

WHITE PAPER:

FACTORS CRITICAL TO SUCCESSFUL CHANGE

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Introduction:

Over the last twenty years most organisations have undergone radical change. This has typically involved changes to strategic objectives, organisational restructuring and a multitude of changes affecting how people work. At the time of writing, (Q1 2016) the drivers of change are greater than ever: geo-political turmoil in the middle east, a down-turn in the Chinese economy, approaching presidential election in the USA and an impending referendum that could see the UK leave the European Union.

What factors are critical to successful change?

This White Paper crystalizes ideas and theories that were developed during a period of academic research. The objective was to identify; *"What factors are critical to successful change?"* An underpinning supposition of the research was that the level of stakeholder engagement was likely to be a key factor. The research investigated fourteen change projects undertaken over a five-year period within a large public sector organisation. I had hoped to see a correlation between the effectiveness of 'engagement' and the success of the change initiative. Such a finding would have provided a nice, simple narrative for the dissertation, however, things turned out to be a little more complicated.

The research produced a mass of data but irritatingly, once the results were analysed, there seemed to be little evidence of a simple correlation between the level of engagement and the success of the project.

In the final event the research did reveal a set of factors that are critical to successful change and in the seventeen years that have elapsed since the original analysis, the findings have provided an invaluable analysis tool when working with client organisations. This White Paper sets out the essential findings of the research, explains how they can be used by anyone who is leading a change project and it also shows why organisations should strive to build a culture based on collaboration.

Essential findings of the research:

The research identified three factors that were necessary to achieve successful change:

1. *Hygiene factors*: Those conditions that must be in place to ensure the right conditions for successful change
2. *Involvement*: The processes and mechanisms for ensuring effective involvement
3. *Implementation*: The capability to implement the required changes

Hygiene factors: This relates to issues such as: clarity of organisational purpose, integrity of management (e.g. words equal actions) and management exhibiting appropriate behaviours, (e.g. open, honest). It is essential that stakeholders feel that management have a clear sense of direction and are committed to delivering a

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successful outcome. Without these hygiene factors there would be a sense that: "It's a passing management fad; give it six months and it will all blow over."

Involvement: This relates to the ways in which departments, teams and individuals are involved in the process of change; are they able to voice concerns, do managers ask for input, are new ideas accepted, is there consensus through discussion. Effective involvement does not require everyone to be consulted on everything, (in fact that was seen to be a negative aspect of poorly run projects), but it does require an engagement process that ensures that stakeholders are consulted on the issues that are significant concern or relevance to them - and where they have specific expertise.

Implementation This relates to the capability of teams and individuals to manage the tasks/activities associated with implementing change. (e.g. effective project management, the capability to define new processes, the ability to implement new systems, to processes to effectively transition people into new roles).

The important thing to recognise about these three factors is that they are interdependent; a project might have the best implementation team, (project managers, business experts, etc.) and it could have all the required hygiene factors in place, (clear business strategy, committed management team, a culture that is open and honest), but unless the stakeholders are effectively engaged then relevant information will not be understood, people will be alienated and the credibility of the programme will be undermined.

Summary:

The failure of change projects is often broadly attributed to "*resistance to change*." This phrase creates an image of something intangible, difficult to address and probably resulting from some deliberate attempt to sabotage the intended outcome. However, in my experience, resistance to change is not an inevitable negative force that has to be combatted on every change project but rather, it is the result of a failure to address the three factors identified above. Understanding the interdependency between the three factors is critical.

This simple principle provides an analytical tool to assess the factors likely to determine a successful outcome and provides change leaders with a methodology that will help them to lead a change project and deliver successful outcomes for the organisation.