



## **Barriers to Effective Communication in Change Management - But Do They Feel What You Are Saying?**

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The single biggest barrier to effective communication in a change management situation is quite simply the disconnection between the change leader and those who are or will be impacted by the change.

Failure reasons in change management are many and varied and well documented. Staggeringly any organisational initiative that creates change - or has a significant change element to it - has a 70% chance of not achieving what was originally envisaged.

Any major business initiative or venture where the business leaders fail to identify and quantify the impact on those people most affected by the change carries a high risk of failure.

The underlying root cause of this catastrophic statistic is the failure by change leaders to take full account of the impact of the change on those people who are going to be most impacted by it. And yet.... the price of failure comes so high!

So, to any business leaders reading this, I ask you:

The numbers may make sense, the business case is sound, the 'synergies' may look sweet, but have you assessed the human, political and cultural factors? Have you taken into account the human impact? Have you made the connection between the human impact and your bottom line?

There are several reasons why this is often not addressed: first and foremost because the focus is on the business logic; secondly because corporate cultures are hard to see, and finally because this aspect of change is seen as "soft", intangible and unquantifiable and by implication not really worthy of detailed scrutiny.

Just as an illustration of this point in the context of M&A, a study of 40 British companies [Cartright and Cooper 1995] reported that all 40 conducted a detailed financial and legal audit of the company they intended to acquire, but that not even one of these same companies made any attempt to carry out an audit of the company's human resources and culture to assess the challenges concerning integration of the organization they were acquiring.

Yet, I find all of this strange given the colossal financial cost and shareholder value destruction that is the direct result of this failure.

### **5 proven barriers to effective workplace communication in change management**

So, if you really want to get it wrong - here's what to do in 5 simple steps:

**(1) Lack of clarity of message** - don't tell them what lies behind the change and don't sell the problem before you try to sell the solution. Use jargon, plenty of it and take a long time telling them. Oh and to really make this one stick, don't tell them how it's going to be different after the change - just keep telling them how it's all about the values, mission and vision.

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**(2) Absence of emotional resonance in your message** - the emotional tone and delivery of your message should clearly indicate that you as senior management haven't given a second thought to the real impact this is going to have on them. Don't tell what they're going to lose or have to let go of. And to reinforce that point make very clear by your tone that you don't care and that that dimension never crossed your mind.

**(3) In-accurate targeting** - make sure you don't reach the right people with the right message at the right time. Most importantly, never address the "what's in it for me" question, and totally disregard the psychological and emotional transitions they will have to go through in adjusting to your change.

**(4) Timing schedule** - why waste valuable senior management time keeping your people fully in the picture? Keep them in the dark and keep them guessing.

**(5) Feedback process** - two-way communication is something you can pay lip service to. Sure go through the motions, but rest easy in the comfortable complacency of your senior management certainty that knows best ["that's what we're paid for isn't it?"]

If you follow these steps you will be in good company as you almost certainly join the illustrious 70% club.

Excuse the lateral thinking for a moment - but can you imagine civil engineers or construction companies or the people who build nuclear power stations - working on the same basis - where a 70% failure rate was accepted? Can you?

So why on earth should the world of business be any different? Why does this bother me? Quite simply, it bothers me because of the very considerable, unnecessary, and totally avoidable human cost.