

Cultural Change as Behavioural Change

(Posted by Dinesh Ganesarajah at [The IT Service Management Blog](#) – 4 Sept. 2007)

In a [previous post](#) I discussed the need for cultural change as the necessary underpinning of any implementation of "best practise" and how I have tried thus far to overcome the resistance to change. Without some level of cultural change, the team or organisation becomes stuck in "current practise", not "best practise" and the implementation will not succeed.

In researching this area, I've come across Dr Leandro Herrero's [Chalfont Project](#). Dr Herrero's perspectives on the area of cultural change are a contrast to other thinking, for example challenging the view that cultural change has to be slow and painful.

Dr Herrero's site has a [video](#) and a number of articles, but the highlights are:

- Cultural change programmes concentrate on creating new mindsets and attitudes. A lot of time and effort is spent in rolling out new processes and tools. There is also a lot of communication and training, rationalising the logical need for change. In all this, an assumption is made that the new behaviours will follow to support these changes.
- In reality, behavioural changes have to come before "cultural change". People need to be performing behaviours that are specifically "collaborating", for example, and this behaviour encouraged and spread. Once the behaviour becomes widespread, it can be considered that cultural change has taken place.
- In this form of change programme, it is necessary to identify the key behaviours that will produce the required change. These behaviours must be reinforced and encouraged.
- To make cultural change happen across an organisation, it is necessary to take advantage of the few people in the organisation who are connected to many people. These people need to be demonstrating and spreading the behavioural change. Dr Herrero compares this to the spread of an infectious disease, virally through a network.
- The best thing that can happen in this kind of programme is dropping the terms "culture" and "change". People have preconceptions about these labels. Instead, people's natural tendencies to copy well regarded behaviours is used.

The content of Dr Herrero's ideas, which he calls [Viral Change](#), make more sense to me than anything else I have come across in the area of cultural change. Perhaps what is more impressive is that I have previously seen a team undergo dramatic changes in working practises and the observations from just seeing that at a distance fit quite well with Dr Herrero's thoughts.

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