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Building change leadership capability: 'The quest for change competence'

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Analysis papers

Building change leadership capability: 'The quest for change competence'

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ABSTRACT *While the literature highlights the continuing, and indeed growing, significance of the challenge of implementing change effectively (eg Kotter, 1994; Carnall, 1999) and explores reasons for failures (eg Kotter, 1996) there seems to be little agreement on a way forward. The seeds for potential progress appear to lie within the examination of change competencies and the building of capability for managing significant and continuing change.*

This paper examines the literature relating to change competencies and capabilities and presents a case study which demonstrates how a competence-based approach has been applied in practice. The process of identifying critical competencies is explored, and a specific change competency framework is examined. In exploring the case, qualitative evidence is presented which suggests that the competency framework, and its application in practice, has had a real impact on the development of change capability in an organisation. This research is seen as being exploratory, however, and providing a stimulus for further research streams which are described towards the end of the paper. The paper concludes that it is focusing on what is involved in implementing change which will lead to a real understanding of the critical competencies required and of a means of building change capability with an organisation.

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INTRODUCTION

Some eight months ago, we were approached by a large international organisation and asked to meet them to

discuss approaches to the effective management of change. During the initial meeting, it became clear that they had two key questions. These were:

1. How can we ensure that we become better at implementing change?
2. What type of people do we need to lead an effective change effort?

In attempting to help the organisation answer these questions and develop their capability to manage change more effectively, we set out on a journey which has produced some interesting and illuminating insights. In this paper, we describe the initial part of this journey. This part is concerned with identifying the competencies associated with the effective leadership of change.

BACKGROUND

Almost no major corporations are free from the challenge of developing and implementing successful strategies for managing change (Kotter, 1994; Senge *et al.*, 1999; Carnall, 1999). Indeed most recognise that strategic change is not a transient issue, but rather a continuous process (Pettigrew, 1985). Yet few organisations seem to be able to implement change effectively. Some have estimated that as many as 70 per cent of change initiatives fail (eg Kotter, 1994, 1996). Why should this be so?

There is no shortage of analyses of the reasons for failure of change initiatives (eg Kanter *et al.*, 1992; Kotter, 1994; Senge *et al.*, 1999). There is no agreed basis or methodology, however, for addressing these shortfalls. Researchers and authors have differing views on the way forward. For example, Kotter (1996) emphasises the leader's role, while Senge *et al.* (1999) take a more systemic approach. Others (eg Carnall, 1999) highlight the need for planned programmes. Beyond proposing the significance of ability to respond to change, some propose that the capacity of an organisation, and people within it, to adapt to continuous change are

significant aspects of competitive performance (eg Ulrich and Yeung, 1989). Understanding the drivers, pace and unpredictability of change, however, does not mean that firms know how to manage change (Ulrich *et al.*, 1997; Conner, 1999). Indeed, they propose that organisations need to consider change and its associated management from two perspectives, viz.

1. fundamental change; a change in the culture or identity of the organisation, and
2. building a capacity for change which, importantly, highlights both speed of response and implementation excellence.

The nature and role of leadership in this context is further emphasised by Antonacopoulou and Fitzgerald (1996) who highlight the need to reappraise the competencies required of leaders. Furthermore, they question the extent to which 'traditional' competency frameworks can provide a robust basis for developing leadership which will take an organisation into a 'prosperous future'. The significance of competencies and change is raised by other authors (eg McEwen *et al.*, 1988; Marcus and Pringle, 1995). Indeed, Marcus and Pringle (1995) highlight competencies as one of the three critical keys to successful change (the other two being commitment and capability). The location of these competencies within organisations (in practice or theory) is contentious. Some authors see the locational focus as being the 'leaders' (eg Kotter, 1994, 1996) others see a growing role for a 're-engineered' HR function (eg Ulrich and Yeung, 1989; Ulrich, 1997). Within the leadership focused group Senge *et al.* (1999) identify differing range leadership roles. These are: (1) executive leaders: (2) local line

leaders; and (3) network leaders. The roles performed by each of these are seen as distinctly different, but nevertheless valuable in the change process. Yet others look more broadly (but less explicitly) at leadership change agents (eg Buchanan and Boddy, 1992; Antonacopoulou and Fitzgerald, 1996).

Within the change literature there is an emerging, if often contradictory, stream of views in relation to the competencies associated with effective change management. These views or 'models' often fail to distinguish between leadership and other roles. However, a review may be helpful in identifying the potential capability which needs to be in place for successful change management, even if its location is not agreed.

In a survey of organisations, Marcus and Pringle (1995) found that future change competencies included:

1. change mastery
2. managing resistance
3. appetite to learn, and
4. influence without authority.

In a survey to identify the critical competencies of change agents, Buchanan and Boddy (1992) found the following important areas:

1. sensitivity to key personnel changes and their impact on goals
2. clarity in specifying goals and defining the achievable
3. flexibility in responding to change and risk taking
4. team building
5. networking
6. ambiguity tolerance
7. communication skills
8. interpersonal skills
9. personal enthusiasm
10. stimulating motivation and commitment in others
11. selling plans and ideas to others

12. negotiating with key players for resources and change
13. political awareness
14. influence skills
15. helicopter perspective.

In exploring the role of Human Resources (HR) in change, Ulrich and Yeung (1989) found that critical competencies related to:

1. helping to focus individual attention on organisational mind-sets
2. facilitating strategy implementation, and
3. building change capability.

They found that building such competencies required mutual respect between line and HR on process, not programmes, and exploring paradoxes through examining balance and integration.

The role of the HR in the change process (and associated HR competencies) remains relatively unexplored. Ulrich *et al.* (1995), however, using survey data from 12,689 respondents in 109 organisations, demonstrated the HR can add value to change in the business by balancing effectiveness in delivery of core services with broad-based management and change management competencies.

From the above brief review of the literature, it is evident that a number of important questions need to be considered. These are:

1. What are the competencies of change leaders which will enable change to be implemented effectively?
2. How do these relate to change processes and stages?
3. How may these competencies be assessed and developed?

The remainder of this paper sets out to

explore a case study which the authors believe will contribute to answering these questions.

THE RESEARCH CASE

Introduction

Faced with the above questions, the authors were presented with a 'real world' opportunity to explore the competencies associated with the effective implementation of change. The initial problem posed by the client organisation related to issues around the role of the 'leader in charge' and broader involvement of others in leading the change processes. Indeed, at this point Senge *et al.*'s (1999) observation appeared appropriate:

'Might not the continual search for the hero-leader be a critical factor in itself, diverting our attention away from building institutions that by their very nature, continually adapt and reinvent themselves, with leadership coming from many people and many places and not just from the top.' Senge *et al.* (1999: 64)

Indeed Carnall (1999) also highlights issues associated with the dependence on leaders for change competence.

'Organisations often do not possess managers who are sufficiently skilful in handling change. Kotter, for example, suggests one syndrome associated with inadequate leadership, which we might similarly associate with inadequate change management.' Carnall (1999: 11)

The organisation presenting the problem asked the authors to assist in developing a change competence framework, and programme for developing change leaders, which would address the problems they faced in making change happen. This presented a real

opportunity for an action research approach to this important topic. The appropriateness of an action research approach is illustrated by the following description of the methodology:

'Classical action research starts from the idea that if you want to understand change you should try to implement it; this is frequently (the approach) adopted in organisational development.' Easterly-Smith *et al.* (1997: 81)

The case background

A major multinational company had embarked upon a fundamental journey of change. The business case for change was clear — industry over-capacity in manufacturing was putting significant pressure on margins, an expansion into retailing was requiring a different way to run the business; customer developments in another of their business sectors was requiring a more global approach to the market. The financials were such that investors could realise greater returns by putting their money into a building society account!

The organisation needed radical realignment to meet these new realities — an integrated global structure for manufacturing, marketing and support services; a local dedication to sales and the customer, new skills and capabilities to lead in a more 'virtual' and flatter organisation; and, significantly, a change in the mindset and behaviours of people from 'serving the hierarchy' to a focus on 'speedy implementation and innovation at the frontline'.

There had been several attempts within the organisation to change over the past three to five years. While a number of these had a significant initial impact, there had also been setbacks. A need had been identified for an integrated change framework. A newly appointed leadership team were given

the mandate to implement change, at the deep structural level. By 'structural', we mean not just organisation structure, but a complete re-wiring of the organisation — its policies, processes, practices and world view. It was recognised that, in order to implement such a radical shift, there would need to be an increased ability in the organisation to lead and sustain large-scale change.

The initial accountability for change advocacy

A dedicated change management team was set up initially to help frame the change strategy, coordinate the journey across the business sectors, and support the line leaders in their implementation of key change initiatives. This helped put the change agenda on the map. Over time, however, it was realised that the team needed more capability and a higher profile to have a real impact on the business. It was, therefore, decided to add change management responsibility to the HR function.

The HR function itself, while having expertise in employee relations, HR policy and professional HR systems, was not able to answer the 'how to's of leading change. It is easy to pick up the books on the 'what to do's in the subject, not so easy to articulate what are the day-to-day behaviours that lead to the initiation and implementation of successful change. The HR role framework of Ulrich (1997) was found to be extremely helpful in uncovering this 'gap' in the experience of the team in this function. The HR leadership decided that they would need some external assistance. In particular, they wanted to commission some research which would lead to the development of a set of change leadership competencies which were benchmarked against 'world class' best practice, and to design a

development curriculum which would transfer these competencies into their everyday behaviour.

Importantly, several pragmatic principles were established at the outset for this competency work. These were simplicity, utility and 'buy-in-ability'. The competency development work itself was to reflect the new culture that the organisation was trying to create. In the past, an extensive study would have been commissioned to sample above-average and average change leaders, and, through lengthy behavioural event interviews and pencil and paper tests, uncover the personality traits and behaviours that distinguished the two groups (eg Boyatzis, 1982). These differentiating competencies would then have been further validated on an independent sample.

There was simply not time for this. The business demanded a speedy and practical solution — one that was owned by the line and memorable; yet still with the rigour and specificity that would facilitate personal insight and development of change leaders.

The initial research quest

The authors were commissioned by the company to conduct the research and develop a curriculum. An internal task force from the HR function was also established to take the outputs from the research and development, test these with key line sponsors, and finalise the framework and wording of the behavioural indicators. This was no mean task, given the global scope of the work. The research began by agreeing that the task was to identify:

1. What are the attitudes, skills and behaviours that make a difference in leading change?
2. How can a range of competence

Table 1 Change management competency profiles in the literature

<i>Source</i>	<i>Key elements</i>
Ulrich <i>et al.</i> (1995)	— Business acumen, HR practices and managing change (latter accounts for 42.7% of the variance in HR professionals' competency levels)
General Electric; definition of HR competencies	— Knowledge of business, delivery of HR, personal credibility, ability to manage change (change advocacy, process orientation, facilitation)
Cornell University (1994); change skills for HR managers	— Facilitation of organisational change (defining change goals, identifying obstacles and resistance, establishing change strategy, implementing interventions, techniques for managing transitions, empowering line managers)
PepsiCo's change leadership profile	— Roger Enrico leading change seminar kills profile for HR professionals (acting as a catalyst for change, being a facilitator, providing support to team members)
Conner (1999); organisation development research	— ODR candidate selection form (sponsor trust, challenge, group dynamics, change agent knowledge)
Armstrong (1992); how to be an internal consultant	— ODR change resilience profile (positive, focussed, flexibility, organised, proactive)
Oliver Wyman & Company; criteria for choosing effective change agents	— Challenger, interventionist, provider of insight, process analyst, listener/observer, developer of ownership
	— High levels of political support, works well across organisational boundaries, personally resilient, produces accurate perception of reality, direct and open

levels be established, which lead to world class, or role model standard?

- How can these be clustered into a simple yet robust framework?

The literature search

Based on our review of the published literature, and practitioner reports, a range of change management competency profiles were identified. These are summarised in Table 1.

The examples in Table 1, from the literature search, were complemented by four additional sources:

- combined 30 years of experience in change management by the authors
- informal discussions with current doctoral researchers and academics, in both change and competency development, at business schools
- several internal papers within the client organisation, and

Table 2 Effective change implementation — What’s the work?

<i>Why? Making the case</i>	<i>Where? Create the new future</i>	<i>How? Getting implemented</i>	<i>How? Keeping going</i>
— Purpose	— What take	— Interventions	— Reinforcement
— Objectives	— What leave	— Strategy	— Alignment
— Unfreezing	— What create	— People infrastructure	— Learning
		— Metrics	— Adjustment

4. numerous articles by change management practitioners/consultants.

Our conclusions, based on this literature research, were that the competency definitions were still at a very conceptual level — describing the ‘what to do’ (eg get sponsor trust, challenge the status quo), but not the behavioural, ‘how to do’, level (eg understand your sponsor’s motives and build these into the case for change, uncover data that convince people that change is vital for business survival). In fact, we were reminded of the comment from Pendlebury *et al.* (1998)

‘Change management is a difficult art — those responsible for it are faced with extremely complex phenomena against which traditional management methods and models are virtually useless.’ (p. 1)

Reframing the question and clarifying the problem

In examining the initial literature review, our focus began to become one of execution and implementation — how do successful leaders actually make change deliver? We wanted to avoid ambiguous statements and focus on ‘the work of change’. This meant starting with a new investigative framework — not the individual behaviour, but the overall organisational context for effective change implementation.

The approach

Having started with the work of change, we then revisited the extensive list of behaviours that we had jointly developed, based on the literature research and our own experience and inquiry. We did a content analysis of the whole, and identified 14 clusters of related behaviours. We then coded all the behaviours into these 14 clusters and allocated these clusters to the four elements of the work of change outlined in Table 2.

In thinking about next steps, we reflected on comments from Senge *et al.* (1999) and, in particular:

‘Virtually every significant change initiative we have seen starts with a genuine partnership among a small number of deeply committed individuals.’ (p. 55)

Therefore, we took this initial work to the internal Project Leader within the client organisation for input and joint development. Insights which came from this session included:

- 1. How can change leaders destabilise and create tension and still be ‘non-anxious’?
- 2. How can change leaders develop an authentic presence within the organisation without creating dependency?
- 3. How can you be perceptive in anticipating the ‘minefields’ ahead?

Table 3 Proficiency levels

Survive = 'Sound Understanding'

— A good understanding of what is involved, able to describe main elements.

Succeed = 'Can Do'

— Able to carry out consistently the activities, perform satisfactorily the majority of activities, solve imaginatively operational problems, guide and advise others in technical/operational aspects.

Steer = 'Role Model'

— Able to develop significant and new approaches, evaluate long-term implications, develop innovative strategic actions and novel applications.

4. How can leaders use their implementation skills as a 'pressure cooker', without doing it all themselves?
5. How can change implementation plans be made 'bullet-proof' and 'field ready' such that the work does actually change in the organisation?

At this meeting the client also supplied further input which provided the principles upon which the final competency framework would be developed, these were:

1. no more than eight overall competency clusters
2. the indicators within each cluster should not overlap with any indicators in another cluster
3. the indicators can be a combination of attitudes, behaviours, and technical skills
4. if there are technical change management skills, then cluster them together
5. the indicators must be observable and measurable — to others and/or the individual
6. there will be three levels of proficiency for each competency indicator, called 'Survive', 'Succeed' and 'Steer'. The definition of these levels is provided in Table 3.

7. use the same indicators in the different levels of proficiency, ie if you are at 'Steer' level, it assumes you also have the behaviours at the 'Survive' and 'Succeed' level.

We subsequently re-visited the original 14 clusters and identified eight overall change management competency clusters. These are shown in Table 4.

Within this framework, we developed three-tier behaviourally anchored scales for 30 indicators. This was the hard part! In total, we therefore arrived at 90 behavioural statements.

The next and vital step was to test out this competency framework and 30 indicators with the internal Task Force. We spent many intensive conversations getting to simplify the statements so that there was high face validity. The Task Force also took the statements to key line sponsors in order to test the framework and its definitions with the business leaders — were these the behaviours that they saw were making a difference?

Finally, we developed a feedback instrument, the Competency Assessment Questionnaire, which was to provide individuals with rich 360-degree data on which level they were currently operating at against each indicator, ie at Survive, Succeed or Steer level.

Table 4 Change management competencies — the eight clusters

1. *Change Initiation* (CIN); ability to create the case for change and secure credible sponsorship
2. *Change Impact* (CIM); ability to scope the breadth, depth, sustainability and returns of a change strategy
3. *Change Facilitation* (CF); ability to help others, through effective facilitation, to gain insight into the human dynamics of change and to develop the confidence to achieve the change goals
4. *Change Leadership* (CL); ability to influence and enthuse others, through personal advocacy, vision and drive, and to access resources to build a solid platform for change.
5. *Change Learning* (CLE); ability to scan, reflect and identify learning and ensure insights are used to develop individual, group and organisational capabilities
6. *Change Execution* (CEX); ability to formulate and guide the implementation of a credible change plan with appropriate goals, resources, metrics and review mechanisms
7. *Change Presence* (CP); demonstrates high personal commitment to achievement of change goals through integrity and courage, while maintaining objectivity and individual resilience ('a non-anxious presence in a sea of anxiety')
8. *Change Technology* (CT); knowledge, generation and skilful application of change theories, tools and processes

In Table 5, we provide both the competency clusters and their respective indicators, plus, in Table 6, an example of how we wrote the three-level behaviourally anchored scale against one of these indicators.

Results

To date, we have seen the competencies being used for development through two trials of the development curriculum, with a total of 27 participants. In summary, the curriculum comprises a combination of formal workshops and implementation practice, supported by line sponsors and coaches. At the end of the process (approximately six months hence), there will be an assessment panel to ascertain the degree of personal development and business impact. The results of this will be explored in a future paper.

Overall, we have witnessed the power of building 'learning capabilities' as a platform for successful change. Both Kanter *et al.* (1992) and, more recently, Senge *et al.* (1999) have commented that

there is no one 'right' way to implement change — no single theory or framework or eight steps can ever capture the complexity of organisational reality. What is important is that the leadership is built to diagnose, understand, confront and reshape the reality as people see it. Change cannot be predicted, yet the ability to harness it can be developed. It is only by learning new things about ourselves, our relationships with others and discovering new ways of seeing reality that we can start to implement new business practices, which ultimately will lead to new business results.

While we cannot present quantitative data at this point, the insights from some of the comments from the participants in the early programmes are illuminating:

'I learnt a great deal about "making it a business issue"... the plan is (now) high on the agenda for the management team. I spent a lot of time with the managers defining the case for change, and the change direction — where are we trying to get to, when and how. I also set about securing

Table 5 The full change management competency framework

<i>Competency cluster</i>	<i>Competency indicators</i>
Change Initiation (CIN); ability to create the case for change and secure credible sponsorship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Surfaces issues — Demonstrates impact of issues on performance — Influences key sponsors — Secures sponsor commitment
Change Impact (CIM); ability to scope the breadth, depth, sustainability and returns of a change strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Scope of thinking — Depth of impact (systematic thinking) — Reframing — Identifies 'returns on change'
Change Facilitation (CF); ability to help others, through effective facilitation, to gain insight into the human dynamics of change and to develop the confidence to achieve the change goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Manages human dynamics — Encourages and supports self-management — Conflict management — Process management
Change Leadership (CL); ability to influence and enthuse others, through personal advocacy, vision and drive, and to access resources to build a solid platform for change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Networking — Relationship building — Personal impact — Sells ideas — Coaching — Listening and inquiry — Knowledge management
Change Learning (CLE); ability to scan, reflect and identify learning and ensure insights are used to develop individual, group and organisational capabilities	
Change Execution (CEX); ability to formulate, and guide the implementation of a credible change plan with appropriate goals, resources, metrics and review mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Organisation savvy — Manages resistance — Journey design — Journey management — Courage — Resilience — Authenticity — Objectivity
Change Presence (CP); demonstrates high personal commitment to achievement of change goals through integrity and courage, while maintaining objectivity and individual resilience ('a non-anxious presence in a sea of anxiety')	
Change Technology (CT); knowledge, generation and skilful application of change theories, tools and processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Theories — Tools — Processes

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sponsorship for the change ... This is proving extremely useful in getting some energy behind the change ...'

'I feel that I have developed considerably as a "change agent". I think I've been able to do this by learning much more to *facilitate* change rather than to *advocate*

constantly! In acting as an agent for change I've been able to facilitate the key decision makers to move themselves ... and it has been extremely fulfilling to see the results!'

'I have found on several occasions that I could not manage my disappointment with

Table 6 An Example of a behaviourally anchored scale against the competency indicator ‘Identifies Returns on Change’

<i>Survive</i>	<i>Succeed</i>	<i>Steer</i>
Identifies and expresses the immediate deliverables of the change process	Clearly identifies both the change outputs and the investment (time, money) needed to implement the change — uses this to determine change priorities	Tests the resolve of the leadership team to embark upon a change journey by combining a touch insight into the visible and hidden costs of the change with a clear line of sight to its bottom line business benefits

above situation well enough. Definitely showing disappointment and frustration did not help at all to improve things. I need to develop competencies to better handle resistance.’

‘I learnt a lot about one-to-one change management skills. In real life, this means that I need to control my behaviour in a way that brings out the best in the *individuals* I deal with. This will probably help with grapevine management and turning blockers into unexpected supporters.’

These observations tend to illustrate the point made by Senge *et al.* (1999):

‘Your understanding of the system will grow steadily as you calibrate these results and try new endeavours in a way that would not be possible if you were merely following someone’s preconceived plan.’ Senge *et al.* (1999: 64)

and illustrate participant reactions to the building of competencies. Importantly, we also received reactions from other stakeholders on this project, which support the participant views.

The original task force was fundamentally impacted by the

development of the competency framework and the behavioural indicators. For many, it was the first time that the day-to-day behaviours had been spelt out, and they were confronted with the probable reality that they did not spend much of their current time in this area (as opposed to professional HR advice). It helped them see that the work and practice of change management was in fact a professional activity in its own right. The coaches of the participants were able to use the competencies as an aid to the provision of development advice. Moreover, it also encouraged them to reflect on their own assessment of their strengths and weaknesses in this area. Interestingly, the understanding and appreciation of the competencies grew throughout the curriculum. At the end of one workshop, a coach commented ‘now I understand what these competencies mean!’

The line sponsors saw the broader potential of the competencies. While originally developed purely for the HR function (or other supporting ‘advocates’ of change), they were quickly adopted as part of the business leader’s competency profile requirement. One line sponsor was so taken by the competency

definitions that she advocated that her entire peer group and her boss perform a self-rating of their competencies. This development led to the participation of several line sponsors on the development curriculum itself.

At the organisation level, the Sounding Board for the entire process were particularly keen to get the aggregate profile of all the participants, since it gave them a sample measure of the overall change management strengths and weaknesses in the organisation. For example, Change Presence and Change Impact were relatively high, whereas Change Execution, Learning and Technology were particularly low. This could well explain why there had been a lot of excellent diagnoses about change strategy in the past, by well-intentioned and courageous leaders, but nothing had been done to implement and track the changes systematically in a way that spread learning quickly across the system.

From our work to date, and the qualitative data reviewed, we believe that there is support for the proposition that the project has:

1. helped people to understand the real work of change
2. provided insight into the personal behaviours that are important for success, and
3. helped leaders recognise that there is no such thing as a simple predictable change process — the right behaviours create the right solution.

Discussion and insights

Based on the above preliminary results, we would venture the following observations for broader learning in this field.

— *Developing competencies develops competence* (Senge *et al.*, 1999). We

were struck by the learning we saw in the Task Force members as we articulated, explored and re-worked the behavioural definitions — including our own learning! For the first time, we were making what we felt was ‘tacit’ knowledge (ie in the heads of individuals, with the potential to walk out the door with those individuals) ‘explicit’ knowledge (ie codified and therefore replicable in the organisation). The basic question — ‘What do you do to be a world class change leader?’ led to an intriguing and thought-provoking journey of self-discovery. The behavioural indicators in particular led to real personal insights —

everybody’s reactions said something about their own ‘mental models’ as to how change should be led. For example, the change indicator ‘encourages self management’ in Change Facilitation was hotly debated — should you always remain impartial as a change leader, to encourage personal responsibility and empowerment, or should you also step in with your own opinion, with the associated risk of creating dependency on you the facilitator?

— *The competency development process needs to mirror the context* (eg Pendlebury *et al.*, 1998). The changes the business was going through were full of ambiguity and volatility, with no clear end state, and the resultant need to stay flexible and fleet of foot. If the competency development process had taken the traditional, more cumbersome route of a six-month research process, with much intellectual debate and statistical studies, then business opportunities would have been missed, and old ways of behaving would have been reinforced. We did the development work using ‘street smarts’ not

academic rigour. It is quite incredible what you can achieve with a bunch of dedicated people, all committed to the goals, all engaging with each other in open and honest conversation — including the courage to dissent — and all putting finger prints on a truly collaborative effort. Our role as consultants was purely to do the initial literature search, validate with our experience, develop the initial competency framework, and then act as a sounding board on the finalisation of the behavioural indicators.

- *Not losing sight of the purpose* (eg Kotter, 1996; Senge *et al.*, 1999). The key driver to the competency development work was the need to generate quite different results in the business. There was a sense of urgency that this work mattered, and would make a difference to the way people led their organisations. Throughout the curriculum, the personal development through the competencies and the business improvement through the participants' change work were continually held in parallel. From participant comment, we can see that changes in their behaviour were linked to changes in business practice — it was not development for development sake. For a lot of our insights here, we were influenced by Conner's concept of 'Returns on Change' (Conner, 1999). Just as financial professionals can articulate the returns any given business investment could make, were we also able to express the investment and execution costs we were spending on this work and the likely yield this was to generate? Indeed, the upcoming assessment and evaluation process will be not only looking at the individual competency progress made, but also the overall business

gains from the process in relation to the significant investment of time, money and emotional commitment behind the programme.

- *Need to use the competencies in practice in order to understand the words* (eg Senge *et al.*, 1999). As with all competency definitions, nothing beats understanding them better than real life examples — particularly your own or ones you observe around you. Since the behavioural definitions themselves have to be generic, sometimes the specificity can get lost. The key to internalising them is therefore to create the conditions within which they should be observed. A very powerful example of this occurred during one of the workshops. The 'formal' facilitators of the programme (one of the authors in conjunction with the internal project leader) had stepped back to enable the participants to facilitate the learning. In one of these sessions, the participant facilitator was clearly not listening and attending to the participants' perspective — and in fact decided not to write their views on a flip chart on which he was recording other people's responses. When forced by the group to write up the comment, he moreover decided to express the comment in his own words. In the debrief at the end of this practice facilitation session, people were suddenly very well aware about what 'objectivity' (Change Presence) and 'listening and inquiry' (Change Learning) truly meant (or did not mean).

FURTHER RESEARCH AND QUESTIONS

The current research is still at an early stage. While the client organisation is now planning to extend the process beyond the two initial 'road tests', we

are awaiting the full impact evaluation of the work and need to subject the competence assessment tool to more rigorous testing. Nonetheless, we have in mind the following lines of inquiry as we move forward:

1. Validating the Competency Assessment Questionnaire (CAQ) instrument (as indicated above). We will be conducting both a reliability and full validation study in both the initial sponsor organisation and other institutions. While we developed the instrument in a 'street smart' way, we feel we owe it to the broader field of inquiry in change management to substantiate the indicators to be truly predictive of success as a change leader
2. Understanding what drives the competencies. We will be analysing what drives the behaviours through cross-correlation work with other psychometric classic instruments. In this way, we will be able to ascertain which of the behaviours are developable and, therefore, which are critical at the selection point for change agents.
3. Finally, at a broader level, we wish to explore whether the ability to lead change should be a core aspect of all leadership development in the 21st century. There are numerous writers currently claiming that this ability is really the only competency that will make a difference to competitive advantage (eg Kotter, 1996; Conner, 1999) in the ever-changing world of increased globalisation, rapid technological shifts and consumers demanding ever greater quality at low cost. Our literature research concluded that there were not many dedicated change leadership competency studies or profiles readily available — perhaps their time has come.

CONCLUSION

Change management is difficult to study and, perhaps more importantly, to make effective in practice. We believe, however, that by focusing on the 'work of change' and its associated competencies, the present study presents a contribution to our understanding of what we need to focus on to make change work. This paper is something of a progress report. We look forward to adding more 'flesh' to this initial framework in our future work and hope that this will form the basis of a follow-up to this paper in the near future.

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