

Change or Implement **Anything** Successfully

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Outline

- Who is this guy?
- A couple of quick questions...
- Some change examples (and lessons learned)
- Received wisdom on org change – three myths
- Leading change vs managing change
- The Ambiguity Principle
- Three upgrades to implementation & change
- Six Steps to Implement Anything Successfully

Who is this guy?

- Cleveland born & bred, adult life in the UK 1990-2012 and 2020-present, Cleveland boomerang 2012-2020
- 30 years in health, social care and education focused primarily on performance, strategy, innovation, service transformation
- 50+ change/implementation projects, 100% success rate
- Independent consulting practice (BroadEye Consulting, Ltd)
- Nonprofit Entrepreneur Academy (online courses & coaching)
- Nonprofit Problem Solver podcast

Quick question #1

- What's something you're looking forward to in 2022?
- Could be...
 - personal
 - professional
 - work-related or
 - not!

Quick question #2

- With regard to a workplace change or strategy implementation...
 - Would you participate in the decision to make the change
 - or set the strategy or would you be implementing the change decided by others?

- A = decision maker
- B = implementer
- C = could be both

Change example 1

- Social Services – introduction of performance management
 - Who's the “expert”? At what?
 - All depts but child protection was “prickliest”
 - The data told us eight weeks was the drop off point for being “in the system”
 - Team reset a process and achieved dramatic results
- Lesson: the Division of Labor Rule
 - Importance of joint working, distribution of labor and being explicit about it
 - Later: doctors, nurses, dentists, therapists, principles, teachers

Change example 2

- Social Services – overhaul of child protection
 - Entire legal framework for assessment and investigations
 - Started with the intake form, which was a total mess
 - Can't you do that from your desk?
- Lesson: the Responsiveness Rule
 - Importance of visibility and accessibility (responsiveness) in building trust and credibility in the process and people
 - Standard contact numbers and dedicated email addresses

Change example 3

- Large county mental health service
 - Importing a proven service model resulted in cataclysmic failure
 - What serves 250k people in a city may not work for 1 million people spread across multiple towns and villages and 88 physician practices
 - Adapted part of previous service model and turned things around overnight
- Lesson 1 – the Baby in the Bathwater Rule
 - What works well? What should we keep?
- Lesson 2 – the Shoe Leather Rule
 - People respond entirely differently when they have a relationship with you, even if it's only a one-off meeting to feel seen and heard

Change example 4

- Large city mental health service replacement
 - Replace existing service with half the budget, double the output (= 4x productivity)
 - Three unions, three employers, office relocation, inherited huge patient backlog, reduced 75 staff to 27, then hired 13 new
 - What's negotiable? What's not?
- Lesson 1 – the Shared Problem Rule
 - Having an ongoing conversation, the weekly FAQ
- Lesson 2 – the Individual Experience Rule
 - Loss feels different and coped with uniquely by each affected person

Change example 5

- Large city school district reduction in chronic absence
 - Public campaign + internal resources for schools
 - The challenge: “Missing the odd day here or there doesn’t matter.”
 - Change happens at the individual level: perception & barriers for parents, older students, schools
- Lesson 1 – the Active Participation Rule
 - Make it easy for people to do things other than talk – design or make something, win prizes, have a party, display a badge or sticker or bag
- Lesson 2 – the Eye on the Ball Rule
 - Monitor progress in improving performance, not the shopping list or “stew”

The standard perspective of change

- Change is hard
- You'll face a huge wall of resistance from staff and other stakeholders
- You need to constantly communicate the “why” and the vision so that staff and stakeholders endorse the way forward
- Start with a big announcement and/or Town Hall
- Recruit a team of “champions” to reinforce the messaging and lead the way locally
- Hold staff accountable for complying with new regime

Myth #1 – “people hate change”

- Classic excuse to ignore any input from staff and stakeholders and just “carry on regardless”
- The number 1 reason why change projects fail
- In reality:
 - Most people desire improvement in their lives
 - Most marketing/advertising relies on results that require behavior change
- People don’t like being forced or “done to”
- People don’t like being surprised with extra work or problems
- People want a say in their adjustments

Myth #2 – “it’s just a process”

- Another way of saying that people will (have to) work their way through it and come out the other end
- Discounts the value of helping people there, usually to cut the time or money investment in change (rip off band-aid, throw in deep end)
- In reality:
 - The “process” isn’t linear because it’s unlearning certain behaviors and learning new ones while others are doing the same at different speeds
 - Every person has a unique, individualized experience
- Left to their own devices, people will adapt only minimally and with a view to protecting themselves, contradicting the need to learn

Myth #3 – “get buy-in to the vision”

- I have more arguments about this point than any other – and that’s with experienced change professionals!
- In reality:
 - Agreeing doesn’t mean they’ll do what they need to
 - Disagreeing doesn’t mean they won’t do what they need to
- Staff see the decision as “above their pay grade”
- Staff care most about their own performance and experience
- Staff listen to the person at the top and their own “manager”, no one else

Summary of Lessons

Shorthand	Lesson
Division of Labor Rule	Importance of joint working, distribution of labor and being explicit about it
Responsiveness Rule	Importance of visibility and accessibility (responsiveness) in building trust and credibility in the process and people
Baby in the Bathwater Rule	What works well? What should we keep?
Shoe Leather Rule	People respond entirely differently when they have a relationship with you, even if it's only a one-off meeting to feel seen and heard
Shared Problem Rule	Having an ongoing conversation, the weekly FAQ
Individual Experience Rule	Loss feels different and coped with uniquely by each affected person
Active Participation Rule	Make it easy for people to do things other than talk – design or make something, win prizes, have a party, display a badge or sticker or bag
Eye on the Ball Rule	Monitor progress in improving performance, not the shopping list or “stew”

Why change at all?

- All change is to **improve performance** – the universal “why”
- Not incremental improvements but a “step change”
- Positively stated:
 - Improve efficiency/productivity/throughput
 - Gain market share
 - Raise customer satisfaction
- Negatively stated:
 - Reduce cost
 - Reduce inefficiencies
 - Downsize

Ambiguity not uncertainty

- If improving performance is good, then what's the problem?
 - We don't know for sure if or how it will work
 - We can't see clearly how we get from current A to hoped-for B
 - We may have tough decisions and trade-offs to make
- Any of the above = “not sure what it will look and feel like”
- *Uncertainty* = we know what's going on, but not the outcome
- **Ambiguity** = we don't know what's going on, for how long, who or how it will develop, or even what the right questions are; disorienting, the “normal” rules don't all apply

The Ambiguity Principle - 1

1. An organization's performance relies on the behavior of its employees. Organizational change aims to improve performance. To succeed, it must work through the behavior of employees.

The Ambiguity Principle - 2

2. Organizational change has two components: (a) the technical change itself and (b) the adjustments to behavior that employees have to make in order to translate the technical change to improvements in performance.

The Ambiguity Principle - 3

3. The technical component of change may follow a logical progression, but it always creates ambiguity for the behavioral component because each individual employee will interpret the change in a highly subjective way based on his or her unique perspective. The subjective change experience revolves around each individual's perception of what it is about the change that is ambiguous, how much it matters to them and why.

The Ambiguity Principle - 4

4. The task of resolving ambiguity challenges existing thoughts, feelings and behaviors and gives rise to new ones in unpredictable ways. When many people are undergoing these challenges there are further layers of reaction and adjustment, which risk creating confusion and chaos.

The Ambiguity Principle - 5

5. People do not let their ambiguities go unresolved. Explicit, structured support for individuals working through these adjustments can help them make the behavior changes that will improve performance in the way the organizational change intended. In the absence of such support, people will resolve their ambiguities as quickly as possible in any way that makes sense to them, typically resenting the change that forced them through such an unpleasant experience.

A revised view of org change

- Technical change – the universal “what” and usually what we name it: reorg, merger, new system, etc
- Adaptive change – individual behavior change at scale
- Result is co-produced by technical + adaptive
- Energy to resolve ambiguity is the power to move forward
- What if we harness this energy and direct it positively?
- If we could do that, wouldn't “ambiguity” be a gift rather than something to overcome?

The standard perspective of change

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What “change managers” get wrong

- Presume one or more of the myths
- Operate top down and/or center out
- Manage information in ways that undermine trust
 - Mishandling bad news
 - Not addressing ambiguity (“mushroom management”)
 - Overcommunicating
 - One direction only
- Mistake the technical change for the real change
- Mistake “training” for staff support to make the change

Gift of ambiguity gives us three upgrades

- Accept the gift – mutuality mindset
 - We're in this together: co-produce outputs & outcomes along the way
 - Build trust through clarity of what's (non) negotiable and listening A LOT
- Give the gift – participation
 - Coordinate conversations for “stakeholders” to use voice and choice
 - Build trust through responsiveness and listening A LOT
- Open the gift – set change free
 - Invite local, decentralized solutions that respect individuals' expertise, ownership and agency – but not left hanging – staff need confirmation and reassurance as they LEARN, mistakes are inevitable and okay

What “change managers” get ~~wrong~~ right

- ~~Presume one or more of the myths~~ Talk about what change is like
- ~~Operate top down and/or center out~~ Lead a conversation
- ~~Manage information in ways that undermine trust~~
 - ~~Mishandling bad news~~ Honest about what we know and don't know
 - ~~Not addressing ambiguity (“mushroom management”)~~ Empathy
 - ~~Overcommunicating~~ Less “messaging”, more interaction & “touches”
 - ~~One direction only~~ Listening, listening, listening and being seen to listen
- ~~Mistake the technical change for the real change~~ Focus on behavior
- ~~Mistake “training” for staff support~~ Focus on problem solving

Leading change vs managing change

- Leading
 - 1 to many relationship
 - Everyone (the “many”) should hear the same thing
 - For change/implementation: Vision (the why) and Framing/Context
- Managing
 - 1 to 1 relationship
 - Job is to get the best performance from each individual in the team
 - Tailored and differentiated support and guidance
 - For change/implementation: supporting each team member to change their own behavior to improve performance in line with change objectives

Six Steps to Change Anything Successfully

- aka: How to Wield Ambiguity to Improve Performance
- Preparing the groundwork for a successful conversation to transition from point A to the Next Normal, when both the technical and adaptive (behavioral) changes are complete
- The conversation itself is Step 7

Step 1 – Why is the Next Normal better?

- **Key questions:**

- What are the specific gains in performance the change will achieve?
- How will the change generate that improvement?
- What else needs to be present for the change to deliver its performance gain?

- **Homework:** The why, what, who/when/where/how

Step 2 – How will we get to the Next Normal?

- **Key questions:**

- What resources do we have (time, money, talents) and what other resources (commitments, relationships, talents) can we leverage?
- How has the change been communicated (formally and informally)?
- What else is happening in the organization and how does that affect this change project?

- **Homework:** Resource map and project timescales

Step 3 – Who is going to the Next Normal?

- **Key questions:**
 - Who are ALL the stakeholders?
 - How are partner organizations (delivery partners, vendors) affected?
 - How are clients and customers affected?
- **Homework:** Comprehensive list of specific stakeholder groups

Step 4 – How will people feel in the Next Normal?

- **Key question:**

- For each stakeholder group, answer the following: “The change will be successful when X feels...”

- Example when closing schools: *The change will be successful when...*

- *every family knows what school their children will attend next year*

- *every staff member knows where they'll be working next year*

- **Homework:** desired point of view after implementation for each stakeholder group, i.e. make the change objectives subjective

Step 5 – How will people participate in the journey?

- **Key questions:**

- How best to interact with each stakeholder group?
- How frequently?
- What resources from step 2 can we use to reach stakeholders?

- **Homework:** Communications structure and process for each stakeholder group

Step 6 – How do we fuel the journey?

- **Key questions:**
 - What messages best initiate the conversation?
 - How will the change team be visible, accessible, responsive and accountable?
- **Homework:** Finalized change plan

Any questions?

- Everyone ready to “wield ambiguity like a maestro”?
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