

The key to unlocking your potential

Summary Points

- § Lack of balance leads to the failure of change
- § Balancing the approach to change management
- § The key stages of change management
- § The personal dynamics of change
- § The four final elements of change

Leading and communicating change is the single biggest test of leadership. The dynamic nature of the change process means its result is not guaranteed. The coherence and success of the process depends upon the personality and vision of the person who leads it. This puts to the test both the intellectual and emotional skills of the individual selected to guide the change process and may just as quickly highlight any weaknesses in leadership style as it will any strengths.

Thinking about change as a dynamic process that is driven by both leadership and communication skills emphasises not only the transformational process of change but also the capacity of the change manager to transform his or her skills as required. Many hard working managers have failed to oversee successful change because they did not appreciate the need for transformational versatility in themselves.

This can be because of an undue emphasis placed on deadlines – time, in other words – which can create an exaggerated shift in attention to the volume of work. This can lead managers to underestimate, or overlook altogether, the transactional and transformational aspects of the change process.

Lack of balance may lead to the failure of change

For change to be successful, it must be seen in the context of its three principal dimensions. Once these

dimensions are understood, the skills necessary for the successful implementation of any change program can be fostered and all key stakeholders successfully involved.

This places considerable emphasis upon the quality of the communication style adopted by those leading the change cycle. It also requires a holistic means of thinking about the change process. There must be an awareness of not only how change may affect the organisation itself, thereby creating institutional stressors, but what impact it may have on the people who work within the organisation, which creates personal stressors.

The failure to take into account the way an organisation's changes may affect the personal and professional lives of employees and contractors may see, in its most extreme manifestation, the complete failure of the change process. Rarely are such failures sudden or dramatic: they occur through a process of attrition as energy and focus are leached from the project, leaving staff demoralised, or antagonistic, and managers deeply frustrated and embarrassed. This can finally result in the emergence of a management driven blame culture.

The symptoms of this failure are most often seen in organisations that suffer from the following cultural or organisational difficulties:

- loss of energy and focus in the completion of tasks, which leads to a failure in strategic planning and the capacity to meet deadlines;

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- loss of morale amongst staff and contractors;
- rigid thinking in approaching tasks requiring problem solving skills and critical analysis;
- unwillingness to listen to, or accept, valid criticism;
- a sense of organisational exhaustion;
- an atmosphere of personal discontent, particularly if staff perceive little obvious reward;
- a cycle of negative behavioural patterns such as an increase in workplace confrontations, greater levels of bullying, or a rise in staff absenteeism;
- the emergence of a blame culture as individuals try to avoid responsibility for the project's failure.

Once these patterns have emerged within an organisation, it can prove difficult to communicate and lead change in a productive and dynamic way. In a manner of speaking, energy will leak from the system in greater volume than that at which it can be replaced. What develops is a negative polarity of cynicism, mistrust and, at worst, open hostility to the entire process.

The importance of a balanced approach to change management

The communication and leadership of change must take into account both the inherent and anticipated institutional and personal stressors of the change process. This requires leaders to examine both the key

stages and the personal elements of change as a fundamental part of the change planning process. It also means that the communication style employed in this process must be open; it must authentically signal to everyone involved a willingness to engage with criticism in a fair and impartial manner and clearly communicate a fundamental belief in the capacity of the staff and contractors involved to manage the process.

It must also involve a transparent, two-way pattern of communication that lays the foundation for a meaningful dialogue between management and staff. This is vital to removing the power plays that emerge when knowledge is quarantined from sectors of the organisation, whether deliberately or due to poorly managed communication processes. This can lead to feelings of fear and mistrust, which can effectively derail the process before it has even begun.

Even more fundamentally, all parties involved in the change process must understand it in terms of being a process of growth and renewal. For this to have real meaning, organisations must understand how their change cycle will affect the personal lives of their staff and contractors and offer them appropriate support strategies for dealing with that change as and when it will be appropriate.

This pastoral initiative must be seen as a priority by managers. Otherwise the energies of their staff are directed inwards, to managing their own apprehensions and fears, leaving little energy to manage the change process at work. If the conflict is significant enough for staff, they will begin to leave or may work against the change plan because they can

see no future for themselves within the new articulated vision.

The key stages of managing change

The key stages of successful change management rest upon three dimensions that dominate both organisational and personal existence. They are the transformational, transactional and temporal dimensions of communication and change. These three elements underpin both how individuals communicate with each other and their contextual behaviours.

The transformational dimension covers the ability of people to think differently. That is, their capacity to question underlying assumptions in their thinking and to think critically about new information and existing problems. Importantly, this leads to change because the transformational dimension supports the ability to alter the context of behaviours and challenge underlying values and beliefs and assess their continued usefulness to the individual or organisation.

The transactional dimension refers to the capacity to extend the transformation of thought and values to the alteration of patterns of thinking and to build on new or existing strengths.

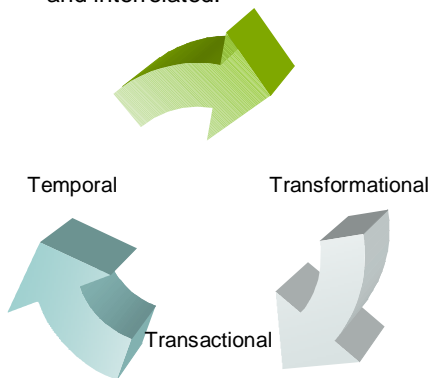
The final dimension, the temporal, locates us in the workplace, or in the context of our daily lives, and refers us back to our contextual behavioural patterns: our work or personal effectiveness, work and task allocation and project management skills.

These three dimensions form a cycle within which thinking about communication and change management can take place. They

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force an assessment of the real purpose of the change process and, once this has been critically examined, of how that change will be best communicated to the relevant stakeholders. This will create a cycle within which change and communication strategies may be developed.

This cycle is suggested in the diagram below, which shows how the three dimensions are interdependent and interrelated.



This process creates a dynamic that takes into account the need for the purpose of the change and its communication strategies to be aligned with each other. This, in turn, creates the interdependent synergies required for change to become a force for renewal and growth.

The personal dynamics of change

Once this process of organisational change has been developed, the next important phase is the process of personal change. Without ensuring the alignment of both cycles of change, the process may still fail.

This process takes into account those who will be affected by the change process – the stakeholders if you will – identifies those with whom dialogue must be established, clarifies the vested interests of each group affected and establishes acceptable

boundaries within which each group may operate.

Of equal importance is the fact that this more personal focus provides a means by which individuals and groups can sustain themselves in their personal and professional lives during the change process.

These personal changes take into account three dimensions that parallel and complement the organisational dimensions discussed earlier.

The first of these is the mental dimension, which incorporates the need for mental preparation, creativity, visualisation and positive self-talk.

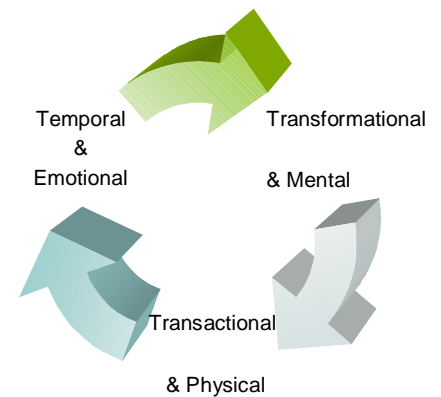
The second dimension, often overlooked when the temporal dimension has taken priority over all else, is the physical dimension. This takes into account the functional needs of each individual in terms of allowing time for sufficient rest, exercise, hydration, good diet and sleep.

The final dimension is the emotional. This is a means of monitoring and nurturing important and appropriate contextual behaviours based on the principles of self-control, empathy, ethical behaviour, self-confidence and interpersonal effectiveness.

These three personal dimensions are significant in terms of enhancing the effectiveness of communication and in developing dialogue with all key stakeholders. By taking into account the personal needs of stakeholders, the organisation as a whole can continue to renew and grow while recognising that, like all organisms, it is part of an interdependent system.

Finally, there is the need to ensure there is an alignment between the

stated goal, the means employed to communicate that goal and those who will be involved in achieving that goal. If these three factors are aligned correctly, an organisation will have change occurring within a symmetry that can be best described as circular. Each dimension will be in balance, allowing for an optimal and equal flow of energy. If they are not correctly aligned, the symmetry is no longer that of a perfect circle, but may become elliptical, meaning more energy is diverted to one particular area at the expense of the others.



Having these two dimensions correctly aligned will make easier the task of aligning the key stakeholders in the change process and ensuring they communicate in the same manner with each other.

This goes beyond ensuring they deliver the same message; it goes to the very heart of how they communicate and seeks to establish a consistent alignment not only with the message but with the pattern and style of communication adopted with other individuals and groups within the organisation. Thus managers and their teams, as well as others within the organisation, need to be aligned carefully for the dimensions to function in a symmetrical manner.

The four final elements of effective change

To achieve this outcome requires time, careful strategic review, critical thinking and honest personal and organisational self-assessment. Therefore, the opportunities for self-assessment must be recognised and created if they do not already exist; this means listening carefully to the criticisms and suggestions of various stakeholders and strategically understanding they may contain the necessary seeds for the process of change.

The four final elements that must always be borne in mind when undergoing any change process are that:

- there must be an opportunity for open and transparent self-assessment;
- behavioural change – at an organisational and individual level – takes both patience and practice;
- there must be a specific measurable or quantifiable change plan implemented;
- continued structural, organisational and personal support is provided at all levels of the organisation.

Each of these elements is vital to achieving and communicating change. This ensures that energy is directed equally to all areas involved in the change process and that communication flows are open and reciprocal.

Such a balanced pattern of energy expenditure better enables the organisation to meet the inevitable challenges change brings with it in a

more intellectually and behaviourally adaptable manner. It avoids an unnecessary waste of valuable resources involved in the negative behavioural patterns discussed at the beginning of this article.

Fundamentally, it cannot be forgotten that all successful change involves an investment in the organisation itself as well as in the individuals involved. Aligning these through good communication and planning strategies enables the organisational system to adapt and renew itself in a resilient and sustainable manner.

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