

## Planning for Change in Lifelong Learning

*In the following article, Terry Newman describes the process her community education program went through while adjusting to a new software system. The author recounts her direct experience dealing with the LLMS software system to illustrate the experience that many programs go through when they adopt new management tools. The author offers a three step “process of change” as an antidote to the frustrations of mismatched expectations that often come about when adjusting to a new set of management tools. Newman comes to the conclusion that embracing the process of change can lead to a better functioning lifelong learning program.*

### Abstract

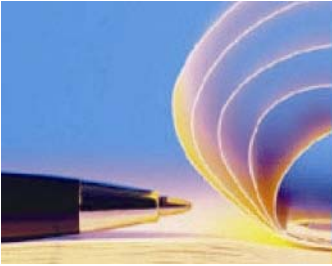
In the springtime of 2000, Community Education began getting calls asking if our catalog was on a website and whether we had online registration. Buying on the web was taking off and people were finding that it could save them a great deal of time. If Community Education wanted to become and stay competitive, we would have to give our customers what they wanted in the way they wanted it. Establishing a dynamic website could be the solution to many problems including rising staffing costs, the need for 24/7 registration, and the desire for fast, effective customer service. So the search began for possible solutions. Colleagues at other colleges were contacted, vendors were approached at various conferences, and websites were reviewed. Products were reviewed and tested; references were checked.

We finally decided on the LLMS system and the announcement was made to the Community Education staff about our new, upcoming online registration software program. The staff was given access to a test site where we could all become familiar with the standard program and begin to formulate our specific needs. Everyone was enthusiastic about it and looking forward to the change. For the next month or so, we played around on the test site, spelled out our needs and then proposed requirements for customizations. The vendor submitted their recommendations and implementation plan. Little did we know that we were about to undertake a major change within our department.

As LLMS was being changed, customized, and tested by the vendor, the Community Education program went about its regular business, offering classes, helping customers, waiting for the change. Finally, we began beta testing the program with practice data. Beta testing revealed problems, but as bugs were identified and fixed, our questions were asked and answered. It seemed that we were ready to go live. There was a great deal of apprehension and anxiety because we were entering the unknown.

---

**Terry Newman**, Director  
of Contract & Community  
Education, Gavilan  
College



It wasn't long, however, before we began to encounter more problems on a day-to-day basis. We were accustomed to being able to manipulate data, maneuver through the database in numerous ways and trace our transactions from beginning to end. Reports were not giving us the information we wanted and needed in the way we were used to receiving them. Everything required a "work around," or temporary fix, in order to get the functionality we required. LLMS was not functioning the way the old system functioned and it was creating extra work for all of us. Every process and procedure associated with running the program had changed. We were trying to make the LLMS system fit our old procedures, yet it was these old procedures that were holding us back. This had all the potential of a major disaster. But we had a few things going for us. This process was planned (or what I thought was planned). We had identified a need—to be responsive to our customers and competitive in our environment. There was picture of where we wanted to be in the future. It also involved the entire Community Education "system."

There are three stages in the change process: unfreezing, changing, and refreezing. Unfreezing is the stage where we must cast aside old ideas and practices so that new ones can be learned. We did not go through this step willingly; we did not even know we would have to unfreeze. It was in our minds that everything would remain the same and that LLMS would conform to our old ways. I was no less committed to the process, but I had not anticipated the amount of time it would require of me (especially since I maintained control of all aspects of the change) and my staff. Many of the changes were still being developed, refined, modified, re-modified and then adjusted again.

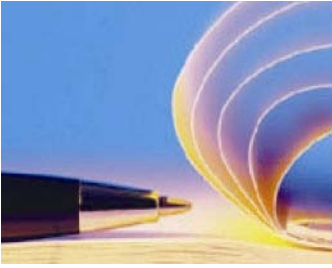
So I placed a number one priority on either making the system do what we needed it to do or to make changes in our processes so that they would work within the LLMS system. I began meeting regularly with the staff to identify problem areas and I assigned the responsibility of communicating directly with the vendor to one of the staff members. Over the next eight months, we continually moved forward toward achieving our goal.

We were revitalized as we were able to see how we could take advantage of all that the LLMS program had to offer. We found that as we adopted new ways of working and thinking, the system met our needs in ways we had not anticipated. As the kinks were worked out, we established new processes and procedures that worked with our new program and, finally, our change was complete.

After a year and a half of going through the change process, we finally made it to the refreezing process. This is where change takes hold and systems become stable. We continue to review current processes and identify more ways to make LLMS work better for us. Because the program has capabilities far beyond what we had originally anticipated, we continue to unfreeze old processes, make the changes necessary to adopt new features and then refreeze.

The program is now functioning well and has cut down significantly on staffing hours. Our customers register all hours of the day and night. We continue to find new ways to do things that will best use the capabilities of LLMS and our work lives have finally settled down.

By implementing the steps to a successful change and recognizing that the unfolding process will bring discomfort, ambiguity and stress, managers can help their employees come through the



# journal of lifelong learning™

Exclusively from Augusoft, Inc.

change by clear communication, empowerment, acknowledging the contribution of employees' skills and knowledge, coaching through resistance, and constant support and commitment from top management.