the CENTRE for CHANGE MANAGEMENT

C4CM™

Training for Change

Synopsis

With most organisations going through significant change the ability to execute change well must be a core competence for the survival of any organisation. Yet empirical research shows repeatedly that as much as three fifths of change is unsuccessful. With survival at stake, why is change so hard? We suggest that managers don't have a sufficient capability to do change well and as a result underestimate their capacity to do change. Change capability has been shown to be directly related to change success by a number of management consultants. We believe that a poor capability to do change leads to managers making decisions that build in failure; whereas managers who have a good capability are able to make decisions leading to success.

The best way to improve a capability is through training and internal culture support. Training needs to include appropriate change methods, with related knowledge, skills and experience. The article identifies specific barriers to change and relates these to four factors that are required to make training successful in increasing a capability. Starting with the need to make change driven by the benefits a set of specific topics in change are proposed that will have the most impact on improving the capability of an organisation to do successful change.

1 Introduction

Most organisations are facing a lot of change; much of it driven by external forces. Nearly all organisations are finding that doing successful change is difficult. Research suggests that three in five organisations failed to meet their targets for their change initiatives (see McKinsey [1]). Why are organisations so poor at what is clearly a core activity for most of them?

The answer seems to be the capability for doing change is insufficient and the capacity for doing change is underestimated. In practice organisations try to do too much change as well as poorly executing the change they try. In the same report,

[1] Jennifer A. LaClair and Ravi P. Rao, "Helping employees embrace change", McKinsey Quarterly, November 2002

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McKinsey showed a direct correlation between change capability and the achievement of targets for change. In our view the organisations that fail to achieve their targets for change have put in place barriers to success (or built in failure) whereas those who succeed have managed to avoid these barriers by building in success.

2 Barriers to change

The lack of capability in change management is probably the main barrier. Capability means staff with the knowledge, skills and experience to deliver effective change across the organisation and especially across the management structure. It is usually the middle managers that either make change work or get in the way. Knowledge and skills can be acquired (most obviously through training) and experience can be nurtured.

Capacity is a real issue because humans have an ability to deliver extra capacity, sometimes. A good way to characterise available capacity is:

- Cash, every pound (euro, dollar, etc) spent doing change is not being spent on the front line or is subtracted from profits. So it needs to be spent very wisely.
- Every person working on change is not working on the front line delivering services or creating profit. Demand for front line activity means there is limited capacity in an organisation if it is to continue to satisfy its customers.

Most organisations stretch the human capacity too far by trying to do too much change at the same time. This results in poor execution and very often new changes sweep away recent changes which have not had time to have an effect and hence are wasted.

Many organisations use projects to deliver change which is an unsuitable method. A project is an excellent vehicle for producing something that has not been produced before. But it usually finishes producing before people change in the business is complete and embedded so the focus is lost and the business fails to complete the change. This is especially common in technology led change.

An obvious solution to the project problem is to have a separate change team responsible for doing the people change and following through to achieve the benefits identified in the business case. This, of course, requires additional resources of knowledgeable and skilled people! Most organisations don't have change teams so rely on good luck to make the changes work.

Serious barriers to effective change are the senior managers in an organisation. As the pace of change and the need for efficient change has grown these managers have not learnt new skills and do not really understand what they need to do to make change work. These managers need new skills to see how to make change successful and their role in achieving that success.

3 Training to overcome barriers

Increasing knowledge and skills can be achieved through training. By focussing the training and development of staff to overcome barriers to change effectiveness an organisation can have the most impact on its capability to do change. We have identified 4 factors that will affect the impact training has on change capability.

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- **Timeliness**: training needs to provide knowledge and skills at the time they are required; due to the very fast loss of knowledge and skill after training when it is not used. It is not efficient to train staff on everything in a week long course when they will use a very small portion of the knowledge in the near future.
- **Need and application**: Training should enable staff to practice skills and use knowledge to solve problems that are relevant to current needs. Staff will want to solve problems that they have identified as necessary to their success. They should use training as the chance to try out skills and knowledge in a safe environment where mistakes can be made and lessons learned.
- **Commitment**: effective training will only occur if the participants are committed to the training and their personal improvement. Too many people turn up on training courses with no commitment ("I was told to come, I have no idea why") and no agreement with their line manager about how the training will be used and what impact is expected in return for the investment. Both the participant and their manager need to commit to the training.
- **Other contributors**: training is only one of the contributors to improving capability in an organisation. Other contributions need to be aligned and put in place so a self-reinforcing environment and culture of improvement is created. Other contributors include: mentoring & coaching, leadership, and appropriate motivation.

4 Topics for change

Based on the UK Government Cabinet Office Best Practice[2] methods for project and programme management we have identified five key topics that are ideal for training in successful change: benefits management, stakeholders and communications, risk management, soft skills and the business change manager (or change team) role.

4.1 Benefits management

Benefits are the reason why most organisations do change. Benefits describe the advantages that the change will deliver to the organisation and are an important part of the business case for a change proposal. Delivering benefits requires them to be identified, planned and actively managed if they are to appear in sufficient quantity to give success. Indeed, the definition of a successful change is that it delivers the promised benefits. A common characteristic of an unsuccessful change is that it costs at least as much as predicted (if not much more) and all the benefits have vaporised. Learning how to define, validate, map, plan, measure, and realise benefits from change is important.

4.2 Stakeholders and communications

How often have you heard complaints about poor, or non-existent, communication during a change; or about resistance that is not overcome? This is a failure of stakeholder engagement and communication. Every change has a plethora of stakeholders across the organisation and beyond. They need to be brought on board and for some taken on a journey that involves changing their behaviour. This is not easy, but with analysis, planning, and a methodical approach it can be achieved. The

[2] See http://www.best-management-practice.com

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key to effective stakeholder engagement and communications is having clear objectives and regular testing against those objectives. You don't have to be an expert in communications to be successful, you do need to know what you need to communicate, to whom and when.

4.3 Risk management

Risk management is a technique for analysing and managing uncertain events in the future and using the information to make informed decisions in the present. Doing change and people's response to change are prone to risks. Benefits are in the future and themselves subject to risk. Risk management techniques to identify, assess, manage and mitigate are essential to understand the nature of a change and its potential success.

4.4 Soft skills

Change in an organisation only results from people behaving differently from what they do now and each individual finding their own path to adopting the new behaviours. Understanding the way humans are motivated and adapt to change and the individual differences humans have to learning and communicating is key knowledge for anyone hoping to do change an organisation. Skills in recognising differences and types of people change and adapting the change approach to meet individual and group needs will ease the resistance and both increase the impact of change and the reduce the risk of failure.

4.5 Business change manager role

Having a team of people to facilitate change in an organisation, who are more than the project, was shown above to be a good idea. Understanding how such a team role fits with a project or programme, works with (say) a project manager, or what makes a good change team member need to be worked out to enable the change team to be effective. What the change team needs to know, when they need to know and the skills they require will drive their training requirements.

5 Having an effect

Training for change needs to be effective in increasing the organisation capability for change. Using a model of change capability, such as that from Prosci [3] will help to identify knowledge and skill needs. When training is planned the organisation needs to ensure value for money through the four factors identified above.

Provide training in bit size chunks and focussed on the needs of the moment. Our topics approach provides a useful chunk of knowledge and skills which can be taken when needed. Staff need to be motivated by their line managers and training objectives for individuals need to be followed up. Otherwise the training is just day away from the office. The training needs to be part of a larger plan to increase and support improvement in change capability, it is not a magic bullet.

Qualifications are a good way of signalling a competence, as well as providing value to individuals in terms of career development. However, it is useful to look at the method of assessment used in a qualification. A knowledge test at the end of a course

[3] http://www.change-management.com/cmmma.htm

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can only show recent knowledge that is subject to decay; even worse an objective test often focuses on textual analysis and demonstrates no practical application at all. A vocational assessment, where the candidate must apply the course knowledge and skills to a real situation, will demonstrate understanding and analysis; with the knowledge and skills being re-enforced through use.

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