

The Management of Major Change

Managing change well is not primarily about IT systems, hardware, processes, procedures, resources or contracts. The main thing that it all comes down to is engagement with people. That is not necessarily the same as everyone being happy all the time!

This paper deals with the main learning that I have gained from implementing major change over the last 20 years of direct experience of change management (listed at the end).

1. Set clear objectives

Jack Welch at GE was influenced by the philosophy of a 19th century Prussian general called Helmut von Moltke who emphasised the importance of being clear on deliverables, accountabilities and purpose. The same philosophy applies to major change management. Everyone in the organisation who is involved in the change needs clarity on the mission and strategic objectives of the change.

It sounds easy... but the words of the famous French scientist Blaise Pascal apply: "I am sorry I have had to write you such a long letter, but I did not have time to write you a short one". It is not easy to provide the kind of succinct, easily understandable guidance that enables empowerment – but it is no less vital.

2. Establish commitment

Delivering a successful outcome means that every person involved has to commit to the change. Commitment leads to preparation and planning, which leads to all-consuming, effective, action. For this reason, I ask reluctant participants of change this question: "Are you going to be an agent for change or just a subject of the changes?"

Agents for Change make things happen, they decide to be pro-active. They create positive energy, they are engaged, and they see the opportunities ahead. Other people are just the subjects of the changes - they have things done to them. Doing nothing - staying neutral as your default - is a subtle but very real personal choice!

3. Establish clear accountabilities

It is vital to get the right hierarchy in place for the role, purpose and deliverables of each work stream in the context of the overall plan, so that every team understands what the teams above and alongside are trying to achieve. That is how you manage through the many uncertainties, changes, and surprises that develop in major change management.

4. Plan in detail, but don't go over the top

It is important in major change to create a detailed integration programme with many work streams, but you can't do it through trying to plan every

detail centrally. There are many uncertainties in any major change, and the inherent inflexibility of an over detailed process will stagnate progress.

Success means engaging a wide team across numerous work streams, including clear sets of outcomes with critical dependencies identified, so that necessary change can be efficiently accommodated.

5. Dispel people uncertainty as quickly as possible

Most businesses are highly vulnerable to 'people uncertainty'. This is because tens of thousands of people worrying about the future of their role, business unit and division is not a good thing from an employee retention point of view. It is important to be clear and decisive, making things happen to get people out of the worry zone as quickly as possible. Even if you aren't sure whether a decision is 100% right, *making a decision* is very often better than making none at all.

6. Focus on solving problems not blame

Uncertainty is an inevitable part of the process of major change, so it is important to expect issues to be there and for mistakes to happen. What matters is how you deal with the mistakes and issues that happen.

So it is important to focus efforts on solving the problems, rather than bickering about them. All that the blame game does is waste effort and encourage people not to take responsibility in future. You can help people to manage uncertainty - as just part of life - by not being too hard on either them or on yourself. That doesn't mean 'Don't hold people accountable', but rather 'Celebrate their endeavour!' Collaborating together to solve huge problems is going to carry risk, but the upside benefits are huge.

Here is a list of some of the major transformations that I have been deeply involved with conceiving, delivering and implementing.

Year	Nature of Change	Main Actor	Main Subject
1995	Integrating major construction companies	Tarmac Construction (£1bn sales)	Wimpey Construction (£700m sales)
1999	Demerger of Construction	Tarmac Plc (£4bn sales)	Carillion (£2bn sales)
2002	Creation of cross-group shared services	Carillion Plc (£2bn sales)	All Carillion business divisions
2006	Acquisition of Mowlem Plc	Carillion Plc (£2bn sales)	Mowlem Plc (£2bn sales)
2008	Acquisition of Alfred McAlpine	Carillion Plc (£4bn sales)	Alfred McAlpine Plc (£1.3bn sales)
2011	Acquisition of Eaga Plc	Carillion Plc (£5bn sales)	Eaga Plc (£700m sales)

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