

## **Article on Change Management vs. Behavioural Change Management**

By Jonathan Gardner

Where change management fails and what to do about it?

“Change Management”: one of the buzzwords of our time. But what does it mean and does it deliver long term change?

There are a number of definitions of “Change Management” that can be found through a quick search on the web. One which particularly seems to sum up popular opinion is the following:

*Methods and processes that assist individuals in adjusting constructively to new systems, procedures, processes, workflow, organizational relationships and other differences as they occur.*

Change management has been applied to many and varied situations in business including: introduction of new IT systems, new business processes, Mergers and acquisitions, new organisational structures. And I am sure that in every case there are examples where the change management programme has been very effective. However, there are just as many cases where the programme has worked for the first while only to fade into insignificance later. Somewhere along the way, the reasons and focus for change get lost. Is success predictable? Can you increase the chances of success?

Let's first take a look at the traditional approach to change management and see where it might be falling short. Generally speaking change management can be broken down into the following 5 items:

- A shared vision is created among senior management about the changes needed. Senior management then announces a new corporate quality / re-engineering / process improvement programme.
- A partnership is created between internal and external resources
- Company-wide half-day training workshops are arranged to bring everyone up to speed.
- Cross functional committees are set up to meet and discuss 'the way forward'. Perhaps some training takes place
- Resources are reallocated desks duly moved, PCs plugged in at new abode

This is obviously a simplified approach but one that is very common. In fact often the situation is treated too simply by the implementers. Machiavelli highlighted the problem:

*“There is nothing more difficult to plan, more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to manage than the creation of a new system. For the initiator has the enmity of all who would profit by the preservation of the old institutions, and merely lukewarm defenders in those who should gain by the new ones”.*

His statement is backed by data showing that: over the last decade approx 84% of US companies underwent at least one major business transformation the top three change programmes were Information Technology / business process re-engineering / business strategy development. But 75% of all transformation efforts fail and 50-75% of re-engineering projects fail. (source Buletpoint 2003)

So what are the problems with the traditional approach to change management – why does it so often go wrong? Well there are a number of reasons some of which lie in the implementation of the change management programme but some are more fundamental. They include:

- Misunderstanding of what change is – it should be seen as a journey not destination
- Lack of planning and preparation – management looking only to the end result, not focusing on the steps necessary to get there
- Change programme has no clear vision – don't know where you are going so can't get there
- Goals are set, but too far in the future - no recognition for short-term wins
- Quick fix option – it should be more than a poster, t-shirt, coffee mug, half-day seminar, or management message in the company newsletter
- Poor communication – giving information gradually is risky
- Legacy of previous change – the result of years of failed changes may well be a skeptical, risk-averse culture which is incompatible with the innovative spirit central to change
- The refrain “the way we do things around here” is often heard especially where the organization has enjoyed success in the past, managers may believe change is not needed
- Fear of failure
- Employee resistance
- Management ignore the reinforcements necessary to sustain change
- Ill prepared employees

It is not so much that change management is bad in itself. Change management programmes if implemented well sometimes do help the change process. However, if we look at the list of failures above we can see that in essence they often do a good job of motivation and training and it may well start off in the right direction, however, sustainability is the main problem. As Aristotle said:

*"It is easy to perform a good action, but not easy to acquire a settled habit of performing such actions."*

So how do you create sustainable change? Well if you look into it from a Psychological perspective you have to ask first what you want to change on a sustained basis? Is it really the processes involved? Or is it more the actual day to day actions of the individuals? I would argue that it is the day to day actions that are most important and it is these that are left out of many change

programmes. People are often told “you must be more entrepreneurial” or “we need more innovation” or “this system must be used better” but rarely are specific actions broken down.

But we need to go beyond that even further. It is one thing to get actions defined (and in some cases this does happen – particularly with system implementations) but is it quite another as Aristotle say to turn these into “habits” or “behaviours”.

From a social sciences viewpoint, to change someone’s behaviours you have to not only define the ones that are desirable, but also define the existing behaviours to see where you are coming from. Then you have to motivate the starting of a behaviour. (The motivation aspect is where change management programmes focus – but often even these programmes see simple “communication” as a form of motivation).

### **Definition of behavioural change management**

*Behavioural change management is a methodology used to facilitate change from one state to another by uncovering and studying the habits and behaviours behind the current practices, processes and systems, and adapting those behaviours or creating new ones that will sustain the new desired practices. The application of the psychology of reinforcements to those behaviours then creates the sustainable change.*

To perform real, sustained change you need a knowledge of behavioural sciences to understand, for example, the difference between; attitudes, behaviours, rewards, incentives, reinforcement. You will need an overview of the effect of organisational structure on behaviours just as much as the effect of management actions on other behaviours. Having all this will lead to a much higher chance of sustained change and a real employee action change from the grass roots.

“But” you say, “I don’t have such experience or knowledge”. Well here are ten tips to get you started down the right lines:

### **SEVEN TIPS FOR CHANGE beyond your average change management strategy**

- 1 Don’t just stop with a communication strategy
  - Communication isn’t enough, you need to work on the motivation of the employees and look at how each job function must change in terms of day to day actions
- 2 Understand that there are multitude of forms of motivation
  - Motivation for one person will be very different to that which motivates his neighbour. You will not necessarily be able to analyse each person to find what he responds to so you will need to use a variety of motivational tools to affect as many different types of people as possible
- 3 Utilize change agents or change champions

- It is key that any external help or internal driver uses a group of “change champions” from within your firm to drive the change. It is your employees that will understand your culture and ways of working the best. The change champions do however, have to be trained well and empowered to drive change forward
- 4 Define specific behaviours and actions you need for success
  - You can't just assume by saying “entrepreneurial” that everyone in sales and marketing and financial will know what this means for them in their role on a day-to-day basis. You must look at each individual role within the company and see how you want their day-to-day life to change. Ask them to help you in defining this.
- 5 Understand which current behaviours are blocking that route to success
  - Many things occurring on a day-to-day basis at the moment may be hindering the success of any change programme without you even realizing it. You must first understand what is happening now to know where you need to change. Ultimately there may be many things that are already in place that are conducive to success, that, if ignored may fade away! Remember the cardinal rule of psychology: **if a behaviour is not being reinforced it will fade! And conversely any behaviour that exists currently, does so because it is being reinforced.**
- 6 Use the correct reinforcements to encourage new behaviours and extinguish bad ones
  - Many managers don't realize that there are many more ways beyond remuneration to encourage a sustained change in behaviour. Some can be as simple as changing their own way of responding to problems or measuring progress. It is also important to remember that some management actions may be unwittingly sustaining undesirable behaviours. (More on that in my next article or at [www.thechalfontproject.com](http://www.thechalfontproject.com))
- 7 Use variable and intermittent reinforcements correctly
  - This is fairly complicated, but simply put, you may have noticed that regular salaries are good for some things, set targets are good for others, and random prizes like the lottery are good for other behaviours. Try to understand how your reinforcements work and be aware that they will need to change as the behaviour moves from a “new introduction” to an old habit.

**Conclusion:**

Change management is more complicated than simply changing processes or technology. It is fundamentally about people, vision and strategy. If you are undergoing change then make sure you are looking at the long term sustainability of specific actions and not just the communication of changed

ideas. Change normally involves the need for behavioural change and as such it is important to look at the things that sustain change over time (reinforcements) and change them as appropriate.

In the next article we will look into reinforcements and motivations in more depth and demonstrate the differences between various types and forms.

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