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MANAGING A LARGE SCALE CHANGE

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Managing a large scale change

"Imagine a river flowing through the village where you were born. The river constantly changes in many small ways - higher or lower, muddier or clearer, and so on. But while it changes a bit every day, it remains recognisable as the river that flows through your village. Now, imagine that village leaders change the course of the river, re-routing it around the village and paving over its old course for a new shopping street. That would be transformational change. If you left the village at an early age and now return years later, everything would seem very different." - Kurt Lewin

Large scale change can be one of the most exciting initiatives that we are ever part of. It is complex, multi-faceted, requires engagement with many stakeholders, involves many processes and may take many years and lots of energy to deliver.

At the same time evidence shows that most large-scale change initiatives fail to deliver their goals at the scale and in the time sought. This is particularly true of complex change initiatives that cross organisational boundaries. Large scale change programmes may fail for many reasons. This could be that there was no clear mandate for the change, that leadership was poor and there were not the resources available to achieve the changes required. Other reasons could be a lack of engagement or even a lack of time.



There are some key factors that can support and enhance the creation of the right conditions for large scale change:

1. Too often 'change management' or a 'change programme' is based on the premise that a small number of people can envision the outcomes sought, that the change process can be controlled and that people will be supportive of the change. History demonstrates that change is truly a dynamic process and we have to test, fail, learn and evolve as we go.
2. Cultural 'readiness for change' is a key issue. Is our working environment actually receptive to change? Change leaders often consider structure (organisations, policies, roles, resources) and processes (customers journeys, procedures, flows of information) in their large scale change planning but may tend to give less time and thought to patterns of behaviour (mindsets, trust, dealing with conflict, and learning).
3. The most frequently occurring problem in large scale change is that people run out of energy. Building energy for change for the long haul is one of the most important considerations for change leaders. How to tap into the positive energy for change that exists among the most engaged people and use it for the benefit of achieving the feeling of shared purpose should be one of the most important planning considerations.
4. There are numerous change management tools and approaches that can assist us with our change efforts.
5. In the past, innovation was done within organisations, using internal expertise. In an era of open innovation, a much wider group of people from inside and outside of the organisation can contribute to change. We want to make best use of our internal experts but we also want to invite the wider community, leaders from other organisations and other industries to take part in our innovation process to obtain the best possible results.