

One person's tweak is another's quantum leap.

Ignore this statement at your peril –
Otherwise you'll probably be in the majority of organisations for whom the good news is that change fails only 80%+ of the time!

At Enabling Development, our work with people and organisations is to turn this ratio on its head. We reckon that if companies took the same sort of care with change as they do with investment appraisal for a new plant or office building, then a one in five chance of success would be unacceptable.

Given that you can walk into any business bookshop and find lots of books about change

– does this suggest organisational reading difficulties? “Yes”, says director Steve Gorton “most organisations, and for that term read people, rush into change without considering the ramifications in sufficient depth. They have an idea and will hammer it in, usually top down, ignoring the people who are charged with implementing it and delivering the goods. BOHICA strikes again.”

So what are some of the basics which enhance the success rate? We reckon there are **nine key areas to consider**.

BE CLEAR WHY YOU BELIEVE CHANGE IS REQUIRED.....

Is it a fashion because someone else is doing it in your industry, eg business process reengineering a few years ago? Or have you researched the situation and come to the conclusion that unless you do something you will slowly (or quickly) disappear from the market. Is this just your feeling as an individual or have you carried out a reality check with colleagues, non-exec directors and independent sounding boards.

The next question is to change from What? to What? – really clever operators have an early warning centre (an organisational Fylingdales) which continually scans the external environment in the short, medium and long term to see what might affect them. They are then **proactive long before their competitors**, and indeed tend to shape the environment around them.

TAKE A SYSTEMIC VIEW.....

As a leader in your organisation, you've probably worked your way up and done well in a functional sense. It is unlikely you've done this by yourself and others will have helped, though sometimes you might not have noticed this. Should you work in manufacturing, you rely on the sales and marketing function to create and satisfy the demand for what you make, the R&D people to generate the new products and the finance people to organise the funding for the machinery. In your own function there is a

range of people from those on the production line to those designing the production process in the first place.

We believe it is important to **involve all your stakeholders** – both internal and external to your own part of the value chain. Talk to suppliers and buyers as well to ensure that all those impacted by change have an opportunity for input. At the end of the day many of them have the power and influence to stop your change in its tracks or accelerate it at the speed of light.

SHARE THE THINKING.....

Having identified those who are affected, design your change team to involve representatives from all the critical stakeholder groups. Many organisations design their teams with a range of functions – this makes sense – only to fill the positions with abominable yesmen and the rising stars in the company. Everyone is happy and the blinkers make certain we don't have to consider any difficulties.

Gorton says "Get real - fill some of the key roles with those at the sharp end and the people who usually resist change. Invariably they have good reasons borne out of experience. Most importantly once they are

involved and take ownership not only do they become excellent ambassadors – they can use their less formal networks to gain more ideas and improve the thought processes making the change process robust – and also they influence many more people than through the official channels." (an example is MD Foods (now Arla) who won the first ever UK People Management Award in 1998)

Then **give the change team the power and authority to make it happen in deed as well as word** – sometimes a bridge too far for the CEO and their team – in which case.... there are some pieces to put into place before anything else can happen.

TAKE ACCOUNT OF WHO AND WHERE YOU ARE.....

Sometimes top teams are not willing to allow the necessary change to take place. This is because people and organisations adapt to the conditions in which they live. Their personal values and corporate culture are strong influences on what can be achieved. Many change initiatives require people who can't drive to act as if they were two close rivals on equal points in the final Grand Prix of the season.

Awareness of this dynamic is often seen and occasionally understood. Only rarely is it taken into account. Success depends on this more than anything else. Successful change leaders are acutely aware of its power either

way. They know that big change takes time and that it is best carried out in manageable stages. (It is entirely possible to eat an elephant a leg here and a leg there. To eat it all at once leads to indigestion)

The one exception is in a situation of extremis where the alternatives are too awful to contemplate. In this instance everyone usually bands together to deal with the common enemy. That is – they **share a vision**. If they don't, then the situation is probably beyond retrieval and time for the organisation to rest in peace. It might also be a result of too much badly designed change. Sometimes NO is the right answer.

CREATE AND SHARE THE COMPELLING VISION.....

Provided it is motivating, enthusing and takes account of the cultural aspects above, the compelling vision will be a beacon attracting all involved. Make it real, make it live, make it bright and noisy. Make it a friendly black hole which pulls everyone (and the necessary resources) towards it. Compare and contrast the previous state with the desired state you are now achieving – be clear about change from **what to what and why**.

This is where the change team takes on the role of inspirational leaders – they use creativity to the hilt helping the organisation and its members move outside the box. This is where the marketing people can demonstrate their skills internally by designing the internal communication campaign. This is where the signs and symbols of the achieved vision are visible.

LEAD BY EXAMPLE.....

The top team has already devolved appropriate responsibility to the change team. Insist each member of the board and senior management walk the talk as congruent role models.

Enough said!!

COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE ¹⁰

For those on the change team – imagine you are in an episode of Dr Who and surrounded by Daleks who are shrieking “Communicate, Communicate, Communicate”

The more you do this with the rationale and vision before, during and after the change intervention, the greater the involvement, ownership and commitment to make it happen.

One of the first things GNER did when they took over the East Coast rail line in 1996 was to paint the exteriors of the trains and re-

uniform their staff in the new identity – the latter from day one. Whilst this was obvious to passengers along with the logo on timetables, perhaps the key message was directed internally to signal the change to all those inside the organisation. This helped to provide focus and visibility whilst the more subtle and longer term changes were and are taking place through training etc.

It took nearly 8 years before some other train operating companies changed their trains from BR livery. What does this suggest about their vision?

UPDATE: In Dec 2007 the GNER franchise moved to National Express. An overnight rebrand took place with temporary signage on the trains themselves. Two years later East Coast did the same. Succeeded by Virgin/Stagecoach it took a while to rebrand. Back into public ownership as LNER in 2018. an overnight rebrand took place across the network.

STATE THE OBVIOUS.....

Those successful with change significantly reduce resistance by involvement. There are some issues for some people which take longer. In the majority of cases these will be uncovered by understanding the reasons why change is required, what the future is like and addressing the cultural implications. The gaps in support, training, employment policies are identified, filled and aligned with the new organisation.

Support those who are having difficulty and bite the bullet should they remain stuck.

Treat them fairly – after all it is the organisation that employed them before and it has now changed the rules.

Some people may leave of their own accord – treat them well – celebrate what they brought to the previous organisation and recognise that for some it is time to move on. They will serve as ambassadors. Respect and fair treatment send powerful positive messages to the people who are taking the organisation into its next stage of development.

DEMONSTRATE SUCCESS.....

Build into your programme lots of short-term wins. They don't have to be world shattering. Make them real, meaningful and aligned with the vision of successful change. (the East Coast example is one such). Major change programmes take time. Realise this and celebrate the wins as you go. Your communication strategy has already taken this into account.

Promising jam tomorrow for five years drains energy and motivation which ultimately leads nowhere other than to sap value. We can all think of our personal experiences and how we felt. Better to top up and grow bit by bit by bigger bit by even bigger bit as things fall into place. So, as you think about it now - How much better does that feel?

IT'S THE JOURNEY RATHER THAN THE DESTINATION.....

Hard as this may sound, when we are honest with ourselves we know that by the time we arrive the conditions will have changed and we start over again. The good news is we have already installed our processes and are well on the way to becoming an adaptive organisation.

SO WHAT?

You could say this is all consultancy pie in the sky and for other organisations. That might be true – it certainly seems like it to you should that be your view. We would reflect it back by asking what this says about both you and your organisation – if you like offer up a mirror and ask you to look into it deeply.

The killer question is to ask what you will do when your major competitor (and they are in the public sector as well) takes this proactive approach and you choose not to. As in the Olympics, you might do your personal best.

So incorporate and consolidate the changes thus far and move on to the next stage of this moving target – look beyond the original vision to the next one.

You are becoming a learning organisation that is defining and achieving its purpose.

When your rival gets to the tape a split second faster in the race or a centimetre longer in the javelin then they succeed.

People who embrace successful change feel involved, motivated and committed because they take ownership of and responsibility for their future.

Your good news is that the majority of the time change succeeds because you've taken responsibility and done everything in your control.

Have you taken full responsibility and done everything in your control?

Then what for you used to be a quantum leap is now a tweak

The future is in your hands – How much do you like it?

Enabling Development recognise that change leaders operate at many levels in organisations, not just in the top team. They have developed a range of tools and frameworks around change dynamics, which may be adapted to meet the specific issues of your organisation. Their aim is to make sure that every change initiative is successful. In one telecoms organisation a single individual realised £5m of additional value and a police force €15m.

Amongst other discussion papers in this series are "Sustainable Change" and "The Power of Purpose". Please contact [Enabling Development](mailto:info@enablingdevelopment.com) for more details and click on our website www.enablingdevelopment.com

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