

That Other Change Management

Opinion by Susie Farquhar, Senior Consultant, Lucid IT. S.farquhar@lucidit.com.au

I'm really perplexed! Over the last five years or so, I've been hearing/seeing an ever-increasing amount of information and ideas regarding how we deal with the 'human' element of corporate life. It doesn't matter what sort of project is involved, from a system implementation to a company merger, the management of organisational change (that *other* Change Management) is important – we need to address the 'people' P of the four Ps. However, the management of organisational change and the 'human' element don't seem to be performed any better than they were years ago. Why is that? Perhaps there's the same amount of information and focus out there as there always was, and I'm just more attuned to it these days. This could be because of my developing interest in finding the inclination and the 'head-space' to take a long, hard look at the organisations I've been in over the last twenty-odd years, and think about the cultural attributes of each.

Maybe it's just ALL about 'head-space' – a term I use for simply having the time to reflect. In most of our lives, let alone our jobs, it seems we barely have time to think about how we're going to solve the issues right in our face, let alone ones that may happen sometime in the future. It takes a compelling event to cause us to slow down, and rethink and review our organisation and our position within it. Usually, we are too busy thinking about all of the things we need to get done each day. It's about unbounded time; time on one activity to fully explore options, without the pressure of the next activity crowding in. I guess this is why many people like to work on a particularly difficult work issue on the weekend, rather than during the working week when there are many more tasks to be finished by each day's end.

This relationship with time lies at the crux of good change management. Most change projects I've been involved in have been pared back to the minimum because time is money. The benefits have to be very tangible (jolly obvious in fact) before more time is allocated to any particular activity. It takes courage to stand up and say "No, we need this time to integrate this change into our corporate thinking". It sounds a bit too "soft" doesn't it - especially in our current environment where managers are relatively transient and are often looking for quick results to populate their CV with. And what if we got the time allocated for the soft stuff, and the project was a failure anyway? Not good for our career! *More* courage required. . . .

Another aspect I ponder is the importance of shared thinking – some people call it *being on the same page/reading from the same songbook*. Not enough is *said* in organisations – people keep quiet too often. There's so much sub-text going on, and not enough specific questions are asked to uncover the issues, perhaps for fear of being seen as obstructionist, or too slow in 'getting with the programme'. Perhaps there is a fear of having to deal with whatever the issue is once it is tabled: will we know what to do; what if we can't fix it? Yet *more* courage required. . . This often results in projects or activities not being grounded in reality, and people losing sight of the big picture. Peter Block talks about it in his book *The Answer to How is Yes*:

"The culture has forsaken idealism for cynicism, it has foregone intimacy and depth, we function at a cosmetic level, pushed along by fashion, out of touch with our centre, and we react as if we are the effect of the culture rather than its cause."

What we need is a lot more courage if our change management initiatives are to be successful. Because essentially, that is what any IT Service Management

implementation is. We all know that the ITIL concepts are tried, tested and true (and not rocket science as we say); it's the human factor that determines our level of success at the end of the day. The types of conversations that are happening around the organisation at all levels determine the way our initiative will be received, and how it will or will not be integrated into the existing corporate landscape. Don't ever forget – change hurts, and people need a big motivator with a big dollop of courage to change the way they do things. Peter de Jager (www.technobility.com) goes so far as to use the word 'frightening' in one of his articles *Tempering Traumatic Transitions*:

“Even when we want it so badly we can taste it, real Change is difficult, though not impossible, to achieve. Learning any significantly new skill is difficult. Learning a significant skill upon which your paycheque depends is frightening.”

de Jager suggests a support structure with four elements: Training, Encouragement, Reinforcement, and Celebration. John Kotter in his book *Managing Change* suggests eight principles we must not forget during any change initiative which echo these four. Kotter's more recent book *Our Iceberg Is Melting* builds on the eight principles, and illustrates how they work by using a fable to assist with change initiatives. The book uses a story with penguin characters, giving examples of the many ways people react to change, and suggests ways to use or defuse these reactions.

Block, Kotter and de Jager would be my favourite authors around this topic, but there are many others you may find suit your personal style better. Other sources I find useful are Gestalt practitioners such as Jenny Mackewn, who are widely recognised for their publications regarding working with groups.

From these and various other sources, my top ten points for effectively managing the human element of a change program would be:

- Encourage ownership of the problem - Then get the 'owners' to agree/understand that the situation needs a solution – then support the work to develop a solution. It's no good presenting your solution to an unrecognised problem.
- Mistakes are OK - Don't interfere with the learning process – encourage a culture which allows mistakes to happen along the way, this is how people learn.
- Use resistance to fire up the project - When something new is introduced, it is an unconscious response for people to push back – don't react to the resistance as negative – get people to think about their reasons for resisting, and take that energy and use it for the change.
- “Never say nothing” - We all know the importance of communication in any change initiative. As a change implementer, when the way ahead is not clear – say something! In a communication vacuum, people make up what they don't know – and in no time there are all sorts of assumptions, rumours and pieces of misinformation hindering the initiative.
- Encourage courage - During conversations around the change, take a leaf from the Gestalt practitioners' book, and encourage people to “work in the here and now”, and have courage to “stay with the unknown”. This helps to defuse the fear, and push the message that we are all in this together – all levels of the organisation. .
- Look out for Ego – Try to encourage a team spirit, so that no one person is looking to get the credit if things go well. If you don't care who gets the credit – it's amazing how much you can accomplish! Try to get people to understand that

if they focus on and enjoy the success of others, they will find they are also successful.

- Use a Fable – like the one in John Kotter's *Our Iceberg Is Melting* to help defuse fear around a change, and gently point out non-helpful attitudes and actions.
- Use a Legend - Sometimes an organisation's history provides a story or stories which can be used in a helpful way. There are many stories which live on in organisations years after their occurrence. Don't ignore stories, they always tell something important about the values of the organisation.
- Keep the Momentum Going – Don't allow a hiccup to stall progress. People do not always move forward in accepting change – there are often a few steps forward, and then some back; don't overreact to the few steps back, and allow it to stall things.
- Take Note of What's Filtering Down - Don't forget that culture (culture too) is strongly affected by what filters down from the top; your top management team may appear to be supportive of the initiative, but if they're hesitant about its success, you may have trouble!!!

I wish you the 'best of courage' in your change initiatives – luck has nothing to do with it!