

## WHAT THEY DON'T TELL YOU ABOUT CHANGE

If you are reading this article then we know it is extremely unlikely that you will not have encountered 'change management' in some form or other. Intuitively, one feels that a huge amount has been written about this subject. Even then, it is still a shock to find Google picking up 10,500,000 items on 'change management' and over 30 million on 'change'.

When you dig a bit deeper you find that the approach to organizational change is generally intellectual. Here is a process that will help you get from A to B...Here is a checklist to work through....

One of the most eminent writers in this field is John P. Kotter of Harvard Business School. His 8-stage process dating from the mid 1990s is one that we have found tremendously helpful and robust in almost every situation as coaches. It takes full account of the political, social and behavioural facets of organizational life, and puts great stress on the need for complete communication. And yet, there is a sense of detachment, which is not altogether surprising. As well as being a business school professor, he is a really a highpowered consultant who is good at advising. But, ultimately, some people within the organization actually have to lead the change - and get their hands dirty.

In the course of many coaching conversations, we have been struck by something else. Managing change is an intense emotional experience for those leading the organization. No matter how much planning, project management or advice one receives, nothing quite prepares you for the reality.

A number of our clients, inevitably, have been in a situation of major organisational change. So we decided to interview a small group of them and try to find out how it actually feels to be leading change. They were remarkably frank about

involved and the triggers for

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Our interviews covered the public sector, transportation, business services, aerospace, logistics, and telecommunications. In all cases except the public sector, change was applied across the whole organization. The companies involved were mainly FTSE 100, with one from the FTSE 250. The triggers for change were obviously particular to each business. So, for example, one was driven by the sale of the business from a larger group to a venture capital company with its own clear cut imperatives for transformation. Another was losing substantial amounts of money every day and, "...months away from not being a going concern..." And yet, there was a common theme running right across our sample: the old culture of 'jobs for life' or 'we are too big/successful to worry' was being challenged directly by market pressures. Each organization has encountered real and induced insecurity on a scale and with a newness that relatively few people had experienced before. This was as true for a company that had

Drivers:

When we asked what were the most powerful drivers for change, we got the responses we expected i.e. the business imperatives and, particularly, the notion of a burning platform. And then, in the next breath, came the people as drivers: "A new chairman, chief executive and me, all determined to make it happen" - "Key managers who understood why change was necessary and shared the commitment to deliver it" - "The chief executive and board pushing through the new strategy" - "The new CEO's clarity about the 'New World'" - "Appointing a small core team of respected people" - "My own drive, passion and beliefs".

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## European Mentoring & Coaching Council Conference 2005

Zurich in December does not sound like a marvellous attraction. Rosemary Harper and I set off from Heathrow under a sleety sky with minimal expectations. There is something about Swiss architecture and buildings that is uniquely functional and boringly grey. Zurich airport confirmed that impression. But our hotel was right in the heart of the old town with cobbled, pedestrianised streets and superb medieval buildings overlooking the River Limmat. We rushed out to find somewhere for dinner before everything closed and were staggered by the choice of restaurants and cuisines - and by the throngs of people. Zurich not only has a night life but a very thriving one - even on a Wednesday!

The next morning we walked over the bridge and found the UBS head office that was hosting the EMCC conference. It was back to grey functionalism but the delegates looked animated, and interesting. This might seem a strange thing to say, but we had never before attended a conference of coaches. As a coach, one just gets on with one's work, visiting all sorts of organisations and meeting a wonderful variety of executives. But meeting other coaches is a rare event: a few organisations have called their coaching providers together to discuss generic issues, giving us a welcome opportunity to compare notes with colleagues and competitors.

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### Emotions:

There is plenty of support for the notion of morale moving through phases - the now familiar change curve - as people across the organization come to terms with what is happening. But the reality was less tidy than the model.

- "Frustration soon after I got in - 'where the hell do you start?'"
- "Huge personal excitement at the scale of the challenge and the complexity"
- "I soon had a lot of knowledge. That was very powerful. I felt more in control leading the change than having it done to me"

"Sheer surprise - at how many mature and senior people felt imprisoned by the system and followed sheep-like".

After the initial excitement comes the more gritty phase - and a full spectrum of emotions:

- "Very switched on top team but real frustration lower down where the old command and control mentality persisted"
- "Fear: as an HR director I had to go out on a limb many times and drive the weeding out of poor performers personally"
- "Elation-swiftly replaced by depression when the results came through but our team became arrogant and got carried away with our own publicity"
- I knew what I was doing was right and the commitment of the Board was absolutely critical. It only wavered once: I was really pissed off
- "Massive frustration that even senior people couldn't or wouldn't recognize the benefits of the redesigned jobs. In the end, I showed my frustration very visibly. It was cathartic. Eventually, we reached a good outcome"

### Head v Heart

Striking a balance between 'head' and 'heart' is at the crux of managing change in terms of communicating to the rest of the organization and coping with the pressures. Often the business logic is completely compelling to those at the top and to detached observers. Yet, if the culture of the organization is somewhere else, appeals to logic will fall on stony ground:

- "The heart of the organization was public service -so why worry too much about making a profit?"  
"The business logic will not get you emotionally engaged and able to take the pain of change; we will probably have to close an operation and go through pain before people really buy in"  
"You have to start with the business logic but the implementation and overcoming obstacles is all about 'heart'"
- "The new CEO was swift and decisive. The takeover was on a Friday and the directors that were going, left that day. Head! On Monday, he had all the staff in and introduced himself, which had never happened before. Heart!"
- "We were in crisis with our backs to the wall. You have to be emotional and go with your gut feeling. We also made a conscious effort not to prioritise. We aimed high and achieved everything"

### Coping:

How do our leaders handle the inevitable stresses and strains? What have they learned about developing their own coping strategies? Several set out to build a team around themselves:

- "Have a like-minded team around you, that you can trust to deliver what you ask and share the inevitable stresses"

"I always build a small, trusting team around me. We share the same vision, trust each other and are deeply committed. The team is my coping mechanism. Stress goes inside me but sharing of intense emotions with the team is the safety valve"

Others have more individual strategies:

- "Don't get totally consumed- make sure you plan to get out and do things that release that pressure"

"I soon realised that I had to be really disciplined about time management and especially to schedule in free time; I get more stressed by work not done than by doing it"

Another approach was to: "identify quickly what I could control and what was outside my control - and stop beating myself up about the stuff that I couldn't control"

- "Having an external coach was hugely valuable."

"I felt more in control leading the change than having it done"

"Fear: as HR Director I had to go out on a limb many times"

"Massive frustration that even senior people couldn't - or wouldn't - recognise the benefits"

"The team is my coping mechanism"

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### Lessons Learned:

Perhaps because change is so emotionally charged, the lessons learned seem etched into each person's mind. None of them comes out of a text book.

"Really get to the bottom of what people mean by changing culture. I *had* one model and my chairman had another. I was making my assumptions *based* on my experience of change and he had his own"

"Question everything: at first I took things on face value but *discovered* that a 5% absence rate-bad but not high priority-was really 8%. The figures were being *fudged* by finance.

- "Having a good team around you is essential but make sure they are right for the environment. I brought in some excellent people but they couldn't relate to a blue collar environment"
- "Under promise and over deliver". This was a reference to taking out cost straightaway but leaving too little resource to cope with the extra work and 'unknowns' subsequently needed to deliver the overall change.
- "You can have an immaculately articulated strategy and you can communicate it many times. But if you can't define what it means at every level and every part of the organization - you are *dead*. Leaders at every management level have to own it and be able to translate it into practical issues and actions for their own teams."

The importance of leadership: "Leaders are in a *goldfish* bowl - people are always looking for negative signs that they can exploit cynically"

And communication: "It takes time to get the message out: you need to repeat it many times and in many ways. *Make* sure you have a feedback loop to tell you where the organization is."

"Communicate three times more than you *think* you have to. Put a high investment in face-to-face time".

"*Behavioural* change and business change are not separate tracks - one run by HR and the other by operations. They have to be integrated and drive off each other."

"You've got to have the right people at the top - the way the leaders behave is the most critical factor"

- "Identify champions down, across and up the line. Build the adrenaline rush and then release the valve through the guiding coalition"

### Personal Insights:

- "You can always do more than you feel capable of. We all find reserves we didn't know we had. For me it is matter of pride that others see me doing my *job* well."

"For me it was a time of huge personal growth: I learned so much about myself and other people. It was a superbly enjoyable and rewarding experience".

If you want to develop as a leader, 'change' is not one of the items that is going to fall out of a menu of items for personal development. But when it happens, it can be one of the most electrifying phases of one's personal growth. All the people we spoke to gained massively from the experience and felt positively about leading change again.

Change is much more an emotional process than intellectual. People disagree about what needs changing and what the outcome should look like. They almost always disagree about the speed of change. They often try to delegate it to others. Some people resist out of fear of loss, or the unknown. You start with ambiguity all round and continue with more ambiguity as events unfold. Excitement switches to frustration and back to elation, sometimes in one day. The emotions of 'steady state' management are amplified many times over. Sometimes, everything can seem to be skidding out of control.

Being able to 'download' the emotions, refocus the swirl of ambiguities, and make sense of all the signals around one is difficult, if not impossible to do all alone. Having someone right outside the system - detached - but with deep, personal experience of organisational change - empathetic - is vital for survival. Maximising the learning as you go along is even harder to do all alone. If there's one time when having an external coach is going to pay the greatest dividends it is precisely when you are leading change.

*We hope you found this article interesting. We regard it as unfinished work and would be delighted to receive observations based on your own experience - or interview you - so that we can develop the theme further in our next newsletter*

**"if you can't define what it means at every level and every part of the organisation you are dead!"**

**"Behavioural change and business change are not separate tracks-they have to drive off each other"**

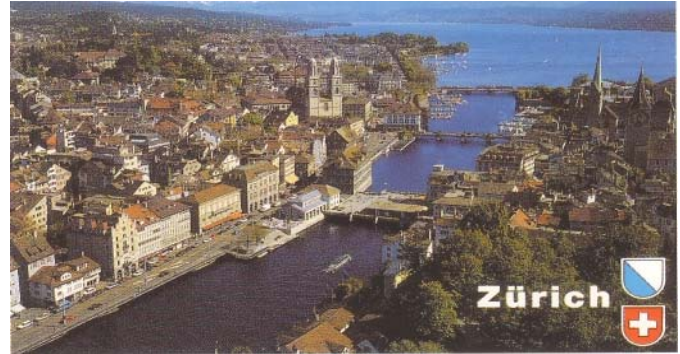
**"For me it was a time of huge personal growth"**

Here in Zurich we were in the company of 200 coaches and mentors from more 17 countries. One tends to think of coaching as a particularly AngloAmerican phenomenon but it is clearly now well established in Germany, Scandinavia, the Netherlands and to a lesser extent in the Latin countries such as France, Spain and Italy. Even Estonia had a delegate.

Looking around the conference hall one got the impression that coaching is now about 60% female, not unlike the HR profession but with a relatively higher age profile. As ever, the number of people like us that spend 100% of their time coaching was a very small minority. Many are consultants who do a bit of recruiting, a bit of training, and a bit of coaching on an opportunistic basis. Many are HR professionals who have become interested or involved in coaching almost by accident. Some are academics who have spotted not only an interesting field to research but an opportunity for more lucrative work. Some are psychologists who have found a rewarding application for their knowledge.

A huge amount of thought and time is still going into qualifications for coaching - desirable in principle but devilish in the detail. There are really three strands to the debate: the psychological, the academic; and the practical. The EMCC is actively engaged in the debate. Addressing the latter strand, it has already set clear standards for practitioners.

The EMCC's range of topics for the plenary sessions and the workshops was fascinating: evoking leadership; empowering professionals, a systems perspective, talent coaching, coaching project leaders; mentoring and coach evaluation in the health sector; tribes and territories in the teaching of executive coaching; the matching process, the coach as a climbing companion



(Swiss, of course); blame and envy in the boardroom; coaching in matrixed organisations; style switching. Two of the British 'gurus', Megginson and Clutterbuck offered a useful framework for any organisation to evaluate just how far it has got with fostering a coaching culture.

Was it worthwhile? We were stimulated by some totally new perspectives, frustrated by the lack of time in the programme to develop ideas properly, and really encouraged to find colleagues stoutly defending some of the founding principles of coaching: listening hard; challenging, not advising; managing the boundaries; maintaining a balance between the outputs for the individual and for the organisation.

Even the conference dinner was different: Professor George Kohlrieser of IMD made links to coaching from his experience as hostage negotiator. Think about it... We left with the unique sound of a genuine alpenhorn trio ringing in our ears!

Coaching has certainly come a long way: no longer in its youth but not middle-aged either.



We are delighted to announce that Feng Wang (Eric) joined our team as Client Support Manager. Eric is responsible for all our support activities and administers our psychometrics. Eric, originally from Beijing, recently completed his Master's Degree in International Management at SOAS, University of London and hopes to become a business

**To hear more about Keary Harper please do call us or email us as we would love to hear from you**

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