



Whitepaper: Influencer-led approaches to effective change management

The basic lesson of implementing people-intensive change is to recognise that traditional, logical top-down change implementation has an appalling track record.

A global survey conducted in 2008 by McKinsey and Company offered the insight that organisations could only hope to survive by constantly changing, but approximately two thirds of all change initiatives fail.

In a recent "Call for Papers" for the Journal of Change Management, for a special issue entitled, "Why Does Change Fail and What Can We Do About It?", Professor Bernard Burnes of Manchester Business School makes the observation that whilst this does seem to be an astonishingly high rate of failure, it is in line with most of the literature on change, which consistently quotes failure rates of between 60% and 90% (Burnes, 2009). For example, consultants Bain and Co claim the general failure rate is 70%, but they indicate that it rises to 90% for culture change programmes. And in relation to the failure rate of BPR initiatives, prevalent in the 1990s, Hammer and Champy (1993) claimed a failure rate of 70%. According to "Research Findings on Program Failure and Success" by Patrick Morley, Ph.D. Chairman and CEO of Man in the Mirror, "Two thirds of Total Quality Management (TQM) programmes fail, and re-engineering initiatives fail 70% of the time" (Senge, 1999). "Change initiatives crucial to organisational success fail 70% of the time" (Miller, 2002).

A Computer Weekly study in 2003 of 421 IT projects revealed the following:

--16% of all projects successfully completed (that is they were delivered in scope on-time and on-budget).

--75% of all projects were "challenged" in the following ways:

- 35% behind schedule
- 59% over budget.
- 54% under-delivered on planned scope.

A survey conducted by the Standish Group in 2003 showed that 66% of IT projects are either totally abandoned or fail against a measure of budget, scope, time or quality, i.e. "challenged."

The world of mergers and acquisitions fares little better. The value enhancement trend for 10 years of KPMG International's Manda survey shows that on average only 28% of mergers have resulted in enhanced shareholder value, whilst an average of 36% have led to a reduction in shareholder value. This value assessment is based on company share price movements relative to average industry sector movement during a two-year period.

Influencer-led approaches to change management

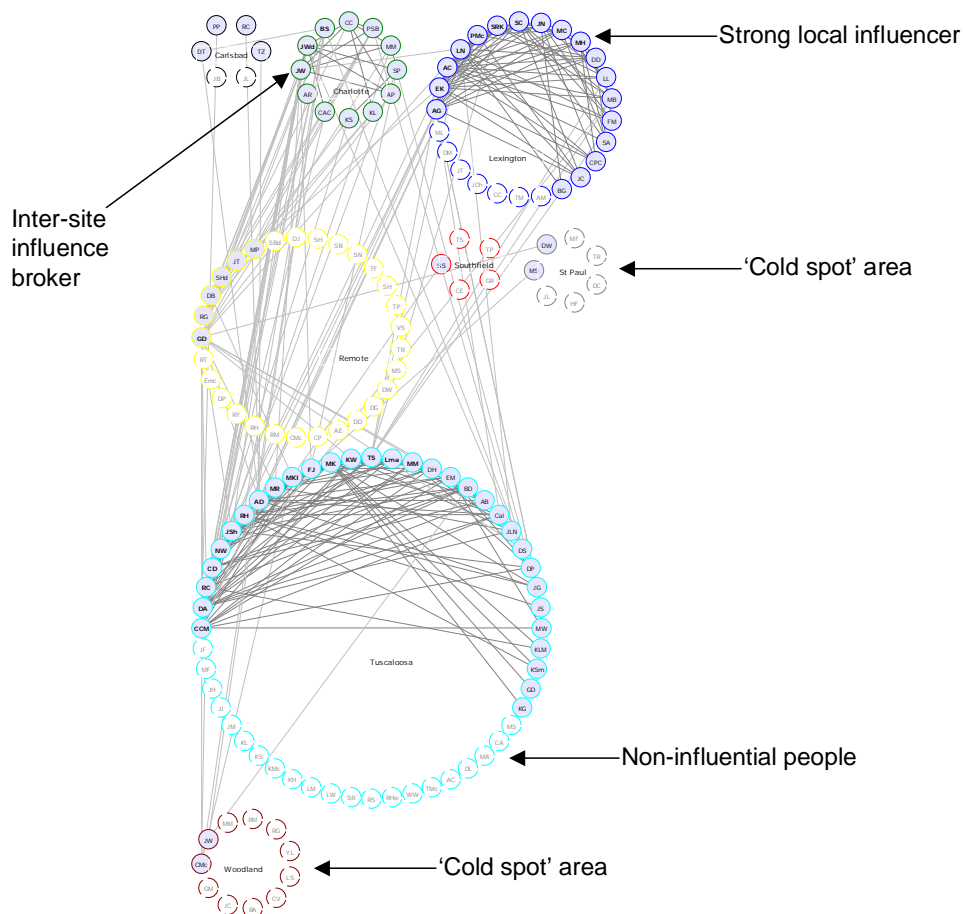
Over the last two decade however, informal network analysis has led to the development and testing of very different approaches based on identifying influencers in an organisation, irrespective of their job titles or levels in the hierarchy. These new approaches have achieved much greater success when used in major business change programmes.

The use of influencer-led approaches to change is totally compatible with all the main programme and project management methods. The bottom line is that you end up with very different people working in your change teams, with much more effective outputs. Our experience shows that more than 90% of business objectives can be achieved in shorter timescales at lower cost, provided that change-positive and open-minded influencers are identified, treated as intelligent adults and fully involved in all aspect of the change process.

Before driving ahead with the use of selected influencers, however, it is important to win the hearts and minds of those who will often not feature strongly in the lists of influencers – namely the

managers. The concept of empowering influencers is often alien to many managers' instincts and may be viewed as a personal criticism (why am I not influential?) or a threat to future career prospects. In practice, after an initial reality check, most senior and middle managers recognise the power of the influencer approach and recognise the logic of their (usually) modest position in the influence pecking order. Good managers are notable for the quality of their judgement, not least in recognising the realities of influence patterns across the organisation. Denial is not a realistic option.

Figure 2.8: Example of influencer network overview across sites



The underlying principle behind winning the support of colleagues for change initiatives is to progressively use influencers to win over their followers – those who they influence – in a logical sequence, starting with the easiest first. Therefore the first choice of individuals to involve in a change team are relevant – those with knowledge of the areas impacted by the proposed change – change-positive influencers.

By engaging these key individuals and genuinely involving them in change decisions, the initial objective is to win their 'hearts and minds' in favour of the relevant changes. As a natural consequence of this support, their influence is then used (enhanced by appropriate meetings, social events, e-mails, videos, etc. as necessary) to win the hearts and minds of the colleagues that they influence.

Following on from involvement of change-positive influencers (and sometimes in parallel with it), relevant open-minded influencers are also engaged to win their 'hearts and minds' in favour of the relevant changes. Wherever possible, priority is given to those who are influenced by one or more change-positive influencers and whose personal influence network is strong across relevant business areas to provide maximum influence 'coverage'. Once again, as a natural consequence of this support, their influence is then used (enhanced by appropriate meetings, social events, e-mails, videos, etc. as necessary) to win the hearts and minds of the colleagues that they influence.

There are usually more open-minded leaders than change-positive leaders and achieving a tipping point in winning employee hearts and minds will usually require a substantial proportion of the open minded to buy in to proposed changes.

Influencer involvement in change mechanisms

Using selected managers and innovative influencers in change teams is key to change success. When using this approach, very few if any line managers and innovative influencers are seconded full time. Work on change teams, steering committees, etc. is very much a part-time activity, leaving the influencers with the bulk of their time doing their day-to-day jobs – with lots of colleague contact and opportunities to build wider staff support for relevant change initiatives. Despite being part-time change team members, the managers and influencers chosen for change teams (and strongly supported by senior management) will have a profound impact in four main areas – enhanced change quality and relevance, relevant and timely change communications, successfully pioneering new change implementations, and driving agreed culture change.

Improving change quality and relevance

The inclusion of selected managers and innovative influencers in a change process must be closely integrated with the programme and project management structures. These selected managers and influencers will usually not be skilled in many of the techniques needed for organisational design, process design, systems design, performance management or programme management. They do, however, bring a strong understanding of the current work environment, the strengths and weaknesses of colleagues, and the issues and concerns that are currently talked about in the workplace. In their part-time roles (on change teams, steering committees, etc.) they can therefore add a new dimension to the change programme by acting as reality checks on proposed changes, suggesting ways that proposed new work environment can be improved from a staff and service user perspective, and highlighting potential problem areas.

A very important aspect of this participation is that these managers and influencers become more personally committed to the change programme (if they are used as valued members of change teams and not just 'token gestures'). This increased personal commitment in turn increases their impact as change agents, increasing buy in at both middle management and local staff levels through peer pressure – the people enthusing about the changes are respected and influential with colleagues, they are fully informed on current developments in the change programme, and they have strong senior management support.

The motivation of the selected individuals is very strong, since their morale is boosted by being chosen for these roles, and their career prospects are likely to be significantly enhanced if they perform well over the change period. The end result of using selected line managers and innovative influencers in this way is that many potential problems are highlighted at an early stage and dealt with; implementation schedules are adjusted to take account of local 'readiness for change'

(ensuring that early implementations are successful, leading to a positive bandwagon effect); changes have practical imperatives built in; and timescales and budgets are much more likely to be met.

Relevant and timely change communications

The overall goals of any change communication campaign are to ensure that people effected by the change programme are aware of the change programme and its aims; buy-in to relevant changes in the programme; individuals know how they fit in the new organisation; individuals know what is expected from them; individuals are continuously up-to-date and clear about progress being made.

While many traditional communication mechanisms are used during a change process, selected influencers and other highly-connected individuals are used throughout the communications campaign to place great emphasis on informal communications and feedback, while still maintaining a high profile and professional approach to formal communications. In effect, the approach focuses on achieving an effective, focused level of 'buy in' to the change programme through co-ordination of formal and informal change messages. Levels of buy in to change by different groups across the organisation are monitored informally and at regular intervals (typically monthly) in meetings of the change communications team. This real time communications feedback via influencers and highly-connected individuals forms the basis for ongoing monitoring of 'readiness for change', which in turn impacts on change sequencing decisions.

Pioneering successful changes

As a normal part of the change process, innovative influencers are frequently used to test new training materials, new systems and new ways of working. These individuals are trusted to give objective feedback on strengths and weaknesses, and to generate ideas on how things can be improved. There are often situations where new organisational designs, processes, systems and working arrangements need to be piloted before a full roll out of new ways of working can take place. Typically, these pilots are used to test the designs, with relevant improvements being made and used in the full implementation.

Some Managers, supervisors and key operational staff have the competencies to pioneer new ways of working, including the ability to overcome teething problems. Wherever possible, these rare individuals should be used to repeatedly establish one new work area after another. Some, but not all of these people will be innovative influencers. Experience shows, however, that innovative influencers are an excellent starting point to rapidly identify other staff with these pioneering capabilities.

Innovative influencer activities during major people-intensive change

Over the entire period of a change programme, starting at the point where a draft vision has been prepared, relevant influencers will be identified and engaged in a range of change activities, determined by the change sponsor and other relevant senior managers in agreement with the programme director/manager and relevant line managers. These activities typically include:

- Reviewing and suggesting practical enhancements/additions to the change vision to make implementation easier or more effective
- Contributing to ongoing 'readiness for change' analysis by providing regular assessments of local colleague support for the changes

- Being members of a communications review group (which meets monthly) - possibly on a rotating basis. Sometimes, also being a part-time member of the internal communications team for one or two days a week during crucial change periods.
- Being user representatives on change teams (systems, process, organisational, rewards & recognition, training, cultural, relocation etc.)
- Preparing and completing informal organisational questionnaires
- Attending workshops to discuss issues and identify solutions to the problems highlighted through organisational surveys
- Identifying and agreeing practical behaviours to support the organisation's agreed values
- Engaging in culture change initiatives to encourage and challenge day-to-day behaviours in line with agreed, desired behaviours
- Providing on-going advice on new actions and organisational mechanisms that would help drive the change programme
- Identifying problem areas where interventions might be needed rapidly to minimise the impact
- Identifying influential, change positive or open-minded colleagues who have the skills necessary to fill new and existing management roles as these become necessary during the change process
- Contributing to local continuous improvement initiatives, where these are in keeping with overall change programme activities and objectives

Next steps

For organisations wishing to explore these insights further, we offer a tailored combination of:

- In-house training programmes
- A limited number of public courses
- Informal network surveys to identify hidden leaders
- Selected pilot projects to test the impact of these insights
- An ongoing *Partner Relationship* for those who are truly the next wave of early adopters

Our next public course on 'Social Network Analysis for organisational Change' will be held in central London on the 27th and 28th November 2014. For details and registration information see:

<http://informalnetworks.co.uk/training/sna-practitioner/>

If you are interested in attending this course or in participating in the development and implementation of influencer-led approaches to change management please contact:

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