

Motivating change

Group CEO of **Echo Research** Sandra Macleod explains how successful change programmes need to be underpinned by an understanding of the values held by the team members taking part and a strong vision of what the result of change will be.

A company ran a prize-winning programme for employees to become energy conservation ambassadors among their colleagues. This was a step-change, yielding significant money savings to the company. Team members were urged to behave energy-efficiently at work, cut consumption at home, and provide practical suggestions on further changes. Taking part made them eligible for prizes, such as low-consumption electrical appliances. A conservation contest film featured football fans cheering on people who turned off their lights or unplugged their mobiles.

Employees dressed up as these fans for a chance to be in a company advert, posting pictures of their costumes online to be voted upon; people were motivated, commitment and behaviour change rippled through all teams. Formative research among the target groups inside and outside the organisation shaped and validated the programme and evaluative research assessed its success and pointed to lessons to support a lasting and sustainable culture change that would drive dividends internally and externally.

Sadly, this happens all too rarely because many change programmes simply don't deliver and don't last, partly because they don't motivate teams by tapping into their values. Or it is because the urge to win or gain something is not there, or the recognition of efforts and demonstrating impact are missing. Perhaps the pleasure in doing something intrinsically satisfying is absent. Sometimes there is a sense that leaders are leading not by example but by edict, or the present climate could be making people wary of yet another change programme.

A common circumstance of failure is when people understand in their minds the case for change, but physically and emotionally it has not become part of them, not been embedded, internalised, or integrated.

Refreshing change

Moreover, leaders who understand the insidious effects of subjectivity will not let the organisation do its own research into its own people, or let outside change management consultants design research that subliminally plays to the solutions they offer, but will ask an independent research company to cast a fresh and unbiased eye on the situation and recommend new directions.

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With CEOs on ever-shortening tenures, other risks to watch out for include the desire of leaders to make a short-term big splash rather than stick to a long-term plan to monitor change and keep the programme on track.

You need to ask what it is all going to look like when the changes are done. People need to be inspired by what the future will be like, echoing management guru Stephen Covey's direction to 'begin with the end in mind'. Provide evidence that progress is indeed being made and that people are making a difference.

A crucial leadership skill is the ability to understand the holistic picture of change across key audiences, internally and externally, and find that fine midpoint between heavy-handed steering that fails to catch a favourable breeze, and the



laissez-faire surrender of stewardship, which lets the boat run uncontrolled before the wind. A close listening to the echoes of their perceptions and expectations helps to inform the judgement calls required.

As the impact of greater competition collides with declining levels of trust globally, the demand for insight and evidence to support planning, decision-making and resourcing is set to grow, and not just in internal change management.

The awareness and understanding of intangibles is growing across management generally as a feature of greater professionalism; and greater sophistication in appreciating these intangibles is helping organisations to feel their way with greater speed towards competitive differentiation based on values.

Insight, benchmarks, reputation scorecards as products of intelligently conceived and conducted research – a specialised skillset, not easily acquired, and rarely found in full flower even among professional research firms – is key to success and to showing people the route map, the potential pitfalls and the progress that they are making on the journey. ■

Further information

Echo Research

Website: www.echoresearch.com