



AGILE CHANGE
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Lessons Learned

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Introduction

I recently attended the annual conference of the Association of Change Management Professionals in Orlando, Florida. For me, attending these events is an important opportunity to hear the views and experiences of others and have a chance to think how this affects my own work. There were many great speakers, who all triggered thoughts and ideas (not always about their subject, but that is the joy of having time to think!).

To help myself, and hopefully to help you, I have collected together my key lessons learned, reflecting on work that I am currently doing or change initiatives I am about to deliver for clients around the world.

I hope you find them useful and that they trigger your own thoughts about how to improve your approach to change management, portfolio management and project and programme management.

Lessons Learned – Reinforcing change

Introduction

I attended numerous presentations last week which identified how critical senior leader commitment to change really is. This isn't a surprise to any of us, but I thought it would be useful to define some practical activities to generate the reinforcement of change by senior leaders.

To ensure the change you make becomes the new norm, and to prevent rollback to old ways of working requires a concerted effort on the part of all those responsible for the change. This effort falls into two categories:

1. Structural reinforcement
2. Emotional reinforcement

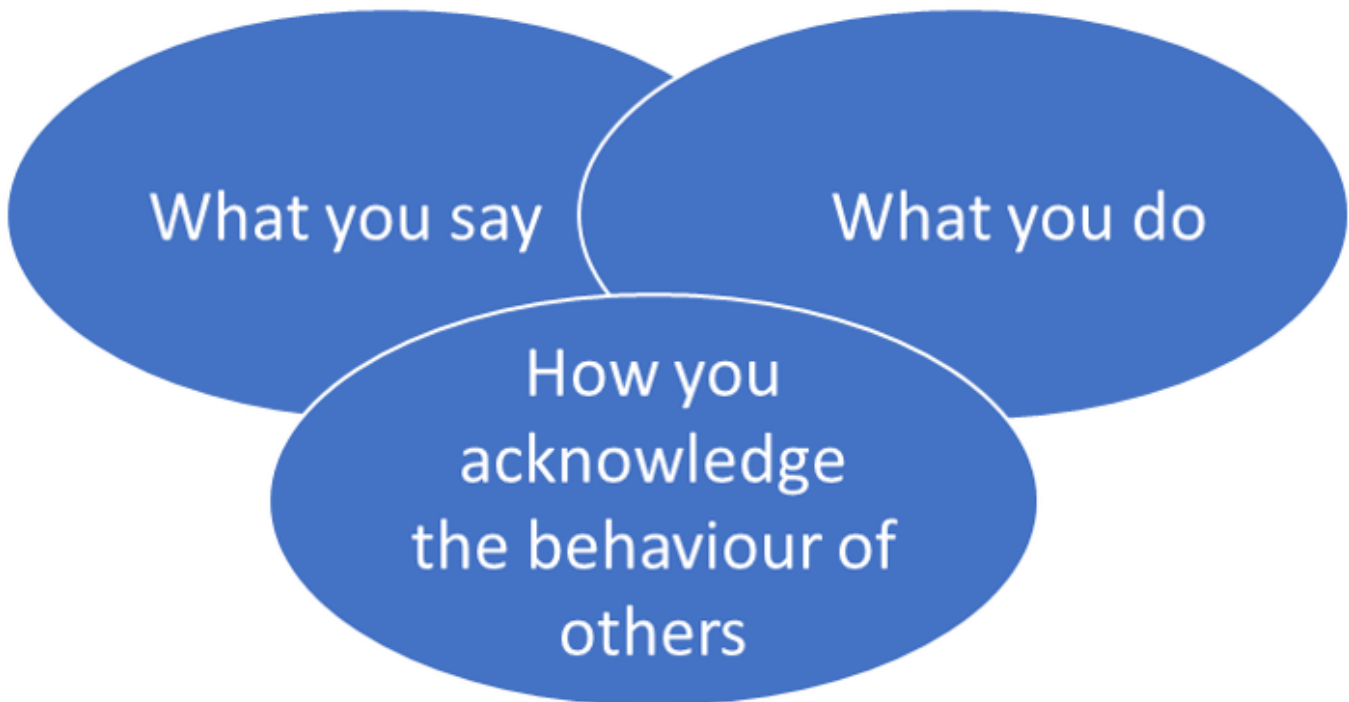
Structural reinforcement

Structural reinforcement is a key element of the cultural models of Carolyn Taylor and Von Trompenaars and Hampden Turner who state that change must be incorporated into the systems used to run your organisation. As you change ways of working update processes, standards, policies, job descriptions and performance metrics to reflect how work is now done. This ensures that when you are audited, what you do and how you do it is reflected in your procedures. It also ensures that when new staff are on-boarded induction materials and training materials are up to date.

Emotional reinforcement

Emotional reinforcement involves appealing to the heart, making people feel they want to work in the new way. There are 3 complementary activities that generate emotional reinforcement:





What you say

What you say can be further defined:

- What you say
- Who you say it to
- How you say it
- When you say it
- How often you say it

What you say

This can be factual or dramatic, using stories. Both are important as some people seek out evidence that what they are doing is correct and other prefer to hear examples of how the new ways can make a positive difference.

It is worth noting that neuroscience shows that when we are told stories we are more engaged because we use more parts of our brain than when we are listening to facts, and we retain more information for longer (read this article for a summary of these points <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/brain-wise/201411/your-brain-stories%3famp>)

What you say must be positive. Research carried out by Implementation Management Associates Inc found that positive reinforcement through recognition and rewards is 3 times as important to sustaining change than statements expressing the vision.



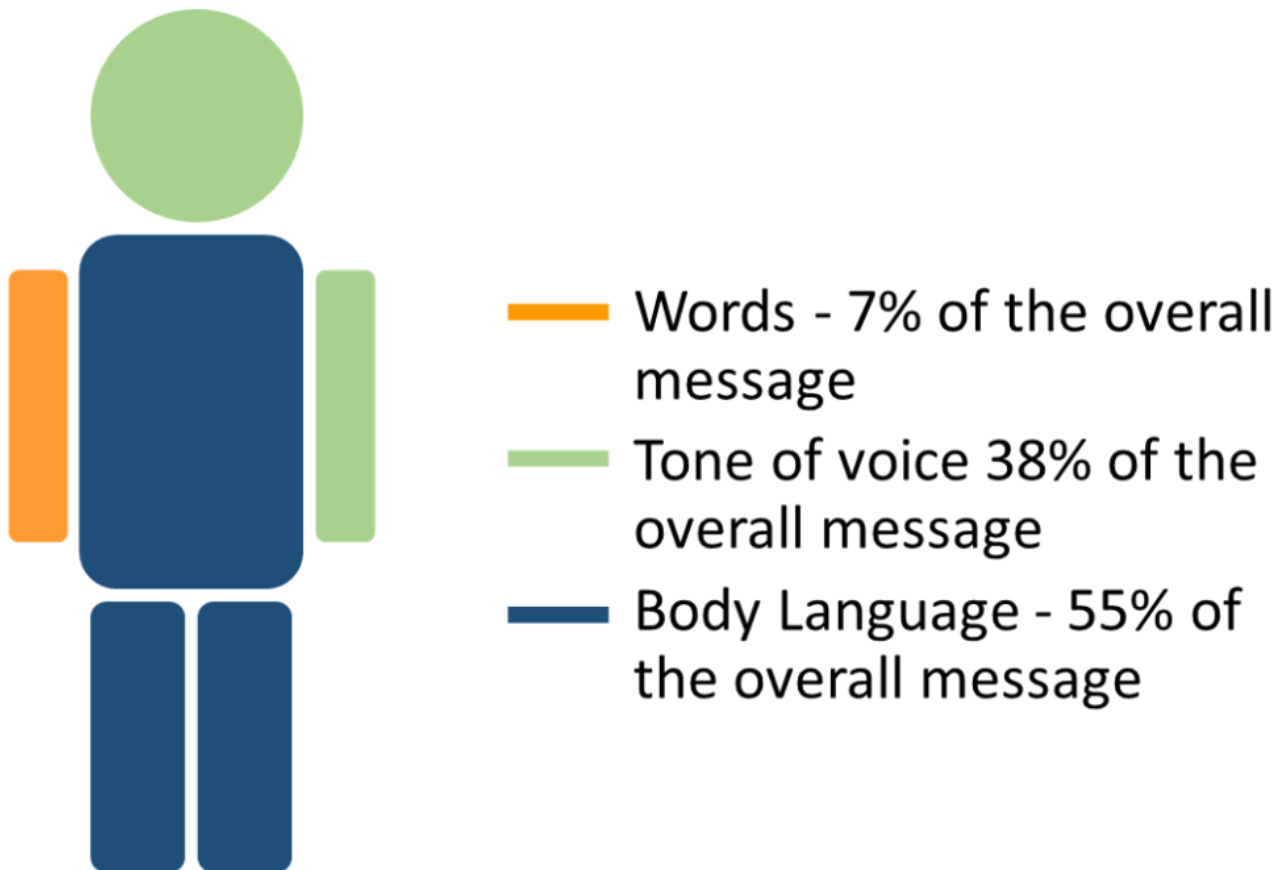
Who you say it to

It is easy to create offence by leaving people out when talking about change. If you only address those that are most affected by the new ways of working you will help to achieve change. But...what about all those who experience a knock-on effect as a result of these core changes?

None of us like to be left out because it makes us feel unimportant and our contribution disrespected. You need to find a way to engage with everyone affected by change, however much they are on the periphery. This starts with very thorough stakeholder analysis and a willingness to keep searching out new stakeholders as your change evolves.

How you say it

Albert Mehrabian famously define his model in 1972 of how humans take in information:



Albert Mehrabian (1971)

When you say it

What you say has to connect with what people do. So a basic rule is to make sure your positive acknowledgement of someone working in the new way happens "in the moment" rather than waiting until a meeting long after what you observed.

How often you say it

We are talking about reinforcing the change so frequent and regular acknowledgements of progress made is more effective than a one off big speech about how well everyone has done.

What you do

Role modelling the new behaviours is key because it demonstrates two things:

1. It provides evidence that this is the way things are to be done now.
2. It provides examples that the new ways of working are possible.

As senior leaders do not do the same work as their staff, they cannot role model the exact same behaviours. However, role modelling isn't mirroring the behaviour. It is wider and involves how the leader takes decisions, what information they seek, their use of new systems even if this is interrogating the data rather than data entry, how they allocate resources and how they prioritise tasks.

How you acknowledge the behaviours of others.

Your acknowledgement needs to be celebratory. Even though people have started working in the new ways, they are still filled with doubt. Celebrating their achievements makes it clear that they are heading in the right direction and helps to overcome this doubt.

Conclusion

Reinforcement requires effort and as each of the factors described above are inter-related, it is worth planning activities that will achieve the encouragement of those impacted by the change to keep going until the change has become the new norm. These activities can be captured in a Communications Plan or a Change Plan, but as many of them are specific to the leader who is providing the encouragement, it can be more effective to have one to one conversation to help the leader decide how they will behave during the change, and how this will help to reinforce the change.



Lessons learned – Change Agents

Introduction

Working with a new group of Change Agents last week, I thought I would share their lessons learned.

Lesson 1 – Relationships

First big surprise for many of them as the week unfolded was the realisation that whilst it is called “change management” don’t assume the word management means process.

As one of them said to me, change management is more of an art than a science because it is all about people.

So the first big takeaway is that core to our success is the ability to persuade others. In turn, this requires us to build trusting relationships where we demonstrate empathy for their viewpoint and help them discover the impact and benefits of the change so they are willing to work differently.

Lesson 2 – Motivation

The next big takeaway was the importance of intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivators (rewards and punishments) still have their part to play but they are the support act.

The main event is the development of a deep seated desire by those impacted to want to change. We used Dan Pinks work on intrinsic motivation to get our thinking started. We talked about the inter-dependencies between purpose, autonomy and mastery.

To establish purpose we used lots of techniques including Force Field Analysis to help those impacted vent their frustrations about the difficulties and problems associated with the change.

This gives people a chance to “clear the decks” emotionally before seeking out the benefits, improvements and advantages of the change that we as Change Agents will continually need to remind them of as the journey towards full adoption of the change.

We examined the concepts of autonomy and mastery by playing games to discover our own preferences for how we like to work. This gave us insight into how we all approach the same task differently, and how we feel motivated if we are allowed to do things our way and how we feel demotivated if we have to follow instructions from others about how we work.

Lesson 3 – Building a community

Finally we identified the need for a network of committed and energetic people to take the change forward. As Change Agents we recognised the importance of helping to build this network by seeking out natural influencers who others follow as a way of amplifying our messages about change by having these people communicate either followers.



We discovered how much effort is required to build this network, constantly seeking out relevant people and developing them into a community who work together, support each other and innovate together to make the change a reality.

Conclusion

We only scratched the surface of the importance of the role of Change Agent last week.

In our next get together we are going to deepen understanding by studying for the APMG Change Management Foundation qualification. This is because the group recognise the importance of building their credibility with those they seek to influence. Having a globally recognised qualification demonstrates to others you know what you are talking about and gives you an inner glow of confidence which is especially important when resistors to change make you question what you are doing.



Lessons learned – Agile for Teams

Introduction

I attended an inspiring talk on using neuroscience to create high performing teams by Kamila Sip, Director of Neuroscience Research at Neuroleadership Institute. Three factors emerged as key to excellent team relationships and high performance:

1. Have a common goal – clarity of what is expected and why is a powerful unifying force for the team. It encourages working together as people realise they need the help of others to deliver something that is bigger than their own skill set.
2. Break group think – celebrate those who raise questions and concerns about the viability and practicality of the work. Harmony doesn't lead to the greatest productivity and innovation. Challenge is important for finding better answers.
3. Avoid social loafing – make sure people don't opt out of pulling their weight by letting other team members take up the slack.

AgilePM®

My reflection was how the Kick Off and Investigation steps in setting up Timeboxes or Sprints from AgilePM® addresses these success factors, along with the usefulness of the Daily Standup meeting.

Kick Off

The Kick Off is the point at which the Project Manager hands over the objectives of the Timebox/Sprint to the team. This is when the common goal is established. In my experience it is important to ensure this common goal fulfils the following criteria:

- Everyone has the same understanding of what it means – facilitate a discussion on what will be achieved and what a good outcome looks like.
- Give everyone a chance to raise any concerns about practicality and address them. For example, the team should question and arrange for the necessary resources for the work including equipment, meeting space, time with the business etc.
- Ensure team members share their interpretation of the objectives so that if there are wildly different views now is the time to debate them. This reduces the risk of group think.

Also, in the Kick Off there should be a discussion about who is doing what. This is a chance for team members to define their specialist skills and clarify how they think they can deploy these to contribute to the objective and complement the work of other team members. This begins the process of overcoming social loading.

Investigation

During the Investigation step, every team member breaks the objective into specific tasks and activities and identifies the inter-dependencies between them. To create a workable plan there must be horse trading between the team members about what needs to be done first and what can come next. Again, this sets the foundations for avoiding social loafing because it is very clear how one person's work is dependent on the contribution from other team members.

It is during Investigation that specific roles are assigned, and this helps to reduce potential team conflict because it reduces mis-match between what a team member thinks they are going to do and what other team members think they are responsible for. Again, it helps to reduce social loafing.



Daily Stand Ups

Daily Stand Ups or Scrums are great for avoiding social loafing as they are the forum where everyone shares their progress and explains what they will be doing next. It is hard to hide a lack of contribution when your colleagues are waiting to hear what you have been doing. In my experience the daily nature of them also exerts a subtle pressure to achieve something worth sharing every day.

Conclusion

AgilePM® is a great approach to building effective Agile working practices, as it contains both structure via a lifecycle model and techniques for getting the work done, which gives the team a starting point in agreeing how they will work together.



Lessons learned - prioritising

Introduction

At a presentation by Don Harrison, President of IMA, I was totally inspired by his comment “stop talking about prioritisation and start talking about sequencing”. Don was referring to the problem that senior executives too often have multiple top priorities. This means that whilst they believe they are prioritising they are in fact categorising. They are reviewing the portfolio and making the distinction between essential, important and nice to have. However, they are not taking the difficult decisions to identify what comes first and what comes next.

Don believes sequencing is the answer. This means asking penetrating questions about each initiative to understand what shape of jigsaw puzzle piece it is and how it contributes to the overall jigsaw. I applaud the idea but these questions are not being asked.

Problem

As with everything I think its important to try to understand the problem before finding a solution. So why are executives living with a situation where there are multiple “top” priorities and staff are trying to manage multiple calls on their time to deliver changes whilst still maintaining “business as usual”?

I think there are multiple factors, so consider which ones are most relevant for your organisation:

1. The effort required to make change happen is invisible, because it is sunk costs. Staff salaries are already baked into the cost structure, and as most change is about changing how an organisation works, the majority of the work is done by existing staff.
2. Taking decisions is hard. It means making a choice, with the attendant risk that we have made the wrong choice. Executives are human too, so like the rest of us they worry they will be judged for “backing the wrong horse”. Just think how you feel when the lane you are in when stuck in traffic goes slower than the other lanes. You criticise yourself for having chosen the wrong lane.
3. There is too much choice. The bigger the range to choose from, the longer it takes to make a choice. If you only choose vanilla or strawberry ice cream you will make a swift choice but if are in an Italian cafe with 50 ice cream flavours you are going to be at the counter for a long time, and when you walk away you will be watching the enjoyment on the faces of those that have chosen different ice creams to validate if you have made the “right” choice.

Solution

To encourage our executives to create this sequence, it helps if we have tried to provide answers to the following questions:

1. Identify the relationships between the initiatives to work out which initiative creates the outcomes needed by other initiatives.



2. Compare the relative contribution of each initiative to the strategic objectives of the organisation. Perhaps the ones with the highest contribution are the ones that have only a few steps between “create outcome X to achieve objective Y”
3. Compare the relative sizes of the benefits versus costs offered by each initiative. Consider if those that offer the highest value for the least cost are more important than those that offer less benefits.
4. Identify those initiatives that have identified and planned the necessary resources to achieve their outcomes. Bring forward those initiatives where people (often the most constrained resource) are in place and ready to start work.
5. Compare the impact on “business as usual” (I.e. levels of operational risk) and bring forward those that have a plan to mitigate any negative effects on customer service and staff engagement.

Conclusion

This is another example of how essential effective portfolio management is to successful change initiatives. It is the skills of managing a portfolio, seeing the whole picture and not just a few “important” initiatives that make the difference between being very busy and achieving our objectives.



About the author

I have been responsible for the successful delivery of effective change and for creating environments that support transformational change for over twenty years. I have an impressive track record of successful consulting assignments and I am an acknowledged thought leader in Change Management.

I am the Co-Chair of the Change Management Institute UK and a respected author of text books and articles on change, project and programme management. I am a talented communicator with a reputation for delivering complex information with humour and passion. I draw on my wealth of practical experience to illustrate concepts and to engage my audience in lively debates on advantages and disadvantages of each approach that I outline.

To access more resources about change management, connect with Melanie on LinkedIn
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