
Change with Engagement - a case study in getting the basics right

by Arnab Banerjee and Marie King



Abstract

This case study covers a period of 18 months in which a major infrastructure business unit in the public sector underwent significant developments in its ways of working. Engagement of staff was measured at the beginning, the middle and the end, and followed the classic 'change curve' very closely; the final results outperforming the rest of the organisation. Some of the key elements of classical Change literature were missing – eg Guiding Coalition, Vision for Change, Reward and Recognition - but there was a heavy emphasis on Quick Wins, Personal Contact and Infrastructure. All practitioners are familiar with change programmes that start off with grand statements but then do not follow through with meaningful content – leading to disengagement with that initiative and others that follow. In order to deliver high levels of engagement, this paper emphasises the need to focus on the more mechanical steps and having 'meat in the sandwich' from the beginning.

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Introduction

'Anything interesting going on in your area that I can get my teeth into?' Arnab asks his friend, Andrew (not his real name), one slow August day. Andrew is a report to the Director of a major infrastructure programme – more than 100 staff, a forecast spend in excess of £16bn and a duration of 20 years.

A couple of days later, an e-mail from Andrew spills out several spreadsheets. These are the results of various studies – one carried out by a Big 4 Consultancy, another by an Internal Assurance/Audit Team and a third by Central Government, each one examining the working arrangements of the programme in significant depth. There are more than 70 improvement actions. Arnab puts forward a proposal on how the work could be tackled going forward and is told by the Director, 'Ok – some good thinking here. Now this is your problem. Welcome aboard.'

This case study covers Engagement, one key aspect of any 'change journey'. In this case, it is measurable. The parent organisation runs annual and mid-year Engagement Surveys (anonymous and run by an independent agency) for its 18,000 staff with major business units receiving individual results.

'Performing better than the rest of the organisation' is put into Arnab's personal objectives for the Engagement Survey - annual survey in September and mid-year in March.

Name: Arnab Banerjee						
Item	Weight	Objective	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	
Specific Personal Objective	25%					
	3	5%	Engagement Score	within 10% of peers	on par with peers	outperforming peers

Table 1: Performance Objective – 'this is now personal!'

Arnab joins the Leadership Team, gathers his Development team - including Marie, as Business Change Manager - and we're off; 3 main themes, 12 work-streams.

The Key Developments – a Short Summary

The development actions covered every element of the business unit. Risk Management, Reporting, Process and Quality, Governance, Stakeholder Management, Organisational Development, Resource Management, Operating Model, Delivery and Commercial Strategy, Estimating, People Development to name some of the headlines. The key point here is that the work affected every member of the business unit and was not restricted to particular areas or people.

Why are we using the word 'Developments' and not 'Change'? The Director was clear in his view that he did not 'believe' in Change. His position was that these were 'obvious' developments, ones which just had to be done. He considered them to be evolutionary, and top-down direction was there to be followed – 'I don't buy that we somehow have to get everyone's agreement to what we are doing. As senior management, we set direction that others need to follow.'

Case Study Hypothesis

This case study will attempt to show that, based on the above direction, while some of the formal elements of 'change' were missing, enough of the 'mechanical' or 'basic' aspects were implemented to deliver a significantly positive result in Engagement scores – outperforming the parent organisation. So, even in a situation where the emphasis may not be on securing buy-in, high levels of engagement are still achievable.

To make use of common Change vocabulary that readers will be familiar with, well known frameworks - Kotter (8-Step) and Shapiro (7 Levers) – will be used to analyse the work done.

The Engagement Results ... to maintain your interest

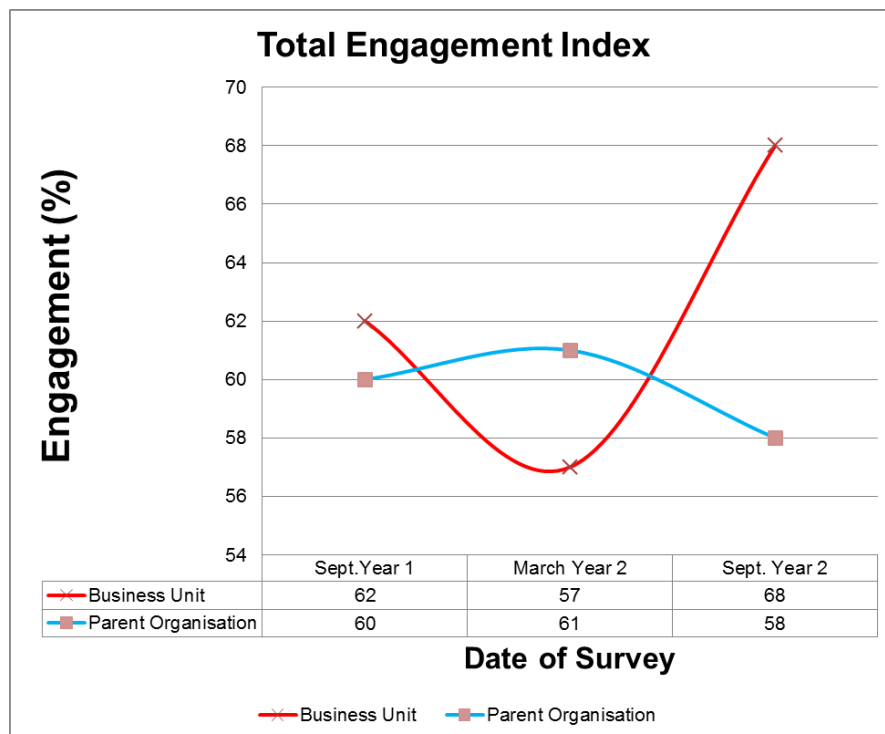


Fig. 1 – Total Engagement Index – Business Unit and Parent Organisation

The **Total Engagement Index** (a composite score) is made up of several elements:

Engagement with Team and Wider Business: Measuring support and collaboration both inside and outside the unit

Engagement with Work: Measuring enjoyment of work, satisfaction, recognition, understanding of one's role and involvement in decisions

Engagement with Management: Driven by the level of help and support, reinforcement, encouragement with innovation and performance feedback from line managers

Engagement with Brand: Focused on the individual's commitment and identification with the parent organisation

Engagement with Change and Leadership: Driven by confidence of a clear vision, open and honest communication from senior managers, being safe to challenge and change being well managed

Fig. 1 above shows the profile of the Total Engagement Index over the period from September Year 1 (when the Development Team started work) to September Year 2 and includes the smaller March Year 2 survey. Total Engagement was significantly higher in Year 2 and outperformed the organisational metric – but with a dip in between.

The curve shows a profile very similar to the classic [Change Curve](#) (Fig. 2).

The Change Curve

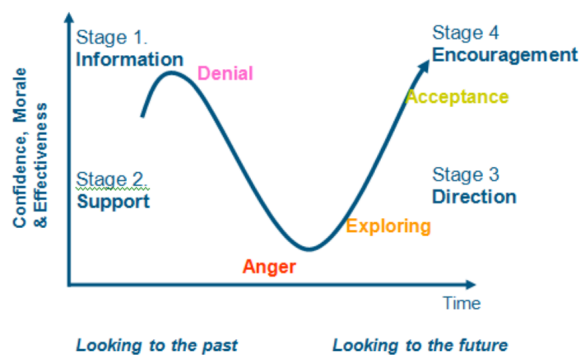


Fig. 2 – Typical Change Curve – based on Kubler-Ross

The convergence of theory and practice based on a relatively large sample (there was 86% participation in the survey inside the business unit – another business-leading statistic) was extremely noticeable and prompted this case study.

What about some of the individual Engagement Elements? For clarity, only Business Unit data is shown.

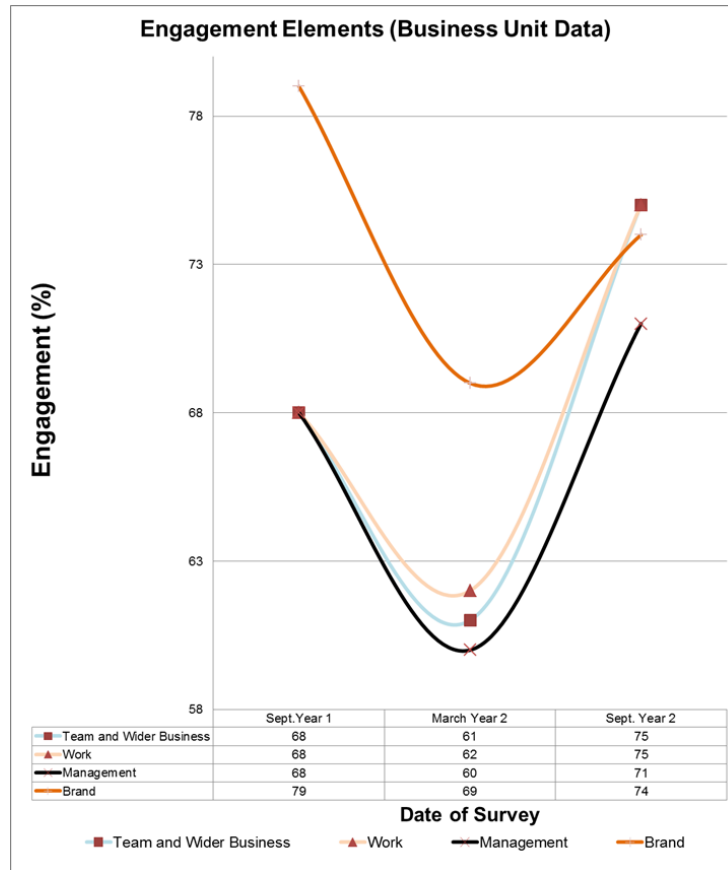


Fig. 3 – Engagement Elements (business unit data only)

Most of the individual engagement curves also followed the classic trend, as shown in Fig.3. Other than 'Engagement with Brand', all ended up higher in Y2 than Y1 but with a dip on the journey.

One individual engagement measure is considered critical to the organisation and will be important for any change programme – Engagement with Change and Leadership. To repeat, this is driven by confidence of a clear vision, open and honest communication from senior managers, being safe to challenge and change being well managed.

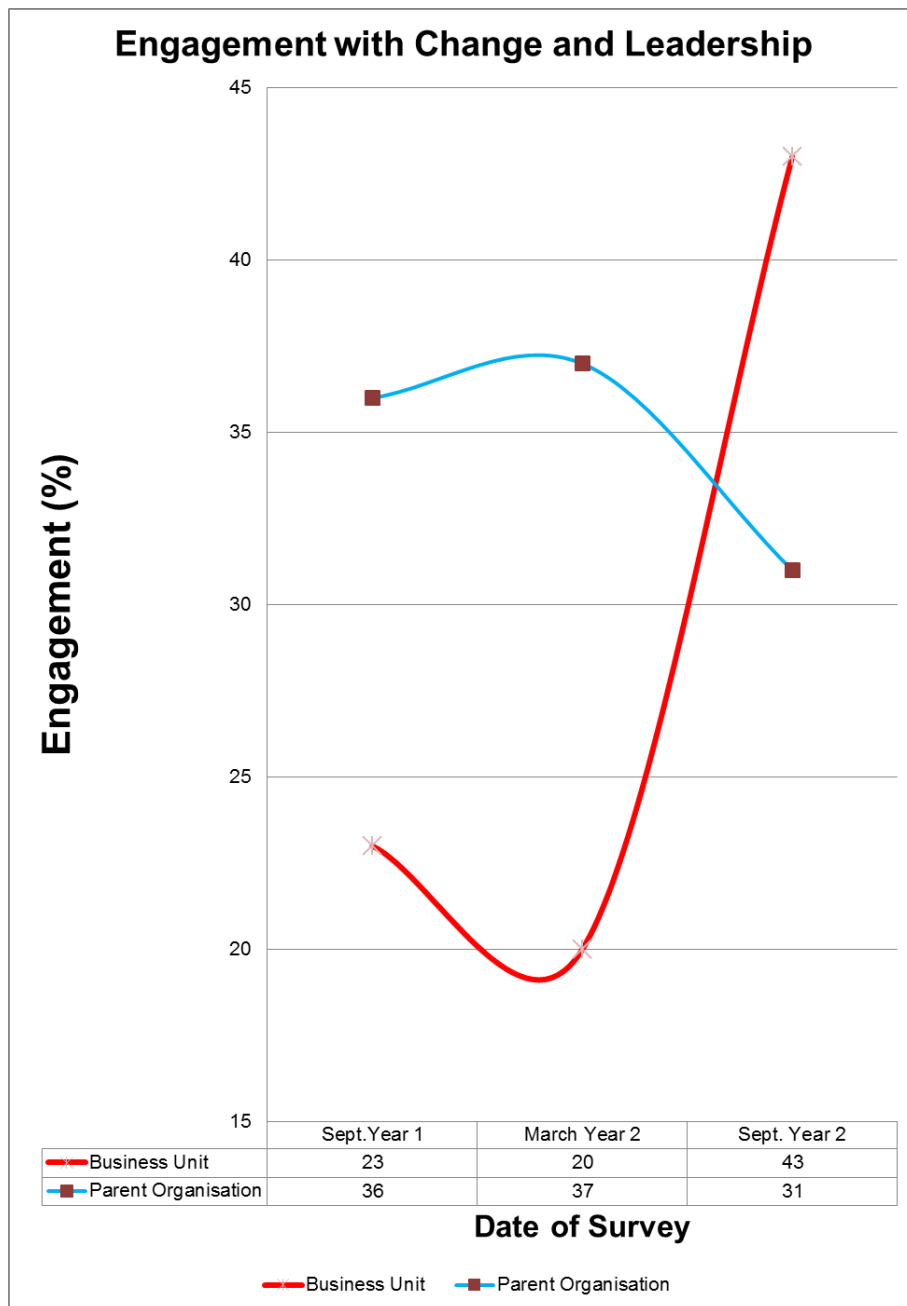


Fig. 4 – Engagement with Change and Leadership – Business Unit and Parent Organisation

Fig. 4 shows the variation in the year for Engagement with Change and Leadership – both at Business Unit and Organisational level. The uplift in the business unit through the period of development and the gap with the organisational performance are clearly seen.

Without equivocation, the evidence suggests that Engagement with Change had increased considerably over the year – so we must have done some things right!

So, What did we do? The Steps to High Engagement

1. *Transparency*: From the very beginning, going somewhat against the prevailing organisational culture, there was commitment from the Director to complete

transparency – with the full team as well as external stakeholders. The outcomes of all reviews, updates on various approvals, internal weaknesses were all shared openly with an affirmation of what was being done about them and how team members might be affected and how they could contribute.

2. *Self-assessment*: Along with the external reviews, a self-assessment involving all members of the business unit was carried out using a formal framework based on good practice - P3M3. The self-assessment was consistent with the third party reviews and showed widespread recognition of the issues and the need to improve – a self-realisation.
3. *Show and Tells*: The change team committed to regular Show and Tells showcasing bite sized chunks of the developments as elements became relevant. Team members were able to question, challenge and provide input.

Date	Formal Event
22 September Y1	Team Event including Development Challenges
20 November Y1	Show and Tell - Envisaged Role of the Programme Partner
15 December Y1	Team Engagement Event including Maturity (PgM3) self-assessment
17th December Y1	Show and Tell - Introducing the Development Workstreams
12th February Y2	Show and Tell - Development Recap and Operating Model
18th March Y2	Show and Tell - Performance Management Baseline
26th April Y2	Team Engagement Event including Operating Model update
1st June Y2	Show and Tell - Sharepoint Site and People Development
13th July Y2	Show and Tell - Gate B - Bringing it all together
27th July Y2	Team Engagement Event - Integrated Baseline 1 Presentation
6th September Y2	Team Engagement Event - year look back and look forward

Fig 5: Timetable of formal events

4. *All Team Events*: Five such were held in the twelve months. Initially they were half-day events and covered a lot of ground. One happened to be shorter and focused on just a few topics – this was met with a more positive response and so subsequent ones were modelled on being smaller events. A mixture of presenters from all levels was used.
5. *Post Event Surveys*: Feedback on content and structure was continuously requested and taken into account when designing subsequent events; for example, shorter events.
6. *Monthly Team Briefs and Staff Bulletins*: These were informal affairs on the office floor with general organisational and business unit updates from all of the Leadership Team – followed up with comprehensive bulletins covering the information shared.
7. *Director 1:1s*: Following the rather poor engagement results at the March review, the Director instigated 1:1s with every member of the team. This was very much a 'mechanical' response as no particular action resulted from them but the very act of a 1:1 was clearly appreciated.

8. *Business Change Manager (Marie) interviews:* Another outcome of the poor March results was direct and confidential interviews with a wide group of programme members to understand the 'real' issues in the programme. These pointed towards the need to have a more collaborative approach from the Leadership Team and a greater involvement of teams.
9. *Team Leaders' Forum:* One consequence of the above was the formal setting up of a Team Leaders' Forum. This group consisted of senior staff who managed teams. It was not just a method of cascade but a group designed to discuss issues big and small and look to develop solutions – ranging from committing to fewer e-mails to modifying scope due to budget constraints.
10. *Programme Partner:* A Programme Partner was appointed to help the business with the developments. This consisted of a series of experts in various functions who updated or created key processes and tools as part of the development - for example, new reporting standards and associated tools.
11. *Programme Gate B, Funding Review and Central Government Review:* These were critical. Given the importance of the programme, significant overview was always present from Corporate departments and Central Government. These included Programme Assurance reviews to sustain funding and provide confidence about the continued health and sustainability of the programme.

In October Year 1 it was decided to set up an internally run Programme Definition Gate in July Year 2 – known as Gate B in Managing Successful Programmes (MSP). Gate B was the target set for when all the developments needed to coalesce, where the programme would judge itself and be ready for external reviews in October / November Y2.

This was the front face of the developments. Passing the Gate became the medium and the message. The Gate, as it was known by everyone, would soon be followed by annual Central Government and Internal Audit reviews prior to the next phase of funding. This was a milestone not simply for the Development Team to show progress but a key stepping stone to survival. Its importance, and the work required to pass, was clear.

12. *Intranet Site:* A SharePoint site was created specifically for the programme. In this instance there was significant engagement in terms of asking team members what they might want from such a site. The site promoted widespread sharing of information and was also set up to be a tool for everyday use – for example, latest reports and programme board packs, upcoming milestones, people directory, organisational news, programme key documents, lessons learned and so on.

What Worked? Let the People Speak...? Survey on the Survey

A SurveyMonkey questionnaire was circulated following the positive results.

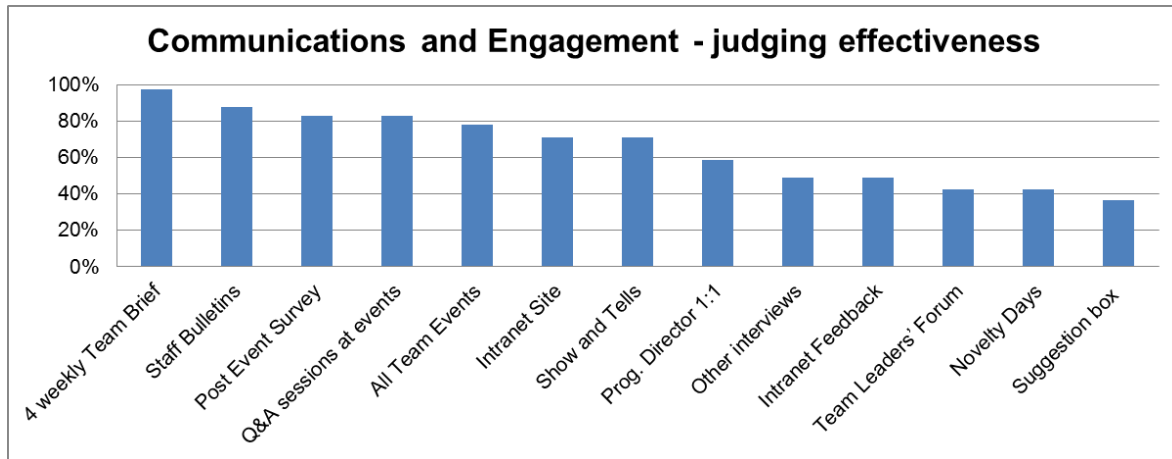


Fig. 6 – Review Survey following positive Engagement Results

41 people responded as we tried to understand those steps taken that were appreciated and those that were not. So, for example, 97.5% of respondents suggested that the '4 weekly Team Brief' was effective in building engagement. Surveys after events – and visible adjustment to content and format following the feedback – appeared to be appreciated.

Considering the above and from freeform feedback also received, the strong driver for improved engagement appeared to be open and honest communication – of good news and bad. For example, the July Gate B did not initially receive a Pass – a 'failure' that, once again, went against the prevailing culture of the parent organisation which had been seen to suffer from green-washing of assessments and reports. The outcome was not hidden, the reasons were shared and the corrective actions that needed to be taken were made visible to all. Not only was Gate B, therefore, a Quick Win which gave a face to the developments, it was also a clear illustration of the behaviours expected in the Programme.

It should be noted that in all vehicles for engagement, there was always real content in every session – rah-rah messaging and empty rhetoric was avoided; content was factual and serious.

In terms of Engagement, the Show and Tells and the Director 1:1 interviews were well received. The very act of making the time to meet with everyone seemed to have a very positive effect.

It was anticipated that the Team Leader Forums would receive widespread support. The survey result, though, did not indicate a strong preference for this level of engagement. However, the effort to engage more formally appeared to be appreciated and may have acted as a catalyst to give team leaders the confidence to challenge.

Short and sharp communications – for example, two-hour meetings focused on one or two topics - were commended rather than all-afternoon sessions with a wider range of subjects. The use of several presenters from various levels was welcomed.

The first indication that Engagement results would be positive came from a post-event survey result in September Year 2 just prior to the Engagement Survey: 'Are you happy that the responses provided in the Q&A session were open & honest? Yes 91.1%, Partly 8.9%, No 0% (47 respondents)'.

An element that was not so popular was the setting up of Networking / Novelty Days – for example, French Day with croissants, St. George’s Day with scones. These were referred to as ‘childish’ in free comment.

This is a case-study of one particular change programme and what worked well here will not necessarily work in other environments. ‘Novelty Days’ may well be effective in some instances. Team Leader Forums will surely be effective elsewhere. This population consisted of 25% aged between 36 and 45 and 25% between 46 and 55 with 50% having spent more than 10 years in the business. Frequent ‘conversations’ with substance appears to have been successful rather than ‘fun’ events and there appeared to be some comfort with ‘top-down’ so long as the reasoning, updates and general information was shared.

Data on several of the key ‘driver’ questions for the Engagement Survey support the premise that providing practical tools and being open and honest delivered the higher engagement even in the absence of some of the formal ‘change’ elements.

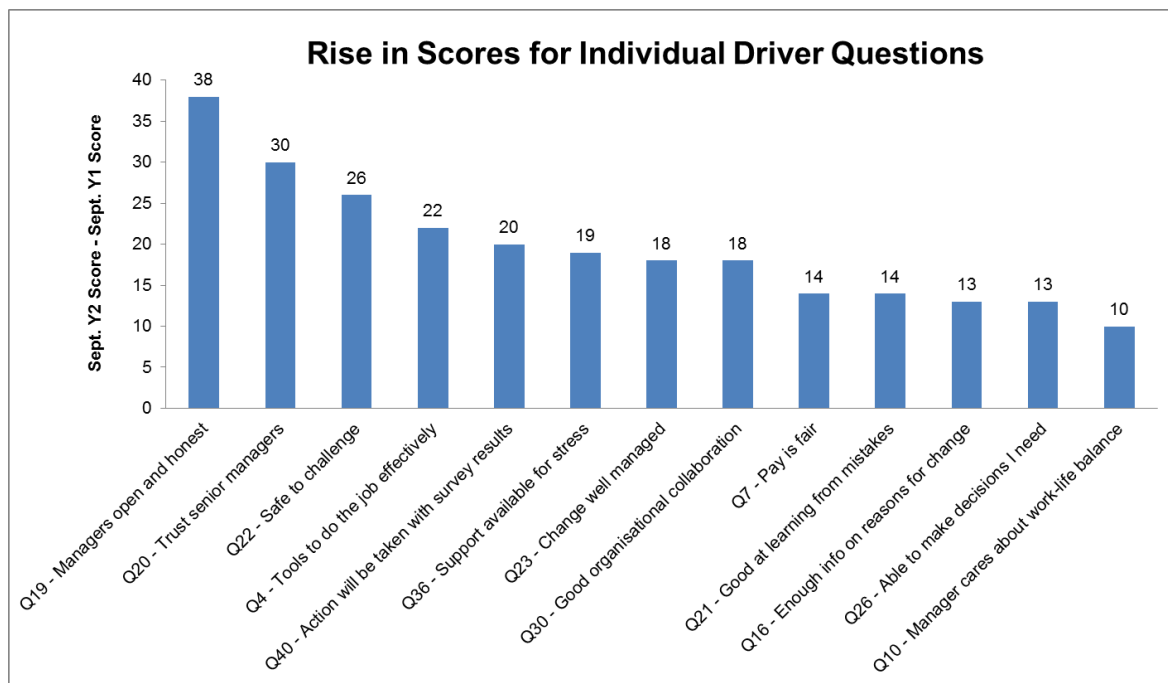


Fig. 7 – Positive Variation in Engagement Driver Questions between Y1 and Y2

A very interesting measure to note is that the ‘Pay is Fair’ rating increased by 14 points when no initiative was taken in this area. Does this suggest that improvements in the wider environment also affect the perception of more personal measures?

Aligning to Kotter and Shapiro Frameworks

The point of trying to align to frameworks is to apply some context using general vocabulary widely familiar to change practitioners. First, Kotter.



Fig. 6 – Kotter 8 Step Model (source: Kotter International)

Step	Did we do this?
Create a Sense of Urgency	<p>Actions: (1), (2), (4), (11)</p> <p>Yes. The importance of being a mature programme was stated time and again but very much in the context of the need to pass Gate B, obtain funding and be reviewed favourably by Central Government.</p>
Build a Guiding / powerful Coalition	<p>Actions: (9) – partly</p> <p>Not initially and never effectively – until a later attempt with the Team Leaders' Forum. The direction was to deliver top-down with the clear view that undertaking the developments were 'obvious.'</p>
Create a Vision for Change and Communicate the Vision	<p>Actions: None</p> <p>A lack of a desire to label the developments as 'Change' meant there was little support for a Vision or a Guiding Coalition. This may have implications for sustainability – as explored in the Next Steps below.</p>
Empower Actions / Remove Obstacles	<p>Actions: No direct ones</p> <p>This was an across-the-board set of developments and there were no significant 'owners' of current processes.</p> <p>For example, a single 'cost number' was covering all spend. This was replaced with multiple control accounts</p>

Step	Did we do this?
	<p>covering different activities. It was not possible to argue – and no one did – that a single account should cover all spend.</p> <p>The challenge, therefore, with this and other activity, was to go with the message that the developments were necessary for individuals, the business unit and the organisation even if it appeared to be 'more' work.</p>
<p>Generate Short-term Wins</p>	<p>Actions: (11)</p> <p>These turned out to be absolutely key. As stated above, passing Gate B, obtaining funding and gaining a favourable review from external parties became the driver reason for the developments. As these steps were critical for survival, this was not surprising and 'passing' was clearly an easier concept than a long term vision or maturity.</p>
<p>Build on the Change</p>	<p>A year into the developments, the parent organisation drove significant changes to the whole business in terms of spend and scope; the business unit under consideration was no exception.</p> <p>The improvements in ways of working – for example, better estimates, higher quality schedule, more granular breakdown structures - were critical in allowing the programme to react and respond quickly and accurately.</p> <p>The ability to do this – and the credibility accruing to the programme as a consequence - was clearly shared with the whole team.</p>
<p>Anchor in Corporate Culture</p>	<p>Arnab often states that 'mechanics drive culture' and takes as his inspiration the excellent book by Lou Gerstner on the IBM turnaround, 'Who Says Elephants Can't Dance?' Ways of working help to define culture, which cannot happen by itself.</p> <p>In addition to the examples stated in 'Build on the Change', making Board Minutes available online, sharing review reports, updating on progress were visible indicators of transparency.</p> <p>Accurate, high quality work and openness in actions were both cultural values supported by concrete steps.</p>

Table 2: Actions and the Kotter Framework

Now, let's look at Shapiro



Fig. 7: The Seven Levers of Change (source: www.strategyperspective.com)

Lever	Did we do this?
Mass Exposure	<p>Actions: (1), (2), (3), (4), (6), (11) (12)</p> <p>Yes. Significant amount of time was spent communicating the need for development. The P3M3 self-assessment was a method of gaining a wide-understanding and self-realisation; multiple team events and show and tells provided information and data. The need to pass the Gate became the major message, however.</p>
Personal Contact – advocates and team members	<p>Actions: (1), (3), (4), (7), (8), (10)</p> <p>Yes – Through involvement of staff during development, attendance at team meetings, show-and-tells, sharing the positive outcomes of external and internal reviews, Director 1:1s, Change Manager interviews.</p>
Hire Advocates	<p>Actions: (10)</p> <p>Yes – The Programme Partner led many of the initiatives and were external experts; others were led directly by the Development Team</p>
Shift Resisters	<p>Actions: No direct ones</p> <p>The success of the developments could be seen in the strong endorsements from important external stakeholders but the initiatives remained top-down with little 'negotiation' inside the business</p>
Infrastructure	<p>Actions: (10), (11)</p> <p>The most stress was on this. From programme management methodology to reporting structures, a</p>

Lever	Did we do this?
	significant amount of infrastructure was developed, training undertaken and new processes implemented.
Walk the Talk	<p>Actions: (1), (7)</p> <p>Only partly– As stated above, the Director (and most of the Leadership Team) were not significant 'change champions.'</p> <p>However, they did get behind the Gate B structure which had clear definitions of what would be required to attain a Pass and thus be critical in securing further funding, and the Director was transparent in communication on key issues</p> <p>Even at the highest level, the focus was on the 'quick-win' and deliverables – emphasising how important these are.</p>
Reward and Recognition	<p>Actions: None</p> <p>No – financial constraints and organisational policy mitigated against significant flexibility in this area.</p>

Table 3: Actions and the Shapiro Levers of Change

Conclusions

What might be the conclusions that follow from the above case study that can be take-aways?

There was a strong 'I do not believe in 'change'' direction at the start of the work which meant that some of the more well known steps of change management – vision, guiding coalition etc. – were not emphasised. However, the Programme Director most definitely supported the more 'mechanical' or 'basic' aspects of change management – focused and content-full communications, systems and support, open and honest sharing of information, quick wins in the form of a Gate B and assurance reviews.

This is not to suggest that the latter steps are enough but, rather, they emphasise their need. Many will be familiar with change programmes that declare grand visions, create exquisite marketing campaigns and try to generate enthusiasm. 'Closer to the customer', 'more commercial', 'look after our people', 'less with more' and so on – random business improvement word generators which would be applicable anywhere at any time. Often lacking is a clear line of sight from those objectives to actual steps and support and tools – the 'meat' and the substance; just '...sound and fury. Signifying nothing.'

In this case, the majority of the attention may have been focused on a Gate and getting through Internal Audit and Central Government assurance reviews but they were the vehicles for real and visible developments and engagement. There was plenty of substance and meaningful communication.

It is an obvious point to make that the mode of engagement will differ when dealing with an older, more traditional population than a younger one; more 'basic' engagement

worked well here rather than utilising tools such as Yammer or electronic discussion boards which were also tried. Be prepared to experiment!

Comparison to the Kotter and Shapiro has been retrospective – used to help frame the discussion in this paper. Each represents different aspects of good practice. And it is critical to keep the good practices going even when results are not what they are anticipated to be in the short term.

If we had developed change champions, would the engagement have been even higher? That is an unknown but what is a key finding is that undertaking the ‘mechanics’ and doing the basics well are absolutely critical.

So, Engagement was Good but were the Developments Effective?

The Central Government agency stated:

‘..it is the most comprehensive example I’ve seen of (review) outputs being embedded’

‘Clear growth in Capability across the Programme – evidenced through interviews and document review. Assessments show a significant and positive shift in capability.’

The Internal Assurance Function stated, ‘significant improvement has been made over the past year since the last review...’

There was, therefore, measurable and evidenced capability improvement.

What Next?

A change author called Tim Clark¹ suggested that, ‘the front end of change is for the rock star’ while, ‘the back end is for the roadie: the thrill is gone; comes down to grinding discipline and un-recognised and inglorious execution.’

In an earlier publication - Planning Change is Easy, Making Sure it Sticks is not (2011) – Arnab articulated the symbolic principle of the Continuum – ‘continuing’ the Change Curve. This requires the change initiative to continue to support teams affected through embedment activities such as training, provide opportunities for feedback and improvement and retain high level sponsorship – not declare ‘victory’ too early, as Kotter puts it.

¹ <http://www.change-management-blog.com/2008/05/early-vs-late-stage-failure.html>

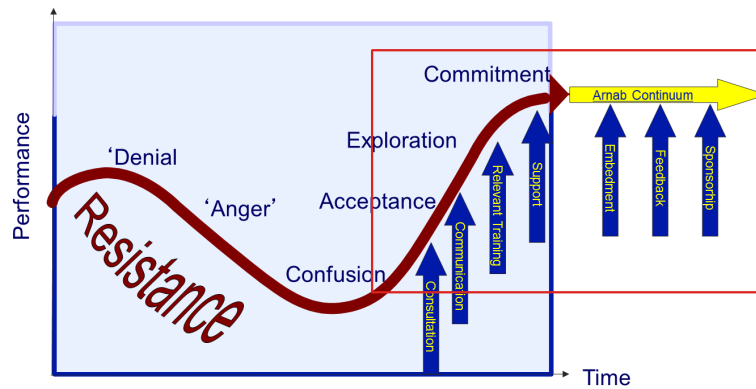


Fig. 8: The Back End of Change – the 'Amab Continuum'

In a previous change programme where this principle was adhered to, the implementation of the change was, in fact, treated as a separate 'project' from the development phase - to give it the necessary importance and longevity and gain the necessary resource. Thus, Embedment meant continued support to those affected by the change up to a year or more after implementation. Feedback meant ownership (and continuous improvement) of the change out in the wider business and not in the central team – through facilitated subject matter expert groups. Sponsorship meant that resources were retained in order to 'continue the change curve.'

It is self-evident that, in order to be self-sustaining, changes and systems need to be nurtured; there must be active ownership from the users and, as a consequence, user-driven improvement. Due to budgetary constraints, in this instance, the Development Team was downsized and most of the external advocates removed in mid-Year 3 – following the Year 2 Engagement survey and external reviews from the government and internal audit. While the developments were being used and could be seen in day to day activity across the programme, further support, training and people development would have been envisaged.

The effects of the reduction of the team – for very valid business reasons - in terms of continuing development and improvement will be interesting to monitor.

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