

## ***Advances in Project Management Series<sup>1</sup>***

# **Managing Change: Organisations, People and the Search for Perfection**

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### ***Introduction to the June 2013 Advances in PM Series Article***

Is change management a part of project management?

Change is increasingly recognised as a fact of life in business. Successive surveys and reports confirm that many CEOs consider change to be the greatest challenge facing their organisation. Moreover, in the last five years uncertainty and complexity have combined to make the business environment more ambiguous and unpredictable.

Organisations that do not change tend not to survive. However, the rate of successful change is low; frequently quoted figures suggest that between 70-80% of change initiatives become significant failures. A large proportion of the change literature has become increasingly frustrated at the tendency to create and implement change in a top-down fashion which tends to ignore the role of people in buying into, embracing and supporting change. Recent discourse has engaged the metaphor of change leaders, rather than managers, as the individuals responsible for guiding change endeavours, and transforming organisations attempt to guide others.

The essence of the discourse is that some of the essential mechanisms required to identify, embrace and deploy change successfully are not explicitly recognised within organisational theory. Making change stick is equally difficult. Addressing the implications of change therefore requires new ways of reasoning about the purpose of organisations, the value of initiatives, and the methods required for managing, and leading improvement efforts.

This month's column attempts to address some of these issues. Donal Carroll's contribution is extracted from his new book *Managing Value in Organisations: New learning, Management and Business Models* published by Gower. The book offers a new and fresh perspective on the delivery of change in organisations. Given the recognition that change is inevitable in provides new ways of engaging with and reasoning about change.

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<sup>1</sup>The *Advances in Project Management* series includes articles by authors of program and project management books published by Gower in the UK. Each month an introduction to the currently monthly article is provided by series editor **Prof Darren Dalcher**, who is also the editor of the Gower *Advances in Project Management* series of books on new and emerging concepts in PM. For more on Gower project management, visit <http://www.gowerpublishing.com/default.aspx?page=2063>.

Organisations are traditionally judged according to their business model. However, Donal suggests that what is needed is a more sophisticated and dynamic approach to management. The starting point for any change involves learning, which kick starts any learning journey. His key thesis is that in order to manage value, organisations need to update not just their business model, but also their management model and their learning model. The combination of the models offers a richer perspective for engaging with the *how* alongside the *what*, whilst also considering the implications on learning and engaging.

Understanding organisational change is crucial to the effective delivery of projects that convey value and deliver meaning. Addressing value in organisation implies a deeper engagement that is not concerned with mere efficiency, but also with the effectiveness of proposed approaches and the reasoning that underpin decisions and actions.

“There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, that to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things.”

-- Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince* (1532)

Many have spoken about change. Heraclitus observed that “nothing endures but change”. Martin Luther King recognised that change comes through continuous struggle. Gandhi conceded that one must “be the change you wish to see in the world”. Change requires new ways of seeing and engaging with reality. Indeed, Einstein captured the dynamic interaction between reality and people: “The world as we have created it is a process of our thinking. It cannot be changed without changing our thinking”. Similarly, George Bernard Shaw asserted that ‘those who cannot change their mind cannot change anything’.

Earlier still, Lao Tzu recognised that ‘life is a series of natural and spontaneous changes. Don’t resist them; that only creates sorrow. Let reality be reality. Let things flow naturally forward in whatever way they like.’

Apple Inc. used to advertise for ‘misfits, rebels and troublemakers’ who seek to change the world, reasoning that they “push the human race forwards... because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones who do”. Project managers often manage and lead society’s efforts to improve, grow and expand. While change management is frequently not recognised as an essential part of their body of knowledge, it is often implicit in its impact and influence. After all projects are delivered by people for people, operating within more or less permanent organisations.

Aldus Huxley pointed out that “I wanted to change the world. But I have found that the only thing one can be sure of changing is oneself.” As part of our growing effort of managing projects in a rapidly changing environment, the onus on project professionals is to develop the capability of understanding and dealing with contextual and environmental factors, including people and politics that extend beyond technical concerns. Such development will require new models and perspectives to engage with the expanding dimensions of management.

Nonetheless, we can be reminded of Winston Churchill who pointed out that: “to improve is to change; to be perfect is to change often”. In a seemingly faster changing world, our challenge can perhaps be re-positioned as the need to remain perfect for longer...

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*Editor's note: Darren Dalcher is the editor of the series of books on Advances in Project Management published by Gower in the UK. Information about the Gower series can be found at <http://www.gowerpublishing.com/advancesinprojectmanagement>. The above article is an introduction to the invited paper this month in the PMWJ by Gower author Donal Carroll. You can find previously published articles by Prof Dalcher and Gower authors at [www.pmworldlibrary.net](http://www.pmworldlibrary.net).*

## About the Author



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