Experts uncut

Motivation to change

Arnab Banerjee
Why quality support from the outset is key in the implementation of changes within an organisation

More than a decade ago, a very high-level quality professional friend of mine was told by a unit managing director of a multinational: "Oh, X, you always over-engineer things!" Roll on a few years and a quality review carried out by a reputable quality consultancy concluded that while processes in a large projects' organisation are adequate, there is a lack of management support and understanding of quality.

My expertise lies in the field of change management, with particular emphasis on engagement and embedment/implementation. The readers of *QW* work with data, so let me share with you my own findings.

I recently ran a webinar for the Association of Project Management (APM) on "Cross-organisational change in a complex environment".

In the poll, we asked the audience – and remember that the audience are probably change practitioners and inclined to be more positive than people from other functions – to imagine themselves as recipients of change rather than leaders, and to review their experiences. The feedback to the following three questions speaks for itself:

Infographic: SUCCESSFUL CHANGE — GOOD GOVERNANCE, PLANNING, ENGAGEMENT, RESOURCES, SUPPORT, ASSURANCE

Question 1:
On average, you have understood the reason(s) for the change – whatever that change might be?

Answer:
51% Yes
49 % No

Question 2:
On average, you have seen clear alignment between the why, what, how and when of the change?

Answer:
21% Yes
79% No

Question 3:
On average, have you been adequately supported following release and through implementation?

Answer:
17% Yes
83% No

Even with this audience, and even at the front end of change where there is great excitement from senior managers, only 51 per cent understand why there was change.

A question I am often asked by change leaders is how to make up for inadequate support following the implementation of a change. There is no magic answer. It is not possible to achieve the right results with the wrong actions, such as having no adequate resource for implementation. Support is required post-implementation and there are no short-cuts.

The survey results show that only a small percentage felt adequately supported through implementation. In fact, leaders often set the strategic direction for the change, but then remain remote from the actual change implementation (sometimes called 'distance transformation') leaving the actual change to less motivated people.

So, what I am saying is that whichever level of leader you are, if you are going to run an initiative, you need to have good quality from start to finish.

Quality is about more than counting non-conformances, just as project management is about more than simply writing documents.

Doing the right things – like good governance and assurance or proper planning and estimating, or getting engagement and maintaining resource for embedment – does not slow us down, it actually helps us to succeed.

Arnab Banerjee is an independent consultant focusing on change. He previously worked for Transport for London and ALSTOM Power in a variety of roles