# Sustainable Organisational Change: The Critical Success Factors that make the Difference

One of the most prominent challenges that exists in the People & Organisational Development industry is that the value creation and ROI of development and change programmes are often questioned. People development and business performance improvement through people is a tricky one because the reality is that the value creation and real ROI cannot be boxed up and isolated as a result of a perfectly formed experiment. Instead, there are numerous interrelated factors at play that influence the impact and outcome, which, by the way, can have a lag time of months or even years.

There are traps where sponsors of change and development programmes can fall into when investing in well designed and planned programmes. While they are often based on the latest research, practitioner experience and attention paid to the unique business context, there is often a lack of due diligence paid to Critical Success Factors being in place and remaining throughout the duration of a programme.

As a result, the chances for success are largely diminished before you've even begun. In the same way that you can have the most progressive and well-designed personal training programme, if you don't follow a few key criteria (regularity in frequency of workouts per week, maintaining changes to your diet and having the training gear to do the exercise properly) then your chances of achieving your personal fitness and health goals based on engaging in that specific programme are significantly reduced.

The same holds true for work and initiatives done within the people & organisational development space: engagement initiatives, culture change, leadership development and the like. If you're not willing to stick to key conditions for success then you're better off not making the investment to begin with.

By 'you' I mean the sponsor(s), leadership team, or shifts in wider organisational practices to allow for the conditions to be in place. It's a collaborative effort but systemic and organisational change cannot happen in isolation.

*So what makes the difference? What Critical Success Factors need to be in place for change programmes to be both successful and sustainable?*

**Pool together a Committee-** Companies and larger organisations that pool together a group of committed and passionate individuals from across the organisation, who are willing and able to be the Walking Company Ambassadors for the change work, are more likely to generate awareness, enthusiasm, and clarity in what, how, and why things are changing. They act as day-to-day role models and animate reminders of both the actual change work as well as what the wider ambition is really about.

**Consistency to support Habit Change-** Habit formation and change happens through discipline. Motivation serves as a kick starter but it doesn't last - discipline is what makes the difference. Companies need to be proactive and plan for success. To maximise the 70:20:10 principle of learning (70% of learning happens through on-the-job experience, 20% through social learning e.g. from interactions with our colleagues, and 10% from formal training e.g. classroom or online courses), there has to be structures, reminders, and check-points in place from the start to ensure that the learning and development is embedded within the organisation and importantly, within people.

You might see your personal trainer once a week, but does that mean that you only go to the gym once a week? Not if you're serious about your fitness goals and results. You would instead take your trainer's insights and recommendations and use them to inform your gym sessions throughout the remainder of the week. The same is true for OD work. Create opportunities outside of a one or two day team session to facilitate and encourage habit change and formation on a day to day basis.

**Capability building to breed Confidence-** When our careers, reputations and rewards depend largely on our performance, doing what we know best often wins the day over doing what we don't know best and trying to be successful at that. It's human nature to steer away from uncertainty. There has to be a consistent eye on Capability within the business.

Do people feel capable and skilled in their ability to take on new ways of working and/or to do things a different way? Do they know how? This impacts heavily on their sense of self-efficacy (their beliefs about their own capabilities to influence or control events, or achieve their goals) which in turn impacts on their confidence to perform effectively in the 'new way'.

It's important to take continual pulse checks here and ensure the building blocks to transformation and habit change are in place for it to unfold as best as possible. For example, if you're trying to create a culture shift to engender greater trust within an organisation, consider offering capability training sessions around giving & receiving feedback, or effective listening. You'd be surprised at how common a sense isn't always a common sense.

**Role-Modelling to symbolise Sponsorship-** Behaviour breeds behaviour. It's as simple as that. The responsibility of leadership is massive, inspiring followership comes from not what you say but importantly, what you do. Humans pick up on everything - what you say/do, what you don't say/do, your habits, what's really important to you… Sustainable change won't happen if there is a marked contrast between what's expected to happen on the ground and the way things really are at the top.



**Clarity in the 'new way'-** Another reason why many change and transformation programmes fail is because people lack clarity in where on earth they are headed, and that brings fear and uncertainty, which in turn pushes us back to our familiar ways of doing and being.

It's imperative, but not enough to say *why* we are changing; many have a strong need to understand the *how*, explicitly. *What do I need to do? Today, tomorrow…* Clear, consistent communication and importantly, continual signposting and managing of expectations, is a useful way to avoid fear of a *Black Hole.*

If you're serious about cultivating change within your business then you'd do well in ensuring that the above critical success factors are, and remain, in place throughout the whole duration of a change programme.

This way you are far more likely to extract the most value from your investment, maintain the commitment and loyalty of your employees, and enjoy witnessing and leading a change journey that over time generates better business performance and results.

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