualitative analysis was used to conduct a step-by-step comparison of John P. Kotter's eight-stage process of creating major change to the actions directed and taken by Air Force leaders before and during the implementation of the new AFIS. The analysis revealed that all eight steps from Kotter's model had been addressed, though not all eight steps had reached completion. Additionally, some recommend improvement areas were identified to assist Air Force leaders with future major change initiatives.

INTRODUCTION

It must be considered that there is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle, than to initiate a new order of things.

—Niccoló Machiavelli, *The Prince*

Change is never easy, especially in a large, complex organizations, but it is often necessary, otherwise organizations run the risk of becoming ineffective or irrelevant. Since its inception in 1947, the United States Air Force has undergone many change efforts intended to improve its organizational and operational effectiveness. From 1990 to 1994 alone, Air Force leaders implemented more than 20 major changes affecting personnel, organizational structure, training, acquisitions, and operations. Some of these changes have remained a part of Air Force culture, but some have not.¹ Unfortunately, this is not uncommon in large organizations, where approximately 70 percent of all change efforts fail to produce lasting results.² Nevertheless, Air Force leaders continue to initiate major change efforts in attempts to improve organizational efficiency and effectiveness.

One such change effort is the implementation of the new Air Force Inspection System. In 2010, the Office of the Secretary of the Air Force, Inspector General (SAF/IG) began an “aggressive effort to improve inspection policy by reducing the burden that it places on inspected units and increasing the quality of relevant information it generates for the secretary and chief of staff of the Air Force and for commanders throughout the Air Force.”³ As part of this effort, SAF/IG formed an Inspection System Improvement Tiger Team (ISITT) that was responsible for finding ways to improve inspection policy across all Air Force functional areas. During its multi-year effort, the ISITT developed a concept for a new inspection system that was eventually approved by Air Force senior leaders.⁴ On 17 June 2013, *Headquarters United States Air Force*

Program Action Directive 13-01, Implementation of the Secretary of the United States Air Force Direction to Implement a New Air Force Inspection System directed the implementation of the new AFIS and initiated a transformation effort that brought changes to every level of the US Air Force.⁵

Under the new AFIS, the inspection roles and responsibilities have changed for thousands of Airmen, including Headquarters US Air Force (HAF) and major command (MAJCOM) staffs and commanders at all levels.⁶ Consequently, the Air Force has devoted man-hours and training dollars to MAJCOM IG staffs, wing IGs, and wing inspection team (WIT) members to ensure they complete new training required to perform inspector duties under the new AFIS construct.⁷ Additionally, HAF functional area managers have reviewed, updated, and staffed over 1,200 Air Force instructions (AFI) to ensure all compliance statements that direct action at or below the wing level adhere to new Air Force publications requirements.⁸ Meanwhile, MAJCOM functional area managers and wing plans offices have worked to react to these AFI changes. The Air Force has also invested resources in developing and upgrading a collection of information technology systems needed to support and manage AFIS inspections and self-assessments.⁹ Yet it remains to be seen whether all of the resources and effort invested in the new AFIS implementation will result in lasting cultural change for the Air Force.

In the July 2014 issue of *The Inspector General Brief*, Lieutenant General Stephen P. Mueller, the Air Force Inspector General, described the new AFIS as the Air Force's "single largest cultural change in the past four decades."¹⁰ If this is indeed the case, one would expect Air Force leaders to have a well-designed change management strategy to implement such a significant transformation. However, the strategy of "implement first, innovate later" directed by the Office of the Secretary of the Air Force, Inspector General, Inspections

Directorate (SAF/IGI) in the *Commander's Inspection Program Wing/FOA/DRU*

Implementation Guide Ver 1.0. appears to be a haphazard approach to executing such a major change effort,¹¹ thus prompting the question, “How effective was the change management strategy utilized by Air Force leaders to implement the new AFIS?”

Prior to the release of *Program Action Directive (PAD) 13-01*, the RAND Corporation published the results of an extensive study that was conducted in cooperation with SAF/IG to help identify effective inspection practices used by other large organizations. The report also included several detailed recommendations on how Air Force leaders should implement changes to its inspection system.¹² The recommendations were based on elements of change management processes that are commonly employed in other “large, complex American public and private sector organizations,”¹³ including John P. Kotter’s eight-stage process of creating major change. While following a popular change management process provides no guarantee of lasting change, it does provide a viable method for overcoming some of the most difficult challenges of organizational change, including developing a vision and communication strategy, overcoming resistance to change, building support for change, and instilling the new norms of behavior and shared values that create lasting cultural change within an organization.¹⁴

John P. Kotter’s eight-stage process of creating major change is one of the most reputable change management models in modern commercial industry.¹⁵ An internationally recognized expert on leadership and change, Kotter has identified that successful transformation efforts tend to involve the use of a multistep change process.¹⁶ Kotter published the details of his eight-stage process in his 1997 best-selling book, *Leading Change*. His process has since become one of the most highly regarded change management models in both academic and practical applications, and his book includes numerous accounts of successful transformation efforts in organizations

that have employed his process. Kotter's book also describes many change efforts that failed to produce the desired outcome when organizations did not adhere to the eight-stage process.¹⁷

Although using Kotter's eight-stage process does not guarantee a transformation effort will result in lasting cultural change, "applying the model is likely to improve the chances of success" for an organization implementing a major change initiative.¹⁸

Research Methodology

An exploratory case study framework will be used to analyze the change strategy used to implement the new AFIS with the intent of showing that it will produce lasting cultural change for the Air Force because it addressed all of the key steps from Kotter's eight-stage process. Background information will first be provided about Department of Defense (DOD) and Air Force inspection requirements, responsibilities under the previous inspection system as well as the new AFIS, and reasons for changing the inspection system. To provide greater context for the subsequent case study analysis, the background section will also discuss the forces that drive organizational change, reasons for resistance to change, and methods to overcome such resistance.

A qualitative analysis will then be used to conduct a step-by-step comparison of Kotter's eight-stage process of creating major change to the actions directed and taken by Air Force leaders before and during the implementation of the new AFIS. The case study will identify and discuss the strengths and shortcomings of the new AFIS implementation strategy as compared to Kotter's eight-stage process. Recommendations will then be provided to address the AFIS implementation strategy shortfalls and help Air Force leaders develop effective change management strategies for future transformation initiatives. Evaluating the effectiveness of the new AFIS itself is beyond the scope of this paper. Rather, it will focus on the change

management strategy used to implement this program and discuss whether it included the steps of Kotter's eight-stage process.

BACKGROUND

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the new AFIS implementation strategy, one must first understand the forces for and the resistances to organizational change, as well as the context in which the new AFIS was developed. "Organizational change is the process by which organizations move from their current state to some desired future state to increase their effectiveness."¹⁹ Goals of the new AFIS included improving the Air Force's efficiency, effectiveness, and readiness through critical self-assessments and continual evaluation.²⁰ There were numerous forces that influenced the Air Force's decision to implement the new AFIS, and, like many large organizations, the Air Force was susceptible to resistance to change at the organizational, functional, group, and individual levels. However, several methods for overcoming resistance were available. The manner in which the Air Force used these various methods to overcome resistance will be discussed and analyzed during the subsequent case study.

Air Force Inspection System History

The office of the inspector general (IG) has been a part of the US military since 1778, when the Continental Congress, under the recommendation of General George Washington, commissioned Major General Frederick William von Steuben as Inspector General of the Continental Army. At the time, General von Steuben personally inspected the troops and their equipment to ensure good order and discipline. He also wrote training regulations that were passed down to brigade and regiment inspectors. The regulations written by von Steuben

remained in use by the US Army until 1814, and though the role of the office of the inspector general has changed over time, its legacy is still present in all branches of the US military.²¹

The requirement for an Inspector General of the Air Force is now written into Title 10 United States Code (USC) Section 8020, which states, “There is an Inspector General of the Air Force who shall be detailed to such position by the Secretary of the Air Force from the general officers of the Air Force.”²² Section 8020 also states that “when directed by the Secretary or the Chief of Staff, the Inspector General shall inquire into and report upon the discipline, efficiency, and economy of the Air Force.”²³ Additionally, Title 10 USC Section 8583 requires all commanding officers and others in authority in the Air Force “to be vigilant in inspecting the conduct of all persons who are placed under their command.”²⁴ Current Air Force inspection requirements are further codified in Air Force Policy Directive (AFPD) 90-2, *Inspector General—The Inspection System*, which establishes the overarching Air Force inspection policy and directs the Air Force to use the Air Force Inspection System to evaluate the state of discipline, economy, efficiency, readiness, and resource management.²⁵ Furthermore, AFI 90-201, *The Air Force Inspection System*, implements the policy in AFPD 90-2 and contains guidance for all Air Force inspection activity.²⁶

When the United States Air Force was created in 1947, it conducted only six types of inspections, but by 2010, Air Force units could receive over 97 different types of inspections, assessments, and evaluations conducted by the Air Force, DOD, and other government agencies. This long list of activities included Operational Readiness Inspections, Nuclear Surety Inspections, Nuclear Operational Readiness Inspections, and various compliance inspections that were designed to evaluate the state of discipline, efficiency, and readiness of an Air Force wing.²⁷ Most Air Force wings were scheduled to receive the applicable inspections on a periodic

basis, and the visiting MAJCOM IG teams could consist of more than 100 inspectors. The length of the inspections would vary, but the inspection teams would always require transportation to and from the inspection location, as well as food, lodging, and transportation once arriving on site.²⁸

Unit commanders could expect to receive at least one MAJCOM IG inspection during their command tour, the outcome of which was extremely important due to the potential career implications. The results of an inspection could positively or negatively affect commanders' careers, as they were held responsible for a passing or failing grade. Therefore, tremendous time and effort were dedicated to preparing for inspections. The prevalence of these inspection preparation efforts was highlighted in the February 2008 version of *Guidelines for Commanders*, an Air University publication that contained an entire chapter about compliance and inspections, including a section dedicated to preparing for inspections. This section stressed the importance of "developing a good inspection preparatory plan in the months prior to the visit" and included a list of tips for success during a MAJCOM IG inspection.²⁹ This type of inspection preparation had little to do with improving overall organizational effectiveness and mission readiness, but rather it focused on creating the appearance of compliance and making a favorable impression on the MAJCOM inspectors.³⁰

Over the course of several decades, Air Force leaders began to realize that committing time and resources to inspection preparation and sustaining traveling IG teams was inherently wasteful because it contributed little to overall mission readiness. The unchecked growth of inspection requirements and the perception that looking good for a visiting IG team was more important than daily readiness further fueled the need for change. Additionally, commanders had developed "an unhealthy reliance on periodic external inspections as the primary indicators of

unit health,”³¹ and they began to acknowledge the atrophy of organizational muscles that occurred during the lulls between MAJCOM inspections. Furthermore, fiscal constraints that had not existed previously began to play a larger role in Air Force decision making, thus forcing Air Force leaders to prioritize activities to ensure units focused on mission readiness rather than inspection readiness.³²

As a result of the many forces of change at work, the secretary of the Air Force (SECAF) directed the implementation of the new Air Force Inspection System in June 2013. Since then, SAF/IGI has completely revised AFPD 90-2 and AFI 90-201 to align with the principles of this new inspection philosophy. AFPD 90-2 now explicitly states that “the Air Force will not prepare for inspections,” which is a significant paradigm shift from the previous inspection system.³³ The introduction of the new AFIS also prompted SAF/IG to publish AFI 1-2, *Commander’s Responsibilities*. First released on 8 May 2014, AFI 1-2 establishes broad expectations and responsibilities for Air Force commanders, but it recommends that leaders at all level apply its principles and methods.³⁴

The new AFIS placed the responsibility for inspections back in the hands of commanders, where it rightfully belongs in accordance with Title 10 USC. Rather than relying solely on external inspections, wings now rely heavily on self-assessments accomplished by Airmen at the shop level and a Commander’s Inspection Program (CCIP) executed by the wing IG on behalf of the wing commander.³⁵ Commanders at all levels are responsible for their own self-assessment program, and wing commanders now have the flexibility to tailor the CCIP based on changing priorities.³⁶ MAJCOM IG teams still visit wings every 24-30 months during a Unit Effectiveness Inspection (UEI) Capstone, but the inspection teams are much smaller than in the past. The UEI

Capstone is part of a continual evaluation process that encourages commanders to focus on mission readiness, which, in turn, will result in inspection readiness.³⁷

Forces Driving Organizational Change

There are countless reasons organizational change occurs, but it is normally in reaction to or anticipation of changes in the environment in which an organization operates.³⁸ Consequently, an organization is driven to find improved methods of employing available resources in order to enhance its capabilities. Some external forces that can drive organizational change include competitive forces, global political and economic forces, social forces, and ethical forces.³⁹ Additionally, organizations will make changes when they identify performance gaps.⁴⁰

Competitive forces arise from organizations that are seeking to gain an advantage over other organizations through improved efficiency, quality, or capability.⁴¹ The competitive forces affecting the US Air Force are from adversaries who are continually improving their technology, tactics, and training in an attempt to gain a warfighting advantage. Competitive forces have a tremendous impact on the way the Air Force operates because if it lags behind, then national security is at stake. Therefore, the Air Force continuously seeks opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness so that warfighting capability and mission readiness remain at the highest possible levels. Continuous improvement efforts are more critical and more difficult in a fiscally constrained environment because resources are limited, yet the number of threats and the demand for protection of national security interests continues to rise.

Global political and economic forces are the result of operating in the international community, including participation in trade agreements and international alliances.⁴² These forces create an increasing demand on the Air Force and its members. Political forces include the diplomatic relationships that the US government maintains with both its allies and potential

adversaries. As the geopolitical landscape continues to change, the need continues to increase for the Air Force to form new partnerships and adjust its tactics, techniques, and procedures to operate and succeed in different cultures and operating areas. Additionally, political forces within the US government have an impact on how and when the Air Force is able to employ its capabilities.

Global economic forces also play a tremendous role in driving change within the Air Force. Each year, the US government seeks to operate within a balanced budget; however, when the US economy is underperforming on the global stage, the US government is forced to make budget cuts to minimize further accumulation of debt. Consequently, the DOD and US Air Force budgets are also reduced, and both organizations are forced to change the way they operate to ensure readiness is maintained at the highest possible level.

An example of such changes involves fuel reduction initiatives identified by Air Mobility Command (AMC) in its efforts to reduce fuel consumption. The DOD accounts for approximately 80 percent of the US government's energy use, half of which is in the form of aviation fuel. Therefore, AMC, the largest DOD consumer of aviation fuel, has implemented several measures that helped the Air Force reduce aviation fuel consumption by 12 percent between 2006 and 2013, equating to tens of millions of dollars in savings.⁴³ In some cases, these measures have caused aircrews and maintenance personnel to operate in ways that are less efficient or effective, but the shrinking DOD budget often leaves Air Force leaders with no choice but to find ways to conserve resources whenever possible.

Social forces created by a changing workforce composition can also drive change within an organization.⁴⁴ The US Air Force, like all public institutions, is subject to social forces. In recent years, the Air Force, along with other DOD components, has been forced to change the

way it operates in order to accommodate a more diverse workforce and to correct behaviors that are no longer socially acceptable. These changes have resulted in new policies, additional education and training for Airmen, and even the removal of senior leaders from key positions. Additionally, commanders and leaders at all levels have had to adjust their leadership and management styles and learn new ways to effectively supervise and motivate a more diverse workforce. Furthermore, the reduction in the Air Force manning has driven the need for greater empowerment of Airmen to make important decisions at lower levels.

Ethical forces are the political and societal demands for organizations to operate responsibly and promote honest and moral behavior.⁴⁵ Ethical behavior is expected from all Airmen, not only to maintain good order and discipline, but also to ensure they are good stewards of taxpayer dollars. Government officials and the American people demand transparency in Air Force operations, thus commanders and their Airman are expected to act with integrity and honesty. Additionally, Airmen are expected to report those who are being irresponsible with the power that has been entrusted to them by the American people. Recent Air Force cheating scandals and cases of alleged impropriety amongst Air Force officers are just a couple examples of the types of unethical behavior that cannot be tolerated in a professional military organization. Therefore, when Air Force leaders detect such behavior, they must make changes within their organization to correct it.

A performance gap is the difference between the actual and expected level of organizational performance.⁴⁶ In other words, when an organization identifies that it is not meeting expectations or standards, either internal or external, it makes changes to improve its lagging performance. The Air Force has performance targets that it is expected to meet to ensure it is able to provide warfighting capabilities to combatant commanders in support of national

strategic objectives. Additionally, due to the inherent risk involved in executing many Air Force operations, maintaining standards is crucial to protecting Airmen and equipment from unnecessary risk. Commanders at all levels are responsible for monitoring the performance of their organization, and they are expected to make necessary changes to correct poor performance if and when it occurs.⁴⁷

Resistances to Change

Organizations are most effective when they can quickly adapt and overcome the driving forces of change. In order to do so, leaders must first recognize the resistances to change that can decrease the organization's overall effectiveness and affect its ability to implement changes.⁴⁸ Even when an organization is faced with disconcerting data confirming the need for change, resistance can be present at the organizational, functional, group, and individual levels. At the organizational level, resistance to change can be influenced by the organization's structure, culture, and systems. At the functional level, differences in subunit orientation and power imbalances can create barriers to change. At the group level, resistance to change may result from established norms, unit cohesiveness, and groupthink. At the individual level, resistance is often fueled by fear, perception, and habits that have developed over time.⁴⁹

Some of the most powerful organizational-level barriers to change stem from an organization's structure, culture, and systems. The structure of an organization is one characteristic that can influence resistance to change. "A mechanistic structure is characterized by a tall hierarchy, centralized decision making, and the standardization of behavior through rules and procedures."⁵⁰ Conversely, an organic structure, which is typically found in smaller organizations, is characterized by a flat hierarchy, decentralized decision making, and members

of the organization are more empowered to make decisions at lower levels in order to achieve organizational objectives.⁵¹

Organizations with a mechanistic structure, such as the US Air Force, are more resistant to change because of the administrative workload required to alter the policies, procedures, and personnel systems that define expected behavior within the organization. Individuals working within a mechanistic structure become accustomed to operating in a certain way, thus they do not develop the skills that are needed to adjust their behaviors to rapidly changing conditions. Alternately, organic organizations encourage creativity and foster an environment of continuous process improvement, making it easier for them to implement change quickly.⁵²

Organizational culture can be another significant barrier to change. Over time, organizations develop norms and values that influence how people behave. If organizational change contradicts those accepted norms and values and attempts to alter members' behavior, the organization's culture will resist the change in order to maintain the status quo. In other words, the "this is how we have always done things" mentality will keep people committed to accepted values and norms, thus making them reluctant to adopt changes. Culture can affect all levels of an organization, including management. Therefore, if all affected managers are unable to adapt to change within their organization, the level of resistance will increase significantly because subordinates will tend to emulate their manager's behavior rather than contradict it.⁵³

Organizational systems can also create resistance to change. Most organizations are designed to be stable and efficient. However, change efforts tend to create temporary instability, even though they may improve organizational effectiveness in the long run. If the forces within an organization that promote stability include hiring, training, promotion, and rewards policies that encourage members to act a certain way, members will tend to adhere to those policies in the

interest of self-preservation. These policies are all part of organizational systems that are designed to promote job stability, and they can be very difficult to overcome if members perceive that changes will create instability within the organization.⁵⁴ Many Air Force systems, including promotions, awards, and training, reward Airmen for behavior that aligns with these policies; thus, any changes that disrupted them would be met with resistance caused by uncertainty and insecurity.

At the functional level, differences in subunit orientation can slow the change process. “Different functions and divisions often see the source of a problem differently because they see an issue or problem primarily from their own viewpoint.”⁵⁵ They often disagree on the root cause of a problem and the countermeasures needed to correct it, thus the organization has to dedicate resources to resolving these disputes. Such debates can consume time and effort that distract an organization from moving forward with an effective change program. Additionally, many organizational changes involve a shift in the balance of power and resources between individuals, functions, or groups, resulting in political conflict that can impede the change process as entities compete to maintain their advantageous position within the organization. Consequently, those entities that are on the losing end on the deal tend to create resistance that can slow or stop the change process entirely. If individuals, functions, or groups will not change, then the organization as a whole cannot change.⁵⁶ The functional orientation of Air Force structures and increased competition for limited resources can create this type of resistance when functional areas affected by a change strive to preserve their respective interests.

Group-level characteristics that can produce resistance to change include norms, unit cohesiveness, and groupthink. Sub units or groups within an organization tend to develop their own norms that define the acceptable behavior of the group members. These norms can be

disrupted by organizational change that modifies the roles and responsibilities of group members, thus creating a source of resistance. Group cohesiveness can also be a source of resistance because members' loyalty to the group may be stronger than their loyalty to the organization. Therefore, when the organization's management attempts to make changes, the group may resist them in order to protect their own interests, rather than doing what is in the best interest of the entire organization. Groupthink often occurs within cohesive groups and can become an additional source of resistance to change. Groupthink can cause group members to ignore the forces of change that are occurring around them, leading them to continue with a course of action that is degrading the organization's effectiveness rather than adopting changes that would improve it.⁵⁷ Group-level resistance can occur at the group or squadron level, where loyalty to the unit creates competition between units that can cause them to lose focus of overarching organizational goals.

Individual-level resistance to change is primarily the result of fear, habit, and people's perception of a change effort. There are four types of fear associated with change: fear of change failure, fear of partial awareness, fear of personal loss, and fear of inadequate support. Due to the uncertainty and risk of most change efforts, it is common for individuals to believe that it is impossible for the change to succeed. Individuals may also fear that they are not being given complete information about the change. Additionally, they might believe that their leadership only wants them to hear the positive impacts and is ignoring the negative aspects of a change effort.⁵⁸

Many people resist change simply because they are unsure about how the change is going to affect them personally. Organizational changes can cause some individuals to lose responsibilities, power, prestige, salary, benefits, or job security. Consequently, their fear of the unknown causes them to resist changes that may threaten their position within the organization.

Furthermore, individuals might be afraid that leadership will not provide the necessary support and guidance during a transformation effort, thus they are unwilling or unmotivated to support the change.⁵⁹

Another individual barrier to change is the habits that people develop over time, causing them to become comfortable in their environment. Organizational changes may disrupt their routine by creating new challenges or forcing them to adopt new habits or methods, thus individuals tend to resist change in order to maintain the status quo. Some individuals may resist change because they are unable or unwilling to learn a new skill, or they may be insecure about their ability to adapt to a new organizational structure. Additionally, individuals may resist change simply because they like the way things are and want to avoid any disruptions.⁶⁰

Finally, perception plays a significant role in whether individuals will resist change. “Change itself is not the cause of resistance. Resistance is caused by how people perceive change.”⁶¹ If individuals do not recognize the need for change, misunderstand the change, do not trust management, or had a negative experience with a previously unsuccessful change attempt, they are likely to resist current change efforts.⁶²

Methods to Overcome Resistance to Change

There are number of methods that leaders can use to overcome resistance to change, including education and communication, participation and empowerment, facilitation and support, negotiation and agreement, manipulation, and coercion.⁶³ “Successful organizational change efforts are always characterized by the skillful application of a number of these approaches, often in very different combinations.”⁶⁴ Each method has advantages and disadvantages and is more effective in certain situations than others, which is why it is important for leaders to accurately assess the climate and culture of their organization so they can

determine the type of resistance they expect to encounter before selecting a method to overcome it. Selecting the correct method or methods can bolster the change effort and have a positive influence on the members of the organization, but selecting the incorrect method can lead to greater resistance and decreased organizational effectiveness.⁶⁵

Education and communication can be used in circumstances when inadequate or inaccurate information about a change effort has created resistance due to uncertainty, misperception, or misunderstanding. This method involves educating members of an organization about a change effort before and during its implementation in order to help dispel any rumors or false information. Constant and effective communication is required to ensure all members of the organization receive and understand the change message. Since people learn in different ways, it is also important for change leaders to use a variety of communication media to convey their information, including meetings, briefings, seminars, video teleconferences, memorandums, news articles, and emails.⁶⁶ This method can be effective at decreasing resistance, but it can also be expensive and time-consuming to implement.

Participation and empowerment is effective at reducing resistance to change in situations where leaders are seeking advice and input from members of the organization. This method allows members to be more involved in the change process because they are able to make decisions that affect their role in the organization once the change effort is complete. In doing so, members often assume greater responsibility within the organization, and because they have helped influence the future of their organization, their commitment to the change effort and the organization's success tends to increase.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, there are some possible disadvantages to this method. First, if the members of the organization do not possess the proper knowledge or if the change leader does not provide enough guidance, the members will develop an inadequate

solution to the organization's problems. Second, this method can be very time-consuming and should be avoided by leaders needing to implement changes quickly.⁶⁸

Facilitation and support can decrease resistance to change by helping members of an organization adjust to the changes being implemented. Change can be stressful for leaders and subordinates alike, especially in a workplace setting where employees may lose benefits, salary, prestige, or their job entirely, or when managers may be forced to make difficult decisions affecting the lives of their subordinates. "Facilitation and support are most helpful when fear and anxiety lie at the heart of resistance."⁶⁹ To help members manage additional stress, organizations can facilitate training opportunities to teach members new skills they can use within the new organizational structure. Organizations can also provide members emotional support through counseling services or give members time away from their usual activities to help them cope with the stresses of a major change effort.⁷⁰ Unfortunately, these programs can require significant amounts of time and money, neither of which may be available in a struggling organization that is looking to implement change quickly.⁷¹

Negotiation and agreement, also known as bargaining, are commonly used in situations "where someone or some group will lose out in a change, and where that [person or] group has considerable power to resist."⁷² In some cases, changes that may improve overall organizational effectiveness may also result in certain members or groups losing something that is important to them, including wages, benefits, resources, power, or prestige. Consequently, those on the losing end of the deal will resist the change in order to preserve what they believe is rightfully theirs. If management is able to anticipate the resistance created by these losses, they can negotiate with resisters in order to gain their cooperation and support for the change effort.⁷³ Although this can be a relatively simple method of dealing with resistance, the negotiation process can result in

significant delays to the change process and create additional expenses that the organization's leaders may not have anticipated.⁷⁴

Manipulation is a subtle method used to overcome resistance to change when leaders determine that other techniques either will not work or will be too costly or time-consuming. Manipulation involves leaders controlling the flow of information to members of the organization in order to obtain their compliance with change implementation.⁷⁵ Manipulation can also include co-optation, which involves giving certain members in the organization a key role in the change effort in exchange for their cooperation. Although manipulation can be an inexpensive means of overcoming resistance to change, it has potentially negative consequences that must be weighed carefully by leaders who are considering this method. If members of the organization feel as if they are being deceived or lied to, they will likely respond negatively and resist the change even more.⁷⁶

Coercion is another method of overcoming resistances to change that has a high potential for negative consequences. Coercion involves forcing members of an organization to accept change by threatening them with undesirable consequences.⁷⁷ The most notable advantage of coercion is the speed at which it can force change. However, "using coercion is a risky process because inevitably people strongly resent forced change."⁷⁸ There may be situations when coercion is the only option, especially if a change is unpopular and it must be implemented quickly; however, managers and change leaders must be aware of the long-term consequences that the excessive use of coercion can have on their organization.⁷⁹

Every organization will be subjected to different forces of change, and each will encounter different types of resistance, depending on the organizational climate and culture. Thus, it is important for change leaders to not only have a realistic appraisal of their

organization, but also to employ the appropriate methods for overcoming resistance, taking into account their own strengths and limitations. Choosing the appropriate method first requires an accurate assessment of the factors affecting the situation, to include (1) the amount and type of resistance that is expected, (2) the power distance between the change initiator and the resisters, (3) the amount of reliance on others for information and support, and (4) the risk to overall organizational performance if the change effort fails.⁸⁰ “Organizational change efforts that ignore these factors inevitably run into problems,”⁸¹ which is why it is so important for leaders to conduct a thorough analysis of their organization and develop a change strategy based on their unique situation.

CASE STUDY ANALYSIS OF THE NEW AFIS IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

John P. Kotter’s Eight-Stage Process of Creating Major Change

John P. Kotter’s eight-stage process of creating major change is one model that leaders can use to develop and implement a change strategy. Kotter’s method was first introduced in his 1996 book, *Leading Change*, which became a best-seller in 1997 and has been cited over 4,000 times by other authors, including other distinguished change experts.⁸² John P. Kotter is a graduate of both The Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University, and he is currently the Konosuke Matsushita Professor of Leadership, Emeritus at the Harvard Business School. He has authored 18 books that have been printed in over 150 languages, with total sales exceeding three million copies. Kotter is considered the foremost speaker on the topics of leadership and change, and his advice is highly regarded throughout the international business community.⁸³

Kotter's eight-stage process of creating major change is designed to help change leaders and managers avoid or mitigate eight errors that are common to organizational change efforts. The eight stages of Kotter's process are (1) establishing a sense of urgency, (2) creating the guiding coalition, (3) developing a vision and strategy, (4) communicating the change vision, (5) empowering a broad-based action, (6) generating short-term wins, (7) consolidating gains and producing more change, and (8) anchoring new approaches in the culture.⁸⁴ Kotter's process focuses on transformational leadership that aligns individual and organizational goals, but he also acknowledges that successful change efforts require some management skills because his eight-stage process is designed to be executed sequentially and completely. Kotter maintains that many organizations make mistakes by either skipping steps entirely or initiating steps in an order other than that prescribed by his model. When this occurs, the change effort fails to create the momentum needed to overcome the resistances to change that exist within many organizations.⁸⁵

Establishing a Sense of Urgency

The first step in Kotter's eight-stage process of creating major change is to establish a sense of urgency. This step involves either creating or identifying a compelling need for change that is strong enough to overcome the complacency that often exists in an organization when its members do not perceive change to be necessary. If the leaders of an organization do not see a reason to initiate a change effort, they are unlikely to take action. However, when they do see a need for change, they must create a sense of urgency throughout the entire organization that is strong enough to overcome complacency and the resistances to change. Kotter maintains that unless change leaders establish a strong sense of urgency across all levels of the organization, the change effort will falter, regardless of how hard the leaders push.⁸⁶

There are several sources of complacency within organizations, but some are more prevalent than others in the US Air Force. First, Air Force organizational structures and internal controls keep employees focused on functional goals and not necessarily the success of the entire organization. The Air Force organizational structure favors an environment where units report functional metrics to their functional area managers, but there are very few metrics that indicate the overall performance of a wing. Additionally, there are only a few means of collecting data on the Air Force's overall performance, effectiveness, and readiness that can be used to detect an impending crisis.⁸⁷ Even though budget cuts and downsizing have occurred, the Air Force continues to fulfill its taskings in support of combatant commanders, so there is little sense among the majority of Airmen that the Air Force is at risk of succumbing to US adversaries.

Second, in the Air Force, much of the discussion needed to establish a sense of urgency only occurs amongst senior leaders. For several years, Air Force senior leaders have reported to Congress that low readiness levels threaten the Air Force's ability to meet future operational requirements,⁸⁸ yet Air Force news agencies continue to publish stories about the success of the Air Force and all of the great accomplishments of its Airmen. The continued boasting of success negates the sense of urgency to implement change and leaves Airmen questioning why change is needed when the Air Force appears to be doing so well.⁸⁹ In order for real change to occur, the message must be consistent at all levels so every member of the organization understands the pressing need for change.⁹⁰

There are several ways to increase the sense of urgency in an organization, including (1) exposing major weaknesses or errors; (2) eliminating signs of success such as awards and parties; (3) consulting with an outside party to obtain relevant, objective data; (4) setting high performance goals that cannot be attained using current operating practices; (5) ensuring that

information exposing potential weaknesses is disseminated to all members of the organization, not just senior leaders; (6) publishing stories and having more honest discussions about the organization's problems and eliminating the "happy talk" that indicates everything is okay; and (7) bombarding people with information about the opportunities that would exist if change was to occur.⁹¹ "Creating a strong sense of urgency usually demands bold or even risky actions," but it is sometimes difficult to find leaders who are willing to take such actions, especially if the consequences will be unpopular or if the actions create the appearance that leadership not in control of the situation. Increasing the sense of urgency in an organization can also create uncomfortable anxiety for its members, thus some leaders may attempt to skip this step entirely.⁹²

There is evidence indicating that Air Force leaders made an effort to establish a sense of urgency prior to implementing the new AFIS. In 2010, SAF/IG created an Inspection System Improvement Tiger Team and requested the RAND Corporation to support this effort by "collecting new primary data on the inspection system, identifying effective inspection and information collection practices elsewhere that the Air Force might emulate."⁹³ It is unclear whether the external look from the RAND report directly influenced the decision to change the inspection system, but the fact that an outside agency was consulted to obtain relevant, objective data shows the intent to establish a sense of urgency amongst Air Force senior leaders.

Additionally, *PAD 13-01*, released in June 2013, directed the implementation of the new AFIS by 1 October 2014, which was an accelerated timeline, considering that it often takes several years of effort to fully implement a major change.⁹⁴ This strict suspense was intended to compel members at the wing and MAJCOM levels to act in a timely manner and keep them engaged in the change effort.

Even with the accelerated AFIS implementation timeline, complacency persisted at the unit level because the forces driving the Air Force to implement the new AFIS were not being felt by all Airmen. A major influence on the decision to implement the new AFIS was fiscal constraints. SAF/IG claimed the Air Force could no longer sustain the increasing amounts of time and money required to conduct inspections under the previous system. Additionally, the intent of the new AFIS was to allow wings, many of which are below their authorized manning, to focus on mission readiness rather than devoting resources to inspection preparation. Furthermore, SAF/IGI claimed the previous inspection system did not provide reliable data about the Air Force's overall organizational effectiveness.⁹⁵

Many Airmen recognized that the previous inspection system was not an accurate representation of their unit's readiness to perform its war time mission, yet there was little sense of urgency for change among all Airmen. They were not exposed to a crisis, nor were they being asked to give up anything in order to sustain the previous inspection system. There were some articles published by SAF/IG indicating a need for change, but they were read by a relatively small audience and were inconsistent with the many other Air Force stories of greatness. Furthermore, there was very little honest discussion between commanders and their subordinates to ensure that a majority of Airmen understood and believed that a major cultural change was absolutely necessary to ensure the Air Force remained an effective military organization.

Creating the Guiding Coalition

Creating a guiding coalition is the second step in Kotter's eight-stage process. The guiding coalition is a group of stakeholders who will lead the change effort and help the organization create and maintain the momentum needed to overcome obstacles to change. According to Kotter, the four key characteristics of an effective guiding coalition are position

power, expertise, credibility, and leadership. Additionally, the team members must trust each other and be considered trustworthy by the organization. They also must share a common goal and put aside their personal, political, and functional differences for the good of the entire organization.⁹⁶ Furthermore, a guiding coalition needs both leadership and management skills. Leadership is needed to envision and energize the change, while management is needed to administer the change process.⁹⁷

The new AFIS guiding coalition consisted of leaders from the most powerful positions in the Air Force, including the SECAF, the chief of staff, the Inspector General, MAJCOM commanders, and Air Staff leaders at the Pentagon, as well as the SAF/IGI staff.⁹⁸ This diverse team, consisting mostly of general officers, had with a wealth of expertise in numerous functional areas. Additionally, by virtue of their rank and position, the members of the AFIS guiding coalition presumably had considerable credibility amongst Airmen, had the proven leadership skills needed to lead a major change effort, and were considered trustworthy by the Airmen they were leading. Furthermore, when the implementation of the new AFIS was directed, its guiding coalition consisted of both leaders and managers working toward a common goal.

The new AFIS had many characteristics of an effective guiding coalition, but it lacked continuity. According to Kotter, a guiding coalition “must remain intact and functional for the duration of any successful major change.”⁹⁹ However, many of the general officers, colonels, and other stakeholders who were part of the original AFIS guiding coalition have since retired or moved on to other positions. According to a Government Accountability Office report, “the experience of successful transformations and change management initiatives in large public and private organizations suggests that it can take at least seven years until such initiatives are fully implemented and cultures are transformed in a substantial manner.”¹⁰⁰ If this is the case, the

discontinuity of the new AFIS guiding coalition increases the potential for the change effort to lose momentum over time.

The new AFIS required each wing commander to build his or her own Commander's Inspection Program and implement major changes at the wing level, thus requiring them to create their own guiding coalition.¹⁰¹ At most installations, the wing commander was the head of a guiding coalition consisting of group and squadron commanders, superintendents, and the wing IG; however, this was not always the case. Some wing commanders did not create a guiding coalition to build a CCIP and implement the new AFIS. Instead, they delegated the responsibility to the wing IG, typically a lieutenant colonel or below.

When this occurred, the wing IG and his or her small staff often assumed the responsibility for establishing a sense of urgency throughout the wing, developing a vision and strategy for the AFIS implementation at the wing level, training all other wing members on AFIS principles, persuading other wings leaders to join the guiding coalition, and communicating with all Airmen in the wing to convince them of the benefits of the new AFIS. In these situations, the guiding coalition at the wing level often lacked the position power, expertise, credibility, and leadership skills needed to lead an entire wing through a significant transformation effort. Additionally, the relative size of the guiding coalition was too small to be effective at implementing major change throughout an entire wing.¹⁰² Furthermore, some wing IGs encountered strong resistance from higher-ranking group or squadron commanders, sometimes resulting in an adversarial relationship characterized by distrust and conflicting goals. The lack of buy-in from these wing leaders could also lead to increased resistance within their units, which, in turn, hampered the progress of the entire wing.

Developing a Vision and Strategy

Developing a vision and strategy is the third step in Kotter's eight-stage process of creating major change, but it is the first step the guiding coalition accomplishes as a team. "Vision refers to a picture of the future with some implicit or explicit commentary on why people should strive to create that future."¹⁰³ A vision serves three purposes in the change process. First, it clarifies the general direction for change. Without a clear vision for change there can be disagreement and confusion about the intended direction of the organization. Second, a vision motivates people to take action in the right direction, even though those actions may require temporary pain and sacrifice. Third, a clear vision helps to align priorities and coordinate the actions of many different people. Clarity is especially important when implementing changes in a large, complex organization. A clear vision empowers people to make decisions and better understand their role in the change effort, which can help alleviate confusion and save time during subsequent steps of the change process.¹⁰⁴

Vision is an important factor in a change effort because it inspires the strategies and plans that are needed to implement change. Effective visions (1) convey a picture of the future state of the organization, (2) appeal to the long-term interests of most of the people who have stake in the situation, (3) have realistic and attainable goals, (4) are focused enough to guide and empower decision making, (5) are flexible enough to allow individual initiative, and (6) are easy to communicate to the entire organization.¹⁰⁵ A vision that lacks one or more of these elements can undermine a change effort if it fails to inspire people to take action. Thus, the time and effort spent on creating a vision for change is in an investment in the future of the organization and should not be overlooked or underestimated.¹⁰⁶

In the January 2013 issue of *The Inspector General Brief*, Colonel Robert D. Hyde from SAF/IGI published an article describing the new AFIS vision. In this article, Colonel Hyde used the analogy of “painting the grass green” to illustrate the time and resources that units had wasted in the past by preparing for inspections.¹⁰⁷ Colonel Hyde’s article also described how the new AFIS had the potential to significantly improve the Air Force’s warfighting capability by allowing units to focus their resources on mission readiness rather than inspection preparation.¹⁰⁸ He continued to provide the following vision of the new AFIS:

In the new inspection system, inspection preparation will be unnecessary and ineffective. Inspection preparation will become less necessary as commanders strengthen their day-to-day core mission capabilities and continually improve their own ability to detect and prevent atrophy and build trust up and down the chain that honest, accurate reporting is more highly valued than green metrics (or green grass).

Inspection preparation will be less effective as commanders further ingrain inspection—critically assessing how a unit can improve—into the daily fabric of unit culture. Most inspections will be done by the wing commander’s inspection team...just part of the way the wing works as Airmen focus on mission readiness every day. The new system is more of a photo-album than a snapshot that is designed to measure sustained performance and not how well the unit can surge in preparation for an inspection. In the new Air Force Inspection System (AFIS) commanders will inspect their unit’s ability to execute the mission and manage resources and people to improve performance. Functional staff experts will focus on enabling as commanders focus on ensuring. In the new system, commanders, their staffs and their inspectors will work to improve the long-term health of the lawn. Perhaps grass painting fooled an Inspector General or two along the way, but it did not and will not make us more capable of deterring and defeating our nation’s enemies. I’m convinced the new AFIS will help us all choose fertilizer over green paint.¹⁰⁹

Lieutenant General Mueller, the Inspector General of the Air Force from May 2012 to August 2014 and a prominent member of the new AFIS guiding coalition, also wrote several articles about the new AFIS vision and changes to Air Force culture. Although Lieutenant General Mueller’s message was not as concise as Colonel Hyde’s, he did convey many of same key elements of the new AFIS vision, including enhancing commander inspection responsibilities, encouraging self-identification of deficiencies, and improving mission readiness.

In the July 2013 issue of *The Inspector General Brief*, Lieutenant General Mueller described the cultural change of the new AFIS as “better aligning commander’s responsibilities with their authorities” and “getting Airmen to identify our problem areas so that we can work on them collectively.”¹¹⁰

In September 2013, Lieutenant General Mueller discussed how the new AFIS would promote continuous process improvement and empower Airmen to self-identify deficiencies to their chain of command without fear of retribution. He described the new inspection system as one that “empowers Airmen at every level to examine their work closely and empowers Wing Commanders to formally inspect. It is built on trust. Trust that every Airman wants to improve and wants to make our Air Force better.”¹¹¹

Furthermore, in November 2013, Lieutenant General Mueller explained how the new AFIS would improve organizational effectiveness and mission readiness. He wrote, “At the very heart of the inspection system is alignment of mission effectiveness with inspection readiness. This alignment means Airmen can focus their time on improving the mission, in effect saving Airmen their most valuable resource, their time.”¹¹²

The new AFIS vision described by Colonel Hyde and Lieutenant General Mueller had most of the characteristics of an effective vision. It described what the future of Air Force inspections would look like, and it appealed to the long-term interests of all Airmen. The new AFIS vision was attainable, but it also acknowledged the challenges of creating lasting cultural change across the Air Force. The new AFIS vision was also flexible in the sense that it encouraged innovation and continuous improvement, and it was designed to allow wing commanders to tailor their CCIP to meet the needs of their unit. Finally, the vision described by Colonel Hyde was succinct and could be explained in a few minutes. However, this version of

the new AFIS vision is the most complete one available. Although the new AFIS vision was mentioned in a number of forums, a comprehensive vision statement was not published and identified as such.

The new AFIS vision also could have used some improvement regarding its focus. The concepts of the new AFIS regarding the self-identification of deficiencies lacked sufficient detail and clarity, and some Airmen, including commanders, had difficulty relating to them. The new AFIS encouraged Airmen at every level to identify problems to their chain of command so leaders could fix them. However, many Airmen were skeptical of this idea because Air Force culture under the previous inspection system had taught Airmen “that it was better to hide problems rather than identify them.”¹¹³

Under the previous inspection system, unsatisfactory inspection results could have negative consequences on a commander’s career, thus there was tremendous pressure to perform well during inspections. Consequently, commanders and their Airmen sometimes attempted to conceal problems from a visiting IG team in order to receive a passing inspection grade.¹¹⁴ Additionally, the Air Force’s merit-based structure rewarded Airmen for solving problems at their level rather than exposing them to their chain of command.¹¹⁵ Consequently, many Airmen and their commanders questioned whether these new concepts could be employed effectively across the Air Force.¹¹⁶

Communicating the Change Vision

Communicating the change vision, the fourth step in Kotter’s eight-stage process, focuses on ensuring all members of an organization who are affected by a change have a common understanding of its goals and direction. According to Kotter, effective communication has several key elements. First, communication should be simple and direct, eliminating any jargon

or technical language that could confuse or alienate the intended audience. Simple and direct communication may also involve the use of metaphors, analogies, or examples to create a verbal picture of the change vision.¹¹⁷ Second, effective communication should come in many different forums, including meetings, briefings, memorandums, news articles, posters, and informal one-on-one interaction. “When the same message comes from [many] different directions, it stands a better chance of being heard and remembered, on both intellectual and emotional levels.”¹¹⁸ Third, effective communication requires repetition. People rarely fully comprehend a message after receiving it only one time because of distractions, disinterest, or questions that remain unanswered. Kotter contends that “all successful cases of major change seem to include tens of thousands of communications that help employees to grapple with difficult intellectual and emotional issues.”¹¹⁹

Effective communication is an important step in the change process because it helps members of an organization comprehend and appreciate not only the necessity for change, but also the benefits to the organization. Effective communication also builds support for a change effort and helps alleviate resistance by educating members about how a change will affect them and their work.¹²⁰ Kotter asserts that if members of an organization either do not understand or do not accept a vision for change, they are unlikely to follow it. Hence, they will not take action when empowered to do so, nor will they put forth the effort needed to generate short-term wins that will maintain the momentum for change.¹²¹ Furthermore, effective communication helps manage expectations before and during a change, which can also help lower resistance and improve the chances of success for the change effort.¹²²

Communication from a guiding coalition involves not only written and verbal, but also nonverbal communication. Actions often speak louder than words; thus, a guiding coalition must

lead by example and their behavior must be consistent with the change vision, otherwise they risk undermining their message.¹²³ Additionally, in order for communication to be effective, it must address any perceived inconsistencies. If a guiding coalition fails to do so, members of the organization may feel as if they are being manipulated or coerced, thus increasing their resistance to change. However, if a guiding coalition addresses inconsistencies in an open and honest manner, it can help build trust and credibility and reduce resistance to change.¹²⁴

Finally, effective communication must be a two-way endeavor. Two-way communication can benefit a guiding coalition in several ways. Not only can it help answer members' concerns and alleviate their anxiety about the change, but it can also help identify errors in the change vision that need to be corrected prior to implementation.¹²⁵ If leaders are not receptive to feedback, they may lead their people in the wrong direction and waste the organization's valuable time and resources.¹²⁶

Lieutenant General Mueller, Colonel Hyde, and other Air Force leaders incorporated most of the key elements of effective communication when informing Airmen about the new AFIS vision. Their message was simple and direct, and they avoided the use of jargon or technical inspection terms. They also attempted to use common language to which all Airmen could relate. In addition, they used examples and the analogy of "painting the grass green" to help Airmen envision how the new AFIS would help improve their unit and the Air Force as a whole.¹²⁷

The guiding coalition communicated the new AFIS vision through multiple forums, including *The Inspector General Brief*, the official US Air Force news service website, MAJCOM publications such as *The Mobility Forum*, base newspapers, commander's calls, staff meetings, briefings, and computer-based training (CBT). *The Inspector General Brief* continues

to publish periodic updates about the progress of the AFIS implementation, as do some base newspapers and MAJCOM publications. An AFIS CBT was created to educate all Airmen about the new inspection system, but it has since been replaced by AFIS briefings that are now part of base newcomer's orientation as well as the curriculum at Air Force Basic Military Training, Air Force commissioning sources, and Air Force professional military education courses.¹²⁸ The AFIS concepts and vision are also discussed during mandatory periodic meetings, including Quarterly Inspection Working Group (QIWG) and Semi-Annual Inspection Council (SAIC) meetings hosted by MAJCOM IGs and Commander's Inspection Management Board (CIMB) meetings hosted by wing commanders.¹²⁹

Although Air Force leaders used a number of means to communicate information about the new AFIS, the overall quantity of messages was comparatively low considering the number of people affected by the change. *PAD 13-01* did contain a communication management plan, the details of which cannot be discussed here because *PAD 13-01* information is For Official Use Only. However, the communication plan lacked sufficient repetition and timeliness to ensure all Airmen received and understood the new AFIS vision.

The Inspector General Brief has featured several articles about the new AFIS in nearly every issue since November 2012; however, *The Inspector General Brief* is only published four to six times per year, and the readership is relatively low compared to the total Air Force population. Not all Airmen read or are even aware of the existence of this newsletter, and those who do read it are typically members of a MAJCOM or wing IG staff. Additionally, a keyword search for "Air Force Inspection System" on the official US Air Force online news service reveals only six stories related to the new AFIS. One article was posted in 2011, two were posted in 2013, and three were posted in 2014.¹³⁰ Other new stories have been published at the

MAJCOM and wing levels, but only the six articles mentioned above were published Air Force wide. Furthermore, the meetings where AFIS is discussed regularly are only attended by senior-ranking leaders at the MAJCOM and wing levels. Consequently, there are still Airmen amongst the ranks who do not understand the new AFIS vision or intent.

In addition to lacking sufficient repetition, the new AFIS vision and its implementation strategy were not communicated in a timely manner, thus a majority of Airmen were unaware of this information prior to the release of *PAD 13-01* in June 2013. Although several articles were published in *The Inspector General Brief* in late 2012 and early 2013 that foreshadowed the new AFIS implementation, these articles did not contain any specific details regarding how or when the new inspection system would be implemented. Additionally, due to low readership, awareness of the new AFIS vision was generally low across the Air Force, except among senior leaders, SAF/IGI staff, and Airmen assigned to US Air Forces in Europe, which was a test bed for implementation of the new AFIS.¹³¹

On 1 July 2013, two weeks after the SECAF directed the implementation of the new AFIS, SAF/IGI published the *Commander's Inspection Program Wing/FOA/DRU Implementation Guide*. This guide helped explain the vision and concepts of the new AFIS to commanders and new IG staffs at Air Force wings, field operating agencies (FOA), and direct reporting units (DRU) who were responsible to for implementing the new AFIS and CCIP at their level.¹³² Although this guide contained much useful information, its intended audience was a very small segment of a wing's population, so most Airmen did not receive its message.

When it came to leading by example, Air Force senior leaders employed this key element of effective communication by recognizing and rewarding Airmen for acknowledging problems in their organization.¹³³ The SECAF and chief of staff have also utilized data collected through

AFIS methodologies to identify problems at the HAF level that affect all Airmen. Consequently, they have taken action to reduce the number of additional duties and the amount of ancillary training that Airmen are required to do, thus allowing them to focus more on mission readiness.¹³⁴

Air Force leaders have attempted to build credibility and trust by using several means to address seeming inconsistencies in the new AFIS vision. In order to address inconsistencies in AFIS policy, SAF/IGI has revised AFI 90-201 several times since June 2013, the most recent of which was in September 2016.¹³⁵ Air Force senior leaders continue to use *The Inspector General Brief* and periodic meetings such as the QIWG, SAIC, and CIMB to address inconsistencies and solicit feedback from IG staffs and unit commanders. Furthermore, instructors from SAF/IGI and the Air Force Inspection Agency (AFIA) have been receptive to feedback from MAJCOM and wing IG staff who have attended the Inspector General Training Course (IGTC), and many of the changes suggested by IGTC attendees have been incorporated into recent revisions of AFI 90-201.

SAF/IGI also created several forums to train and educate Airmen about the new AFIS, but they were not available until a year or more after the SEACF directed the implementation of the new AFIS. All Airmen assigned to MAJCOM and wing IG billets were required to attend the IGTC, which was designed to train inspectors on how to conduct inspections and employ the new AFIS methodology.¹³⁶ However, the first IGTC was not offered by SAF/IGI until June 2014, one year after *PAD 13-01* was released.¹³⁷ Additionally, SAF/IGI designed a CBT to communicate the new AFIS vision and concepts to all Airmen. However, the AFIS CBT was not released on the Air Force Advanced Distributed Learning System, an on-line database for Air

Force ancillary training, until February 2015, more than a year and a half after the SECAF directed the implementation of the new AFIS.¹³⁸

Empowering Broad-Based Action

The fifth step in Kotter's eight-stage process of creating major change is empowering broad-based action. According to Kotter, the purpose of this stage "is to empower a broad base of people to take action by removing as many barriers to the implementation of the change vision as possible at this point in the process."¹³⁹ Therefore, this step involves removing obstacles that impede change, altering organizational "systems or structures that undermine the change vision," and "encouraging risk taking and nontraditional ideas, activities, and actions."¹⁴⁰ Empowerment also involves teaching personnel the skills they need to implement the change vision, as well as confronting resistant supervisors who can discourage other members of the organization from taking action.¹⁴¹

Empowering members of an organization begins with communicating a sensible and realistic vision for change. If members believe in the vision and have a shared sense of purpose, they are more likely to take action to achieve a common goal. Next, the guiding coalition must make organizational structures compatible with the change vision, ensuring strategic alignment of all functions within the organization. The guiding coalition then must provide members of the organization with the training needed to develop the skills and attitudes required to implement the change vision. The guiding coalition must also ensure information and personnel systems are not only aligned with the organizational goals, but also encourage members to take action in support of the change vision. Finally, the guiding coalition must confront supervisors who undermine the change vision and create resistance within the organization.¹⁴²

Even though the new AFIS communication strategy lacked sufficient timeliness and repetition, the guiding coalition did develop a sensible and realistic vision for change, and they communicated it with Airmen through a number of forums. One of the main themes of the new AFIS vision has always been empowerment, as seen in Lieutenant General Mueller's message in the September 2013 issue of *The Inspector General Brief*: "The new inspection system empowers Airmen at every level to examine their work closely and empowers Wing Commanders to formally inspect."¹⁴³ The increased utilization of self-assessments and the Commander's Inspection Program encouraged Airmen and commanders to openly identify areas of waste and non-compliance and actively work toward the common goal of improving the effectiveness of their unit and the Air Force. Furthermore, using this type of participation and empowerment was a viable method for decreasing resistance to change among Airmen at the unit level.

Air Force leaders also attempted to remove obstacles to change and alter organizational systems and structures that undermined the new AFIS vision. They directed functional area managers to reduce the number of unit-level compliance items in Air Force instructions and, for the remaining items, specify a waiver authority that would allow commanders to request relief from requirements that did not enhance their mission readiness.¹⁴⁴ The new AFIS also altered the wing organizational structure by realigning inspection and exercise responsibilities under the wing IG, which empowered commanders to fulfill their Title 10 USC responsibilities.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, the new AFIS introduced a tiered inspection system that evaluated the not only the effectiveness and readiness of units in the field, but also the adequacy of the support they received from their MAJCOM.¹⁴⁶ This aspect of the new AFIS empowered Airmen at all levels

because they now had an avenue to inform their chain of command if mission readiness was suffering due to inadequate resources.

Providing the proper training to equip Airmen with the skills and attitudes needed to implement the new AFIS vision has been challenging due to the number of personnel affected and the paradigm shift required by this change. Robust training programs for MAJCOM and wing IG staff and wing inspection team members now exist, but this has not always been the case. When the SECAF directed the implementation of the new AFIS, MAJCOM IG teams were responsible for conducting compliance and readiness inspections for units, thus this capability did not exist at the wing level. Therefore, several new training courses had to be developed to meet the growing demand for inspections expertise.

Once wing organizational structures were adjusted to realign inspection responsibilities under the wing IG office, wing IG staffs required training on AFIS principles, inspection methodology, exercise design, and report writing, as well as training on the information technology systems used by MAJCOM IG offices to plan, schedule, and manage inspections. The initial solution for this training was a three-day interactive course conducted by AFIA instructors using a SharePoint site. After approximately one year, SAF/IGI introduced the IGTC, a five-day in-residence course for MAJCOM and wing IG staff.¹⁴⁷ The IGTC is now taught by AFIA and has since been reduced to a three-day course. AFIA instructors also taught wing IG members how to use the Management Internal Control Toolset (MICT) and the Inspector General Evaluation Management System (IGEMS), the Air Force systems of record for self-assessments and inspections.¹⁴⁸

Once the wing IG staff became proficient in these inspection skills, they were then required to develop a curriculum and train the WIT, which are teams of 50 to 100 people from all

functional areas of a wing. Additionally, the wing IG staff was required to teach applicable wing members how to accomplish critical self-assessments using MICT. The number of MICT users depends on the size of the organization, but most wings have several hundred MICT users who require training. Since there is continuous turnover of WIT members and MICT users due to gains and losses from the unit, the wing IG must conduct recurring training sessions.¹⁴⁹

Furthermore, SAF/IGI developed an AFIS CBT that was released in February 2015 to ensure that all Airmen have necessary skills and attitudes to feel empowered within the new AFIS.¹⁵⁰

In addition to the new training that was required to implement the new AFIS vision, Air Force leaders also aligned information and personnel systems to empower Airmen to take action. First, the new AFIS encouraged all Airmen to identify problems to the chain of command, whereas the previous inspection system incentivized hiding problems.¹⁵¹ Second, AFIA personnel made numerous upgrades to MICT and IGEMS to enhance the utility for commanders and their IG staff.¹⁵² Third, by identifying a wavier authority level for all unit-level compliance items, FAMs could now receive feedback directly from units regarding the usefulness of requirements, thus enabling them to adjust or eliminate items that do not enhance mission readiness.

Despite all of the communication attempts, changes to organizational structures, additional training opportunities, and changes to information and personnel systems, the size and complexity of the Air Force makes it challenging to ensure that every single supervisor is supporting the new AFIS vision and empowering their Airmen to do the same. Consequently, pockets of resistance continue to exist throughout Air Force units, and it is up to commanders at all levels to confront these members and employ the appropriate methods to help overcome their

resistance. In order for the new AFIS vision to be fully implemented, all Airmen must be willing to confront those who are resistant to change and disempower their fellow Airmen.

Generating Short-Term Wins

Generating short-term wins is the sixth step in Kotter's eight-stage process of creating major change. This step involves planning for and achieving visible and unambiguous performance improvements, as well as recognizing and rewarding the members of the organization who made those achievements possible.¹⁵³ Short-term performance improvements are important for a change effort because they (1) provide evidence that the sacrifices required by the change are worthwhile; (2) reward change agents for their hard work, helping to build their morale and motivation; (3) provide data that helps the guiding coalition make minor adjustments to the change vision and strategy; (4) help overcome the skepticism of resisters; (5) help retain the support of senior leaders and keep them engaged; and (6) build momentum for change amongst members of the organization who were neutral or reluctant to support the transformation effort.¹⁵⁴ Kotter maintains that the guiding coalition must deliberately plan, organize, and act to generate short-term wins, while balancing near-term results with the potential to achieve lasting change. Additionally, the guiding coalition must have sufficient management skills to execute the details of the change strategy, as well as enough leadership to focus on the long-term vision for change.¹⁵⁵

The new AFIS implementation strategy was designed to generate short-term wins, while still maintaining focus on the enduring vision. *PAD 13-01*, released on 17 June 2013, directed the implementation of the new AFIS by 1 October 2014. However, since SAF/IGI did not expect each MAJCOM, wing, FOA, and DRU to be fully mature in their new inspection capabilities by that date, they planned for short-term wins. To help implement the new AFIS at the wing level,

PAD 13-01 established 16 “CCIP-capable” criteria that represented the basic actions required to build a Commander’s Inspection Program. Similarly, at the MAJCOM level, *PAD 13-01* established 14 “UEI-capable” criteria designed to help MAJCOM IG teams be prepared to inspect wings under the new AFIS construct.¹⁵⁶ SAF/IGI also created a step-by-step action plan to help wings implement the new AFIS vision and build new processes for actions that had never been accomplished at the wing level.¹⁵⁷ Achieving these steps provided an opportunity for commanders to reward significant contributors from their organization, as well as helping build momentum to achieve greater results in the future.

Goals of the new AFIS vision included creating more “white space” on commanders’ calendars and decreasing reliance on external inspections so that commanders would be empowered to execute their Title 10 USC responsibilities.¹⁵⁸ The actions directed by SAF/IGI were designed to help MAJCOMs and units generate short-term performance improvements so they could provide evidence to commanders and Air Force senior leaders that all of the work required to change organizational structures, train Airmen in their new inspection and self-assessment duties, and update personnel and information systems had been worthwhile and was helping achieve the long-term goals of the new AFIS.

Short-term wins also provided opportunities for leaders at each level to recognize and reward Airmen who made significant contributions toward implementing the new AFIS vision. For example, the Air Mobility Command Public Affairs office published an article shortly after AMC/IG conducted its first UEI Capstone at Little Rock Air Force Base (AFB), Arkansas. In the article, Brigadier General Steve Arquette, AMC/IG, was noted as saying the successes seen during the Little Rock UEI gave him “great confidence that AMC, and the Air Force as a whole, is on the right path.”¹⁵⁹ Reports from this inspection and others were forwarded to MAJCOM

commanders, the Air Force Inspector General, and other members of the guiding coalition, who closely monitored the progress of the new AFIS implementation and were encouraged by the potential for this system to improve mission readiness and change Air Force culture.¹⁶⁰

The data acquired from short-term wins have helped SAF/IGI, MAJCOM IGs, and wing IGs continue to make improvements to inspection policy and processes. Additionally, as UEIs and wing IG-led CCIP events occurred, Airmen who were skeptical of the new AFIS concepts became less resistant as the new system demonstrated its intent. After the initial UEI at Little Rock AFB, Colonel Christopher Sullivan, the AMC/IG team chief noted, “We had to establish some trust with the unit by explaining that the Unit Effectiveness Inspection was much more of a process over time, not just a one-week product.”¹⁶¹ The end result of these short-term wins was strengthening momentum across the Air Force as more Airmen began to realize the benefits of the new AFIS.¹⁶²

Consolidating Gains and Producing More Change

The seventh step in Kotter’s eight-stage process is consolidating gains and producing more change. By this step in the process, modifications to organizational structures, systems, and policies have produced some performance improvements that may entice some people to lessen the sense of urgency for change. However, according to Kotter, “in successful transformations the guiding coalition uses the credibility afforded by short-term wins to push forward faster, tackling even more or bigger projects.”¹⁶³ This includes altering all of the structures, systems, and policies that are not compatible with the change vision, as well as hiring, promoting, and/or developing people to join the guiding coalition to help lead and manage additional projects.¹⁶⁴

Kotter also asserts that this is a pivotal step in the change process for a number of reasons. First, there may still be members of the organization who will use the short-term wins to

try to convince others that the transformation effort has been a success and that there is no reason to pursue further changes. If these resistors are successful in their attempts, the sense of urgency may decrease, and the change effort may lose momentum. If the resistors have great enough influence within the organization, they may be able to convince other members to abandon the change effort entirely, thus allowing the previous structures, systems, and policies to reemerge over time.¹⁶⁵ Second, interdependencies that exist within large, complex organizations make it difficult to make changes to one function or program without affecting others, hence the reason more projects are often required than originally anticipated.¹⁶⁶

When SAF/IG began its efforts to improve Air Force inspection policy, it had some specific goals related to how inspections were conducted, including choosing an inspection interval that provided the best assessment of unit readiness, discipline, and efficiency; “reducing the inspection footprint;” and “increasing the emphasis on self-inspections and self-reporting of non-compliance.”¹⁶⁷ However, implementing the new AFIS vision and improving the inspection system was not possible without making changes at every level and within every functional area of the Air Force. For example, when the new AFIS implementation was directed, it shifted inspection responsibilities from the MAJCOM level to the wing level and between wing-level functions, and it created new responsibilities at the HAF, MAJCOM, and wing level. It also required all HAF and MAJCOM functional area managers to revise Air Force instructions to reduce the overall number of wing-level compliance items and eliminate non-value-added functional inspection requirements, as well as ensure remaining requirements were properly tiered for the appropriate waiver authority.¹⁶⁸ Moreover, Air Force leaders sought to build “a culture of critical self-assessment and continuous improvement.”¹⁶⁹ Therefore, every Airmen at

every level was affected by the new AFIS because they now had a role in the inspection system, whereas most Airmen did not have an active role under the previous system.

AFIS implementation projects have already generated some short-term wins, and senior leaders show no signs of slowing their efforts to improve mission readiness across the Air Force. As result of the new AFIS implementation, SAF/IGI published AFI 1-2, *Commander's Responsibilities*, in May 2014. AFI 1-2 describes the duties and responsibilities of Air Force commanders in terms of the four major graded areas—Managing Resources, Leading People, Improving the Unit, and Executing the Mission—that were introduced as part of the new AFIS. The guidance in AFI 1-2 is intended to align units for success under the new AFIS by ensuring all Air Force leaders focus on mission readiness rather than inspection preparation.¹⁷⁰

In order to improve organizational effectiveness and mission readiness, Air Force senior leaders, including the chief of staff, have embodied the guidance in AFI 1-2, especially regarding Managing Resources. One of the forces of change that influenced the decision to implement the new AFIS was growing fiscal constraints. Therefore, in order to ensure effective and efficient mission accomplishment, Air Force senior leaders have made a concerted effort to be good stewards of the resources entrusted to them by the American public, including manpower, funds, equipment, facilities, and Airmen's time. Recently, the SECAF and chief of staff have focused on the judicious use of Airmen's time as a way to improve mission readiness.

On 9 August 2016, General David L. Goldfein, Air Force chief of staff, published a letter to Airmen in which he described his priorities to revitalize Air Force squadrons to sustain and improve their warfighting capability.¹⁷¹ General Goldfein provided no specific details in this letter, but it displays his intent and willingness to take on additional projects that will help squadrons execute their mission more effectively. Additionally, this letter displays General

Goldfein's commitment to improving the Air Force and ensuring units have the resources they need to be prepared for future challenges.

On 18 August 2016, the SECAF and chief of staff published a memorandum to all Airmen discussing the initial results of an "Airmen's Time" task force that was created to "tackle and streamline...additional duties, as well as the complete set of requirements, functions, training, and reports that detract from [Air Force] core missions." Specifically, the SECAF and chief of staff initiated projects aimed at eliminating, modifying, or consolidating 61 additional duties in order to reduce their impact on Airmen's time. They also outlined their direction to revise current Air Force instructions to reflect their guidance and prevent the unrestrained growth of additional duties in the future. Furthermore, they discussed their intent to review the impact of computer-based training requirements on Airmen's time.¹⁷²

On 27 October 2016, the SECAF and chief of staff published a memorandum to all Airmen as a follow-up to the "Reducing Additional Duties" memorandum in which they declared they were able to reduce or eliminate 29 additional duties. They also discussed efforts to review 42 different Air Force training requirements and their impact on Airmen's time. As a result of the review, the SECAF and chief of staff eliminated 15 training courses and streamlined or consolidated 16 more courses. Additionally, they described future projects to review training requirements resulting from federal statutes or DOD policy and seek relief from those requirements when applicable.¹⁷³ The momentum for these projects is rooted in the implementation of the new AFIS, and they are helping to change Air Force systems, structures, policies that are not consistent with the new AFIS vision. All of these new projects have required time and effort to manage and execute, but the end result will be improved mission readiness.

Anchoring New Approaches in the Culture

The final step in Kotter's eight-stage process of creating major change is anchoring new approaches in the culture. This stage of the change process involves creating a sustained environment of improved performance through mission-oriented behavior and attitudes, more and better leadership, and more effective management.¹⁷⁴ It also involves organizational leaders making "a conscious attempt to show people how specific behaviors and attitudes have helped improve performance."¹⁷⁵ Furthermore, it involves "developing means to ensure leadership development and succession" so subsequent leaders continue to embody the changes that an organization has worked so hard to implement.¹⁷⁶

Kotter explains culture as follows: "*Culture* refers to the norms of behavior and shared values among a group of people. *Norms of behavior* are common or pervasive ways of acting that are found in a group and that persist because group members tend to behave in ways that teach these practices to new members, rewarding those who fit in and sanctioning those who do not. *Shared values* are important concerns and goals shared by most of the people in a group that tend to shape group behavior and that often persist over time even when group membership changes."¹⁷⁷

Changing the culture of an organization can be difficult because it first requires a change in the norms of behavior and the shared values of the members. Culture stems from behavior that is learned over time. Therefore, in order for culture to change, members of an organization must be afforded an opportunity to realize the benefit of changes and understand that old methods will no longer be accepted or rewarded. In doing so, they will be able to adjust their norms of behavior and, consequently, the shared values of the organization, which will eventually result in cultural change.¹⁷⁸

The long-term goal of the new AFIS, as articulated by the Inspector General and other members of the guiding coalition, was to change Air Force culture by ingraining critical self-assessment and constant process improvement into every Airman's daily routine.¹⁷⁹ Air Force instructions that were published after the new AFIS implementation was directed echoed these sentiments. Specifically, AFI 90-201 stated, "One of the primary objectives of the AFIS is to foster a culture of critical self-assessment and continuous improvement, and to reduce reliance on external inspection teams."¹⁸⁰ In addition, AFI 1-2, which was created as a result of the new AFIS, directed that commanders must "cultivate a culture of compliance and accountability while promoting unit and mission pride" and "foster a culture of innovation and challenge inefficiencies."¹⁸¹ However, cultural change takes time and cannot simply be directed by an instruction.

According to the current Air Force Inspector General, the new AFIS has not yet been fully implemented, and the desired norms of behavior and shared values have not yet been fully ingrained into Air Force culture. In the October 2016 issue of *The Inspector General Brief*, Lieutenant General Anthony J. Rock, wrote, "When we instituted the Air Force Inspection System (AFIS) we expected it would take several years to fully mature and change the inspection culture. If we accept that it takes roughly seven years to implement institutional change, we are half-way into this process and are transitioning from implementation to the refinement and sustainment phase."¹⁸² Observations across the Air Force inspections enterprise support Lieutenant General Rock's statements that there is still work to be done because the new AFIS vision has not yet been fully realized.

Many Airmen, including some commanders, are still unfamiliar with the AFIS vision and have not yet embraced its concepts. Some Airmen are still hesitant to honestly and accurately

self-assess their programs and functions because some Air Force structures still do not encourage or reward such behavior. Additionally, some Airmen, including commanders, do not yet share the values of the new AFIS vision, and they prefer to keep their units' problems "in house." Therefore, they continue to prepare for inspections, albeit on a much smaller scale because the wing IG and WIT do not have the capacity to inspect every aspect of a unit. Also, some commanders direct the WIT members from their unit to bring identified deficiencies to them before reporting back to the wing IG, thus negating the integrity of the CCIP and the AFIS. Furthermore, Airmen who are concerned about protecting their career in a shrinking Air Force are cautious about bringing up issues that may reflect poorly upon them out of fear of not being stratified on their next evaluation or selected for promotion. These issues, and many others, will likely persist until all Air Force structures, systems, and policies are aligned with the new AFIS values.

The new AFIS vision and concepts have not yet been anchored in Air Force culture, but the steps taken thus far have postured the Air Force to complete a successful change effort. When Colonel Hyde from SAF/IGI was asked how the Air Force will know when it has successfully implementing the new AFIS, he replied, "We will be successful when Airmen feel it is their duty to identify problems, supervisors support and encourage honest reporting, and leaders at all levels reward this behavior."¹⁸³ Once these norms of behavior and shared values become commonplace amongst all Airmen, the new AFIS vision will be anchored in Air Force culture.

CASE STUDY ANALYSIS SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The Air Force's change strategy to implement the new AFIS addressed all eight steps from Kotter's eight-stage process of creating major change, but all steps have not yet been

completed. The efforts by Air Force leaders to create a sense of urgency for change did not have a significant impact on the daily lives of most Airmen, and the necessity for change was not communicated effectively to all Airmen. Therefore, most Airmen were unaware of the need to implement a new inspection system. Nevertheless, enough senior leaders were convinced that it was necessary to change Air Force inspection policy, thus the SECAF directed the implementation of the new AFIS in June 2013.

Air Force senior leaders formed a powerful guiding coalition that had key leadership and management skills needed to guide a major transformation effort. Since the new AFIS is a tiered inspection system, guiding coalitions were required at the HAF, MAJCOM, and wing levels to lead and manage the change effort at their respective level. However, the position power, expertise, credibility, and leadership characteristics of the guiding coalition at the wing level were sometimes lacking, resulting in an ineffective CCIP.

SAF/IGI developed a new AFIS vision that was grounded in the Air Force core values and appealed to the long-term interests of all Airmen. The new AFIS vision conveyed a picture of the future state of the Air Force, and the goals of the new system were realistic and attainable. It also gave commanders the flexibility to be innovative and adjust to changing priorities. However, lack of a clear and concise vision statement caused confusion and skepticism amongst some Airmen because they did not fully understand the intent of the new AFIS.

The guiding coalition communicated the new AFIS vision through several forums, but the overall timeliness and repetition of the communication was insufficient to ensure all Airmen received and understood the new AFIS vision. Additionally, there was insufficient face-to-face communication between direct supervisors and their Airmen. During the new AFIS implementation, most of the communication about the vision and strategy was written, and many

supervisors learned that the change had been directed at the same time as their Airmen. Additionally, most first-line supervisors had not received any information about new AFIS from their supervisor, so their own questions had not been answered. Therefore, they were unprepared to relay the message and answer questions from their subordinates.

The new AFIS implementation strategy was designed to empower broad-based action. The direction to implement the new AFIS initiated changes to numerous Air Force structures and systems in order to better align them with the new vision. The new AFIS empowered Airmen at all levels to identify problems and work toward solutions that would improve organizational effectiveness. The new AFIS also empowered unit commanders to tailor their CCIP to their specific needs and priorities, and it allowed them to focus on mission readiness instead of inspection preparation. Furthermore, unit commanders and wing IGs have been encouraged to participate in continuous process improvement efforts by providing feedback to SAF/IGI and their respective MAJCOM IG.

The new AFIS change strategy was also designed to help generate short-term wins during the implementation phase. These short-term performance improvements provided evidence to Air Force senior leaders that the new AFIS was helping change Air Force culture and improve mission readiness. They also provided valuable data that helped leaders at all levels fine-tune the new AFIS vision and strategies. Additionally, short-term wins provided opportunities to reward Airmen who made significant contributions, and they helped convince reluctant supporters to take a more active role in the change effort.

The data collected from AFIS short-term wins has prompted Air Force senior leaders to initiate additional projects and change more systems, structures, and policies in order to better align them with the new AFIS vision. An Air Force instruction regarding commander's

responsibilities was created as a result of the new AFIS implementation, and many Air Force leaders have embodied this guidance as they lead their organization. In addition, the SECAF and chief of staff have recently unveiled several initiatives that align with AFIS principles and are designed to enhance mission readiness.

Although much progress has occurred, the new AFIS approaches have not yet been anchored in Air Force culture. True cultural change takes time, and many Airmen have not yet fully realized the benefits of the new AFIS. Additionally, not all Airmen have adopted the desired norms of behaviors and shared values, thus pockets of resistance still exist. However, the steps taken thus far as part of the AFIS implementation strategy have postured the Air Force to overcome this resistance and create lasting cultural change, provided the change effort momentum is sustained by current and future Air Force leaders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Even though the new AFIS change strategy included all eight stages from Kotter's eight-stage process of creating major change, there are some recommended improvement areas regarding establishing a sense of urgency, developing a vision and strategy, and communicating the change vision. These recommendations address some of the gaps that were identified in the new AFIS change strategy. They are also intended to assist Air Force leaders in developing more effective change management strategies for future transformation efforts.

Communicate the Need for Change in Order to Establish a High Enough Sense of Urgency

Kotter lists establishing a sense of urgency as the first step in his change process because without it, people will not be motivated to take action or help accomplish any of the subsequent steps in the transformation effort.¹⁸⁴ Kotter asserts that "by far the biggest mistake people make

when trying to change organizations is to plunge ahead without establishing a high enough sense of urgency in fellow managers and employees. This error is fatal because transformations always fail to achieve their objectives when complacency levels are high.”¹⁸⁵ The structures, systems, and policies within an organization are designed to promote stability and security for its members. Therefore, unless members are confronted with a compelling reason for change, they are unlikely to voluntarily take action to disrupt their stability and security.

There are numerous ways to increase the sense of urgency in an organization, and all of them involve planning and communicating boldly with other members of the organization to ensure they understand the necessity for change.¹⁸⁶ Nevertheless, how does one know when the sense of urgency is high enough to move forward with a change effort? Kotter contends that “a majority of employees, perhaps 75 percent of management overall, and virtually all of the top executives need to believe that considerable change is absolutely essential” before the sense of urgency is high enough to proceed with the next step of the change process.¹⁸⁷ In terms of Air Force personnel, this means that more than half of all Airmen; approximately 75 percent of all unit commanders, directors, supervisors, superintendents, and first sergeants; and nearly every general officer must believe that significant change is necessary in order to achieve a sufficient sense of urgency.

Therefore, it is recommended that, prior to initiating future transformation efforts, Air Force leaders create and execute a plan to ensure the need for change is ardently communicated with all affected levels of management, not just the senior levels of leadership. Doing so will help ensure that commanders and supervisors at all applicable levels understand the necessity for change, thus establishing a sense of urgency across the entire organization. It will also help manage expectations and alleviate anxiety about the upcoming change because affected Airmen

will be better informed.¹⁸⁸ Additionally, persistent and passionate communication regarding the reasons that change is required will help obtain buy-in from key personnel, which will simplify the next step of creating a powerful guiding coalition at every level affected by the change.

Moreover, this communication will help reduce resistance to change because people will be more educated about the upcoming efforts, and they will feel more empowered by participating in the initial stages of the transformation effort rather than simply receiving direction to implement a change they know nothing about.¹⁸⁹

Develop a Clear and Concise Vision Statement and Viable Strategy for Change

Developing a clear and concise vision and a viable strategy for change is an essential step in the change process. “Vision plays a key role in producing useful change by helping to direct, align, and inspire actions on the part of large numbers of people. Without an appropriate vision, a transformation effort can easily dissolve into a list of confusing, incompatible, and time-consuming projects that go in the wrong direction or nowhere at all.”¹⁹⁰ Considering the potential consequences of an unbecoming vision and the growing fiscal constraints facing the US Air Force, it is recommended that any guiding coalition pursuing a major change initiative invest the necessary time and effort to draft an effective and clearly defined vision statement that appeals to the hearts and minds of all affected Airmen. The vision statement should then be published via all available means as part of a strategic communications plan to ensure the widest possible dissemination of the information among all affected Airmen.

Once a vision statement has been created, it is recommended the guiding coalition also create and publish a change management strategy that includes objectives, action items, and suggested timelines that correspond to every step of Kotter’s eight-stage process, beginning with establishing a sense of urgency and ending with anchoring new approaches in the culture. Other

US government agencies, including the General Services Administration, have created change management strategy guides based on Kotter's eight-stage process to aid supervisors and change agents in understanding the steps and processes necessary to implement a successful transformation initiative.¹⁹¹ This type of guide not only provides Airmen with specific directions and details regarding the entire change process, but it also establishes realistic expectations for when the new norms of behavior and shared values of the change vision will be anchored in Air Force culture.

Create and Execute an Effective Strategic Communications Plan

Communicating the vision and strategy is a critical step in the change process because unless the guiding coalition is able to mobilize a majority of an organization's population in support the transformation effort, it will not achieve the momentum needed to overcome resistance and keep people motivated until the change is anchored in the organization's culture. Kotter contends that people "will not make sacrifices, even if they are unhappy with the status quo, unless they believe that useful change is possible. Without credible communication, and a lot of it, the hearts and minds of the troops are never captured."¹⁹² Therefore, it is recommended that when initiating major change efforts in the future, Air Force leaders create and adhere to a robust strategic communication plan that ensures all Airmen receive and understand the change vision and strategy.

In order to be effective, the strategic communications plan should obey several key principles. First, it is incumbent on the sender of the information to ensure the message is received and understood by the intended audience. Therefore, a strategic communications plan must involve abundant repetition and use several different means of communication to target specific audiences while delivering a consistent message. The sheer size and complexity of the

Air Force alone makes it difficult to communicate effectively with all Airmen; however, a communications plan that delivers a consistent message numerous times through many different channels is more likely to succeed at reaching a majority of Airmen.¹⁹³

One medium that must be included in the plan is ample face-to-face communication, preferably from an immediate supervisor. Face-to-face communication encourages a two-way exchange with Airmen that can help clarify ambiguities in the message. It also gives supervisors an opportunity to obtain positive confirmation that the change message was received and understood.¹⁹⁴ During the new AFIS implementation, most of the communication about the vision and strategy was written, and many supervisors learned that the change had been directed at the same time as their Airmen. Additionally, most first-line supervisors had not received any information about the new AFIS from their supervisor, so their own questions had not been answered. Consequently, they were unprepared to relay the message and answer questions from their subordinates.

A strategic communications plan must also be designed to keep Airmen informed throughout all stages of a transformation effort, not just in the beginning. “Organizational changes often flounder because not enough strategic thought is given to communicating the rationale, the progress and the impact of the change.”¹⁹⁵ Therefore, preliminary communication must occur that prepares Airmen for the change by conveying information about what is going to happen and why these actions must occur. Additionally, this communication must account for resistance to change and be used to educate and empower Airmen to help decrease that resistance. In later steps of the change process, the communications plan must continue to inform and educate Airmen through several different means, ensuring everyone affected by the change understands their new roles and responsibilities and remains engaged in the effort until the new

approaches are anchored in Air Force culture. Finally, as a change effort nears full implementation, the communications plan must to inform all Airmen about they will be affected by the new structures and systems that are in place. Such communication will encourage their continued participation in the change process, and will empower Airmen to be successful under the new construct.¹⁹⁶

CONCLUSION

Implementing a major change initiative in a large, complex organization can be a daunting task; however, disciplined planning and execution can help create lasting cultural change. At any given time, there are numerous forces that must be analyzed so organizational leaders can determine whether the need for change exists. If so, they must also assess the climate and culture of their organization in order to determine the type and severity of resistance to change they expect to encounter. Then, a change management strategy must be carefully and thoughtfully constructed to address all conceivable situations during the implementation process.

Several effective change models are available, including John P. Kotter's eight-stage process of creating major change. Kotter's process has become a popular choice for managing major change efforts in private industry and government agencies alike. Therefore, this model was chosen to conduct an exploratory case study of the new AFIS change strategy, comparing the steps of Kotter's model to the actions directed and taken by the Air Force during the implementation of the new AFIS.

The results of the case study revealed that the new AFIS change strategy had addressed all of the steps from Kotter's eight-stage process, although the final two steps have yet to be completed. Air Force leaders continue to use the momentum created by the new AFIS to make

even greater changes to Air Force structures, systems, and policies. However, the desired norms of behavior and shared values of the new AFIS vision are not yet anchored in Air Force culture.

Although the new AFIS change strategy included all eight steps from Kotter's model, some gaps were identified. Therefore, several recommendations were made to address these gaps and help improve the effectiveness of future major Air Force change initiatives. The recommendations included communicating persistently and passionately about the need for change once it is discovered to ensure a majority of Airmen understand its necessity, developing a clear and concise vision and a viable strategy that guides the change effort from beginning to end, and creating and executing an effective strategic communications plan to educate and empower all Airmen to be active participants throughout the transformation effort.

Growing fiscal constraints and emerging national security threats due to a shifting geopolitical landscape will continue to drive the Air Force to make changes in the future. The success of these efforts will be a reflection of the time and effort invested in developing and executing an effective change management strategy. All Airmen from the chief of staff to the newest recruit, will benefit from this investment through enhanced mission readiness and organizational effectiveness, ensuring Air Force leaders at all levels are able to fulfill their duty and responsibility to effectively manage resources, lead people, improve their unit, and execute the mission.

Notes

¹ Lt Col Tim Hopper, “General Merrill A. McPeak: An Effective Change Agent?,” (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air War College, 1997), 14-15.

² Michael Beer and Nitin Nohria, “Cracking the Code of Change,” *Harvard Business Review* 78, no. 3 (May-June 2008): 133.

³ Frank Camm et al., *Charting the Course for a New Air Force Inspection System*, RAND Report TR-1291-AF (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2013), xiii.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

⁵ Col Robert D. Hyde, “New Wing Inspection Approach,” *The Inspector General Brief* 65, no. 5 (September 2013): 4-5.

⁶ SAF/IGI, *Commander’s Inspection Program Wing/FOA/DRU Implementation Guide Ver 1.0.*, 1 July 2013, 2-5.

⁷ Air Force Instruction (AFI) 90-201, *Air Force Inspection System*, 21 April 2015, Incorporating Change 1, 11 February 2016, 105-8.

⁸ Air Force Instruction (AFI) 33-360, *Publications and Forms Management*, 1 December 2015, 12.

⁹ Maj Jonathon P. Phillips, “TIGIRS: The Inspector General’s Inspection Reporting System,” *The Inspector General Brief* 66, no. 6 (December 2014): 7.

¹⁰ Lt Gen Stephen P. Mueller, “From the Inspector General,” *The Inspector General Brief* 66, no. 4 (July 2014): 2.

¹¹ SAF/IGI, *Commander’s Inspection Program Wing/FOA/DRU Implementation Guide Ver 1.0.*, 1 July 2013, 4.

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