

Do change well

Next?

If you recognise some of the issues raised here, or would simply like to have a conversation about your own experiences and plans, we'd be delighted to do so.

Please contact keith.wells@brandwell.uk.com and we'll arrange a time.

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Do change well



Was Heraclitus the first ‘change manager’? He was the one who said “There is nothing permanent except change.” And, judging by how often the ‘C’ word has been used ever since, he was probably right.

It sometimes feels as though ‘change’ has grown into an industry all of its own: job titles, Business School papers and communities, qualifications, and so on. And yet (or should that be ‘therefore’?) McKinsey recently reported that 70% of change programmes fail.

That doesn’t mean 70% of organisations haven’t changed – it suggests that 70% of organisations haven’t changed in the way they wanted to. So they could be in a totally different place from where they wanted and needed to be, and therefore in a worse position than when they started.

In our experience, there are some clear and fundamental differences between those programmes that have worked and those that have failed. ‘Change’ shouldn’t be confused with ‘chance’.

Focus on the outcome, not the process

How's that for a statement of the bleedin' obvious? But we say it because it's also one of the most obvious faults in programmes that fail. As in most things, the "why" is more important than the "what" or the "how".

If there isn't a burning platform, find something to set fire to

Although fear is never the best motivation for action, it certainly helps to focus the mind. By the time Nokia realised what was happening with that "computer company they had nothing to fear from", it was too late. Getting people to understand what is at stake – either negative or positive, whatever is the truth of the situation – is critical to getting their commitment.

Set meaningful measures

Yes, project management is important, and timing plans do need to be stuck to. But those things are of far less motivational value than the outcomes and desired destination. The reasons for the change, the anticipated benefits of its success, are what are driving the programme; the process is just that, the process. It shouldn't be confused with progress. The best programmes are the ones that relate their measures, and report on them, to the desired outcomes.



Be clear and bold

“Send three and fourpence, we’re going to a dance”

People cannot be in any doubt over any part of the change programme, if it is to be successful.

Is this ‘normal change’ or transformation?

If Heraclitus is right, then change is permanent. We might have to re-think that awful ‘BAU’ phrase, because it implies some kind of status quo and therefore ignores the constant improvement that organisations have to commit to.

In that case, for any ‘change’ programme to have real impact it needs to be more than normal. The business needs to aim for something that is transformational, and to have it understood in those terms.

Don’t overpromise

This is not a contradiction of what we’ve just said, but a reminder to be realistic about what’s involved and to be expected in any transformation programme. Set out the timings, describe what needs to happen, identify the leaders, ensure the funds and resources are in place, say when key decisions are going to be made.

Celebrate your successes

There is always a temptation to wait until everything is “finished” before talking about success. Like most temptations, it should be resisted. The harsh truth is that, in reality, everything is never “finished”: even if you hit all your original objectives, other issues will have cropped up through the process and need to be addressed. The softer truth is that people need to know they’re doing well, and all leaders need confirmation of their direction.

So it’s vital to identify, share and celebrate every case of the business transforming itself – from as many different perspectives as possible. Trumpets are made to be blown.



Remember: it's all down to people



Even in the most technology-drive businesses, or transformation programmes, change has to be delivered by people. At all levels.

Leadership is more important than management

If the former is about 'doing the right things', the latter is about 'doing things right'. In transformational programmes, the long term vision, the desired outcomes and business and individual benefits are what motivate people. Nobody can 'have all the answers', so it can never be a test or matter of right and wrong. Keeping people's eyes and minds on the long term, and critically on new behaviours, is more likely to create success than ticking the process boxes.

Put the right skills in the right places

We've said there needs to be a distinction drawn between 'business as usual' (and however much 'normal change' that includes) and transformation. That needs to be reflected in the roles given to individuals: the skills needed in either category are very different, and it is not only unfair but also self-defeating to assume that one person can be equally good at both. Leaders need to ensure that the right people are in the right place to ensure the right things are done.

Answer the five critical questions

'Change' in the Chinese language is represented by two characteristics: one for 'opportunity', the other 'risk'. A lot of attention (particularly by Change Managers and their attempts to raise process above everything else) is often put onto the negative side of that definition. To gain people's commitment to the programme they are asked to contribute to, leaders need to answer five simple, basic but critical questions:

What do we stand for? Where are we going?

How will we get there? What's expected of me?

What's in it for me?

Let your brand drive the change

Our definition of a brand is 'a promise kept'. And a brand is, by nature, long term. It endures, while specific products, services and programmes come and go. Using your brand to set the context and the expectations of a transformation programme increases the chances of being one of the 30% that succeed.

Define your brand properly

Long lists of 'values' that people can't remember or apply don't make a brand. Neither does a lovely logo. Think about the idea of 'a promise kept' and drive for a brand definition that guarantees that integrity. Write a story that compels people to follow you, and to retell that story. Fit your brand and your long-term vision together – because they are one and the same thing.

Give people something to believe in

Even in the most radical transformation programmes, some things have to stay a constant. Your brand should be able to provide that continuity, and also the reassurance that the business still stands for the same things it always has done. Your brand should help explain your long-term vision and retain the depth and human connection that will ultimately help you succeed in your plan.

Re-affirm your superiority

Most people would say that a brand is a key element of differentiation. The best form of differentiation is superiority – and that should be at the core of your brand definition. Any change programme should be aimed at either maintaining that superiority or regaining it. This is not about being boastful, it's about acting with certainty and confidence. Which is exactly what a brand does.

