

Organisations across the private and public sector are being challenged to improve efficiency and to provide ever more complex services with less budget.

This is not new – we have all been under pressure to make improvements for many years now. This, quite rightly, has been a priority even where headline budgets have been generous.

As a nation, we are now entering a new phase of our economic life and the pressure is already increasing to make more radical changes to the way we operate and to adapt to ever more challenging conditions.

So how can we increase the rate of change and be successful in delivering what we are being asked to?

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Rather like an athlete preparing for an event, no organisation should expect to get there in a single step. A regime of preparation and development must be a precursor to higher business performance, and this is equally true of change management performance.

Delivering change always looks easier than it is. By its nature it requires a step into the unknown so we can never be quite sure how well the end solution will work or how difficult the journey will be. Over-optimism, lack of time, vested interests and events will all conspire to derail the process, but it takes a lot more than good project management to deliver a business change.

Many of the issues that organisations face are similar and it is necessary to actively prepare for a period of change rather than drift into it. Some of the causes of delay, expense and failure to achieve the desired results of business change include:

- *Insufficient skills* – unless you have already successfully run a change programme of similar size and scale, you will need to invest in this area before you become more ambitious. Ramp up the size and complexity of projects gradually so the whole organisation learns how best to work together – it is not just about individual skills.
- *Unimaginative solutions* – they say “if you do what you always did, you will get what you always got”. It is vital to step back and think creatively about the outcomes required and design simple and effective solutions. External experience will bring fresh ideas and help you understand what is possible, and avoid many common traps.
- *Unhelpful stakeholders* – during times of change there are always different groups of people who may welcome change, fear its impact or wish to pull it in different directions. Pro actively managing these diverse views and important through a process of identifying and engaging them. There are many techniques that prove helpful when doing this.
- *No systematic continuous improvement (CI)* – the disciplines of CI should be a starting point for change, not an after thought. They demand a clear view of the purpose of each

activity, a range problem solving tools to clarify the issues in each process and require a willingness of all staff to work on them together. It feels good too.

- *Ineffective structures* – there are many ways to fund change projects, each with their pros and cons. The sponsorship and governance needs to provide clear leadership, the drive to deliver the benefits and the mechanism to manage stakeholders. The Directors involved will need to acquire new skills and develop a new level of corporate thinking.

Organisations that plan a more wide-ranging programme of change than they have run before, or who have a mixed track record of delivery (in other words, nearly everyone) should spend some time creating the right conditions for the change to succeed.

This will require some investment, but most importantly some time. It may take 6-12 months to ramp up the organisation’s ability and gain some early wins. Therefore it is essential to get ahead of the game and not to wait until the pressure builds to a crisis point.

With the right foresight and planning, each of these challenges can be addressed and the right environment for change can be established.

The project will then have a far higher chance of success and those involved be far less stressed.

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