Editorial

Change Management

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The Editors are pleased to offer this opportunity for the associate editors for Change Management to outline their domain, and seek contributions from potential authors.

Sometime in the last fifteen to twenty years almost every one of us has been in a situation which has been restructured, downsized, rightsized, merged, taken apart, flattened or in some way significantly 'changed'.

The question is: does anything really change or are we often seeing precisely the same malaises which provoked the change processes re-appearing within a very short time only to provoke the change carousel yet again?

Frequent rounds of organisational change undoubtedly can leave staff exhausted and demoralised and not always as re-energised as the change managers would have liked (Robbins, H and FinleyS 1998). One of the keys to success seems to be the dimension of organisational culture and there is a vast literature over the past twenty years exploring this. The emerging truism is that organisational culture change clearly underpins successful change strategies, and failure to understand it often underpins failed change attempts. Culture can both hold an organisation back in defensive routines, and also re-bind a 'new' post change organisation together in more positive ways. (Stacey 2000; Morgan 1997; Czarniawska and Sevón, 1996).

Despite there being a wide acceptance of the role of culture in managing change, there is not always a good and detailed understanding of what 'culture' really is and how those in leadership roles might go about re-shaping it to bed down a post-change organisational culture.

Perhaps it has been easier and 'softer' to talk

vaguely about leadership, about strategy, and then about values and 'style' – ("the way things are done around here") than it has been to pinpoint exactly which 'things' we are actually talking about. Vast amounts have been written about the imaginative and visionary aspects of leadership in driving change (Morgan 1997) but fewer have examined the detailed day-to-day operational aspects of culture change and the glue which will help stabilize and bind a new culture. It is perhaps less creative, but all the same, fundamental to laying down a new culture-in-action (Nadler and Tushman 1997).

Re-building organisations, often punch drunk from major changes or fractured by repeated restructures, is a difficult task for leaders and managers. It requires an understanding of the more mundane elements of the "old" organisation and an architect's eye for what the key constructs of the new one will be. Rebuilding needs firm supports in the form of unified and consistent systems and re-aligned work practices that which embed the values, style, rewards and punishments wanted in the new organisation (Robbins and Barnwell 2002; Czarniawska and Sevón 1996; Stacey 2000).

Couple this with the ever changing and dynamic environment within which organisations now conduct business. The shift toward virtual working environments in a global economy raises the challenge of whether consistent systems and practices that stabilize the organisation can be adequately sustained. Group membership, security and certainty are issues of concern today in terms of 'core' and 'peripheral' staffing models, homeworking, secondments, and the increasing shift to the virtual organisation with greater use of technology to underpin this. These organisational and management changes erode

membership of specific groups and affect levels of communication, continuity and learning.

Thomas (1999) describes the benefits of virtual working, such as less time commuting; less need for office space, and productivity is boosted by up to 60%. The negative effects however need to be considered on the workforce and added complexities for management of change such as the erosion of teamwork, affiliation to the organisation, increasing social problems, loneliness, and erosion of the corporate culture and higher job turnover.

Walter (2000) however, suggests that virtual organisations are a logical continuation of the development of the industrial organisation, with important consistent management characteristics such as technology management and relationship management to achieve market competitiveness. The virtual organisation is representative of the new economy and the shift from capital in the industrial economy, to services rather than products. This new post industrial business environment is fast moving and requires a structure and management capability to keep pace with the speed of change (Despres and Chauvel, 2000).

These are the aspects of change management with which Operations Research (OR) and related professions can most powerfully assist. Systematic reviewing of what we now do and how we do it requires modelling, mapping and often detailed enquiry. We need the precision insights to know what work practices are in place, both formally and informally. What holds the old ways together and what therefore needs redevelopment to capture the key elements of the new directions and new culture. In some respects we need to get to the “nuts and bolts” level of organisational culture to achieve this.

In this detailed grass roots diagnosis, leaders often need to get their heads out of visionary clouds to see how the engine rooms of their organisation actually work and how they could be adjusted to get revitalised, re-built enterprise. Vision may be a necessary but insufficient driver of change management.

OR has huge scope to contribute with the process and systems analysis, to combine ‘hard’ techniques of diagnosis with more holistic ‘soft’ worlds of organisational visions and culture. All this could shift OR well away from a dependable stolid problem solving role to a hugely creative one at the forefront of re-building battered businesses. It would be stimulating to read more about OR practitioners’ contributions to culture analysis and change.

Please send contributions, conforming to the guidelines for publishing in OR Insight, either directly to the Associate Editors, or to the Editors, by email to the addresses given in this issue.

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