



Achieving Lasting Behavioural Change

Research Findings Report

A photograph of a conference room with an audience seated at round tables, facing a speaker at the front. The image is overlaid with a dark blue semi-transparent filter.

Inspiring people to act differently



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Section 1 – Executive Summary

1.1 The background to the project

Steps decided that we wanted to be able, when discussing large behaviour change programmes with clients, to be able to refer to such evidence as was available to support the advice and recommendations we were giving clients.

We undertook a desk search to find such research and were unable to discover anything that constituted research in this area. There were many opinion pieces but no research.

We decided, therefore, to undertake a piece of work to gather the wisdom of people who have been through the process. We did not feel we had the resources or the technical ability to undertake larger scale research. For a description of the method used see Section 2.

1.2 The findings

In Section 3 we summarise what the respondents believe are the five main keys to success in a behaviour change programme:

- If your leaders don't mean it don't do it
- Communications – listen and adapt
- Evidence-based business case
- Is it clear what people have to do differently
- Is anything happening

In Section 4 we explore the main barriers and challenges. These overlap with the keys to success (i.e. failure to demonstrate the success factors not surprisingly leads to problems). But the issues that cause problems were quite specific so we have categorised them separately as:

- The leadership challenge
- The recognition challenge
- The buy-in challenge
- The embedding challenge
- Evidence of seriousness
- Project specific issues
- The challenge of good learning interventions

In Sections 5–8 we review in detail the responses we received in relation to what we see as the four key stages on the journey to behaviour change:

- Recognising the need for change
- Building buy-in
- Developing the new skills and attitudes

- 
- Embedding the change

In each case we identify from the responses the lessons to be learned.

In Section 9 we summarise the responses from the interviewees as to their key learnings from the behaviour change programmes they have described. Their answers which are listed in this section almost exactly map with their answers in Section 3 about the keys to success.

In Section 10 we list the responses we received to the wider question of what our respondents felt with their greatest learnings from their experience about bringing about behaviour change and what advice they would want to pass on to others. This is grouped under three headings:

- How to build buy-in
- The importance of taking enough time
- Other key issues

Summary

The learning summarised in this document is rich in experience and often hard-won wisdom. However, the research is plainly not statistically valid in any quantitative sense. We would prefer to see it as a source of conversation and further exploration rather than as providing any definitive answers in this very important but under-studied subject area.



Section 2 – Research purpose and method

The purpose of this project was to collect insights and experience as to what contributes to or gets in the way of achieving behavioural change in organisations.

We set out to interview 8–12 people who had led or been closely involved in such projects. We invited senior people whom we knew or who were recommended to us to participate. Some but not all were Steps clients and some (a minority) of the projects they discussed were ones we had been involved in.

In the event 14 respondents were identified who were asked to consider both a project that had been very successful and another which had been less or unsuccessful. One of the respondents combined their insights into more general lessons. A number of the respondents were unable to comment on a less or unsuccessful project. A full list of the respondents and organisations they were responding about can be found in Appendix 1.

In all cases the respondent was sent the questionnaire (see Appendix 2) a few days in advance. Interviews took up to 1 hour and followed the sequence of the questionnaire.

Comments were recorded without interpretation by us and subsequently fact checked with the interviewees.

At a one day workshop, eight people from Steps and the Change Management Institute (six of whom had had no involvement in the interviewing) discussed what they felt were the key insights from the responses.

This summary document was then compiled by Matthew de Lange, the project leader, with reference to the output of the workshop.



Section 3 – The overall keys to success in the successful projects

Question: What were the most important factors in bringing about the behavioural change?

In this section we invited the respondents to extract the key issues which had led to the success of their chosen successful project.

Their responses display a high degree of consistency and we have grouped those under five headings. In this section we have summarised and interpreted their comments. However, in section 9 respondents were asked to describe the most important lessons that they had learnt from the project about behaviour change. Their responses correlate almost exactly with the groupings we have used in this section and in section 9 we have listed their insights verbatim.

3.1 If your leaders don't mean it don't do it. (Cited as key by 11 of 13 respondents)

Far and away the most critical issue is the real commitment of senior leaders to the project.

Senior leadership commitment was cited in almost every one of the successful projects as a key factor in its success. Either the project originated from the highest level or the time was taken to ensure that all the most senior people were behind the project and supportive.

Not surprisingly in responding about the less successful or failed projects, the lack of senior leadership commitment was the number one cause of failure (see section 4.1). In addition, the challenge of building buy-in was the most commonly cited challenge even in the successful projects (see section 4.3).

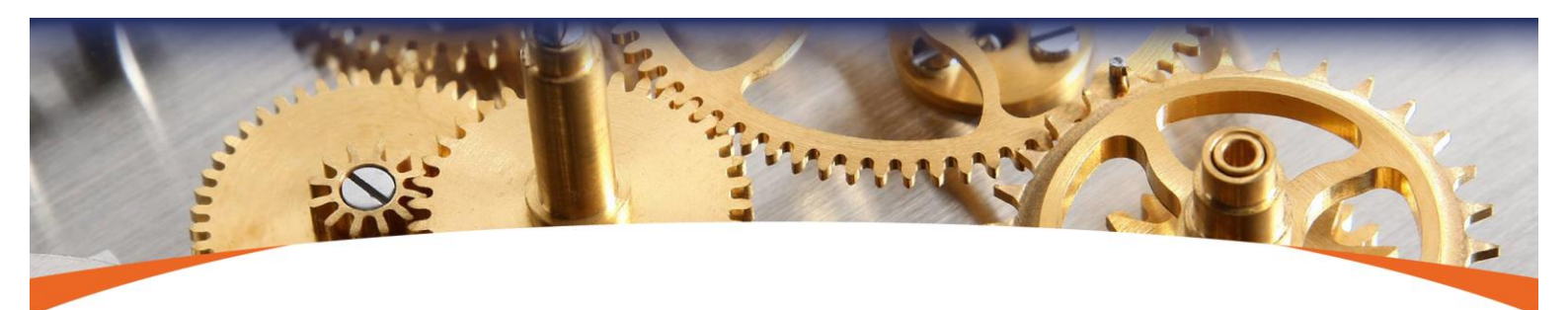
This may sound like a bit of a truism, certainly a common aspect of change theory, but it still is the case (as the unsuccessful projects prove) that many projects are undertaken without this level of support.

Senior leadership commitment takes two very important forms. It could be suggested that the first is widely recognised but the second less so.

- The first is that they must commit to the project, say loudly and clearly that they are committed to it and of course commit the necessary resources.
- The second and equally important is that they must be prepared to get involved on an every-day basis, demonstrating their commitment through their actions and their use of time not just through their words and their use of budget.

Lessons for Programme Leaders:

1. Don't go ahead until and unless you have senior leadership commitment.
2. Take the time to build the support and sponsorship. Invest the time upfront; don't think it will happen as you go along.
3. Invest time, possibly a distinct work stream, in working with the senior leadership to help them to understand the changes in behaviour that they personally will need to make; both



as a consequence of the project itself and in their day-to-day behaviours to demonstrate their support for the project.

3.2 Communications – listen and adapt

Not surprisingly, communication was the number two issue most often cited. But what was particularly interesting were the key messages about communication.

Of course it is really important to do a huge amount of communication but what appeared to make the difference in the successful project were:

- Honesty
- Listening
- Adapting

Success relies on building trust and people being prepared to work with the change not against it. The answer appears to be not to try and persuade people by talking to them, but instead to show that you are listening to them, respecting the culture of their part of the organisation and being prepared to adapt the way things are implemented in response to the considered views of people.

The respondents talked about being honest:

- About the drawbacks
- About how people will be affected by the change
- With yourself
- In your reporting to senior leadership.

This is quite challenging for those running projects who are often part of a central team and working to a tight budget with a clear message about a solution which they have been involved in developing and therefore already have commitment to. But one size does not fit all and people who are concerned are not simply resisting change; they are the people who run the business. They need to be listened to and the implementation needs to be adapted wherever it can to work for everyone because it'll work better and because by listening you will build the trust for it to happen at all.

Lessons for Programme Leaders

1. Plan for far more communications than you might imagine.
2. Make sure that the form of communication is as much about listening to people on the ground as it is to trying to inform them.
3. Be absolutely honest about the implications and consequences of the project. Be honest with yourself and your leaders.
4. Be willing to flex the model and adapt as the project progresses both to local variation and general improvements that may emerge from discussion.
5. Take the time to do this. Don't end up trying to force people to adopt in unrealistic and unreasonable timeframes because you haven't planned enough time.



3.3 Evidence-based business case

One of the distinguishing features of the successful projects appeared to be the focus on building a really credible and evidence-based case for the change so that it was not just seen as fad or whimsy or one person's good idea.

The project needs to be convincingly a “must have” not a “nice to have”. Large-scale organisational change of this sort is just too difficult and demanding to be worth undertaking unless there is a very demonstrable need for the change. So take the time to build the metrics to be able to answer challenges about the why.

Lessons for Programme Leaders

1. Build an evidence-based case for the change.
2. Demonstrate the financial or other benefits in a way which is persuasive and has or gains the commitment of senior leaders. When implementation starts that case for change should be made by the leadership not the project team.
3. Be clear that you have thought about the alternative ways of achieving this necessary outcome and believe that this way is best for a reason.

3.4 Is it clear what people have to do differently?

One of the key differentiators between the successful and less successful projects appears to be the clarity of what individuals and groups within the organisation needed to do differently as a result of the project: being really concrete as to the behavioural outcomes of the project and what people will be doing differently once it is successful. Also important is clarity about the route to getting there. People are more likely to be persuaded to come on the journey if they understand the route and believe it is credible.


Lessons for Programme Leaders

1. Take the time to build really clear pictures of what future behaviours as well as future systems and processes will look like.
2. Find creative ways to make those pictures understood and take the time and allow the discussion to ensure that they are both understood and believed.
3. Be clear also about the journey involved in getting there. People will trust you and believe in the project more if they believe the route map has been thought through and is credible.

3.5 Is anything happening?

The final common factor from the respondents about the keys to success is the importance of demonstrating progress in very visible ways. This is partly about communication of progress, but also about actions that fuel people's belief in the reality and importance of the change. For example:

- People leaving the organisation who were demonstrably not adapting to the change
- Celebration of individuals or teams in very visible ways who had demonstrated the new behaviours

- 
- Other developments in the organisation which are consistent with the change, such as investment in new buildings and facilities

Lessons for Programme Leaders

1. Plan for ongoing communications that demonstrate progress with the implementation for a considerable length of time.
2. Make sure that there are recognisable indicators that those who are adopting the new way are celebrated and those who are not are gone or moved.
3. This requires a separate piece of work with senior leadership to ensure they understand and are committed to the rewards and sanctions that will be necessary.



Section 4 – The biggest challenges and barriers to success

Questions: What were the biggest challenges and how did you overcome them/What were the most important factors in blocking or preventing change?

In this section we explored what were the causes of lack of change in the less successful projects and what were the barriers to change that had to be overcome in the successful ones. As with the keys to success there was a very high degree of consistency in the responses.

Not surprisingly there was also an overlap with the success factors. In other words the absence of the identified success factors certainly contributed greatly to the problems.

However the issues which caused the failure or challenges were described rather differently and we have grouped them under different headings:

1. The leadership challenge
2. The recognition challenge
3. The buy-in challenge
4. The embedding challenge
5. Evidence of seriousness
6. Project specific issues
7. The challenge of good learning interventions

4.1 The leadership challenge

The need for good and consistent high-level sponsorship and championing of the programme was seen as very important (see Section 3.1). But when it came to failures of leadership as a barrier or challenge the respondents raised specific issues. These took broadly three forms:

- Individualism and sometimes sabotage
- Poor practical leadership skills
- Failures of role modelling

Individualism

In these cases there were individual members of the leadership team who were not bought in and were allowed to get away with not supporting the project. In some cases this was the country leader so important geographies were not changing, and this could have a wider implication if other territories then saw what was happening. As one respondent put it: *the one country supported the whole of Europe so had a big impact – their [existing] system worked well and was highly customised, [they] didn't understand the benefits of the new system, and were highly sceptical it would meet their needs.*

Where this was overcome it was necessarily through top leadership acting to require cohesion and support. And by taking the time to listen to their explanations, show respect to their point of view and, if necessary, flex the approach.



Leadership skill

The problems that arose here were:

- Leaders who liked the idea of a particular change but had not actually built the commercial case for it to persuade others, yet were expecting a project team to make it happen anyway.
- Leaders who saw the commercial case and understood the change that others need to make but were unable or not helped to recognise the changes they themselves needed to make.
- Leaders who believed that they could achieve change with a stick and no carrot, and expected others to fall into line without building the buy-in.

As one respondent put it: *It was imposed from the global HR director. No discussion. No stakeholder management.*

Role modelling

A number of very telling examples were given of people not role modelling the new behaviours in ways which seriously damaged the hopes for implementation. For example:

- In a project where people were being encouraged to focus on their wellbeing and on their behaviours with colleagues, people noted their bosses not taking it on: *I can change my health habits et cetera but when it comes to Emotional Intelligence my boss is not like that.* In response the HR director and programme leader spent time with each exec and explained to them that it was their choice to become more effective or to make excuses.
- In another project about good team behaviours: *Other team members were not in the room (this programme was for the team leaders only). Though they were supposed to discuss issues with their teams around various topics there was some evidence that these meetings were poor and displayed all the team-leading behaviours that the programme was meant to be about.* The respondent also noted some of them appeared to lie about these meetings when they came back to the group.
- One of the most heartfelt was about HR itself who were the project owners: *HR! HR function [was] full of people who don't have enough delegated responsibility and don't have the skills to run projects and don't role model the behaviours they expect from others.*

4.2 The recognition challenge

The research strongly bears out that it is critical to recognise what is inadequate or inappropriate or can be improved within the current behaviours exhibited, and seeing what better looks like.

It takes three distinct forms:

- Intellectual recognition of the case for change
- Emotional (almost visceral) recognition of one's own behaviours and why they are inappropriate

- Recognition of what “better” looks like

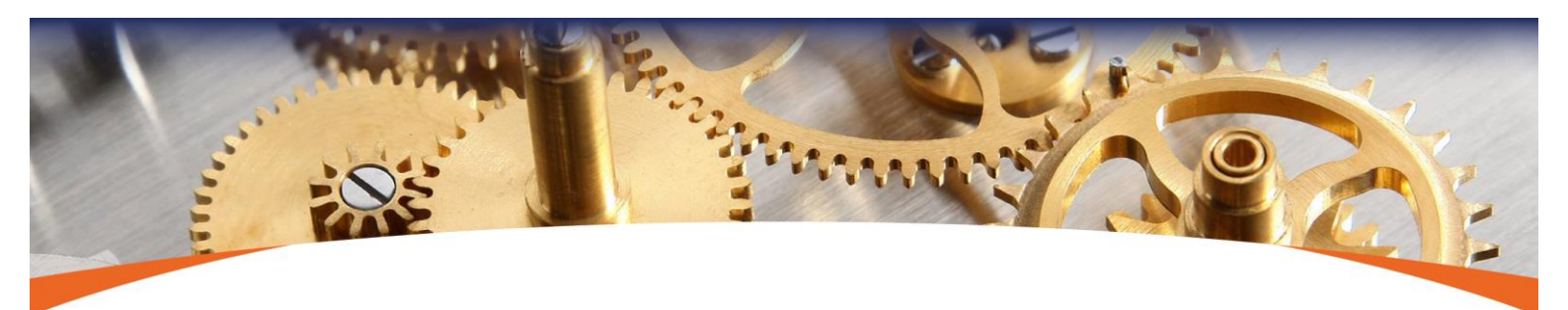
There were generalised problems in the less successful projects with inadequate focus on the business case (see 3.3) but respondents also identified some specific barriers e.g.:

- Senior leaders belief that they are clever and knowledgeable and right because they are senior and successful:
 - *Natural resistance amongst senior leadership that they could be doing something wrong*
 - *[We]Had to get them to take ownership of the problems further down the organisation.*
 - *[We] Achieved this by finding influencers to reinforce the message, and chipping away*
- History. There is a particular form of reluctance to see the problems where you have mergers or different ways of working in different geographies or departments:
 - *[it was] to do with history of growing through acquisition (i.e. people cherished their own way of doing things)*
- Push begets push. Over decades of working in this field my strongly held view is that people generally don't resist change – but they do resist being changed. That's why it's so crucial that the time is taken to let people get to the right conclusion for themselves:
 - *[there was] Resistance from feeling forced to change. [It was] overcome by allowing people to have their views – talking and persuading.*
- Deeply held assumptions. In many (all?) organisations the leaders hold (often unconsciously) untested assumptions. This deep attachment can block rational examination of the issues. So in one project discussed which was about encouraging agile and people-centred working practices:
 - *[We were] Challenging the culture of presenteeism. Dealing with bias. Assumption that you have to be seen to be working and assumption that clients would find it problematic [if you weren't available 24/7].*
- Recognition but not self-recognition. Leaders commonly see the need to change but they see it in others not themselves:
 - *The focus was on others not themselves (i.e. leaders did not see it)*
 - *Mind-set that change is not internal to them [but] an outside thing that would be taken care of like 'budgeting'. Not seeing that 'I' need to change.*

4.3 The buy-in challenge

This was the most often cited source of challenges and failure. Even if people were able to recognise the value of the change proposed they were not necessarily ready to go along with it for themselves and their people.

In few organisations will people just go along with changes because they are told to; and logic is not persuasive.



People need 3 things to get to “buy-in”.

- To have the time to internalise the change and the opportunity to make it their own, preferably by being able to modify or adapt it in some way so that it is “theirs”.
- To address the “how does it affect me” issues
- To see demonstration (not statements) over time that the change is real and matters.

Several respondents focused on the importance of building buy-in over time; continuing to chip away at opposition and reluctance. You can’t usually just run a change project and then feel it’s done and move on to the next project. Change is a long term process and you have to be ready for that investment.

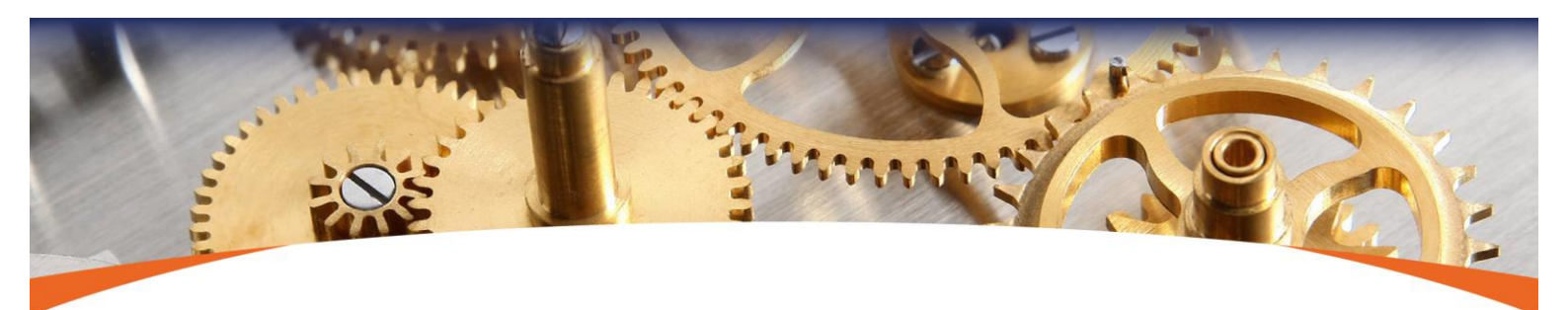
The examples the respondents gave included:

To have the time to internalise the change and the opportunity to make it their own. Preferably by being able to modify or adapt it in some way so that it is “theirs”.

- *[We] Needed to change manager mind-sets to see that this process would make them a good manager both in the business and outside of it (if they lost their job). Uncertainty about job security made them reluctant to go through the process. Merger of two neighbouring countries meant 9000 job losses. But a high level of success was achieved by that focus on building appreciation that the new skills would serve the managers well wherever they were.*
- *Cultural awareness – some people across the globe delayed introducing [the] new process. There was a different mind-set across the global business, [they] needed different explanations. [We] Had to allow a certain amount of customisation to some areas of the business, so it suits them. Don’t be too controlling about content, has to suit different audiences.*
- *Getting everyone on board. Sounding out, building understanding and getting stakeholders on side (need to talk about it, taking time to build buy in and support). [It’s crucial to]Keep separate the systems problems from the people issues. The system is merely a tool – implementation will depend on the people understanding and buying in.*
- *[There were] Suspicions about the programme – overcome through pilots, helping people feel involved in design by gathering feedback. Establishing ownership by the business, not HR.*

To address the “how does it affect me” issues

- *Making sure the aims were aligned to the business – both in the eyes of leaders and the people on the ground. Needed everyone to see the benefits to them and the business. [We had to] Communicate and be open to challenge (allow people to have a voice) – be prepared to make changes as a result. Have champions – not the usual suspects, but people with real cultural influence.*
- *[The problems were caused by] not being allowed to be transparent about the reasons for the project. [I was] told to say it was only for development. [We were] not able to be clear about the outcomes and consequences for the individual [which] led to distrust & not enough buy in or understanding.*

- 
- *What about my job? Is it changing? Do I have one? Overcome by small group conversations exploring and explaining and easing anxiety so people could function while the change was happening.*

To see demonstration (not statements) over time that the change is real and matters.

- *[There was] scepticism about the new approach. A lot of data was gathered on the first regional campaign to demonstrate that it was just as good as previous local ones [to overcome this].*

4.4 The embedding challenge

Not so many respondents talked about this as many of the unsuccessful projects never got to embedding! Here are two examples from successful projects of the steps taken for the long term.

One was a project that involved changing the client-facing behaviours of people as they became senior but these were very different from the skills that people needed when they were more junior.

- *The skill set in place (and being hired for) at junior level is different from what's needed for more client facing roles. The juniors are super smart, very technical – they haven't been hired for what we're now asking them to do. [So we] reviewed the recruitment methodology to focus more on relationship type skills.*

Another example talked about the support mechanisms put in place for the long term:

- *Maintaining/Sustaining momentum in a busy environment: addressed through long term (point in time) feedback, 360 team feedback, and accountability partners/peer mentors to help them continue to work on their behaviours.*

The lack of extensive response about embedding as a barrier or challenge is not, we believe, because it lacks importance, but because the biggest challenges or fatal barriers will have arisen earlier in the process. See Section 8 for detailed consideration of the key embedding techniques and their importance.

4.5 Evidence of seriousness

One of the keys to buy in is that people immediately see things changing around them so that buy-in continues to build. This was a key to success (3.5 above).


Without these signs any potential commitment quickly withers.

So in one successful project:

- *People [were] being let go – but at the same time new jobs were created in the hubs. Showed people the opportunities now available in terms of career progression.*

Whereas in unsuccessful ones:

- *Nothing physically changed after the programme – no change in systems/performance management, no visible change, no stick or carrot.*

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- *There wasn't felt to be any specific context for the need to change. This program was meant to be about team purpose and empowerment and it was seen by the CEO as an important change and linked to the business objective. They had a great facilitator but...when they left the room nothing was visibly different.*

4.6 Project specific issues

There were a number of challenges and sources of failure that were quite specific to the project but plainly worth learning from. Though several of these were overcome with good project leadership. Some of those which proved fatal were:

- Timescales – *[I was] only given 6 weeks to deliver*
- Trainers were chosen for their relevant positions (HR, Diversity) but they didn't carry the necessary weight/credibility within the business
- The Training instruction materials were too long/complex
- The attitude to the project. *[There was a] Belief that [the] change couldn't fail because this was the 3rd attempt and its success was too important. I.e. [it] was hoped that people were sufficiently scared of a third failure to make the change work.*

4.7 The challenge of good learning interventions

The only reason for including this heading is that there was virtually nothing said about the interventions used. The interventions were almost never where the problems lay. One or two respondents, in the lessons learnt section, talked about how, with hindsight, they would do things differently.

But in comparison to the focus on leadership, recognition, buy-in, embedding and evidence of seriousness it is clear that the problems are rarely if ever because the wrong training method or workshop style was used.

We are not in a position to speculate as to whether this is because:

- (a) This is the area people are most familiar with and therefore tend to get right or
- (b) It doesn't matter as much as the other areas.

See Section 7 for a comprehensive list of the techniques referred to by respondents.



Section 5 – Seeing the Need for change

Question: What (if any) particular activities were undertaken to enable the people going through the programme to recognise the shortcomings of their then current behaviour and the need to change?

In this section we explore the steps taken to enable people to recognise the need to change. They need to see what is inadequate about current behaviours and practices and/or what is more attractive about a different way of doing things.

One interesting aspect of the responses in this area was a general feeling that not enough attention is paid to this. That is easy to understand because the people running and leading the project, and the business leaders, have both spent lots of time themselves working through the need for change and what is going to be done about it. That means that by the time they engage with others they are already persuaded and therefore underestimate the journey which everyone else needs to go through.

Of the successful projects two approaches stand out very clearly from everything else tried.

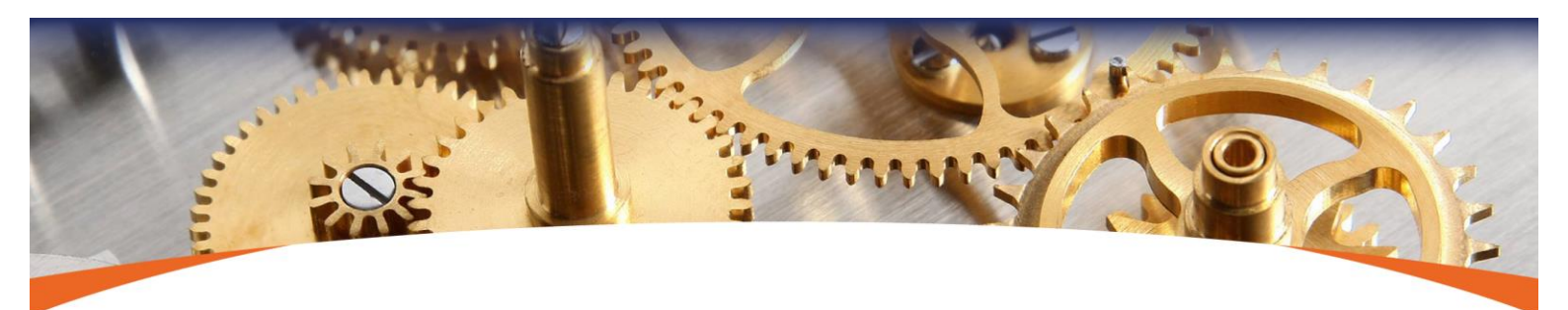
- The use of logic in the form of data and business cases.
- Getting people to explore current behaviours for themselves so as to come to an internalisation of the need to change.

It is surely the case that really successful change will engage both people's heads (with the data and commercials), but also the heart through people feeling the importance of change.

One question which would require further research is whether there is a logical sequence to these two stages. Is it more effective to win people over to the idea intellectually and then engage with them emotionally or vice versa?

Another important dimension is the nature of the programme itself. Our respondents were talking about their experience with projects that range from mergers and reorganisations, to large-scale systems implementations to changes in working practices, to styles of leadership and attitudes. It would appear that people focusing on organisational and systems changes are less likely to prioritise the need to hold up a behavioural mirror to current practices. Our respondents cited that they are far more likely to dive straight in to explaining the intellectual benefits of a new way of working and showing what that is. Given the number of reorganisations cited where people continue to retain tribal royalties to previous groupings and new systems where people continue to find ways to do things the old way (with workarounds) it would suggest that the behavioural mirror is just as vital in these cases.

The only other technique of note that was mentioned several times for the successful projects was the (very familiar) one of talking to people, in groups or individually, to discuss the challenges, and encourage people to embrace a new way of working.



Interestingly the unsuccessful projects that were discussed mainly referred to that discursive approach and in no case referred to either a good intellectual business cases being made or emotional engagement through holding up a mirror to current behavioural practices.

Eight of our respondents described a less or unsuccessful project, and their answers to this question were particularly telling i.e. almost nothing was done at this crucial stage of the behaviour change journey. The responses they gave for these projects in relation to this question about helping people see the need for change were:


Comments relating to the failure to help people see the need:

- *Little!*
- *Very little*
- *The case for change was never made.*
- *New set of behaviours [was] required (i.e. not about the shortcomings of existing behaviours) [but] no work put in to show what the new behaviours were and why they were beneficial.*
- *[Without work on “seeing the need”] You don’t have sight of what you’re aiming for, so don’t have sight of current behaviours.*
- *They randomly surveyed team members to get feedback but this was not specific to individual leaders – so did not encourage individual leaders to see themselves.*
- *No forward planning – how do processes work in multiple locations.*
- *[There was a] focus on practical change – [but] no human aspects.*
- *Attempts to do this [i.e. help people see the need for change] were not accepted and senior stakeholders feared losing control. A culture of not taking responsibility for failings and low competency amongst some senior executives made this impossible.*
- *[There was] Heavy intervention after problem was realised (i.e. that people did not see the need for change).*
- *General observation: This is the problem with open enrolment – [it] lacks the motivation for change.*

Comments about what was done:

- *Some communications and discussion.*
- *Adult to adult conversations.*
- *Tried to speak to all the people who mattered – [but were] denied access by their leader.*
- *Listening to them – actioned because of what some of the managers wanted (but the ones who didn’t see it were closer to the leader).*
- *Plan for people to get together, but company head did not attend – no visible governance.*

In comparison 11 of the 13 respondents who answered this question for a successful project focused on either building a data-driven business case or building emotional commitment or both. Of the other two cases in one the respondent acknowledged that they did not do this well for the reason given above.

- 
- *Not enough time [was] was spent here.*
 - *[It is an] Area which does not get enough attention.*
 - *Decisions [were] made by the top, [but there was not enough patience to bring employees in and give them time.*
 - *Leaders have been involved for months, already been through the arguments and been persuaded and moved on in their heads - no patience to allow the employee to do the same thing.*

In the other exception the case had already been made by a previous failed attempt: *The need had been created by the previous reorganisation so people needed it. So perceiving the need was implicit.*

Lessons for Programme Leaders

1. Persuade the leadership of the requirement to allow time for people to see the need for change for themselves. Don't present them with a solution without them seeing the need.
2. Build a really good data-driven business case. This is a must-have not nice-to-have
3. Create emotional recognition of the need to change. Hearts and mind; not mind alone.



Section 6 – Building ownership and personal commitment

Question: What (if any) particular activities were undertaken to enable or motivate the people going through the programme to take responsibility for achieving the change?

In this section we explored what steps had been taken to build real buy-in, to encourage people to “own” the changes necessary for them and their teams.

Even for the successful projects, respondents felt that relatively little was done in this area: *We perhaps didn't do enough on this.* In addition, what was done varied from case to case with relatively little consistency.

This is perhaps because leaders rely on the ‘see the need’ stage i.e. the belief that once people see the need for change either intellectually and/or emotionally, they will adopt the proposed new ways of working.

Techniques for building ownership that were mentioned by three or more (of the 13) respondents were:


- The use of super users, coaches or other support to help people build their confidence in the new way
- Having the opportunity to co-create the new way of working so that they had a stake in the solution

In some cases sticks were used or the consequences were relied on to ensure adoption:

- *Performance management was aligned with new ways and specific to delivering the change (20% of leaders' objectives for that year)*
- *We did just assume they would want to be motivated. There was no immediate sense of consequences. More just a matter of recognising that it would be career limiting in the longer term if they did not adapt to the new skills.*
- *No stick or carrot (although there was never a threat attached to the programme, in the medium term, people who didn't adapt have largely now gone.)*
- *Formal process – expectations set out in contracts, it was a required change.*

There were other tactics cited but never by more than one respondent:

- *Boring them until they have no alternative*
- *Allowing them to step down [from the new role] if they know it's not for them*
- *Use of bespoke cases addressing their actual situations*
- *Focused on less compliant [individuals]*
- *Bring people in from other organisations to talk about[their] experience*
- *Used a stop/start/continue to create personal commitments*



Depending on the nature and scale of the project it appears it may be possible to build buy-in before proceeding further, but that may not always be practical. There is a critical need to maintain focus on buy-in and keep reinforcing belief in the new way of working.

In the less or unsuccessful projects attempts to build buy-in overwhelmingly did not happen. In 6 of the 8 less/unsuccessful projects discussed respondents cited this failing:

- *Effectively none. It didn't happen.*
- *Harsh approach – make a decision, on the bus or off the bus*
Management by threats
- *None at this stage and the HR lead people were unclear and unhappy.*
- *None - There would have been no consequences of not adapting behaviour but you might have looked out of place and be seen as counter-cultural.*
- *Motivation wasn't possible as the culture of dysfunction meant that information sharing never got beyond the point of informing, there was no personal connection or relationship to build or harness the emotional response of motivation.*
- *No selling benefits of new behaviours. Told about new systems benefits – nothing on human elements. No focus on hearts and minds. Inconsistent messages from leadership about the change – the messages you received depended on which division you were in.*

Perhaps not surprisingly, getting buy-in is in the top three listed by our respondents as the challenges and source of problems in behaviour change projects (see section 4.3).

Lessons for Programme Leaders

1. A lot of thought and empathy is needed at this stage. Don't assume people will adopt the change just because an intellectual case has been made for it.
2. Getting buy-in takes time and needs to be continually reinforced. People must have the opportunity to surface concerns and be listened to.
3. Good techniques include encouraging co-creation so that people have the opportunity to shape the solution and also providing lots of support, coaching and problem solving



Section 7 – Acquiring the new skills and attitudes

Question: What activities were undertaken to enable the people going through the programme to acquire the new skills and attitudes necessary for success?

This section set out to explore the techniques that were used in the projects to ensure that the people who needed to change their behaviour had the skills or attitude to do so.

Perhaps what was most interesting about the responses to this question was when looking at the less or unsuccessful projects. Unlike the other areas, the responses here were not so dissimilar from what was done in the more successful projects. Eight of the nine who responded about less or unsuccessful projects were able to describe the techniques that were used, though they were able in some cases to cite weaknesses in the approach:

- *It was more about appointing people than training them but... There were workshops run e.g. on cross functional team work*
- *The profiling itself was well done by 3 external agencies and about half the people made good use of the profiles.*
- *Reflection on their team, its purpose, why do we exist etcetera. Meetings with their teams. Team audit et cetera. Group discussion with other leaders with expert facilitation*
- *Huge effort (communications and training) around system and system changes – marked as the biggest change [though] Very little on relationships and attitudes*
- *Good Trainer training programme*
- *Allowed to send emails and do Webinars but not allowed access to the people directly*
- *This was a total failure. Activities were: Private conversations, workshops planning the future, review of current position, review of strategy – all efforts failed. Communications to staff also failed – staff deliberately became more entrenched in existing behaviours.*

In one of the 8 cases they focused on what could have been better:


- *Measurement of training impact is not done well. We need to understand what the business looks for on broader programs. We could feedback more to the business on what has been achieved. We could do more check-ins (survey/focus groups) to gauge where the skills from open enrolment courses are being applied. We could get feedback from managers on how a participant in a programme has done, have there been changes.*

In only one case was virtually nothing attempted:

- *Dragging people along, no care, turning system off. Wasn't dealt with at local level, all decisions and "tell" coming from a high level. No patience – "get on with it, we don't have time for this"*

In the successful projects an array of different techniques and approaches were deployed - with none consistently being cited more than others.

- *Lots of communication*

- 
- *Workshops – training in how to use new systems, tools, video, job aids, webinars*
 - *Open office hours for help*
 - *Videos from leaders endorsing [the change]*
 - *FAQs, Wizards*
 - *Experts walking the managers through the new processes the first times*
 - *Combined effort – pre-work/reading, workshop, e-learning to review the learning*
 - *Created videos of all the role plays for them to review by themselves to remember key learnings*
 - *We engaged with the managers as coaches to provide practice opportunities and feedback*
 - *½ day Workshops with individual and team practice sessions. Videoing of presentations/meetings of practice pitches.*
 - *Provided information e.g. on how to run a remote team and advice on how to explain the different ways of working to clients*
 - *Leadership programmes included discussions around how to support the initiative*
 - *A partner programme on how to have a good conversation – included examples related initiative i.e. dealing constructively with requests*
 - *Information for all of our people on how to escalate issues (e.g. if their leader is not supporting requests)*
 - *Giving people examples, case studies, illustrations of what’s worked for others*
 - *A conventional rollout. The programme was three years ago and covered a 12 month period including*
 - *A 2 1/2 –3 day intensive workshop.*
 - *Three small group coaching sessions (attended 83% one, 67% two and about 33% all three)*
 - *A one day follow-up*
 - *Better teams program*
 - *A 1 day wrap-up*
 - *Classroom elements – experiential learning, lots of discussion & input*
 - *Coaching*
 - *Lots of feedback*
 - *Books – chapters for each module*
 - *Forum*
 - *Guest speakers – for example football coach talking about improving team performance*
 - *Bringing in social enterprises to help solve business problems – real life business situations*
 - *Film clips – resources. Shown in team meetings*

It appears that this is not the area where projects particularly succeed or fail. That is exceptionally interesting in its own way as in the vast majority of programmes far more attention (and budget) is given to sourcing and running the various change interventions than is given to the other three stages; seeing the need, building commitment to change and subsequently embedding the change.



Lessons for Programme Leaders

1. Think carefully about the right techniques and intervention
2. This is not the area which will make or break your project so ensure enough time and budget goes into the other stages of the journey



Section 8 – Embedding the change

Question: What (if any) particular activities were undertaken to reinforce and embed the behavioural change over the ensuing months?

In this section we were exploring the steps that were taken to embed the change so that it became the new way of working in the long term.

In the successful projects respondents were able to point at a significant range of activities with some approaches recurring with considerable frequency. In order of mention:

8.1 Leadership continuing to demonstrate focus on the change and monitor progress

- *Working parties to ensure change happened.*
- *Reports, sharing of feedback - informal at first.*
- *Senior leaders must ask/talk about it and demonstrate that it is important to them.*
- *Monitoring data – pulse survey, engagement survey, monetary monitoring, external standings.*
- *Enhanced leadership programme to ensure leaders have leadership skills, not just technical skills.*
- *Being seen to be following through with issues raised in sessions.*
- *Feedback from the system about tickets (new jobs) raised.*
- *Keep people informed of progress – we've achieved steps 1, 2 etc. Have clear milestones*
- *Lots of responses on the employee survey which was every 12 weeks – 100,000 responses. Listened to the feedback and adapted the approach*
- *The survey focused on how people felt as well as what they were doing*
- *In year three there was a review and further modification of the approach*
- *Critical to embedding is to work WITH the people – yes there must be consequences to non-compliance but you must also listen and adapt the processes/systems*

8.2 Reinforcement and continuing communications for the long term:

- *Follow-up activities, Newsletters/communications.*
- *Videos to help reinforce.*
- *Digitisation of the whole programme – covering all content to be shared in newsletters/emails/other programmes etc.*
- *Feedback session 1-2-1 with an actor to help with specific scenarios.*
- *The reinforcing included working with Leaders on change leadership plans.*
- *Keep talking about it.*
- *The feedback and activities were over a sustained period.*
- *Reinforcing video modules required as part of mandatory requirements*



8.3 Celebrations of success and consequence of non-adoption

- *Celebrations – acknowledgement of milestones, write ups on employee site, spotlighting successes in meetings, personal achievements recognised.*
- *Reward/pay/performance management.*
- *Taking action where necessary.*
- *Have successes.*
- *People left who obviously didn't adapt, or whose strengths didn't suit the new system – important to make it a positive story*
- *Consequences.*
- *Award ceremonies – who has done the best (employee of the month etc.)*

8.4 Coaching and support groups


- *Coaching Sets.*
- *Managers coaching and providing practice opportunities.*
- *Option of becoming coaches once the programme was completed.*
- *Bringing them together to help them build a network to lean on.*
- *Champions – from all areas of the business. Coach people informally on behaviours.*
- *Peer support.*
- *It's important to involve managers in coaching/supporting after the training.*

8.5 Process and organisational changes

- *Productive codes [i.e. time on an internal activity being treated as client-facing]*
- *The new system was subsequently (but not immediately) linked to bonuses.*
- *External Diversity Board established to monitor standards and Client panels set up to feed back what they expected of people.*
- *Force majeure – no jobs no department! Had to adapt.*

In the unsuccessful projects, perhaps not surprisingly, there was very little here. In some cases steps were taken to try and overcome the shortcomings of the project as a whole:


- *None. Change not achieved.*
- *Just repetition. The new structure was actually disbanded after two or three years at which point most [of those in the new roles] left! As did the global head of HR!*
- *Efforts to try and bring everyone together – mixed training, mentoring etc. Still ongoing.*
- *The hallmark of a failed project there was just re-iteration of original messages and positioning and no response to feedback that things were not working. There was no room for a change in approach as the negative feedback was responded to with a “we'll hammer it home harder they need to be forced to understand”.*
- *Tenacity! It was a “Crap launch” but leader was a one-person army in doing it and making it happen.*

- 
- *It was yearlong project – when it finished, all activity stopped. Things had to start up again.*

One interesting question which is not clearly answered in the responses is the trade-off between a hard stop and ongoing modification. While several comments stressed the importance of continuing to adapt and modify to build continuing support, others see a value in setting a cut-off date by which compliance must have occurred. Further research could be of value here.

Lessons for Programme Leaders

1. Embedding is key. Don't do the project at all if you're not able to follow through.
2. 5 key areas to include in your embedding strategy are:
 - Leadership continuing to demonstrate focus on the change and monitor progress
 - Reinforcement and continuing communications for the long term
 - Celebrations of success and consequence of non-adoption
 - Coaching and support groups
 - Process and organisational changes
3. Decide whether to have a hard stop or ongoing modifications



Section 9 – What our respondents learnt from their experience on this project

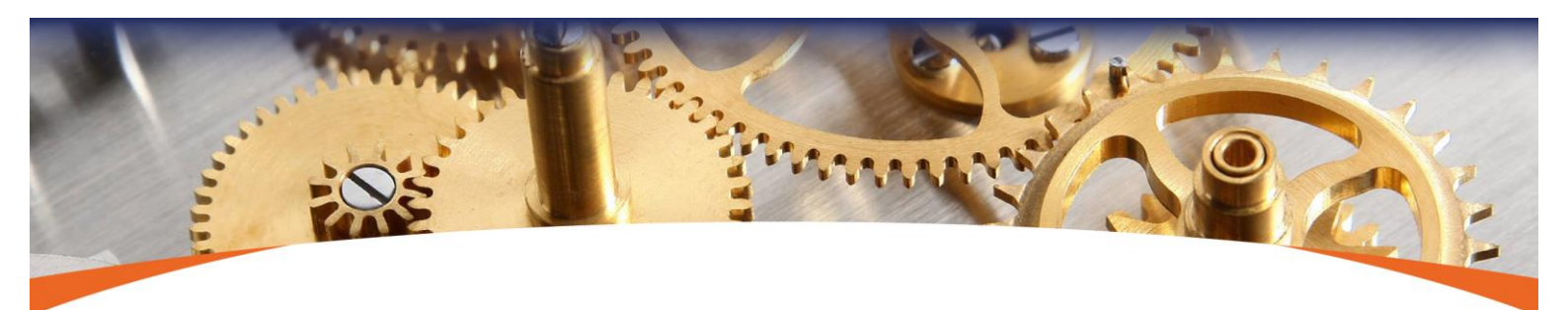
Question: What was your greatest learning from this project about achieving lasting behavioural change?

In this section we invited respondents to draw out their key learning from the project(s) they were responding about.

Interestingly the issues cited largely followed the pattern of those issues they had raised as driving successful change in Section 3. The key lessons are probably therefore the same as those in Section 3 but we thought it might be useful to share the specific words given to us by respondents.

9.1 If your leaders don't mean it don't do it.

- *Don't try and do too much too soon – don't rush the preliminary steps and build support.*
- *Pay attention! Make sure you have early checks of engagement from leaders.*
- *Stakeholder management – almost all problems lead back to this.*
- *The key is to have the sponsorship and for there to be a pain point – show us the effect of this – we can use the data.*
- *Never underestimate the power of people and their network as they can break you.*
- *You MUST have total backing of the bosses and senior executives.*
- *The bosses/senior execs MUST act as role models. Those below them model their behaviours on what the senior leaders do (not what they say).*
- *Set the tone from the top. Leadership to influence partners; partners to influence staff.*
- *Leadership not singing from same song sheet – have to be already reflecting change or happy to be told when things go wrong.*
- *Consistency and credibility of who is “running the change” is key.*
- *Good informal, caring, output focused leadership. With that, stuff works. Without it the time of the project team is diverted into compensating for bad and ineffectual leadership. (having to clear the field of rocks before ploughing and sowing)*
- *When there are blocks at the top – with the chief sponsor / most high profile protagonist, this is the place where things need to be corrected as the false thinking cascades down and poisons everything.*
- *The change manager cannot work around senior staff who are totally misguided and off track. The risk that they present to the project success should be shown to them in bold stark terms early and everything rallied to shift them or shift their responsibility in order for someone with the right thinking to have carriage of the program / project*
- *Consistent good behaviour by leaders*
- *Do not assume that seniority brings understanding – there were about 100 senior leaders who couldn't see the need or didn't have the skills to lead the business. They saw themselves as “finance” or “treasury”, not as part of the overall business leadership.*



9.2 Communications? – listen and adapt

- *Don't accept the facile truth – even if you're busy.*
- *Make sure you engage the team locally, handle with care.*
- *ACCA (Awareness, Comprehension, Commitment, Action). Awareness and Comprehension take the longest to get to, and take the most effort.*
- *Must have transparency.*
- *You must communicate well and, in particular, LISTEN to people on the ground.*
- *You must be willing to flex the planned approach. With the best will in the world the “global” approach might genuinely not work in, say, Asia.*
- *Make sure you know the politics/history of departments, had big effect.*

9.3 Evidence-based business case


- *Don't underestimate the importance of the explanation of the why*
- *Make sure there is a business benefit to the change!*
- *What is the case for change, the benefits - i.e. stakeholder management*
- *I now approach change project projects differently. I ask: is this impacting business results now?*
- *Have to put data back in front of the managers e.g. the cost of not doing the training.*
- *The importance of taking the time to plan and get robust challenge on the plan's reality before starting any execution - once the execution starts you are in to firefighting - if you take the time to plan properly [you] probably up your chances of not having situations needing firefighting.*

9.4 Is it clear what people have to do differently?

- *Test answers, build a clear and supported proposition*
- *Don't rush – have clear steps and actions mapped*
- *Be clear about why the change is necessary.*
- *Do you know what good looks like?*

9.5 Is anything happening?

- *Do we have measures to hold people accountable?*
- *Show the success of the program*
- *Must make a continuous noise about it*
- *This is not “just another programme” – this is the way of life now*
- *If the messages are not reinforced by what is happening around you the chances of change are slim*
- *There was no visible sign of a change in their context to reinforce the need to change their behaviour*

- 
- *You need to persist after implementation. Regular follow ups necessary to drive the new behaviour and processes to become established*
 - *Serious management consequences of non-acceptable behaviour. Clients were rejected for their unacceptable behaviour and people, including partners, were let go for non-appropriate behaviour.*



Section 10 – Key Insights

Question: If the answers above have not identified it already, what is your most important learning or advice for others about achieving lasting behavioural change?

This final question of our interviews asked respondents to distil their key learning; what they'd want others to know. Around 50 separate points were made by our 14 respondents.

Several of the points could be classified in multiple ways, but two areas seem to really stand out:

- How to get buy-in and the importance of listening and adapting (18 responses)
- Change takes time. You can't rush it. (10 responses)

The remaining comments were spread over a range of aspects of behaviour change and because this is such a valuable question we have grouped all the responses below as verbatim.

10.1 How to get buy-in and the importance of listening and adapting (18 responses)

Focusing on the individuals, their world and what motivates them:


- *Think about your audience for every stage of the process – what do they want to hear?*
- *Think about worst case, and what people will do to get round change.*
- *Do things in their own environment – recognise the real world is different to artificial environment of training room. Help them transfer the learning to the real world.*
- *People only change for two reasons – this is a compelling future or being where they are is too uncomfortable.*

Be honest, encourage honesty and listen

- *Don't ignore signals of thing not going to plan*
- *Humans naturally want to hear a pleasant story*
 - *Be suspicious of this*
 - *Encourage honesty, don't hide things*
 - *Accept you won't always have good news and act on bad news*
 - *Focus on it "it can't all be good, tell me the bad" – seek it out and be prepared to hear it.*
 - *Bad news is what makes you think of what could be wrong.*
- *ABC - Authenticity: you have to be genuine, people need to be able to believe in you.*
- *Change thrives in a cultural context of trust and understanding and pragmatic expectations.*
- *Don't ignore the truth – it will not effect change permanently if you do.*

Be adaptable. Build buy-in by giving people a say.

- *Expect the unexpected and adapt.*
- *People need to 'opt in' i.e. want to change. Giving people a choice is a valuable tool.*

- 
- *Building accountability along the way – keep ownership in the hands of the participants not HR. Establish “what’s the benefit for us”.*
 - *Need to bring people along, not just tell them. “Let’s do this together”*
 - *ABC - Collaborate: Can’t be done in isolation – needs to collaborate both people & projects.*
 - *Be open to changing your mind and adapting the approach. People do things differently in different cultures and things just play out differently in different places. So be flexible and adapt.*
 - *Information about what, when, why and how the change is must be communicated and there must be feedback from impacted stakeholders who have an avenue for that feedback to have a meaningful contribution to the ongoing change approach or framing of communications.*
 - *Change works best when small groups or teams are able to work with it themselves and determine what will be best for them to adopt it and what support they need. A one size fits all is not the best approach – actual embedding needs to be enabled at a granular level.*
 - *Co-design change and it’s more likely to sink in – even if unpleasant.*


10.2 Change takes time. You can’t rush it. (10 responses)

- *Don't do things in a rush.*
- *Allow for a lot of time – pace of business doesn’t allow for venting and care, but this is key.*
- *Think about the learning journey end-to-end, beyond the first 12-18 months.*
- *Being too short term focused makes it more difficult to implement long term things at a later point e.g. digitization now would be easier if we’d planned for it.*
- *Need to think on a 3-4 year scale.*
- *Accept something needs to be constantly worked on – it’s not ‘achieved’ within a timescale.*
- *Change is a long-term process and needs to be recognised as such from the start.*
- *Investment upfront is necessary & important – time on buy in. Get people on board.*
- *Create a programme which is not a 1 day event – people don’t change overnight.*
- *ABC – Brave: observe, be strong, be seen, - even if it means pausing on the action.*

10.3 Other key lessons

How you manage the project and yourself (7 responses)

- *Make sure numbers stand up – make sure you don’t lose credibility.*
- *Make sure it’s your day job – so you can dedicate the time and focus that you need.*
- *Go as big as you need to - don’t allow yourself to be cowed into doing the minimum, if you genuinely believe that you need more than that (e.g. because budget is tight). It is far better to spend £1M and achieve the desired result than spend £500K and achieve nothing!*
- *Always have a clear view of where you are.*
- *Put a plan in place – communications consistent and helpful.*
- *Decided to move away from programmes based on cohorts and cascades, sheep dips etc.*

- 
- *Now focused on finding hot spots where there is a need for help/change. Where is the pain? Who needs it/wants?*

Make sure the goals are clear and progress is visible (5 responses)

- *Identification of the end state upfront e.g. what the new skills/behaviours will look like in practice – get this from the senior leadership. (NB leaders are not naturally equipped to answer this, but you can ask them “who does this well?” “Who has made the leap well from technical to client for focus” etc.)*
- *Be very clear on the outcome, purpose, benefit to the employees/end user (or customer)*
- *You must cut off the old ways of doing things*
- *There is no substitute for data. Prove it! Show them the numbers. Including capturing change behaviours and other soft information through surveys, analysis etc. You can make behaviour factual.*
- *Milestones*

Make sure the leaders are leading (3 responses)

- *Change projects are best when they’re business led, not just from change management/L&D/HR. “I can do the mind but leaders need to do the heart”.*
- *Get to leaders in a moment of crisis or necessary change.*
- *Change must be seen to be understood and embraced by leaders – who have taken some personal change on board themselves and modelled it.*

Don’t make assumptions (3 responses)

- *Don’t make assumptions.*
- *Ask yourself: what will you do if people don’t go along.*
- *Don’t make assumptions. Take longer and think through whether you have all the available information before deciding on approaches.*



APPENDIX 1: Respondents

Contributing organisations:

Arla Foods
Change Management Institute
Dechert LLP
Deloitte
HSBC
IBM
ING
Network Rail
Nomura
Pearson Publishing
Penguin Random House
Pfizer
Sky

Contributing respondents

Job titles are either at the time of responding or at the time of the projects described:

Sarah Barron – Senior Director, Global Talent and Leadership
Steven Berkery – Global Head of Talent Development
Laura Cochran – VP Learning and Development
Emma Codd – Managing Partner for Talent
Anita Day – Leader Culture Transformation
Luigi Fierro – Global Head of Performance Management
Liz Jones – Senior Director Talent and Organizational Capability
Jules Livingston – Director of Thought Leadership
Jo Mallia – Director, Learning and Development
Lorraine Martins MBE – Director of Diversity and Inclusion
Satra Sampson-Arokium – Director of Diversity and Inclusion
May Steele – Global HR Director
Tracey Waters - Head of People Development and Comms
Ingo Zimmerman – Big Deals Leader, Europe



Appendix 2: Questionnaire


Bring to mind the most and the least successful large scale behavioural change programmes you have been involved in (or have good knowledge of). If you don't have a most and least example you can identify please answer just for the one you can.

The Most Successful Project

1. What was the project? This question is not vital so please don't disclose details that might identify the project if you'd prefer not to. It's more important that we learn what worked and what went wrong.
2. What were the most important factors in bringing about the behavioural change? Please prioritise no more than five
3. What were the biggest challenges and how did you overcome them?
4. What (if any) particular activities were undertaken to enable the people going through the programme to recognise the shortcomings of their then current behaviour and the need to change?
5. What (if any) particular activities were undertaken to enable or motivate the people going through the programme to take responsibility for achieving the change?
6. What activities were undertaken to enable the people going through the programme to acquire the new skills and attitudes necessary for success?
7. What (if any) particular activities were undertaken to reinforce and embed the behavioural change over the ensuing months?
8. What was your greatest learning from this project about achieving lasting behavioural change?

The Less Successful Project

9. What was the project? This question is not vital so please don't disclose details that might identify the project if you'd prefer not to. It's more important that we learn what worked and what went wrong.
10. What were the most important factors in blocking or preventing the behavioural change? Please prioritise no more than five.

- 
11. What (if any) particular activities were undertaken to enable the people going through the programme to recognise the shortcomings of their then current behaviour and the need to change?
 12. What (if any) particular activities were undertaken to enable or motivate the people going through the programme to take responsibility for achieving the change?
 13. What activities were undertaken to enable the people going through the programme to acquire the new skills and attitudes necessary for success?
 14. What (if any) particular activities were undertaken to reinforce and embed the behavioural change over the ensuing months?
 15. What was your greatest learning from this project about what blocks or prevents lasting behavioural change?

General

16. If the answers above have not identified it already, what is your most important learning or advice for others about achieving lasting behavioural change?