An Analysis and Evaluation of a Change Agent’s Effectiveness

By Michelle Fletcher

19th May 2018

# The type of change, reason for change and the roles played by the change agent.

Change Management is defined as identifying a requirement or opportunity for change, either to improve a situation that is already working, or fix something that isn’t. Once the requirement has been identified, analysing the situation and developing solutions for that requirement and then implementing the selected change. Change management can be from a system update, a strategy change, cultural change to an organisation restructure.

The initial identification of this change was carried out by the Vice Chancellor of the institution. A faculty wasn’t performing as expected and it was not only impacting the team but was having a knock-on effect for the whole university.

As an institute of technology, the executive management at the institution wanted the faculty of engineering and technology (FEIT) to be world leading. However, it was not. FEIT was under performing, there was no leadership and a number of academics were not producing any outputs or they were of poor quality.

In this instance, the Vice Chancellor looked at FEIT as a system, the parts needed to work together to work successfully – or systems thinking as mentioned in MBAX6271 Approaches to change, course notes, unit 4, pg. 8, the following issues were identified:

* Leadership was ineffective.
* The team was no longer functioning as one
* There was little or no people management
* Little or no accountability for performance
* Output was falling by the year
* Income was falling by the year

## Type of change -

When asking the questions about change, as described in MBAX6271 Approaches to change, course notes, unit 1, pg. 7, the first question was, is there a case for change, it was identified that there was and it would add a great deal of value to the faculty and the university.

The remaining questions are, what change is best to make and what is the best way to make that change. The change agent was then employed to ensure that the best change was made and in the best way for the situation.

The change agent identified that there were two changes that were required, an organisational change and the redesign of the faculty strategy.

Huy and Mintzberg (2003) suggest 3 types of change, dramatic, systematic and organic. This type of change would be dramatic as it was a time of crisis and the change was driven by formal leadership, it would be a restructure, reframing the team’s mindset and implementation of a new strategy. As opposed to systematic which is less dramatic, focussed and slower change or organic which happens on its own.

This change would be an incremental transformation as described by Balogun and Hailey (2008), it would take place over time and would be a change in strategy rather than all at once and a realignment of the current strategy.

One interesting point the change agent mentioned was ‘The Burning Platform’ Anthony, S. (2018), he used this phrase to describe the situation when speaking to the team. The situation was not expected, but dire. In using this coercive power, along with his level of authority, from the beginning, people were aware that a significant change was coming.

## Reason for the change –

After identifying the issues, the change agent then scanned and evaluated the issues. An issue can either be an ‘opportunity gap’ where there is no problem, but some things could be improved or it could be a ‘problem gap’ where there is a problem and as a result something isn’t working as described in MBAX6271 Approaches to change, course notes, unit 1, pg. 12.

In this case, something wasn’t working and needed to be fixed.

## The role of the change agent -

The change agent in this change program played a number of roles.

1. The interim Dean of the faculty
2. The lead change agent.

As the interim Dean, recruiting could begin immediately as the strategist and implementor, carrying out the analysis, devising solutions and as the change agent, given the reins to implement the solutions.

An external change manager was employed to assist in the change and an internal human resource change manager (HR Change Manager) was also part of the change team.

# Analysis and evaluation of the change agent's effectiveness

With a team of 3 people their task was to analyse the situation, produce a solution and implement that solution as soon as possible.

As an external employee, diagnosis biases around knowing the process and favouring people were removed. However, it would be beneficial for the change agent to be aware of confirmation bias, especially as he had been given a list of the issues and the halo effect, just because some academics may have been underperforming, it doesn’t mean all of them were.

The change agent clearly looked at this change challenge from a number of different frames, as described by Bolman and Deal unit 5 page 3.

**Political**, there was a change in leadership with a bid to change the direction for the people in the team. Those people in the team had different ideas about how the faculty would be run and what ‘best practice’ would be. Differences in values and interests is important, but making those differences work for the faculty is important.

**Human Resources**, it was recognised that the members of the faculty would be affected by any change, that they would need to be kept in the loop as well as understanding their fit within the new faculty strategy and how to ensure both the individual and organisation benefit.

**Structural**, implementing a new team structure to support the new strategy and ensuring that role descriptions align with this. A new faculty goal will give the faculty focus as one.

**Symbolic**, allowing the team to be and express themselves in a way that also brings them together. Ensuring the team is immersed in the culture that supports them and the new strategy and makes them feel like they are part of a successful driven team.

The risk of frame blindness was taken into account as all frames were considered rather than concentrating on one.

In this case, the 5 W’s – (What, where, when who and why) as described in MBAX6271 Approaches to change, course notes, unit 6, pg. 17, may not have been the most ideal diagnostic tools to use as it breaks the issue down into simple attributes, however in this case, the attributes weren’t simple. Also, the who, what, where and when had already been identified.

* Who, FEIT, certain faculty members and the Dean.
* What, output, income and team issues.
* When, the majority of the time.
* Where, when it comes to performance reviews, output measuring and the strategy the team is working towards.

As part of the 5 W’s, the why is where you can get into the detail and understand what the underlying cause is.

In this change program, the change agent used the Why? Why? process for establishing the root cause of the issue. Appendix A shows an amended version of the diagram as the root causes that the change agent identified were both causing similar issues within the faculty. Due to ineffective management and leadership and a strategy that was no longer working for the faculty, the knock-on effect was lack of team work, lack of productivity resulting in low quality outputs and low funding.

A Why? Why? diagram is useful for finding a root cause, however, as 2 issues were identified, it would have been more beneficial to produce a Why? Why? diagram for each issue. If any specific challenges to income or outputs were identified, an alternative root cause could have been identified.

A systems approach considers the system and relationships between them as stated in MBAX6271 Approaches to change, course notes, unit 6, pg. 23. This approach was not used in this change program; however, it considers the following - the critical processes and tasks, the organisation structure and rewards systems, the culture of the team and communication points within it and the individual people within the team. This theory could be amended to investigate just the relationships and processes and the ways they align making systems out of scope, for example, looking at the processes the team and management followed, the organisational hierarchy for the team, targets and governance for them, how the strategy for the faculty was implemented, the skills and attributes of the team and how leadership and management was exercised within the team.

During the change process, a large stakeholder identification activity took place to assess the groups affected, who had influence, who had power, who was committed to making the change happen, establish who fit into what category and then establish the best way to manage those categories.

In establishing who had influence, it was clear that the team members didn’t have anyone to follow. The major change was to employ an inspirational leader, as noted in MBAX6271 Approaches to change, course notes, unit 8, pg. 3, who could use inspiration and rational persuasion influencing tactics as suggested by Yukl, 2012. By using the faculty values and their benefits to the team, strategy could be updated in line with those values.

One definition of leadership is “the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives”. (Yukl 2012, p. 7). In influencing people, the right leader can take care of the team, empowering them to see the benefits of the change and fostering a positive attitude towards the change. Having followers in the team means ideas and changes can be implemented and followed through to completion and beyond. Whilst there are different styles of followers, from the sheep who need someone to motivate them and tell them what to do, to the star followers who are active, think for themselves and evaluate decisions of their own accord, there are also the ‘NoNo’s (Kotter, 2008) to take into account. As Kotter describes, everything offered to a NoNo, will be resisted with excuses, delays or stirring up anxieties.

The change agent in this program, identified NoNo’s, sheep, the alienated who can have a negative energy yet are sceptical and the pragmatics who don’t pick a side, but will observe and then go along with the change once decisions have been made. He then looked at how to manage each group as noted in MBAX6271 Approaches to change, course notes, unit 10, pg. 39. By involving all groups in the change, they were actually part of the change. The NoNo’s didn’t get involved, but for those who chose to take part, they displayed internalised commitment, where they understood and accepted the reason for the change.

The new state was replacing the current low performers, including the head of department, with new team members who were high performers and able to meet the new centre strategy.

In this case, the change agent was effective, he performed a thorough analysis of the problem, identified the root cause, established stakeholder commitment and buy in, produced a plan for the NoNo’s and implemented this plan. Once the new leader of the faculty was on board, the organisational change along with the new faculty strategy to become the world leading engineering and information technology faculty was implemented. Since the change, there has been an increase in high quality outputs, increased income for the faculty, an improved culture in the team and more effective leadership supporting these and continual improvements.

# Outcomes and Lessons Learnt

## Results

As a result of the analysis, the following changes occurred over the course of a two-year period.

* Strategic hiring of management who are also good leaders and embrace change.
* Job descriptions updated with key performance indicators.
* Strategic hiring of research staff. With relevant expertise.
* A new faculty strategy that involved targets and performance measurements, also individual performant measurements.
* A ‘free to go’ redundancy option, setting new strategy expectations and if a team member didn’t want to follow this, they were free to take voluntary redundancy.
* A new hierarchy of schools and research strengths based on the new expertise in the team.

## Lessons Learnt

The first lesson learnt from this change program was having the appropriate leadership and management in place and understanding your audience.

Understanding the commitment and resistance to a change and the groups that you will be working with means that you can manage the process and influence accordingly. It also means you can tailor workshops, communications or meetings as appropriate. Having an influential leader, who can build followers and positively encourage change, especially organisational change, is important.

To be an effective change agent, I would implement this into my work by making sure I specifically assessed the leadership and stakeholder involvement in the required change, categorise the commitment level and assess the impact of the change on each of groups or stakeholders.

I would use Beckhard and Pritchard’s (1992) commitment chart to establish the amount of commitment required from each group or stakeholder for the change to happen, identifying key players at the current point in time and where I would like their commitment to be for the change. I would also add a column to this chart to indicate potential leaders or influencers for the change.

Once I was aware of my influential leaders, I would work with them to encourage and assist them in being an advocate for the change. As Zaleznik (2004) writes, managers aim to shift balances of power towards compromises and limiting solutions that, whereas a leader brings in fresh approaches to problems, projecting their ideas in a way that people want to listen and then develop the solutions to make those ideas reality.

To ensure this was timely, I would do this at the beginning of the project and then asses it at regular intervals throughout the project. Especially to take into account any movers within the leader and follower circles. At the end of the change project, I would check the list and assess if they were in the predicted commitment points or influencers as predicted. This would assist with change resistors, followers and being able to manage communications across the change effectively.

The second lesson learnt from this change program is ensuring that at all changes being managed, not matter what size and who is involved, are viewed from a variety of perspectives.

The benefit of this is to be able to fully understand the impact of the change, to be able to identify the solution or solutions required and the best way to implement them. Especially if the perspective is different from the majority or even your own.

Bolman and Deal’s four frames is a useful tool to start with. Looking at the organisation through different lenses – structural, human resources, political and symbolic. Using a table (see appendix B), I would list the 4 lenses and the issues and significant points to note related to the change from that lens.

I would also extend the table to list the stakeholders that would be impacted in each frame with the idea of giving them a high, medium or low impact rating (L, M or H). That way, at a glance, you can see what group or people would be impacted the most in that frame. You could then investigate those impacts further as part of the change management process.

There is a risk of ‘frame-blindness’ as Bolman and Deal (2003) refer to it, where only one or two frames are considered and the other is missed. To prevent this, I would aim to approach each change with the table in appendix B and consider all four frames, even if there is little to write about a frame, it would still be considered. This is similar to the contingency perspective as noted in MBAX6271 Approaches to change, course notes, unit 5, pg. 11, where there is no one best frame to use, that there are different ways to diagnose an issue and using the most appropriate frame for the situation is the most efficient. However, taking it one step further, considering all frames every time for a holistic frame view.

Once the frame analysis was complete, I would make sure the table was part of the official change analysis documentation for reference. It is very important that this activity takes place early on in the change process as it is identifying the issues. With this in mind, it would be one of the first activities on my change task list and where possible, require sign off from the change stakeholders to ensure it has been considered.

This would assist with all change management projects by ensuring an appropriate number of perspectives were considered and providing a reference point for stakeholders for the project.

# Appendix:

## Appendix A – Why? Why?

No accountability

No targets

Ineffective management

Limited feedback

Low outputs and income

Ineffective strategy

No teamwork

Limited training

#

## Appendix B – Four Frame Table

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Frame** | **Issues / Points to Note** | **Stakeholders (impact level)** |
| Structural |  |  |
| Human Resources |  |  |
| Political |  |  |
| Symbolic |  |  |

# References:

Anthony, S. 2018. ‘How to Anticipate a Burning Platform’, Harvard Business Review, accessed 9th May 2018, <https://hbr.org/2012/12/how-to-anticipate-a-burning-platform>

Balogun, J. & Hope Hailey, V. 2008, Exploring strategic change, 3rd edn., London, Prentice Hall.

Beckhard, R. & Pritchard, W. 1992, Changing the essence: the art of creating and leading fundamental change in organizations, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.

Bolman, L. G. & Deal, T. E. 2008, Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice and leadership, 4th edn., Jossey–Bass, San Francisco, CA.

Bolman, L. G. & Deal, T. E. 2013, Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice

and leadership, 5th edn., Jossey–Bass, San Francisco, CA.

Huy, Q. N. & Mintzberg, H. 2003, ‘The rhythm of change’, Sloan Management Review, vol. 44, iss. 4, pp. 79–84.

Kotter, J. P. 2008, ‘Deal with NoNos’ in A Sense of Urgency, Harvard Business Press, Boston, MA.

MBAX6271 Approaches to change, course notes, units 1 - 11, distributed by The University of New South Wales for MNG Semester 1, 2018.

Yukl, 2012, Leadership in Organisations, Prentice-Hall, Upper Saddle River, NJ.

Zaleznik A, 2004, ‘Managers and Leaders: Are They Different?’, Harvard Business Review, vol. 82, no. 1, pp. 74–81. (Originally published Harvard Business Review May/June 1977 pp. 67–78.)