

The Change Monitor An Interview with Kilian Bennebroek Gravenhorst

by Danielle Savage

A member of the International Council on Organizational Change, a group founded and chaired by Dawn-Marie Turner, Kilian is also the creator of the change management tool, The Change Monitor. Recently Danielle Savage of Turner Change Management interviewed Kilian about the Change Monitor and bringing it to North America. Kilian and Danielle are both members of the Change Facilitator's Network.

What is the Change Monitor?

I like to say it's an organizational intervention tool in multiple layers. The questionnaire is the first part or the "Measurement" layer. People give their opinion on three main issues – their organization, the change process and the change strategy. There is a basic version of the questionnaire but a tailor-made version is always created in collaboration with the company. The 2nd layer is the learning component because everyone who's participating in the questionnaire is invited and encouraged to interpret the results for themselves. This is much more effective than if it was just me doing the interpretation. The Change Monitor helps people learn how they react individually and as a group to the change or changes. The second layer is also known as the "Dialogue" layer. The 3rd layer or "Action" phase focuses on two things – how can you improve the less positive results and how can you make better use of the strengths that were identified in the measurement layer? The second part is often the most difficult and the most interesting, because more often than not, we focus on the negative than the positive – the Change Monitor helps people switch their thinking.

What kinds of companies can benefit from using the Change Monitor?

I'm tempted to say any kind of organization, but that's not exactly true. The Change Monitor works best with companies with well-developed management teams and an awareness of organizational issues. In my experience, the best organizations to work with are the ones who are open to new approaches; who value learning; and who are undergoing some already defined changes. It's almost easier to answer this question from the reverse – what companies does the Change Monitor not work well with? It does not work well with companies where open dialogue is not encouraged, with high turnover, and where people are in a crisis situation; focused on survival versus trying to make things better.



When & how should it be used by organizations? What kind of timeframe is involved?

It should be used early on in the change process, but it shouldn't be the first step. Getting the commitment from the team leaders at the beginning is critical to the success of the Change Monitor – it needs management support at the top to carry it through. However, I have to say that organizations have to appreciate that this is not a quick-fix, so it's not good for organizations in a real hurry; the ones that are rushing through change.

Ideally, the process should take, from the first conversation with the client, to the development of the questionnaire, eight weeks. The questionnaire itself can be completed in about 20 minutes but it's designed so you can come back to it again. The results are reviewed within two weeks after closing the questionnaire so the information is still timely and relevant to the people who completed the form. The feedback or dialogue session would typically take a minimum of half a day or more. It's a three-stage process: interpret the results, think about actions to strengthen or improve things going on and then finally, in order to make things more concrete, build a plan identifying who is going to do what, when.

I like to say the action plan is the end of the Change Monitor, but also the beginning. People are very good at plans but it's the execution where people stumble. You can use the Change Monitor again in six months to monitor the progress to see real results. It's nice to do it a second time as a strengthening tool so people can validate and review the effectiveness of their action plan. Three times with one organization is the maximum time I would suggest over a two-year timeframe.

Why did you create the Change Monitor?

It sort of originated by accident. I was doing a PhD on why change is so difficult and in doing a literature review there was lots of information from the management perspective but you hardly ever heard from the people actually doing the change work, I wanted to give them a voice. It's very personal for me because it originates from the desire to activate people, re-energize people. I come from five generations of educators so I have a personal connection to learning; it's in my genes.

Can you tell me a about the science behind the Change Monitor

Yes, there is definite science behind it, 10 years of research, 50 or more projects and more than 10 publications. But, what the real difference between the Change Monitor and other change management tools is that it takes a more integrated approach. Usually the problem is seen from only one point of view, typically the management side. With the Change Monitor, all kinds of explanations and theories have been brought together to form the basis of the questionnaire to explore all viewpoints. Again, to give a voice to people who traditionally haven't had one.

What kind of impact has the Change Monitor had on the companies you've worked with?

The companies I've worked with have really valued the quality of the conversations in the Dialogue phase. They like that they are able to speak with everyone affected by the change, without emotions dominating the conversation. Companies say the Change Monitor generates a mixture of both information they expected and information they did not expect. The Change Monitor produces concrete action plans and new ideas for next steps. People want quick results but that doesn't mean lasting results. It takes courage to do this. We have a lot of scared leaders out there. Approximately 75% of people involved in change don't know what it's about, that's why the Change Monitor is so important.

Why did you enter into a relationship with Turner Change Management (TCM) and allow us to have the North American license for the Change Monitor?

I really like accidental meetings and it was kind of a coincidence that Dawn-Marie found me. When I spoke with her I felt an instant connection and the feeling that this would definitely work out. Every so often I get requests for the questionnaire by students, universities, etc., but I was looking for someone who could make productive use of the Change Monitor and the results that followed. In the first call, I had the idea "this would get a tail," this is what we say in the Netherlands, basically that this meeting would result in something really positive, and it has. And truth be told, a bike ride with Dawn-Marie in Paris cinched the deal.