Creating and communicating a clear and shared vision

It is more important than ever to be crystal clear on the vision for your change programmes. In our experience, it is one of THE critical factors which separates a successful transformation from one with unrealised benefits and unfulfilled commitments. We outline below some of the essential steps to achieve success.

**CHANGE LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK**

One of the ways we view the challenges of change is through our change leadership framework. It describes the capabilities required to be successful at transforming a whole organisation, a business unit or even a discrete business process. In it, we recognise that setting, communicating and achieving the vision is the primary responsibility of good business leadership of change.

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**Business Leadership**
- Setting, communicating and achieving the vision

**Strategy Implementation**
- Defining, directing and controlling the delivery of business solutions

**Ownership**
- Owning and embedding the change required to deliver business outcomes

**Change Leadership Framework**

**Delivery**
- Delivering business solutions effectively (what’s wanted - on time - to budget)

Over the years, we’ve found that most organisations focus on the “bottom right” quadrant of ‘Delivery’ as this is where the most conspicuous cost occurs, where the risks are most apparent, and where most tangible progress is felt and seen.

However, successful change always starts with the top left quadrant of vision. Starting here informs all the subsequent areas. The vision is vital to set the overall aims of the implementation, it’s essential to continue to guide and direct delivery and it’s the “north star” when it comes to embedding this change in the business.

As a business leader, your first focus is to set out with a clear understanding of where you are heading, making sure this is shared by all involved. This sounds obvious, but is usually highly underestimated in terms of the impact, understanding and commitment required across the organisation.
IS THE VISION CLEAR – AND IS IT SHARED?

So how can you be sure your vision is clear and shared? The following questions provide a straightforward checklist and are essential to make sure that both you and the stakeholders from across the organisation are clear and in AGREEMENT.

**WHAT NEXT?**

So, you have a vision that answers the common questions people in your organisation will ask. However, all successful change has a clear “why”, the compelling reasons to act. It sounds incredibly simple to be able to answer this why question, but the focus often turns too soon to the much easier questions of what, when and more usually, how. Your story of why change is necessary is needed to inspire people to join you and support you in a way that simply telling them what you are going to do, will not.
WHAT’S THE STORY BEHIND CHANGE?

You want people to accept that things are going to have to be different; you want them to embrace the change, so you must give them a good reason to do so. We all tend to form hard and fast attachments to our environments, to the way things are and the way things work; and we resist attempts to do things differently. Even small things – a new location, product or process is liable to be met with resistance and a range of reasons why this isn’t the “right” course of action.

So, it’s vital to have a good story that you can tell to set the changes in context, especially if you’re making changes that affect people’s roles in more wide-reaching ways.

It’s essential to be able to articulate again, what needs to change and why? What happens if it doesn’t change? And what stays the same? What is the single compelling message that brings people together?

Of course, it might be that the outcome is not be perceived as cheery for everyone involved, particularly as most change requires changes to existing operating models. The agility and focus required to create these changes is made more possible by creating the story that will galvanise people into taking action. Once you have the story, you need to share it widely, and reinforce it deeply.

““The main challenge we’ve had to really focus on is taking people with us. Implementing new processes or systems, that’s the easy bit, but actually bringing your workforce with you and getting everyone to be active champions of what you’re trying to do - that’s the real challenge.” – CIO Retail Sector
Creating and communicating a clear and shared vision is vital. Having the leadership alignment and consistency of message, is equally essential. Another vital part of your role as a leader of change is listening. Leaders who listen can create trustworthy relationships that are transparent and breed loyalty.

Tell the story of the change, listen to people’s concerns and listen to people’s ideas. Empathy is a powerful display of listening and great leaders know how to balance head and heart.

“Most people don’t listen with the intent to understand, they listen with the intent to reply.” – Stephen R. Covey, The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change

To recap, a strong and clear vision is essential for driving real change and realising real benefits. However, creating a clear and shared vision is not a one-off activity. We need to accept that the change journey can be continuous and can require a change in direction.

Therefore, the vision needs to be kept up to date, so it’s important to keep listening, keep the focus on the story and keep communicating in a way that gets people behind what you are trying to do. Without this, any fast start that you make will quickly fizzle out.

A Project One consultant recently reviewed a large programme that was in trouble. Money was being spent, time was passing by, but real progress was elusive. Schedules were being missed, people were becoming disengaged and some significant work would be needed to get this critical and complex change back on track.

In a moment of reflection, he said “Seen this so many times. It’s certainly not that people aren’t trying and it’s not that they’re doing the wrong things - the problem is that most of the team have forgotten why they’re doing it. They’re focused on the process and not on the outcome; on the mechanics and not on the why.”

Read how the Co-operative Group embarked on a 3 year programme to transform membership. Creating and communicating a clear and shared vision was one of the ways they reaffirmed their business is at the heart of communities in the UK.

CLICK HERE TO FIND OUT MORE
It’s vital to have a clear story

Interested in finding out more? Please contact

David Knappett
Account Director
Email: david.knappett@projectone.com

Dave Jepson
Account Director
Email: dave.jepson@projectone.com