

Working with Change

There is one common thread that links every change program, big or small. It is harder than it looks, the effort required to make a successful transition is always underestimated and the quantum of business benefits proposed is usually compromised by the challenge of changing behaviours.

Can't we just make the change happen?

How often have you thought this as you consider the challenges of bringing in a program of change? Business change takes many forms and can have different levels of impact. From a major transformational change resulting from a merger or a change in business strategy, to less widespread changes that may significantly affect the careers of individuals such as downsizing or a restructure. Change may be technology or process based or relatively straightforward as in the case of office relocation.

So why do we continue to treat change as something that should just happen, with top down direction and a series of communications? Is it possible to reduce the downward trend of performance leading into and following a major change? Is it possible to deliver the level of efficiencies or performance improvement or cost recovery that the business case promised?

Manage the change, manage the risk

Successful change management is not nearly as commonly reported as is its counterpart but it can be achieved. If we took a bird's eye view of the reasons for this, the major ones would be crystal clear. Embedding change is hard work and it relies on two or three strong foundations – really plan for the change, don't underestimate the complexity of changing behaviour and resource the change program adequately. Change management is best understood as a kind of organisational insurance policy. It is the mechanism for managing the risks involved in moving away from the way things are done now, to a new paradigm.

Where to start?

Effective change starts with an imperative, never from a 'nice to have' position. Even if the imperative is a positive – this opportunity is just too great to walk away from – the case for change needs to be compelling. So no one

sees change as optional, and the planning can begin. At two levels.

At the conceptual level we must be very clear about where we are headed and why we have to go there.

At the practical level we require equal rigour in terms of actions and business change milestones that provide us with a continuing feedback loop on progress. It is deceptively easy to show change in a plan, while out in the field very little is changing.

Change is never a point to point activity. We need good visibility of the road map and the end goals, keeping in mind that the next wave of change is just around the corner. This creates a healthy perspective, forcing the change planner to think in a moving timeframe.

Change is always about people

People make change happen and they are also responsible for its failure. People rarely change without very clear and persuasive reasons, and without a high level of engagement along the way. Change is often represented as a curve that shows a dip in performance just preceding the change, which then turns around to rise above the previous level of performance as measured by sales, growth, return on investment on the new system etc. The extent to which the dip is minimised is a good measure of success, but in practical terms what it is measuring is engagement. People, the real targets of change, will be committed to making it work.

The third card - resourcing

Sustaining the momentum and putting in the work to build the new organisational reality takes people and effort, hence the importance of a properly resourced change team, the balance of which should be sourced from the organisation that is undergoing change.

The last, most difficult component of resourcing falls to the business leaders themselves to fulfil, through their own

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involvement and commitment. This may mean releasing team members to contribute to problem diagnosis, risk assessment or solution building, or simply to take the time to learn new skills and unlearn behaviours that may block success. The more operational the change the simpler the transition roadmap; complex or transformational change programs will require a much bigger step up in terms of commitment, to transition successfully.

APP Business Consulting Services

APP Corporation is a leading Australian-owned consulting business specialising in business consulting, project management, infrastructure and urban planning.

We combine innovation, knowledge and technology with the best people to deliver outstanding results for our clients.

In 2009, we will celebrate our 20th year of operation and our 4th year as a wholly-owned subsidiary of Transfield Services Limited (ASX code TSE; www.transfield.com.au), which is now an ASX 100 company with more than 29,000 employees and operations across the world.

APP provides change management services in the context of delivering larger assignments where the focus is on performance improvement, strategy development or process reengineering. We also undertake programs with the single focus of business transformation. Where appropriate, our organisational change consultants will work with the APP Projects and Urban Development & Property teams to provide a holistic service to clients. Our specialist consultants are experienced at designing change programs that enhance the realisation of the broad business goals of the client organisation.

How APP can help

Our approach may be summarised as being 'Start loose, finish tight'. We will meet with you to understand the drivers for change and the strength of the appetite to make change happen, not just from the project sponsor but from the key senior stakeholders. We will also spend the time required to assess the change case, to clarify what the end goal will look like and how the change will be reflected in day to day business and operational terms.

Our change assessment, planning, implementation and review method is aligned with change management methodologies

based on industry standards. Our point of difference lies in the manner of execution, the quality of our consulting team and the discipline we demand in planning, set up and follow through.

We will agree measurable and observable outcomes from the program, both intangible and concrete and the realistic timeframe for change to occur. We also place strong emphasis on client ownership so that change can be sustainable once the program transitions to 'business as usual'.

We aim to realise the objective that our strongest advocates are our clients.



Case Studies

A health sector service provider identified the need to grow in order to survive in an increasingly competitive market place. Wide ranging change initiatives were planned across all business units. APP facilitated the creation of a strong program management culture and individual accountability for delivering on business initiatives.

A major services organisation required improvements in its cash flow management, following a period of unprecedented top-line expansion. Initially focussed on the presenting problems of technology and process, the APP change team surfaced the more powerful performance improvement drivers around behaviour and practice. The team gained endorsement to a program of work that complemented process and technology change through a shift in business priorities, attitudes and reward systems.

A public sector client had achieved sign off for a significant downsizing and cost reduction program and faced the challenge of implementing the plan without incurring an industrial backlash. The APP change team developed and implemented a change management plan that relied heavily upon stakeholder engagement. The cost reductions were achieved with minimal staff issues and disruption of business.

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